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Voices and views on rural children. A proposal for new approaches (Argentina, mid-20th century)

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Abstract. The present work explores rural well-being from a historical point of view, with reference to the case of the agricultural colony of 17 de Octubre, later known as La Capilla (Florencio Varela, Buenos Aires), founded in 1951 and located in a transitional space between the countryside and the city. Personal memories and family photographs support the hypothesis that precarious living conditions are not always assumed to be such. This confirms the need to take into account subjective dimensions of well-being, intercepted by values and aspirations with time and space coordinates.

Keywords: country life; children; rural families; rural development; documentary photography; Argentina.

Introduction

Census and statistical data show that inequality, poverty, and marginalization have been constant features along Argentina's historical path. Among these indicators, it is assumed, at least implicitly, that income level, access to services, and possession of goods constitute means for achieving the ultimate end: well-being. However, given that nuances and heterogeneities are concealed within the objective indicators, they do not in themselves allow for the different facets involved in people's standard of living.

From the human development approach, Sen (1996) makes an important contribution to the topic by proposing a non-utilitarian definition of well-being centered on human capacities and potential. His definition of poverty embraces a concept of quality of life that goes beyond income and he stresses the importance of studying sociopolitical and cultural conditions in order to overcome inequality. Moreover, the assumption of a link, applicable to all times and places, between given objective factors and well-being has not been proven empirically, because the criteria cannot be applied in a uniform fashion. Thus, and to complement quantitative approaches, there are interesting lines of research from multiple disciplines that consider subjective well-being (Di Tella, MacCulloch R., & Oswald, 2001; Frey & Stutzer, 2001; Rojas, 2011). Drawing on a wealth of theoretical and methodological support, a new criteria for measuring well-being has been proposed: happiness, or life satisfaction, based on an individual's responses to direct questions (Van Praag & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2008).

Subjective well-being is a useful approach for understanding the relative importance of each of the factors that lead to life satisfaction, and one that significantly enriches the study of a topic that for decades was dominated by the traditions of imputation and presumption (Rojas, 2011, pp. 65-67).[1] Unlike these, the subjective well-being approach highlights the role of heterogeneity and perceptions of life purposes, while dismissing the equation of well-being to income and wealth. One of its premises is that desires and their satisfaction are founded on the possibilities enabled by the available options as well as on individuals' evaluations of these options, for which the environment is highly influential. Thus, well-being must be measured within precise time-space coordinates. Accordingly, just as 21st century

1 For the former tradition, that of imputation, well-being is no more than the possession of a set of attributes that experts judge to be of value to human beings. In turn, the tradition of presumption recognizes that well-being is something that individuals experience; however, rather than exploring this directly, the approach utilizes theories on human nature and behavior to arrive at lists of attributes or factors that are presumed to be closely related to a more satisfying life experience.

evaluations do not correspond with those of the last century, nor should the urban context be equated with the rural. Moreover, as Williams proposes, the countryside and the city are variable historical realities, and there are also many types of intermediate organizations (2001).

Based on this conceptual framework, the present work seeks to make a modest contribution by shedding light on an area of study that has received little attention, largely due to the absence of written documents: rural well-being from a historical point of view and centered on the perspective of the subjects involved. What factors were relevant to rural well-being in the mid-20th century? What was their relative importance? One of the novel aspects of our proposal is that it focuses primarily on children, who count as the most marginalized in the historical narrative – and much more so if they lived in the countryside. The other aspect is thinking the social through the retrieval of two sources alternative to those traditionally employed: memory and photographs.

Taking memory as a source of study implies its consideration as a selective act of representation of the past but above all as a social act nourished by subjective personal readings and narrations superimposed on coexisting accounts (Todorov, 2000; Halbwachs, 1995; Augé, 1998). At the same time, the emerging memory of the family dynamic is something which, based on ongoing interaction between suppression and conservation, expresses an intersubjective, normative, and limited dimension. Thus, it is worth recalling, as Sosenski points out, that the historical retrieval of voices is not the same as adult memory of childhood (2016). In the latter case, something new is created in the present in which the account is created, but without objective control (Jones, 2003, pp. 27; Dasmasio, 1999, p. 226).

When memory is traversed by a heterogeneity of expectations, a sense of belonging, and a diversity of experiences, the largely general and universalizing substrate of what is understood as well-being begins to corrode. In this sense, interviews that explore personal histories offer the possibility of questioning and validating generalizations about living conditions that are founded on knowledge of a reduced social segment, generally anchored to urban centers. Their richness has inspired us to analyze older persons' evaluations of their quality of life during childhood, focusing on their experiences, aspirations, perceptions, achievements, and failures in the spheres of work, education, recreation, emotional bonds, community life, health, housing, and connection with the city. To complement these patterns of appreciation we turn to the interpretation of photographs, based on the assumption that they contribute to revealing the symbolic fabric of their time, even if it is from the particular viewpoint of those who take them, (Bourdieu, 2003,

p. 44). Photos, as documents of social history, help to construct a "history from below" centered on the everyday life and experiences of simple folk (Burke, 2005, p. 15).

In sum, we are interested in retrieving representations relating to the living conditions of rural children through the testimonies of older adults and photographs. The case study is based on a rural environment close to the city: specifically, the 17 de Octubre colony, later renamed La Capilla (in Florencio Varela, peri-urban Buenos Aires province) in the mid-20th century. In the governmental imaginary of that time, there was a prevailing concern for rural exodus and stigmatization of rural life which, although considered healthy and moralizing, was also deemed rustic and precarious in opposition to the more comfortable and seductive urban life. Thus, the transitional spaces between the countryside and the city were seen as a viable and attractive alternative, in that access to urban goods and services would aid in the settlement of families and in their well-being.

Our hypothesis is that in recollections, this precariousness is not always regarded as such, but intersects with family values, memories, and expectations that give it diverse meanings. This is illustrated by the representations of everyday experiences of rural childhood that memory and photographs provide. Before exploring this hypothesis, the study begins with a brief and general characterization of government perspectives and rural living conditions in the Pampas region in the mid-20th century. Then, we reflect on aspects that we believe to be central to family memory and childhood recollections as a particular source of study, which will provide a foundation for the findings presented. We do not claim that the various inputs we explore are exhaustive, nor that they constitute a representative case, but rather we seek to highlight thought-provoking points that add complexity to conceptualizations of well-being.

Characterization of rural life in the Pampas and government perspectives of the countryside in the mid-20th century

From the start of the 20th century, material expansion, production, and the marketing of agricultural products did not automatically translate into an improvement in living conditions for the rural population (see, among others, Moreyra & Remedi, 2005; Di Liscia, 2007; Gutiérrez, 2015). Illiteracy rates, difficulties in accessing medical services, the vulnerability of children, insecure conditions in the countryside, lack of electricity, and precarious communications had persisted for decades. In general, the everyday circumstances of the inhabitants were marked by small, precarious, and unhygienic housing; overcrowding; grueling workdays; and a diet that

gradually became more varied and nutritional following state promotion of a more dynamic internal market (De Arce & Gutiérrez, 2014). In these circumstances, informal networks of reciprocal solidarity provided help for those who for example, could not afford to build their own houses or to travel to the city. Moreover, in the villages, it is worth noting that civil society activism – cooperatives, charities, school associations, and other groups – articulated different responses to social problems.

This focus on everyday life in rural spaces reveals, on the one hand, the social cost of economic growth; and, on the other, the weak material and institutional penetration of the state, even if these deficiencies did not escape the attention of contemporary figures. In his plans and pronouncements, Juan D. Perón, the icon of the "democratization of well-being," called for a dignified rural standard of living as a stimulus for the realization of the "Nueva Argentina" plan. His administration, taking a utilitarian approach – aimed at generating inputs and foreign currency to strengthen industry – sought to increase and diversify agricultural production and to assure greater stability for the rural population, which was prone to migration to urban centers.

At that time, state discourse on the problem of "social justice" in the rural world translated into an emphasis on land and labor and so public policies were oriented primarily on these two issues. On the one hand, labor regulations established humanitarian working conditions (for instance, through the "Agricultural Laborer Statute," *Estatuto del peon*) and also anticipated the creation of labor tribunals. On the other hand, in the area of distribution of rural property, state intervention took the form of leasing, expropriation, colonization, and credit laws. Slogans such as "Land for those who work it" and "Land should not be an asset for profit but for production" ("La tierra no debe ser un bien de renta sino de producción") became particularly popular within a discourse that presented the *latifundio* as an emblem of the power of the landowning oligarchy. Conversely, the notion of land in the hands of the "genuine producers" was associated with the country's prosperity and the stable residency of families. Although the initial discursive radicalism gave way to more moderate policies, it did lead to the spread of expectations and fears. Beyond land and labor, the public policies aimed at rural well-being were not known for their systematization, specificity, or effectiveness. As during the previous stage, these policies depended more on the incentives produced by agrarian structures (technical training, salary increases) and the strategies of local actors (civic associations, municipalities) than on projects, measures, and actors from the centers of state power (Salomón & Ortiz Bergia, 2017).

This situation was partly transformed in the years that followed. In 1955, after the overthrow of President Juan D. Perón and under the influence of developmentalism, successive civilian and military governments, with varying emphases and nuances, underpinned their projects not with the idea of "social justice,", but with that of "economic development," which was understood as a necessary and sufficient condition for combating poverty. At the same time, the prevailing conception of poverty came closer to charity or benevolence than to a comprehensive plan,[2] despite the fact that the social policies were neither hastily improvised nor totally disarticulated. Moreover, in the rural sphere, during those years incursions were made into the realm of the social through a series of pro-worker measures, such as an increase in the minimum wage and the expansion of pension coverage. Initiatives associated with roads, drinking water, and rural sanitation, as well as a myriad of other projects that were not implemented, reflected an interest in benefiting rural producers, particularly larger ones. Despite the clear reorientation of initiatives towards agriculture, the land redistribution policy was losing support, funding, and impetus.

It should be noted that although the "planning state" played a key role in advancing actions in favor of well-being, it considered the coordinated participation of different agencies and levels of government (provinces, municipalities, INTA, etc.), as well as that of civil society organizations, to be vital. In sum, the violation of civil and political rights starting from 1955 did not necessarily imply a dramatic reversal of the social rights acquired. At any rate, the increase in the social gap, the new economic outlook – marked by inflation, greater income concentration, and a shift in the model – and the anti-establishment climate imposed new challenges upon the state. Some references to the scarce comforts available in Argentina's rural homes can be seen in the census of 1960. It reveals that half of the rural population lived in environments lacking the most basic conditions of hygiene, in adobe housing with dirt floors and scant ventilation. Added to this were other sanitary deficiencies such as lack of access to potable water, lavatories, and, to a greater extent, electricity. This quick snapshot of rural housing conditions attests to the social inequality between the urban and rural spaces in the mid-20th century (Cerdá & Salomón, 2017).

2 One exception to this hegemonic conception can be seen in the extension activities carried out by the then-new National Institute of Agricultural Technology (Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria, INTA). Its actions targeted at rural families sought to effect a cultural change to complement and drive economic development.

In the picture sketched here, with advances and setbacks that reflected the dramatic swings in Argentine politics, the political will emerged in the mid-20th century to implement colonist policies through initiatives favoring family settlement and rural production. These policies were pivotal to other indirectly related ones, in that they took into account previously neglected matters such as technical, economic, and social assistance for the colonies, cooperativism, modernization of the means of production, and agricultural training. Some of the various colonies were founded in the rural areas now termed peri-urban – that is, close to the cities. In the imaginary of the era, it was thought that this proximity would reduce the prices of food staples, reverse urban concentration, facilitate emotional contact and urban consumption by the settlers, and reproduce the idealized rural way of life.

One case that helps illustrate the above-mentioned aspects is the agricultural colony of 17 de Octubre, known as La Capilla after 1955. Founded in 1951 in the rural area of Florencio Varela, it acquired emblematic status in the area, though this ultimately faded come the 1970s. Agriculturalists of various nationalities (Japanese, Italians, Portuguese, Germans, Dutch, Ukrainians, Russians, among others) settled there, expending great effort to establish primary-intensive holdings geared towards horticulture and, to a lesser extent, floriculture and dairy farming (De Marco, 2012, 2017). The colony's location, 15 kilometers from the capital of the *partido*,[3] 30 kilometers from Buenos Aires, and 45 kilometers from the city of La Plata (all key markets for produce) was strategic. These characteristics invite exploration of what life was like in the colony and how the diversity of experiences and ways of socializing combined somewhat incongruously with material living conditions: areas where memory and photography play a fundamental role as regards the possibilities of innovating in the sphere of historical knowledge.

Rural families and childhood: memory as a source

Tackling rural subjects, especially families and children, has always been a challenge. Under-registration and difficulties in accessing appropriate sources with which to reconstruct living conditions, experiences, and perspectives have made the task particularly daunting. Consequently, we are interested in stimulating the discussion by way of a different proposal, which considers oral testimonies as a means of retrieving hidden aspects of rural family life in the past, with special emphasis on the experiences of groups of children. We propose this approach for two reasons: because of the objective, albeit

3 Translator's note: second-level administrative subdivision unique to the province of Buenos Aires.

undetected, participation of children in the rural social and productive fabric; and because these children are now, in the present day, the living repositories of these experiences: adults who reveal their memories through spoken accounts.

We propose, then, to analyze a body of testimonies in order to reconstruct the way in which everyday family and childhood life in rural settings – an everydayness associated with the notion of well-being – is interpreted and invested of meaning. Now resignified, these resources speak to us about this childhood past, just as they do about the present-day construction of that past. It is worth noting that memories of childhood are not just subjective individual productions, but are created under the influence of the trajectories and experiences of the family unit, which gradually cultivates family accounts and memories at each stage of the journey.

As stated earlier, studies of memory can provide perspectives on a large scale, but, as Erll notes, memory is a resource than can also be refocused from a microanalytical perspective through the lenses provided by family memories, which allow for better perception of the subject and the family (2011, p. 303). As such, family memory acts as a common theme in the intergenerational fabric, socializing the individual who carries the memory, consolidating a present "us" and reconstituting it in the past (Muxel 1999, pp. 13-15). It also represents a way of learning lessons from the family experience, of casting a detached glance at the past, the circumstances, and the personas. Thus, family memory is not mere repetition but a permanent circuit of negotiations and renegotiations, a point of comparison for evaluating the present, which, in turn, holds spatial anchors – that is, spaces where the time of one's own childhood itself is crystallized (Muxel, 1999, pp. 19-40). For these reasons, family memory stages the recollections of childhood itself and family life, where filiation plays out by reliving existence.[4]

It is interesting to note that the production of family memories is often conditioned by the local context. Thus, the cultural homogeneousness rooted in generations forges symbolic traits shared by members of a community. Thus, the subjects possess a corpus of stories, tales, and know-how that form part of a culture, and a memory of that culture (Segalen, 2009, p. 173). Although the colony that we analyze was an ad hoc endeavor for newly arriving rural families – and thus there was no preexisting baggage

4 It should be noted that in this study we do not seek to discover what members of a family share in terms of recollections, but how the individual memory of childhood presents particular traits because of how it is forged in a family context of migration, rural work, etc. This family memory thus reaches its members as baggage, and is reproduced in the present-day account.

of memories – it did give rise to relatively similar social, productive, and social conditions in which family memories were ultimately anchored. This homogeneity was also founded on the migrants' trajectories, whereby diversity operated as a common denominator for sharing experiences associated with displacements, family divisions, past generations left behind in other lands, new beginnings, and adaptations. During the colony's beginnings, the rupture in intrafamily relations, and the difficulties implied by resignifiying vast pasts into a local identity, developed into the replication of shared living as a fundamental characteristic in the recollections.

Recollections of family and childhood. An approach to rural life through the testimonies.

In the colony of La Capilla, within a patchwork of ethnic origins and trajectories, children were numerous. On the one hand, there were those from rural environments whose families had worked the land in other parts of Florencio Varela, other *partidos* in the conurbation, other Argentine provinces, and even other countries; but there were also little ones whose families had been introduced to rural work for the first time. Accustomed to urban life, these children had greater difficulty adapting and were often excluded from the family's labor and productive strategies.

It is important to classify the testimonies we analyze based on the origin and rural or urban background of the families. Accordingly, the category of rural foreigners contains three women and one man; that of rural Argentines has five women and four men; and finally, just two women make up the group of urban Argentines. The prevalence of women is due to the greater accessibility of their voices, given their current occupations (in general the men supervise the fields during the day) and their willingness to narrate their experiences. At the same time, the sample attests to the predominance of families with prior rural experience, as well as the migratory influence, in that many of the interviewees are children of transoceanic immigrants, from Italy and Japan in particular. These children, having gone to school in Argentina and mastered the Spanish language, built a "bridge" between the previous generation and the natives, consolidating Argentine culture in the small details of domestic life. But the migrant roots, present in the family memory, can be seen in their own recollections. These aspects are important for discerning experiences and characterizing divergent memories of routes that appear very similar.[5]

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5 The testimonies of individuals born in the colony, their recollections deeply embedded in that physical and social landscape, cannot be dismissed. They did not experience migration –unlike

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, using open questions, with men and women of varied origins ranging in age from 60 to 70 (that is, they were children aged between 5 and 13[6] when the lots were allocated in the colony from 1951 and 1955). These criteria – which, to be sure, do not constitute the entire universe of analysis – allowed for a singular richness in the testimonies, revolving around certain key thematic areas: work, school, social life, housing, health, and the connection to the city.

The references to rural work are numerous, as the intense labor discipline required to maintain lots demanded the input of entire families, women and children included. For instance, Feliciana N. affirms that when her parents worked, she, despite her young age, "helped them out a bit, looked after my siblings [...] I worked for many years there. During the holidays I helped them remove weeds, cut flowers to send to market, make up the packages." For her part, Silvia D. recalls that while sorting tomatoes, she would sing to pass the time.

When describing the roles, the interviewees sometimes used expressions such as "collaboration," "help," and "work" indiscriminately, which reveals a certain naturalization of the activities.[7] Similarly, Carlos N. asserts that "it wasn't an obligation, rather it was the will of the families and the kids themselves, we grew up with that mentality." Conversely, others regard these as tasks or necessities imposed by circumstances: "It wasn't how I helped but how others helped me. I did all the jobs: working with the horses, preparing the land, and planting the gladioli" (Carlos N.). Along similar lines, Antonia S. sums up her arrival in the colony (at 13 years of age) in stark terms: "Working in La Capilla killed me."

What is true is that, according to age and physical capacity, children participated in harvesting, watering, feeding the animals, sorting and packaging the vegetables, and other tasks. But while some recalled their contribution in harsh terms, as an imposition that still takes a physical toll on them today, others idealize those years and argue that far from being a heavy burden, the children took part with relish. The individual recollec-

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most of the other little ones – and formed part of a family already settled and adapted to the environment. But in general, they belong to the subsequent generation (born between 1960-1970) and, in consequence, their experiences differ from those we present in this study.

6 Although the selected age range covers very different experiences, linked to life stages and their intrinsic characteristics, we are of the opinion that, in general, the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees present homogeneous characteristics associated with their being the youngest members of the families who took part in the initial stage of the colonist venture.

7 As Balsa points out in his study of medium-sized producers from the Pampas, in the early decades of the 20th century children grew up in a context of hard agricultural work, which they internalized as a lifestyle (2006, p. 79).

tion is superimposed on a family memory that is also tinged with socially diffused assessments about rural life.

Memories remain of differentiation in child labor based upon gender. "The girls helped their mommies, and at times they helped us depending on what jobs there were to do." When there were lots of tomatoes, sorting the tomatoes was a job for the women; sorting them, not packaging them, not doing." (Martín G.). These assessments converge with social representations about the female role in home care, maternity, and low-intensity tasks. But some of the women interviewed saw their childhood work as similar to that of the boys, thus subverting the traditionally assigned roles. For example, María C., who came to the colony at the age of 13, argues:

> We were four sisters and one male [her brother] who was married, later they gave the lot to him. My sisters had studied a little about dressmaking, but all the same they worked in the field. One would do the watering, the other went to collect the string beans, the tomatoes, whatever there was. Whatever had to be done. We did the same as a son. Barefoot, with the mud up to here, right in the ditch (María C.).

The children's tasks were not strictly divided, quantitatively or qualitatively, by gender, although some activities were deemed more suitable for girls (especially when it came to emulating the role of the female-maternal figure). Indeed, the differentiation that prevailed was based more on age: up to around ten, the chores earmarked for girls and boys alike were less physically demanding. Nor is it possible to confirm any correspondence between a family's origins (Argentina or abroad) and greater or lesser utilization of labor, although it would appear that those from urban areas were less inclined to involve children in productive activities, leaving the entire workload to the adults (María B.).

Work and schooling were two spheres superimposed upon childhood life. Florencio Varela Primary School No. 4 opened a few months after the colony's establishment, in response to the influx of families with school-aged children. But the deterioration of a building not designed for this purpose led to the eventual construction of a replacement in 1956. Recollections of school constantly permeate the accounts. "It was the greatest joy I had in Argentina" (Atilio S.). They tend to recall the fact that the students were organized into one curriculum taught in a single classroom, where the blackboard was divided into two so as to organize contents into two distinct levels. The modesty of the resources is a much-visited topic, but always accompanied by allusions to practices of solidarity that distracted

from the deprivation. Moreover, the interviewees stress the coexistence of ethnic diversity and the integration of all students.

Families prioritizing school over work is an oft-repeated reference among both men and women: "In the morning I had breakfast, went to school; first and foremost came school, before everything else. Then I came back and did the homework, and only then did I help the others (Mafalda D.). "We went to school early, because the school was the most important thing of all, when we got back we had lunch and then Dad gave us chores" (Martín G.). However, certain recollections depict work during childhood as something that took up a lot of time, forcing truancy at certain times of the year. In the accounts, the primacy of school over everyday rural work sheds light on the reality of some households. But this might also be interpreted as a retrospective evaluation by the interviewees; a way of adapting the past to the present general consensus about the importance of schooling and the punitive discourses around child labor.

It is interesting to note that the accounts reveal not only productive participation by the children, but also their capacity to devise strategies to bypass the workload and access spaces of recreation and play – such as school, which was seen as something more than a space for compulsory education as the following recollections confirm:

> There would be a picnic at school, but at home they told us 'no, there's work to be done.' We figured that if the teacher came to ask, they [our parents] wouldn't say no, so the poor teacher would have to come to the house (Mafalda D.).

> They were the best of years, having the countryside there, everyone together at playtime. At that time there were lots of Japanese going there, there were the Fujis, Hijas, Sakaidas, Nagais, us, the Arakakis, Miashiros. I had lots of Japanese classmates (Carlos N.).

> At the morning I would go to school, by bicycle, on horseback. My parents agreed with my going. [With regard to] school, the memories are great, the relationship with my classmates was good (Olga M.).

Appreciation abounds for the teachers, and for the conception that education constituted a channel of social mobility, even if it could not be extended beyond the basic level due to the early age of entry to the world of work, or due to family adversity. The idealization of the school stage contrasts with certain complications associated with transportation, facilities, and cultural diversity. Some children had to walk four or five kilometers to

school, while others went by sulky or on horseback, but all were directly affected by adverse weather conditions. Access to school, irrespective of personal evaluations, is understood as an indicator of well-being. However, it may be considered that these extremely positive evaluations by the interviewees constitute, at the same time, *ex post* constructions that render the school an idealized sanctuary (in the recollection) in the face of the tough living conditions that labor imposed upon the minors.

In sum, childhood memories of school have characteristics in common with the general account of the colony as a space that was rugged, multi-ethnic, and to some extent abandoned by the state, and one where deficiencies could be overcome through the collaborative efforts of the residents. And, once again, childhood memories intersect with the permanently reviewed paternal and maternal discourses.

The sociability of the colony was crucial, in that it framed and gave structure to family life. Indeed, soon after the colony's foundation, the producers joined forces to set up a supply cooperative with a social center, el Ateneo, where members regularly met to hold dances, kermesses, barbecues, and other festivities. The children were rapidly integrated into this setting, participating in a host of activities. At the same time, the children of Asian immigrants had their own space: the Japanese language school, which was an offshoot of the La Capilla Japanese Association. Without doubt, the very youngest members of the colonies were highly active in these spaces, and the interviewees cite numerous memories. Perhaps the more agreeable references to those years spent in the company of peers qualified the harsher aspects of rural life (De Marco, 2017).

Because life in the colony was shaped by agricultural production seasons, especially harvest, the working hours imposed a routine upon all members of the family. The children, for instance, tended to do their homework in the evenings by lantern light, and would celebrate birthdays when they happened to fall on a date that did not clash with production responsibilities: "Do you remember when they celebrated your birthday, with the cake, the candle, and all that? Me? No, never" (María C.). Likewise, the centrality of productive life shaped the ambitions of the parents, which, as the children understood it, would mean giving priority to the purchase of a tractor or a truck over access to consumer goods.

The interviewees' descriptions of their material conditions give an impression, albeit a heterogeneous one, that does not exactly smack of luxury. In the beginning, most of the houses were small and improvised; others, while somewhat larger and more comfortable, were modest nonetheless.

> And when we found out [that the lot had been handed over], my brothers rushed off to buy bricks. Then we bought a trailer with a refrigerator and we slept there. And before building the house, my brother stacked up the bricks and put the sheet metal on top, and we went in. He made a borehole for the water and then, little by little, he built it up for living in. They were years of great blessing (Carlos N.).

With the passage of time, brick-and-motor constructions became widespread and sanitary domestic conditions were a common denominator (and, indeed, were required by the colonizing authority), but the colony still lacked some of the utilities found in the city. It was not until the 1960s that there was an electricity supply, and in the beginning this absence governed the most basic details of domestic and productive life. For instance, there were no freezers, gas cookers, or televisions, and all fieldwork was done manually.

Family diets, especially at the outset, were restricted by the necessities of self-consumption. Thus, it was common to prepare meals using vegetables (soups, stews, salads) and pastas or certain types of meat (some prepared as sausages), which varied according to ancestral origins or recipes. Access to new ingredients was linked to a family's economic progress, which opened up the possibility of obtaining provisions from stores within the environs of the colony, as well as the city.

In turn, illness is not something that is brought up spontaneously in the accounts and, upon prompting, it is recalled as an infrequent occurrence. This might be related not only to comparisons with the interviews' current relatively deteriorated health conditions, but also to difficulties (in terms of money or distance) in accessing medical care. According to the testimonies, children who got sick were first taken to the *salita* (small treatment room) that operated in the colony's administrative center, and only then, if the case was sufficiently serious to warrant it, to the hospital in Florencio Varela. Another common practice involved contacting a doctor to request a house visit. In any case, the faith placed in popular medicine and home remedies tended to take the place of scientific medicine.

Amid the relative scarcity of material resources, the interviewees express satisfaction with their past and their achievements. "I remember a happy childhood" and "we were content," recollect Carlos N. and Martín G, respectively. The optimism with which the interviewees evoke childhood recreation and entertainment is striking. Kite flying, horse racing, hoop rolling, soccer, hunting guinea pigs, fishing, invented games with vegetables, and making toy cars and other homemade playthings were the most common practices in the children's free time.

> We played with marbles, with stickers, *payana*,[8] we got together with other kids from the colony. The lots were far away, but still (Alberto S.).

> On Sundays we went to play soccer there in La Capilla, the field was fifty on one side and fifty on the other, and everyone had fun. It was great! (Ángel S.).

It is notable that many of these practices were played in groups, thus consolidating social bonds. However, gender differences are glimpsed in this sphere, in that the girls, outside school hours, were more inclined to strengthen links within the family.

The 15 kilometers that separated the colony from Florencio Varela city are not habitually referred to. The connection with this city is only elucidated when the question is put, and it is then that the memories sketch out the importance it held for certain children (Vicenta G.). The journey was undertaken on foot, on horseback, by sulky, or in the truck of some neighborly resident. The non-existence of buses and the precariousness of the roads (dirt, with potholes) meant that in some cases, visits were rather sporadic (around twice per year). For those who owned their own vehicle, the trips were more regular (weekly or fortnightly), though inevitably this frequency was also determined by harvest times and the work patterns that the father or the oldest brother, who tended to be recognized as the decision-makers in the family, put in place. The main reasons for visiting the city were to sell vegetables, vaccinate the children, or to make a purchase (clothes, footwear, school supplies, general provisions). For the youngest ones, much of the attraction lay in the fact that only there was it possible to eat ice cream or visit a movie theater or see the circus. At least in their recollections, the city was not generally a place where they wanted to live, since in their horizon of expectations they preferred the freedom and entertainment of the countryside.

In sum, the examples reveal that the ways in which childhood work in the field is remembered (and valued) can differ greatly. These different reasons stem, in part, from past conditions, but they are also constructions of the present, linked to individual trajectories. If the individual can make a correlation between physical work (or the sacrifice of personal goals) and current well-being, the recollection will be tinged by positive associations, even when the experiences they are retrieving are not necessarily happy. It

8 Translator's note: a traditional Argentine children's game played with five small stones.

is interesting how the testimonies about childhood, despite the differing and sometimes opposing perspectives, depict a diverse and dense social landscape, an impression also given by the family pictures.

Families in pose. An exploration through photographic sources

Photographic images are presented as a means of breaking up the everyday perception into infinite fleeting profiles. Despite their variety, these multiple shared glances have a characteristic in common: they are not accidental but are taken to eternalize moments, personas, facts (Bourdieu, 2003, pp. 137-139). Indeed, as a widespread social practice in contemporary western life, photography entails values and purposes. In the pursuit of plainly capturing the real, family photography completes the picture, since nothing can be considered more natural than the family (Bourdieu, 1994) and, by extension, a family photo.

Photographic images show the family to represent a state whose ties are rooted in property, a spiritual ensemble based on moral values and a bond of sentiments that emanates from instincts and passions (Hirsch, 1999). The typical family photo is, inescapably, a system of the patterns of perception, thought, and appreciation common to the group of which the subject taking the picture is part. Thus, it is possible to retrieve the meanings it proclaims, but also those that it reveals in a given time and space (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 1965). So, if photography is liable to be thought of as a source, it is worth asking what it can contribute in relation to the family and its members in rural settings.

Since the 1960s, European authors have been discussing photography in the rural environment (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 1965; Segalen, 1972). As they demonstrate, the analysis of the personas, their postures, location, and other characteristics reveal the cultural patterns of rural families. Along these lines, this section is based on the assumption that it is possible to integrate photography as a complementary tool for the study of the Argentine rural family, and particularly those from the Pampas, where other sources are scarce or remain silent. This is a historical framework in which the creation of family albums and photographs of children are progressively consolidated as signs of household unity and economic progress. In particular, we work with a selection of 21 photos provided by the interviewees, taken by their families. The pictures abound with everyday scenes of work in the fields and, to a lesser extent, of family celebrations and social, institutional, or school gatherings.

Photography solemnizes valuable moments for the family and reaffirms its integration; as such, the choice of situation portrayed is not random,

but represents roles and social relations. Of course, these characteristics are emphasized in photographs of rural communities, given that the unity of the group and the maintenance of community traditions is reaffirmed in a staging that considers precisely those values (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 58). The conventionalism of the posture – rigid, frontal, ceremonial, and featuring the personas' best clothes – expresses a traditional and hierarchical society where descent and emotional ties are more relevant than particular individuals; belonging and moral code are manifested more than the sentiments, intentions, or feelings of the singular subjects; and social exchanges are dominated by concern for portraying the best image, in accordance with the ideals of dignity and honor. In short, giving an ordered and respectful image of oneself is a way of imposing the rules of the perception itself (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 1965, p. 173).

If the situation depicted is not happenstance, then nor is the stage, since in its selection lies highly symbolic content (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 76). This might explain why the field is a preferred space for depiction. Photographs show the families as a whole, working in coordination, but also point to economic progress (such as the purchase of tractors) or integration into the social universe of the colony (through participation in recreational or social events), in a way in which work can usually be appreciated in the background, and tools and equipment symbolizing prosperity are in direct view. In this way, the depiction of scenes of work in the field crystallizes the family's endeavors as a way of reinforcing the memory that is being produced, overlapped with an account in which each member plays a specific role. From this affirmation, a difference might be inferred in relation to urban families and their customs when taking photographs. While, in general terms, images refer to two fundamental universes –social progress and the make-up of the family (Triquell, 2012, p. 63) – in rural spaces the subjects' relationship with their environment expresses greater affectivity, in that they consider this socioproductive space part of their construction. It is no coincidence that most of the images were taken in the fields, where glimpses are invariably caught of the agrarian routine, to be retrieved later by the interviewees.

Just like in the testimonies, the family photographs of work scenes include children. They are usually in the foreground, with adults in front and behind, and tend to sport better clothing than their elders. For example, Figure 1 is captures children from a Polish-Ukrainian family from La Capilla engaged in tomato picking in 1956. The scene is an outdoor one, punctuated by shacks and boxes brimming with newly harvested fruit bearing the marking "AM 45" (in reference to the lot and the father's initials).

In the background are three adults: a laborer on the left, the mother in the middle, and the father on the right. They appear dedicated and committed to their work, and are clad in humble clothing. The family image captures a moment of rest: at the center are young children: the eldest daughter, aged six or seven, and her brother, around three, who receives the girl's caring and protective gesture with a grimace. The photos suggest that the workplace was not foreign to the minors.

Figure 1
Polish-Ukrainian family in the colony of La Capilla, 1956

Source: personal collection of Ms. Olga M.

Figure 2 shows two boys with their father. The three are wearing work clothes, and the eldest has on boots suited to contending with the mud in the fields. They pose together in a vehicle that is emblematic of the colony: a truck used to distribute and market products. It is worth noting that not all the families had managed to acquire their own vehicle, so this photo is clear evidence of economic progress, and the inclination to retain it in memory. Similarly, Figure 3 shows a Japanese family posing dressed up to immortalize the memory of their first tractor purchase, while sheds and boxes of vegetables can be seen in the background. There is nothing new in the fact that the photographs were often passed on to other family members (sometimes on other continents), serving to document lifestyle improvements. Thus, the object acquired combined the best garments and work clothing in as single shot, where labor, the productive unit, and consumption of production assets coexisted.

Figure 2
Children with their father in the family truck, circa 1955

Source: personal collection of Ms. Mafalda D.

Figure 3
Japanese family on their lot by their tractor, 1957

Source: personal collection of Mr. Carlos N.

In this framework, the children appear as a family symbol of access to goods and resources, figures that synthesize well-being. At the same time, the images portray them in the rural environment, involved in work, learning as part of the generational change that will see them take over from their parents.

It is important to stress that the photographs frequently reveal cement houses, modest yet solid, in the background. All the same, it is notable that home interiors are not usually depicted, as if domestic life, a symbol of the feminine stage, was not considered part of what can be or is worth immortalizing in an image; as if that place, only fleetingly inhabited by the men (at least according to the imaginary), did not seem to aid in formalizing the account of unity and family order in the same way as the field, the place of work.

However, not just work scenes are depicted. Another of the spaces that are featured often in the photographs is the school; this is exemplified in Figure 4, a picture taken on the patio of the colony's rural primary school towards the end of the 1950s The activity captured is the beginning of a school event headed by the teacher/principal, where the students, well turned out for the occasion, are ordered into lines. The photo illustrates the different ages and origins brought together by the school, while in the background there is a truck for transporting produce and at the left, a sulky: two commonplace and indispensable forms of transportation for rural work. Thus, the converging elements in the photo are illustrative of the interaction between work, childhood, and education.

The children are also shown intermingling with adults at events of importance to the colony's social life, such as rodeos and *asados*. Moreover, they are at the forefront of religious events such as First Communion, an event particularly loaded with symbolism for the Japanese children who, incidentally, dominate the scene in such photographs, serving as a strong indicator of the extent to which their families integrated into the Catholic rites of Argentine life (Margarita R.) (Figure 5).

Figure 4
Children being taught at primary school, La Capilla colony, around 1960

Source: personal collection of Ms. Mafalda D.

Figure 5
Children from the colony at their First Communion

Source: personal collection of Ms. Margarita R.

Final reflections

In this study, we have sought to present reflections on rural well-being in the mid-20th century through analysis of memories and photographic images. A case study of the La Capilla colony (located in the peri-urban area of Buenos Aires province), has served as a means by which to explore representations of bygone rural childhood, based on memories constructed by older adults and the analysis of family photographs.

We started with the premise that individual recollections are linked to a family memory also imbued with socially diffused appreciations. In the memories about personal childhood experiences, the testimonies reveal relative uniformity in terms of living conditions during the colony's beginnings, marked by material deprivations that were gradually alleviated. On this point, the discourse is underpinned by evaluations about labor, the family unit, and appreciation of rural life. However, the present evaluation is neither uniform nor entirely positive, reflecting the ways in which persons experience their own subsequent paths.

What the testimonies do evoke is the strength of social amalgamation during those early stages, the importance of spaces for sociability and recreation, recurrent family work as a means of progress, and neighborly reciprocity. The same is true of the idealization of schooling, somewhat at odds with the complications associated with transport, infrastructure, cultural diversity, and work obligations. But far from being contradictory, and allowing for the limitations of using memory as a historical resource, this idealization speaks clearly of the contrast between a dense social life and precarious material conditions, and of the process of interpreting reality. As such, it is revealing that the question of the modest resources (in terms of housing, health, public services, consumer goods, and transportation, although not always explicitly) is one that is often revisited – and at the same time, that such deprivation is underestimated and remedied given supportive practices and emotional ties. These values constitute a way of confronting adverse situations.

The testimonies about childhood, from all its diverse perspectives, delineate a dense social landscape that offsets certain material shortcomings, which are also expressed in the family photographs. These images, by representing social roles and relationships, betray the same evaluations: material prosperity associated with access to production goods, collaborative work, education, and neighborly reciprocation. The selection of situations and scenarios features highly symbolic content, for which the depiction of scenes of family work on the field, as well as school events reflecting cultural

integration, is of interest. The children appear as an emblem of prosperity, dressed in their best clothing and blending in with production.

To be sure, the analysis we sketch out does not seek to approach the life of children in the colony in all of its varied manifestations, but to highlight some characteristics that led to the toleration of certain deprivations as normal, and to the adjustment of expectations to glimpsed possibilities rather than unattainable achievements. The present study has shown that when it comes to the "subjective well-being" approach, the perceptions and aspirations of rural inhabitants did not coincide with urbancentric norms. In this vein, the study has exhibited facets silenced by traditional sources that involve representations about the quality of life of rural children and families. It stands as a contribution to the academic analysis of this problem, while also providing comparative perspectives and interlinking photography more intimately with memory, in that the former is a material artifact that can trigger recollections. The crossover between one and the other yields interesting reflections that will help to fill the historiographical gap in the study of the living conditions and imaginaries of Argentine history.

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Individuals interviewed

María B. (73 years old, Argentine). Arrived in 1951 at the age of six with her parents who came from Entre Ríos to engage in crop and animal production in the colony (interview conducted in August 2011, Florencio Varela).

María C. (72 years old, Italian, ex-producer, housewife). Came to the colony when she was 13 in 1956, from Ranelagh (Berazategui, in the southern part of Greater Buenos Aires); worked in the *quinto* with her parents and four siblings (interview conducted in March 2014, in Florencio Varela).

Mafalda D. (69 years old, Italian; ex producer). Arrived at the age of 12. Her family was awarded a lot in 1952 and, lived there from 1957 along with several of her siblings. They practiced floriculture for a brief spell, before moving into horticulture. She was president of the La Capilla Promotion Society (interview conducted in February 2015, La Capilla).

Silvia D. (64 years old, Argentine, daughter of Italians). Her parents were involved in horticulture in Ranelagh (Berazategui partido, southern part), and moved to the colony in 1951 when she was one year old (interview conducted in February 2015, in Florencio Varela).

Martín G. (70 years old, Argentine, son of Italians; ex-producer, retailer). Arrived in 1951 with his parents and 12 siblings from Las Flores, where they engaged in rural labor. They worked in horticulture and founded a family vegetable distribution business (interview conducted in August 2013, in Florencio Varela).

Vicenta G. (73 years old, Italian, ex-producer, housewife). Arrived in 1954 with her Italian parents, when she was 12 years old. Her family were admitted through an international agreement between Italy and Argentina and were active in horticulture; she continued with the activity after marrying a neighbor and fellow Italian colonist (interview conducted in 2015, in Florencio Varela).

Olga M. (73 years old, Argentine, daughter of Poles-Ukrainians; ex-producer, housewife). Her family lived for 15 years in the colony of Los Helechos (Misiones), working on tobacco and yerba mate plantations. She arrived in La Capilla with her parents and a younger brother at the age of 13, growing vegetables on their farm (interview conducted in March 2015, in La Capilla, Florencio Varela).

Carlos N. (71 years old, Argentine, son of Japanese; ex-producer, retired). His Japanese parents moved from Peru to Longchamps, and then to Florencio Varelo, where they were metayers. In 1954 they arrived in La Capilla and engaged primarily in producing leafy vegetables (interview conducted in February 2015, in Florencio Varela).

Feliciana N. (72 years old, Argentine, daughter of Japanese; professor of Natural Sciences). Arrived in 1953 from Escobar along with her Japanese parents, when she was 12 years old. They worked in floriculture (interview conducted in December 2014, in Florencio Varela).

Margarita, R. (62 years old, Argentine of Japanese descent, school teacher and principal; raised by an Argentine couple). She settled in the colony with her parents, who engaged in beekeeping as well as running the cooperative's store, at the end of the 1950s (interview conducted in March 2016, in Ranelagh).

Antonia S. (76 years old, Argentine, daughter of Italians; ex-producer, housewife). Arrived in the colony in 1952, at the age of 13, from Berazategui (Greater Buenos Aires, southern part), where her family worked in agriculture. She is the sister of Alberto and Ángel (interview conducted in March 2014, in Florencio Varela).

Alberto S. (74 years old, Argentine, son of Italians; ex-producer, retired). Arrived in the colony in 1952, at the age of 11, from Berazategui (Greater Buenos Aires, southern part), where his family worked in agriculture (interview conducted in March 2014, in Florencio Varela).

Angel S. (70 years old, Argentine, son of Italians; producer). Arrived in the colony in 1952, at the age of 8, from Berazategui (Greater Buenos Aires, southern part), where his family worked in agriculture (interview conducted in March 2014, in Florencio Varela).

Atilio S. (71 years old, Italian; ex producer, trader). His family (including seven siblings) settled in the colony in 1952, when he was six years old. They produced vegetables on their lot (interview conducted in September 2013, in Florencio Varela).

Guillermo T. (69 years old, Argentine, descendant of Japanese, producer, reflexologist, former youth manager at the La Capilla Japanese Association) (interview conducted in March 2015, in La Capilla).