

Access to written culture as part of the social reproduction strategies of rural families in Cordoba (Argentina)

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A great account, with lots of rich detail and insights into the changing situation you describe and helpful summaries for the reader of what is going on and what we might make of it. Bourdieu and NLS are indeed appropriate for analyzing this – I think you might insert Bourdieu more in the text as you go along (not just in footnotes), using his terms ('reproduction' is not enough without reference to different forms of 'capital' – social, cultural, economic; and it would help the reader if you explained more about 'dispositons'). There are really interesting links here to other research in similar situations and I have signaled especially Rafat Nabi's work in Pakistan especially since her title 'Hidden Literacies' could also describe the situation you describe here.

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1,15 lín.

Since the advent of New Literacy Studies (NLS)¹, the plurality of practices of written culture has been recognized and it is clear that an understanding of these is possible only if one considers the particular context in which they develop. In the account provided in this Chapter, then, Literacy is thus conceived as historically and culturally situated, constructed, and embedded in power relations. Ethnographic methods help to study the particular forms and meanings that these assume, in order to explain, among other issues, how they provide, or otherwise, access resources and opportunities. The aim here is to use this approach to study the way in which social conditions and relations are linked with what people do with reading and writing in practice amongst rural families in Cordoba (Argentina).

In a previous study (Cragolino, 2009), given the concerns raised by NLS, I discussed the analytical possibilities involved in putting into play, the perspective of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as a way to understand the practices and processes of access

Comentario [J1]: Sugiero conceptualizar la noción de access.

I suggest conceptualizing the idea of access and maybe linking it to the use of the term in Judith's Chapter.

¹ See, among many others, Street (1984), Street (1993), Barton and Hamilton (1998). The Spanish version of the central NLS texts can be seen in Zavala, Niño Murcia y Ames (2004)

to and appropriation of written culture². Here, I am interested in taking up some of these ideas again, to go more deeply into how certain practices of reading and writing are incorporated and transformed as part of the social reproduction strategies of families of peasant origin.

Comentario [B2]: Good aims set out in interesting way

I reconstruct the history of a group of rural families living in the north of Cordoba, Argentina for over 40 years; between 1930 and the mid-70's. My aim is to analyze the changes in the relationships they establish with reading and writing as their objective and subjective positions change in the economic, social and cultural fields and according to the transformations of the dispositions acquired throughout their histories.

Comentario [J3]: The first half of this sentence is clear to me, but i do not understand the second half. Dispositions needs explaining too, fom Bourdieu

Entiendo bien la primera mitad de la frase, pero no la segunda.

Contributions from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu for understanding processes of access and appropriation of written culture in peasant families.

Taking the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (1988a) implies recognizing that practices of written culture and people's perceptions about them are configured in the encounter between the objective possibilities offered by different social fields, and the socially differentiated dispositions, the habitus, which, associated to specific types of capital, define the interest for those possibilities.

Bourdieu understands by field a system of positions and relationships between positions, and by habitus a system of internalized structures, subjective but not individual, that structures practices and representations (Bourdieu, 1988a)³. The field is

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² We follow the access definition by Kalman (2010: 11) . She distinguishes “ the material aspects from the social ones through the notions of access and availability. While availability refers to the material conditions necessary for literacy, access to literacy goes beyond the presence of print (or screens); learning to read and write requires the opportunity to interact with other readers and writers, to talk about written text, to insert its use in multiple situations and contexts, to experience its use and tensions, and to use written language for ones own purposes”.

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³ Bourdieu understands by field a system of positions and relationships between positions, and by habitus a system of internalized structures, subjective but not individual, that structures practices and

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a social arena of struggle over the appropriation of certain species of capital and the author identifies various types of capitals and fields; the principals are economic, social, cultural, and simbolic.

Habitus is the social made body. Bourdieu mentions the “system of durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles wich generate and organize practices and representations than can objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or and express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of the obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu, 1991: 88-89)

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I find this a fertile analytical approach which, based on concepts such as field, capital, habitus, disposition, interest, strategy and history, aims to dialectically unite structure and institutions to the action of the actors. It enables me to understand the processes by which the peasant families that are the subjects of my studies define and organize their everyday lives, develop their projects and include education and written culture among their strategies.

Comentario [B4]: good

It is in this line that I propose that practices of written culture may be considered as part of the social reproduction strategies, understood as that set of practices by which individuals and families tend, consciously or unconsciously, to conserve or improve their position in the structure of class relationships (Bourdieu, 1988b, p. 122). In this perspective, social reproduction strategies depend on the “state of the system of instruments of reproduction”, which vary according to different historical periods and contextual spaces. This means thinking not only how the school system and educational provision configure objective opportunities for access to written culture, but also taking

representations (Bourdieu, 1988a) Put this in the text – and add a brief explanatory sentence on dispoiiitons too

into account how the production structure, labor market, probate law, the law regulating land ownership, social policies, social security systems, etc. also do this.

1. The strategies also depend on the differential performance that these instruments of reproduction can offer families according to their objective position, i.e. to the volume (quantity) and structure (conformation) of their resources, the economic, cultural and social capital at their disposal. There are some resources available that ease access to written culture: there are objectified cultural capital (libraries, books, magazines, but also other reading materials related to domestic, religious, community life); there are also embedded resources (knowledge, information, skills), which are important to identify. It is important for analytical purposes to recognize also how economic and social capital facilitate or otherwise, provide access to these cultural resources.

2. Finally, the strategies are also configured according to the system of dispositions, the habitus incorporated throughout the process of class socialization, in this case peasant class, which lead them to think, to perceive, to define “what is possible” and “what is impossible”, “what is thinkable” and “what is unthinkable”, “what is for us” and “what is not for us”. In relation to literacy, the aim is to identify the system of representations which frame and give meaning to the use of the resources of written culture. These habitus constitutes principles of the generation and perception of practices, and helps explain how and to what extent families implement certain alternatives of action in relation to written culture and discard others, put certain mechanisms into effect and make efforts.

But the strategies related to literacy are defined not only on the basis of the volume and structure of the types of capital considered at the time and of the possibilities that these secure for the families them. They are also made according to their evolution over time,

Comentario [E5]: I Explain access and availability en note 2

Comentario [J6]: Access and availability, I suggest conceptualizing these briefly

Acceso y disponibilidad; sugiero conceptualizar estos brevemente.

Comentario [E7]: See reference in footnote 2

Comentario [B8]: Yes, apt framing

Comentario [B9]: But distinguish the concepts

i.e. to their social history and the dispositions, also in history, which are constituted in the long-term relationship with some objective structure of possibilities.

Peasant families, structural transformations, social reproduction and strategies in Tulumba (1930-1970)

The families who are the subject of this analysis come from the Tulumba Department, a region of the province of Cordoba, Argentina, the agro-ecological characteristics of which (semi-mountainous, semi-arid, with an environment degraded by deforesting), since the early 20th century, present a contrast with the rich Pampa south. This is a mostly rural, peasant area that has historically had the highest levels of poverty and illiteracy rates. The peasant families cultivated small plots in the low valleys, raised animals (cattle and goats) in an extensive system, and worked in the bush, cutting timber and making charcoal. Their members sold their labor seasonally in the southern agricultural regions of the provinces of Cordoba, Santa Fe and Buenos Aires or permanently in some of the ranches of the area where they worked as herdsmen or laborers of large establishments engaged in cattle-farming.

As from the 1940's, the possibilities available to rural families for autonomous reproduction became more limited while, in the context of welfare state policies, job and settlement opportunities in the cities increased.⁴ Definitive migration to urban destinations increased and with it a process of depopulation of the villages and depeasantization that has still not stopped. This process is parallel to the expansion of large capital-intensive farms advancing over the production of small properties, fencing in farms and creating a new economic and social scenario.

⁴ See [Castanheira, this volume](#)

Comentario [B10]: We could cross refer here to Lulu's paper, which indicates similar macro economic changes

Elisa says : I dont know who is Lulu.

Comentario [B11]: Useful background info

These structural changes, briefly presented here, meant changes in urban family economic reproduction strategies. In the first decades of the last century, the families ensured their ~~direct~~ direct economic reproduction through a variety of farm activities (maize, horticulture, cattle- or goat-raising, vegetables, the bush, picking fruit, etc.), but steadily lost their capacity for autonomous sustenance as capitalism penetrated the area through the markets of land, labor, products and consumption.

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The diversification of activities, the intensification of the use of family labor, the distribution of tasks by gender and age, were the main strategies. Migration strategies then began to become ever more important. This was in the context of the high availability of labor that the families have and linked to the limited possibilities of further dividing land among the children, without affecting the economic viability of the unit. It was also related to the intention of seeking alternative resources, especially as the monetization of the rural economy increased, with the arrival of services and the purchase of manufactured products which replaced domestic production.

Comentario [B12]: Very similar to Bourdieu's account of his own rural background – maybe reference that

The reproductive strategies of the peasant units of our informants were affected during this period by the changes mentioned above and especially by labor market dynamics: on the one hand, the modification of the annual cycle occupying rural workers in the Pampa area, with the retraction reduction decreased inf the need for manual workers, resulting from the mechanization of agricultural tasks that began in 1940 and accelerated in the 1960s; on the other hand, the development of an urban job market, especially industrial and for services (particularly in building) that turned cities, including Córdoba, into a major magnet for rural dwellers.

Comentario [E13]:

Comentario [E14]: I mean reduction, decreased (in spanish decremento)

With the retraction and then without the contribution of resources from the work in the Pampas, with the growing deterioration of environmental conditions and of the competitive advantages of agricultural products from marginal areas such as northern

Cordoba, economic reproduction as a unit of fin these families could only be guaranteed to the extent that some of its members left the farm and tried out labor strategies involving their definitive departure from the home. Also, greater market integration, produced by the development of means of communication that ease access to markets (both for selling the production and to buy products previously obtained through family self-supply), placed them in a situation of increasing weakness and reinforced the need to increase income.

Migration, whether seasonal or then permanent, of many of the family members, introduced changes in the objective conditions of life and restricted its future as a productive unit. But it was also presented as a structuring process and affected different dimensions of the household unit. As we will see, one of these transformations had to do with the meaning and scope which was starting to be given to schooling as preparation for migration and the relationship they have with written culture.

In the implementation of reproduction strategies, whether related to self-sufficiency on the farm, rural or then urban migration, rural wage-earning, or inheriting the farm and the animals, put into play, in turn, educational strategies that guided different members of the unit, depending on whether they were leaving the farm, becoming rural laborers or herdsmen or remained in charge of the family farm. The family prepared its children for these alternatives and incorporated informal educational mechanisms, and gradually later the school, into this training.

Comentario [B15]: Nice shift to the education – and literacy? - issues

Access to school and reading and writing as part of the strategies of social reproduction

In Tulumba, early in the twentieth century, there were primary schools (provincial and national). The sources consulted⁵ show, however, that only 50% of children complied with compulsory education in the 1930's and that regular attendance was limited to half of those registered. The schools, at that time, attracted mainly the children of the owners of the largest farms and cattle ranches in the area, who had worked to set up the schools and provided premises for them to operate. These families thus ensured the existence of a school in a location near their homes and eased their children's access to education and thus to some knowledge which, in other social sectors and especially in the city, was already given social importance: to know how to read and write and to do some math. For the rest of the peasant families, the possibilities of going to school were much more limited; there were geographical distances to cover (the schools, still not very numerous in the area, were in some cases several kilometers away), but there were also urgent material needs that had to be satisfied which involved the children. The inclusion of children in domestic and peridomestic tasks began at about the age of six and, though its intensity depended on the structure and availability of family labor, it was part of daily routines.

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*Tina: (...) As a little child and then afterwards, everybody out to work... Just getting used to working the land, with the animals.... country people, it seemed to them that school wasn't necessary... and so it was that we grew up... Nothing of learning letters; why should we? We were just in the countryside.*⁶

Comentario [B16]: Apt quote – provide reference

⁵ Source: Anuario Estadístico de la Provincia de Córdoba, Gobierno de la Provincia de Córdoba, 1930.

⁶ Source: Tina interview 2 (May 8, 1998)

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The children were subjected to early learning about domestic and farm work through observation and then imitation, allowing them to gradually appropriate the repertoire of specialized knowledge that would serve to solve "practical" problems (knowledge of weather cycles, the operations necessary for cultivation and harvesting, handling the tools, the diseases of the animals, the routines of the kitchen and household chores). School for these children was far away, not only physically but socially. Education and schooling for these families did not appear as a priority need for generational reproduction.

Comentario [B17]: We could cross refer here to Judith's paper, which also signals the nature of 'local' knowledge and its relation to outside forms of knowledge and new technologies

Comentario [E18]: Elisa says I don't know Judy's paper,

Comentario [B19]: Key point

As from the 1930s, an expansion of basic education services was seen in the department of Tulumba. Between 1930 and 1970, the number of schools increased from 33 to 60, the number of teachers grew from 46 to 154 and enrollment went from 1562 to 2886 students. This situation corresponds to the strengthening of the education system as part of national and provincial state policies; but it was the result not only of state initiatives, but also of new social configurations, and demands and expectations that peasant families began to have regarding the education of their children.

Comentario [B20]: Useful stats

As mentioned earlier, the context was that of a declining population because of permanent emigration, generally to urban destinations, reduction of farms and herds, monetization of transactions and the loss of economic sustainability of farming units.

Comentario [B21]: Helpful summary

These transformations in socio-economic and educational fields influenced the manner and the efforts that families gradually applied to formal education and specific moves to approach the school. The dispositions (objectively adapted, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, which organize practices and representations), were slowly changing and helped build new representations—ideas about how one passed through childhood, what the obligations of children were, the

Comentario [B22]: Remind us what this means in Bourdieu's terms

children's possible futures and the value that reading and writing would have in a future which, in most cases, involved abandoning rural life.

From the late 40s and early 50s, the number of children of study-the families being studied who attended schools gradually increased, though family efforts concerning education were still directed to ensure continuity in school only for some of the children and for a limited period, until the time when they had minimal knowledge of reading and writing and arithmetic, which would enable them to "cope better" when trying to find work outside the farm.

Comentario [J23]: No entiendo las comillas aquí. Why quotations marks here??

It began to be important then to "know how to sign" (their name), "to know how read and to sum" so as not to be cheated, for example, by the contractors who took them to the harvest, by the bosses in the Pampa, the mistress in domestic service, or the owners of the general stores and the traveling salesmen who arrived in the area and provided merchandise. Recognizing their own inability to convey this knowledge, the family began to delegate these activities of formation to the teachers.

Comentario [B24]: Usdeful reference to the actual literacy skills and practices required

Rolo: *"When the boss (contractor for the harvest) arrived, some just by word, but others threw the papers in front of you and the old ones looked at it and didn't know what they were signing... You had to know, that is someone had to know, so that they didn't put one over you, so then if the kids could understand, if they were smart, that was a great help, you understand? So then they always took care that one of the bigger kids should know... The same with the merchandise and all... When they came (the traveling salesmen) and they said to you, give me so much goat and I'll give you the sugar, maté tea, spaghetti and they knew how to take advantage..."*

I was sent... I must have been like 9 (years old), but I didn't like it, so not much, to sign, I sign cute, you wouldn't believe, don't read though, sums, more for sums. But

my cousin Toto, he had a head for it so it was more reading, writing, everything, they always used to consult him... " ⁷

Comentario [B25]: Great quote – provide a reference system for these

Until then, all the job options seen as possible had been (manual and) did not require additional knowledge nor school skills, so the children stayed in school only for the time needed to acquire this initial knowledge, as long as they were not required for farm jobs or while they could balance school activity and work. But then the migration strategies gradually increased, which involved a greater number of domestic group members, and these had urban destinations. That was when school attendance and literacy began to occupy another place in family economic and social reproduction. It was necessary to prepare children for migration to urban centers and there obtain other kinds of jobs. The school could prepare them for this migration.

Tina: "We started to send (the children to school) because you already knew that they couldn't be like us and that there was a lot of work, so much work in the city... In Perón's time... so many people went... lots of possibilities, lots of jobs... and there they had to know, didn't they? about letters, writing, reading. It couldn't be like we were, that here, if you don't know, well, for the goats and animals, but there, if you don't know, the minimum of writing, that they give you a paper and you don't know, or for building or I don't know what, a factory, that the bosses came and passed you a paper and if you didn't know, so many chances were lost..."⁸

Schooling was expected to provide children with instrumental knowledge to make better use of the opportunities that opened up to them in the urban space; they should acquire

⁷Source: Rolo interview 2 (August 8, 1997)

⁸Source: Tina interview 2 (May 8, 1998)

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skills and abilities that would enable them to improve their lives and work. Reading and writing were one of those skills.

Rosa: "They were country people, just that, so ignorant they served for field work and nothing else. In my house, no books or anything, but my dad did have one thing, he said we had to learn to read and write and so he sent us, so they wouldn't look down on us, to have a future, like, if the girl went (to the city) or the boy, so they knew enough to look after themselves, you understand?; so they would be respected, because if you can't read, nobody respects you, you see? And so it was that one after another we were sent."⁹

Although parents did not know what kind of specific knowledge was involved in "managing letters", they recognized its importance. Reading and writing would not only open the way to "decent jobs" and better paid ones, but it began increasingly to be thought of as a means of social empowerment; the ability to read and write opened up the "respect" of others, as Rosa said; it makes its bearer visible and in a way protects them and puts them in better standing.

As the years advanced, the housekeeping needs of some of the study units, particularly those with more economic capital, started to include some resources related to school attendance. On the one hand there were material needs to be resolved, buying supplies and books, but they also had to ensure that the children had enough time to go to school, and space and time to do their homework.

Comentario [B26]: Gthe account is building up nicely

⁹ [Source: Rosa interview 3 \(september 6, 1998\)](#)

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Mercedes: My dad came home late, tired of laboring like a donkey all day... but he called us and made us show him our school books... I don't know what he saw because he didn't know. He had gone to school, but the lack of practice, he didn't know anything, but he looked at them the same.... José, who skipped off more often than not (from school) and stayed around with a friend killing birds or doing I don't know what, had to come back and on the way write something to show the old man (laughs). We had to show him the book, always. ¹⁰

As mentioned by our informants, one of the greatest difficulties the children had in school had to do with reading and writing. They note here the absence of written materials in their homes, the inexistence not only of their parents' "studies", but also the "lack of practice" and the limited opportunities to make use of written language in their everyday and working lives, which distanced most members of the families from these skills.

This lack of knowledge meant that many of these parents were unable to exercise any direct "monitoring" of homework because they did not know what the children were studying. This did not mean that they always ignored these "tasks" and they sought to exercise, in any case, some control above all in terms of habits and responsibilities.

Gladis: At two in the afternoon, Mom sat us down (the daughters)... at the big table, each of us with our homework. She didn't know many things, but she got herself a dictionary and found her way around with that. She was very demanding with spelling and neatness and insisted and insisted on homework. ¹¹

¹⁰ Source: Mercedes interview 4 (June 14, 1997).

¹¹ Source: Gladis interview 5 (March 14, 1998).

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In Gladis' family, the monitoring function involved special times in the household day devoted to this activity, some material resources (books, dictionaries) and the habit of reproducing school writing practices, which were not found in the other study units.

The presence of written culture in family and community life, work and migration

The first image that our informants usually present about their rural communities and households is that of an “illiterate” environment which directly corresponds to “poverty”, “lack of understanding”, “ignorance”, “the work of ignorant people.” However, throughout the interviews and life histories, the existence of materials of written culture and of the inclusion of family members in literate events and practices are mentioned many times.¹²

In the community and around an institution such as the school, multiple literacy practices were deployed. I am referring not only to the variety of written materials found there (posters, files, books, brochures, etc.) or what happened in the classroom or at home about homework, exercise books and books, but to another series of activities that involved the existence of a school. There were, for example, events concerning the production of documents relating to the petition for the opening of a school. In the hamlets, committees were organized, investigations were begun to get the official opening and they communicated with the authorities of the Ministry of Education through a series of documents.

¹² Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe literacy events as observable activities in which reading and/or writing develop. These activities are always embedded in social contexts and emerge from literacy practices that constitute cultural forms for using the written language. Unlike events, practices are not directly observable since they include a series of values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. See also [Nabi Rafat, \(2009\)](#)

Comentario [B27]: Cf 'Hidden Lietraies Rafat Nabi

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Although, in general, these procedures were headed by literate people, in some hamlets, the prestige and trust that the residents deposited in certain members of the community freed them from the condition of “managing letters.” This seems to have happened in the case of Gladis’ family. Her grandfather, who was “illiterate” in formal terms, is mentioned¹³ as the power behind the opening of the Bañado school. With the help of literate neighbors and the teacher of a nearby hamlet, they drew up documents explaining the need for the school to open, and through them went to the General Department of Primary Schools and the Provincial Education Council. As the local political leader, it was he who then also brought to the attention of the political boss of the Department and of the local Senator, a census showing the existence of children of an age for schooling. The lack of formal knowledge of reading and writing did not prevent Don Julian from participating in literacy practices and thereby being the representative of his community in all these proceedings and then becoming president of the School Committee and the Cooperative.

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The fact of “being comfortable” with bureaucratic requirements, for which this man was recognized, had nothing to do with the formal, schooled definition of the ability to write and read but with the ability to handle negotiations related to these, including recognition and use of written texts where needed. The social and political capital he was able to deploy made the written documents more efficient for the community and these kinds of capital were resources which other members of the hamlet did not possess, even if they were ‘officially’ literate. Don Julian was also the “guardian” of the documents that the community considered important to protect and later his family kept some of those papers.

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¹³ The reference to Don Julian’s activities in relation to the opening and management of the school is made not only by family members during the interviews but it is present in official documents, Records of General Inspection of School Buildings, and Inspection Records of Tulumba department. Years 1931-44. Archives of the Directorate of Initial and Primary Level Education of the Province of Córdoba (DGEP)

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The documents we have consulted in the Archives of the Directorate of Primary Schools and the stories of the families also mention other negotiations taken to the Ministry of Education from the peasant communities **studied**. These called for the removal or punishment of teachers in times of conflict or when for various reasons they did not meet the expectations of the parents. The “repeated absences of teachers”, “mistreatment” of children or families, the refusal to “loan” the school for holding parties and other events, gave rise to written complaints and requests for solutions presented by the parents. Other examples of relations with the state mediated by writing, to access goods and services and to assert their rights, are requests or complaints about the conditions of roads, cleaning of canals, or provision of health services.

Comentario [B28]: Good data

As Bourdieu puts it (1990), a good becomes capital to the extent that it presents as "rare" and worth being sought after and valued as a resource in a given social formation. Being scarce, it produces interest by its accumulation. Around it, a certain division of labor is also established between those who produce it, consume it, distribute it and legitimate it

The ability to read and write, familiarity with the documents and petitions or “know-how with papers” were, in the peasant families studied, scarce goods and became significant **cultural** capital that helped maintain or improve the social position of the family and in the network of local power¹⁴. And this was especially true as communications with the outside progressed, services and products arrived and migration strategies increased.

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¹⁴ As Bourdieu puts it (1990), a good becomes capital to the extent that it presents as "rare" and worth being sought after and valued as a resource in a given social formation. Being scarce, it produces interest by its accumulation. Around it, a certain division of labor is also established between those who produce it, consume it, distribute it and legitimate it. Put this in the text – use Bourdieu more explicitly as you go along

At the stage where farm self-sufficiency predominated and communications with other hamlets, towns or cities were more scarce, there seem not to have been many practices of written records of production and labor activities *“because for the work that there was, this was not needed.”* Literacy began to be more important for the families when relationships with the labor market, consumption and products increased. When, as Rolo mentioned in a quote in the previous point, the contractors arrived for seasonal work in the Pampa area, the men who were joining the contingent of harvesters had to sign papers tying them to the “bosses” for several months a year. Something similar occurred when traveling salesmen arrived bringing “merchandise” that could be exchanged for local production (especially baby goats and corn) or when the men of the community began to leave for the towns and cities to sell the leather or meat of their animals.

Don Juan, the grandfather of one of the study families, explained this when he commented that commercial transactions demanded certain knowledge that had to be managed to ease the operation and avoid “being cheated” by the traders who supplied them or to whom they delivered their products. Managing reading and writing and summing would become a resource and a sign of distinction that allowed him to position himself better in his business.

“When you're in a business like this (the sale of goats), it's worth knowing. It's not the same to arrive (at a wholesaler or dealer of the city of Dean Funes or Cordoba) and be told, let's see, how many animals, how many kilos, how much leather? and to check and control, as when you didn't know and they put one over you... So it was always an

advantage, it looked better, because you came from the country and they said, what do they know, but this way they respected you... "¹⁵

Comentario [B29]: Reference?

This same man described the process through which he learned to read and write. Juan did not attend school, but "learned of letters and numbers" while working with the owner of a store in his hamlet and during migration experiences in the south of Santa Fe Province.

"The first one who taught me was Don Toledo when I helped him in the store. I used to spend lots of time there, working, and he taught me little by little... I got better at it over there near Venado Tuerto. Where we used to go, there were some guys working who, in the evening, when we were not in the field, used to come to the sheds and made us practice... They talked about politics... they would tell me they were socialists... I already knew a bit and was enthusiastic and kept practicing. The boys told me I had a head, and not to give up, and I liked it and it's a question of practice till you don't forget anymore."¹⁶

Comentario [B30]: Very similar to the accounts by Rafat Nabi of local learning of literacy practices in Pakistan

The experiences of migration for seasonal work in the harvests or the longer and stable migrations to the cities were thus also spaces for acquiring knowledge about reading and writing and possibilities of participation in literate events.

In the case of the men, another space they mention is the "colimba"¹⁷. The young people who arrived at compulsory military service without having gone through the school or

¹⁵ Source: Juan interview 1 (May 8, 1998).

¹⁶ Source: Juan interview 2 (August 14, 1998).

¹⁷ Compulsory military service called young men for military training and to provide various services in the Armed Forces. In the beginning, people were recruited between 20 and 21 years of age, and it lasted 18 to 24 months. From the 70s, 18-year old men were incorporated. It was popularly known as the

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when they had such a short time of schooling that they had not learned to "deal with the letters", had the opportunity to access this instruction.

For girls raised in the countryside, the first migration experiences were generally to cities to join the informal labor market as domestic servants. In our interviews, this job figured as a turning point in their lives, as it was the first time they left their families and had their own income; but they also remember it as giving them new knowledge and opportunities. One that they mention has to do with contact with the "literate world." The need to follow shopping lists, take messages, be able to read notes with instructions from their bosses, get around the city, have daily access to magazines and newspapers and to write letters to the family, was the impulse for some of our respondents behind the need to acquire or reinforce knowledge of letters.

Comentario [B31]: Helpful list of examples

Finally, in relation to the latter, in all the study households, the letters sent by family members who had migrated played a significant role in mobilizing the relatives. When there was no member who could read and write, they had to find help to enable communication. But in any case, this correspondence was a precious commodity that the families kept, to some of which I had access in my research.

Final reflections

I noted at the beginning of this work that the NLS offers a theoretical framework for understanding how literacy practices are socially constructed, and that we found points in common with the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu. Both of these offer us conceptual tools that help to understand how written culture becomes inserted in the lives of people

"colimba", a word that alludes to three frequent conscript activities: running (corre), cleaning (limpia) and sweeping (barre).

and how the structural constraints and power relations connect with the needs, interests and experiences of the people.

In the preceding pages I tried to show how literacy practices can be analyzed as part of the social reproduction strategies that peasant households implement to maintain or better their position in the system of class relations. This involves considering various analytical, objective and symbolic dimensions, within a historical perspective. It is a matter of reconstructing the history of these families, which in reality always refers to a collective history, through which the social conditions and opportunities are constituted for the use and appropriation of literacy.

Access to reading and writing by peasant families in northern Cordoba was linked to the school. However, it was not the result only of the presence of the State, of the establishment of the educational system and the imposition of compulsory schooling, but is related to other structural processes, including changes in agrarian structure and in the labor market. As time passed and the objective conditions changed (their positions in the economic, social, cultural fields), but also, along with the transformation of dispositions acquired throughout the histories of migration and linkages with the market and the State, new interests are steadily configured that enable the incorporation of written culture as a capital, an efficient resource that the children have to possess, and can then exchange in the new market place.

In these pages it was possible to present only some of the spaces of literacy that were configured in the life of the peasant families of Tulumba. They show, however, a richness and complexity that is often overlooked in educational environments that repeatedly qualify rural spaces as "illiterate." What is also interesting is to note how our interviewees themselves appeared to ignore this wealth and recognized only the school

Comentario [B32]: Helpful summary

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Comentario [B33]: yes

as a literate space.¹⁸ This invisibility is also part, as both the NLS and Bourdieu indicated, of the networks of power relations that must be analyzed in the different empirical cases.

Comentario [B34]: again, Nabi's subjects also referred to themselves as 'illiterate, even though she could show them evidence of their actual uses of everyday literacies – hence the term 'Hidden Literacies'

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¹⁸ [Nabi's subjects also referred to themselves as 'illiterate, even though she could show them evidence of their actual uses of everyday literacies See Nabi, \(2009\).'](#)

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