

**POPULAR CHILDHOOD AND VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY:
DIFFERENT USES AND AFFECTS TOWARDS FICTIONAL CHARACTER ZAMBA
(ARGENTINA)**

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Résumé

Cet article analyse la persistance de certaines formules visuelles s'adressant aux enfants des classes populaires en Argentine. Le point de départ est un personnage fictif enfant nommé Zamba, de la première chaîne publique d'Amérique Latine pour enfants : *Pakapaka*. Les différentes utilisations de l'image de Zamba nous aideront à comprendre d'une part comment on imagine les enfances (surtout de secteurs bas et moyens) ; et d'autre, part le pouvoir des images à l'heure où l'on adapte certains phénomènes sociaux. Cet article vise à réfléchir à la souveraineté visuelle d'un sujet habituellement laissé de côté comme acteur politique: les enfants.

Mots clés : enfances populaires, formule visuelle, souveraineté visuelle, écran, exposition.

Abstract

This article analyzes the persistence of certain visual formulas addressing working class children in Argentina. The starting point is a fictional child character named Zamba, from the first Latin American state channel for children: *Pakapaka*. The different uses of Zamba's image will help us understand how childhood is still imagined and how visuality shapes social phenomena. This article aims to reflect upon the visual sovereignty of a subject usually left behind as a political actor: the children.

Key Words: popular childhood, visual formula, visual sovereignty, screen, exposition.

Introduction: posing a question about visual sovereignty

Children have always had a subaltern place in terms of political participation. In the case of the Spanish word "*infancia*" (meaning childhood), which is still used in many fields, the etymology itself implies the idea of "those who have no voice"¹. That means, they have no place in the political

1 "*Infancia*" has a Latin root: *infans*, a child who cannot talk yet or does not know how to explain himself. It could also mean ignorant or *infacundo* -a person who cannot speak or sustain an argument properly (*Nuevo Valbuena -Diccionario Latino-Español [New Valbuena - Latin-Spanish Dictionary]*, Vicente Salva, 1843, at http://www.biblioteca.uma.es/bbl/doc/FONDO_ANTIGUO/12633926.pdf access 19/08/21) "*In*" is a negative prefix, and "*fari*" means to speak, and mostly, to speak in public (see <http://etimologias.dechile.net/?infancia> access 19/08/21).

activities of their communities, as they are not listened to. Although there have been many studies in recent years that aimed at showing how children can actually play a major role in their neighbourhoods (Hernández, 2020), schools (Batallán & Campanini, 2008; Rodríguez Bustamante, 2020), families (Cosse, 2019; Fonseca, 1998) and other places where they spend their time (Lázaro et al., 2019; Morales, 2020); it is less frequent to find a similar concern about the right they have to their own image. There are two ways to analyse the latter. In recent times the use of children's images on the Internet posed new concerns and questions about this topic. Their consent and the protection of personal data are at the centre of the debates, regarding both the use that families and especially parents make of children's pictures, and the way they might be displayed in the media².

A second aspect of this problem has to do with the way adults imagine childhood and how children should behave, regarding expectations, desires or even fears a society might have. In this case, gender, class, ethnicity and age play a major role. This article will pay attention to this second point, by focusing on how children from working classes are *exposed* (sensu Didi-Huberman, 2014). Not only are the studies about iconography focused on children rare³, but also the idea itself of “visual sovereignty” (Raheja, 2010) has barely reached this group as a politically active subject (not just individual cases). This concept refers originally to visual productions of Native American populations, who started to take part in the making of films about their communities mostly since 1960. Many Indian actors and actresses had already appeared in silent films at the turn of the twentieth century. However, merely appearing did not guarantee (visual) sovereignty as political agents. In general, stereotypes were broadcast, according to what a white audience was expecting to see. A similar scenario is shared by children, especially from the working class in Argentina. They might appear in the media, films, even textbooks at school, but their exposition does not involve their consent or participation and usually reproduces hegemonic adult conceptions. We can obviously find some exceptions for the latter, mainly with relation to social organizations that work with children in cultural centres or political spaces with their own dynamics (Shabel, 2017; Shabel & Chait, 2021; Winckler, 2020). But in this case I will analyze a particular iconography about a fictional TV character, Zamba, from the north of Argentina; and the particular dynamics the TV channel that broadcast the programme is implementing at present, involving children in the decision-making process of the programming itself.

Argentina started in 2010 a pioneering project related to a public state-funded TV channel targeted at children, called *Pakapaka*. This experience was innovative not only in this country, but in the whole Latin American region. The name of the channel means “playing hide and seek” in *Quechua*, an indigenous language of the northern region of Argentina and neighbouring countries, which already shows one of its main intentions: a federal proposal for children, conveying the different realities that they experience. Besides, the channel has a clear viewpoint that envisages children as

2 See the special issue published by UNICEF Argentina in 2017 “Comunicación, infancia y adolescencia: Guías para periodistas” (Communication, Childhood and Adolescence). Available at: https://www.unicef.org/argentina/sites/unicef.org.argentina/files/2018-04/COM-4_ProteccionDatos_Interior_WEB.pdf (access 17/01/22)

3 After the pioneering work of Philippe Ariès, there have not been many proposals for this interest. Some exceptions could be the ambitious work of Anne Higonnet in the USA (1998), which follows Ariès's path. There are also studies about religious iconography of angels and Jesus Christ as a child (Beneyto, 1973), as they influenced the general formula of innocent children in modern Europe. Also, we can find some studies about pedagogic pictures used to educate children (Peña et al., 2007; Szir, 2006). Finally, short papers pay attention to the influence of these modern iconographical formulas in Argentina (Ribeiro, 2021; Winckler, 2020b).

citizens and subjects of law (Salviolo, 2012), particularly in two ways: the active participation of children in decisions related to the programming itself; and the protection and exhibition of children's rights on the screen. These ideas are totally different from the concepts highlighted by commercial and private channels, mainly broadcast on Cable TV, where children are seen mostly as consumers (Duek, 2021; Fuenzalida, 2006). The relation between childhood and the media cannot be thought of without understanding the hegemonic models of childhood, inherited from modern and western Europe. This model is still in operation, but it has also become more complex, as in the last decades the idea of "consumerist children" was built and spread above all by the media (Duek, 2013).

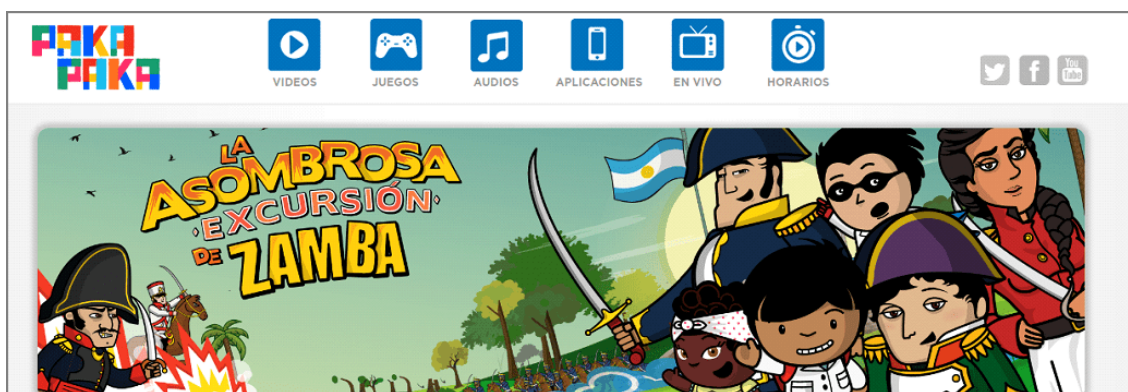
Within this context, the question about the visual sovereignty of children becomes even more urgent when we talk about children of the working class, referred to in this article as "popular⁴ childhood" [*infancias populares*, (Shabel, 2018)]. This heterogeneous group has its own visual formula, which can be traced in Latin America back to colonial times. Children wandering in the streets, begging or simply out of school (a concern that has grown more and more since the nineteenth century) have been described in different chronicles or even portrayed in works of art or magazines and school manuals, as will be shown below. Along with modern childhood, characterized as innocent and committed to school studies, we can also find this other universe of children that by the twentieth century was referred to as "minors"[*menores*]. These children from working class sectors showed a different image from the romantic model of the innocent middle-class child. They were not expected to be successful at school, or even finish it, and most of them worked. The "vagabonds" or urchins were also included in this group, and they were perceived negatively by the local elite. In fact, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the terms *minority* and *criminality* were often put together. Popular childhood was then uniformed under the model of minority by the perceptions of politicians, intellectuals and the local elite, who contributed to crystallize this conception (Zapiola, 2019, p.69).

Although many of the so-called "minors" attended school since the nineteenth century (at least in some regions of Argentina⁵), the debates about which education could be better for them show how they were considered by authorities and other members of the local elite (Zapiola, 2009). Or, let us say, how they *are still* considered. These children are in danger, according to these hegemonic discourses in which their destiny seemed already sealed; but could also be dangerous for the community (Freidenraij, 2015). Minors were excluded from the model of romantic childhood (Higonnet, 1998), which set children at school or doing specific activities, in certain times and places, according to age and gender, and of course, as long as they belonged to middle and upper classes of white skin, in urban contexts.

In this article, I will focus on these formulas of working class children, by taking into account a particular fictional character from *Pakapaka*, created at the same time as the channel: Zamba (Picture 1). He is a boy from Formosa (north of Argentina), has dark skin and goes to a state-funded primary school. His name also refers to a typical music genre of Argentina's folklore.

4 "Popular" in Spanish refers also to working class sectors.

5 The Common Education Law, enacted in 1884 in Argentina, established free and obligatory education for children between 6 and 14 years old in national schools along the Capital City and the National Territories. Although the law excluded the schools that were under the provincial governments' control, it became an ideal model related to the project of modernization of the country (Pineau, 1997; Zapiola, 2011).



Picture 1: Screenshot of the official website of *Pakapaka*⁶, in which Zamba appears with some of the main characters of the programme. He is wearing a white overall, typical of state-funded schools in Argentina. Not only can we see the boy and his female friend from the early nineteenth century, but also some important historical characters, who played a major role in the regional independences.

The starting point of this article is related to an internet meme that reached popularity in 2021 in Argentina, involving this fictional child (Picture 2). During the pandemic, the national government established a strict quarantine, which resulted in virtual lessons or home schooling, as happened in many countries. An intense discussion took place in the media in 2021 when the mayor of Buenos Aires, the capital city, insisted on returning to schools, even though the national administration suggested the opposite. The mayor said that the damages caused to children if they did not go back to the classrooms would be severe⁷.



Picture 2: Internet meme that went viral in April 2021 after the debate about virtual classes for children in Buenos Aires. We can see Zamba with a different hairstyle and different clothes. The sentence says: “Zamba after two years without attending school classes”. As you can see, he is also carrying a gun. The name of this particular Zamba is “Zamba *turro*”, which refers to children and young people from the slums or impoverished neighbourhoods who are generally aesthetically portrayed this way (for example, in the media). “Zamba *turro*” is not always taken with a negative meaning as it is here. The picture was taken from a short article, written by Cora Gamarnik, who criticized the message the original anonymous meme spread⁸.

6 See <http://www.pakapaka.gob.ar/minisitios/126083> (access 19/08/21)

7 See <https://www.lapoliticaonline.com.ar/nota/133683-exclusivo-larreta-rechazo-el-cierre-de-escuelas-causa-un-profundo-dano-en-los-ninos/> (access 19/08/21)

8 See <https://www.elextremosur.com/nota/30075-el-meme-de-zamba-que-estigmatiza-a-lxs-pibxs/> (access 17/08/21)

The meme that became viral, and was also criticized on social networking sites and traditional media, takes us back to these differences outlined so clearly at the start of the twentieth century between “children” and “minors”, according to their school attendance. Those who did (do) not go to school were (are) likely to take “the wrong way” in life [*el mal camino*], as shown in this school book for children used in 1901 in the capital city (Picture 3).⁹



Picture 3: Cover of the book *El Libro del Escolar* [*The book of the school child*], and inner picture of lesson 35, called “En el buen y en el mal camino” [*In the good and the bad way*], by Pablo Pizzurno, 1901. Biblioteca Nacional de Maestras y Maestros¹⁰. This handbook was used at schools, for children between 8 and 10 years old, and was adopted by several provinces of Argentina in 1901. It was also edited many times, which suggests, as happened with other handbooks back then, that this material had a great circulation among teachers and students (Zapiola, 2008).

This traditional and long-lasting formula, revitalized in this recent discussion and its effects, gives us some insight into popular childhood's visual (re)presentation and the importance that Zamba had (and still has) for children but also for adults. It can help us understand how Argentina's society imagines (popular) childhood, the places children are given as political subjects and the complex ideas that many people have about how pictures affect a child's mind. Zamba is not “just” a character of a TV programme that was “successful”. Moreover, he cannot be separated from the children he represents, who wear white overalls (as a sign of public and state education, strongly stigmatized since the 1990s) and eat regional food, come from disadvantaged populations and live far away from the capital city. Those young people were not on the screen or in the programmes that Argentinian children could see before *Pakapaka* existed. I will first briefly describe the visual formula that shaped popular childhood. Then I will pay attention especially to Zamba and *Pakapaka*, as part of a greater political debate about the link between politics and children, most of

9 The author is Prof. Pablo Pizzurno, who was a former general inspector of Secondary Teacher Training and of Primary Schools in the capital city. In fact, nowadays the building where the national Ministry of Education operates is known as “Pizzurno Palace” (in Buenos Aires), and there are schools which are named after him.

10 The National Library of Teachers [*Biblioteca Nacional de Maestras y Maestros*] has published several handbooks online, such as Pizzurno's one. See <http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/catalogo/Search/Results?lookfor=libro+del+escolar> (access 18/08/21). For Pizzurno's book specifically see: <http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/ebooks/reader/reader.php?inv=00015588&mon=0> (access 19/08/21)

all, when it comes to an Argentinian political movement called “Peronism¹¹”. And finally the article will seek to explain what lies behind the internet meme that reappeared in 2021, stigmatizing children from the working class. The theoretical framework that will be referred to in this article finds its roots in the concept of *Pathosformeln*, first elaborated by Aby Warburg (1866-1929, Germany), and updated contemporarily by Georges Didi-Huberman. Additionally, I will focus on how the visual field builds social phenomena and helps to establish and disseminate certain concepts, for instance, about childhood. The article intends to show how this recent discussion about Zamba and children from the working class has a long-lasting root, still operating, which could be helpful to understand what “visual sovereignty” could mean or, even better, why it matters.

Childhood models: popular childhood and its visual formula

Picture 3 shows us two different scenes that perfectly illustrate the models of childhood in dispute, though schematically. We can see in the superior part two neat white children inside a comfortable middle-class living room, reading their books. On the other hand, we see a group of amused children (one of them is a black child) playing cards in the street and wearing scruffy clothes. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was common to find children in the streets of big cities such as Buenos Aires, wandering off, a practice called *vagabundeo* (understood as wandering, roaming or even vagrancy) (Stagno, 2010).

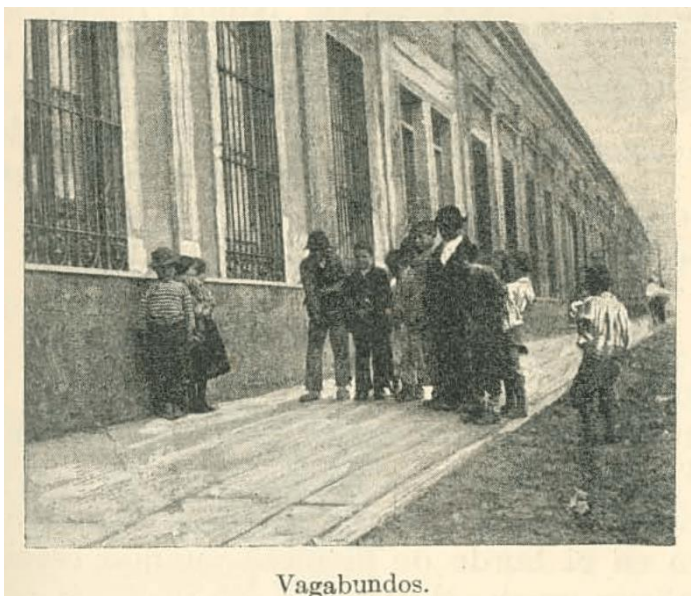
Carolina Zapiola quotes a prominent philosopher and physician from Argentina, José Ingenieros, who wrote in 1901 an article called “Child newspaper vendors and premature delinquency” [*Los niños vendedores de diario y la delincuencia precoz*], published in a magazine about psychiatry, criminology and related sciences (Zapiola, 2008). The children who sold newspapers on the streets of Buenos Aires concerned the elite groups, as well as other working children who were not under the control of the local authorities (differently from the ones who worked in workshops and factories). They spent hours and hours in the streets without a clear address or a regular activity, and were seen as a great danger to society. According to Ingenieros, they represented a peril even greater than adult criminals, from whom the community could defend itself straightaway (Zapiola, 2008, p. 7).

The danger these children represented had to do also with a moral dimension, which was central for elite groups and specialists that were becoming more and more popular locally, for example, criminologists. Children exposed to “indecent” ways of living, or situations described as “irregular” if they did not follow the bourgeois family model (Stagno, 2010), were in danger themselves but became also dangerous. This idea of “being in danger/being dangerous” is still important today, as in many countries, including Argentina, there is an ongoing debate that comes and goes from media attention about the age in which a child should be sent to prison, if they commit a crime. Social organizations that work with disadvantaged children started a campaign against lowering the age of

11 Peronism is a popular and political movement, named after Juan Domingo Perón, who presided Argentina between 1945 and 1955, and during a brief time in 1973-1974. Although his government still generates controversy in local debates, it was associated to an improvement of the working class' living conditions. This included extending working rights, access to a state-funded healthcare system and better educational institutions, and particular politics addressed to children. A famous slogan from Perón's first and second presidency was “Children are the only privileged of the nation” [*Los únicos privilegiados son los niños*]. One of the main criticism towards this movement was the political alleged indoctrination practiced at schools, or in cultural programmes (on television, at the cinema, magazines, etc.). The idea of “peronizing” Argentina was a common argument at that time. The current government in Argentina, presided by Alberto Fernández, follows the peronist tradition, and some of the arguments used to criticize it resembles those of the twentieth century.

criminal responsibility. One of their slogans says “We are not dangerous: we are in danger”¹², in general accompanied by pictures of children from the working class. As we can see, some ideas from the turn of the twentieth century have not lost their intensity, although we cannot say the situation remains exactly the same.

Going back to the above mentioned handbook, and without losing sight of similar ideas in other documents, such as the ones Zapiola quotes, we can see that there is a good way and a bad one to follow. The picture in the book states it clearly. In fact, a couple of pages later, an “encounter” between these two groups of children from different social classes is shown (Picture 4). Atilio and Sara on the one hand are “prudent” children, as described in the text, who go to school and need to avoid the “risks” that can be faced in the streets. Among them, of course, the children that roam around and do not attend classes, that is to say, children belonging to this popular childhood. Atilio and Sara, in contrast, are a perfect sample of this romantic modern model of childhood (Higonnet, 1998).



Picture 4 : Picture used in Lesson 36 “Los niños bien educados” [Well-educated children], part 2, “En la calle” [In the street], in *El Libro del Escolar* [The book of the school child], by Pablo Pizzurno, 1901, Biblioteca Nacional de *Maestras y Maestros*. The epigraph says “*Vagabundos*” (vagabonds).

The epigraph of this particular image tells us that the “bunch of kids” Atilio and Sara bumped into are actually a group of *vagabundos* (vagabonds or urchins, as they are children). The two middle-class children do not stop to talk to them, because they are cautious and punctual: they need to get to school on time. In this case, the frontier seems uncrossable -the middle-class children even appear to be surrounded by those menacing urchins-.¹³

12 See for instance <https://cta.org.ar/los-jovenes-no-somos-peligrosos.html> (access 19/08/21)

13 It must be said, however, that some nuance is shown in the same book, by giving examples of abnegated disadvantaged children who fight against their alleged destiny. This contrast is important to understand that, although there were two role models that outlined wanted and unwanted childhood, the boundaries may not have been so strict or inflexible.

As Zapiola (2008) says, there are two different ideas circulating at the time: the student child (*niño-alumno*) and the minor (*menor*). But the definitions were not monolithic and there were several nuances within these discussions., even more so if the school could act and intervene in poor children's lives. This hopeful point of view was supported by a current that Zapiola refers to as *educationist* (*educacionista*), to which Pizzurno, among others, belonged. They did not share the same ideas as criminologists or psychiatrists, for instance, that some criminal behaviours could be hereditary, and trusted the power school education had to at least comfort poor children. In this way, even if they did not achieve a great academic level, they would not become *pillos* either (cheeky pickpockets or urchins) (Zapiola, 2008, p.13).

The debate about school attendance and the type of education children from contrasting social classes should receive was key at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, and gained strength during the 1930s and 1940s as well. It was not independent though of a general context, in which political confrontation and social mobilization were growing intensively in Argentina (Zapiola, 2008). Furthermore, the discussion about childhood had a strong connection with the idea of a Nation “under construction”, which implied a new citizenship that imitated and admired the urban west European lifestyles, but also needed to establish the specificity of the Argentinian nationality in contrast with the dissemination of different collectivities after the massive immigration the country received constantly, at the end of the nineteenth century but mainly at the beginning of the twentieth (Bertoni, 2020 [2001]). This idea of “construction” is not merely metaphorical. New buildings and institutions were being settled and the whole process had to be exhibited. That is why we can find several albums of photographs taken by members of the elite who were also amateur photographers, following the path of modernization. One of these groups was the Argentinian Photographic Society of Aficionados (*Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados*), which started working in 1889 and continued until the 1920s. They were of utter importance to build up a representation of modernity, mainly in the cities, and photographing schools, among other state institutions, was a major activity (Pestarino, 2016). Of course, there were also specific centres of re-education for minors, inspired by European and North American models. Most of them were created to separate children from adult criminals, psychiatric interns or homeless people (with whom they used to share spaces earlier), as a special discourse about childhood grew popular (Zapiola, 2019).

This view of a civilized (and European) nation was also entangled in the image of the desired childhood. For example, we can see the case of the handbook *El nene* (*The boy*), written by Andrés Ferreyra and José María Aubín, and adopted by the National Council of Education in 1898. One of the lessons is about how children can serve their homelands (“Cómo sirven los niños a su país” [*How children serve their countries*], 1898, p. 88). One boy, called José, hates studying or doing minor jobs with his parents, but he has a lively passion for historical events that were important for the development of the country (he has a strong patriotic feeling, “*sentimiento patriótico*”). One day he talks to his father and learns that it is not only adult men who could contribute to their motherlands: also children have their share. His father says that by studying, José could be a useful citizen of the young nation, which is just as important as what soldiers and national heroes do and did for the country. José immediately wants to go to school and eventually becomes one of the best students. This link between citizenship and childhood will survive until the present day, not only in pedagogic projects, but also in public speeches and political measures, with a major turn during the first Peronist governments, 1945-1955 (Aversa, 2007). The children continue to be the future of the countries as long as they are good and prepared students (Magistris & Morales, 2021).

As Sandra Szir (2006) points out, the role pictures played in these debates was relevant and definitely *constructive*, that is to say, they were not just a mere illustration of what was happening. They also helped to establish a certain “sentiment of infancy”, using Philippe Ariès's term, which led the way. Not only must we consider the so-called pedagogic pictures (for example, Pizzurno or Ferreyra and Aubin's ones), but also those that circulated in the press, and most of all, the magazines from the nineteenth century that were aimed at children¹⁴. They included drawings and illustrations taken from European magazines, as it was not so easy or common to print them locally, and some of them were not even created for children, but for an adult audience (Szir, 2006, p. 34). The use of foreign illustrations resulted in a huge number of representations that reached (some) children, but did not necessarily reflect their lives, which took place in a different region and had perhaps other characteristics. We will see later that this very problem was taken into consideration when *Pakapaka* was created, more than a hundred years afterwards.

The pictures in magazines and school books had many things in common, although they were not necessarily present in the same circuits (school or homes, for instance). Mainly, they had a pedagogic intention, which focused on moral learnings. The pictures in the magazines intended to teach children what was expected of them and the proper manners and environments they had to inhabit. Similar ideas related to childhood could also be found in previous and later periods of time. Therefore, it is necessary at this point to explain the relation between time and images. The model that will be applied here understands the time of the pictures as anachronistic, as it will be now described.

“Whenever we are before the image, we are before time¹⁵”, says Georges Didi-Huberman (2015a, p. 31). This means that we cannot understand pictures as if they only belonged to one time, for example, when they were made. Their historicity has an anachronistic feature, which turns their time into an impure matter of multiple layers. When we say “complex time” we are talking about different moments coexisting in pictures, showing how diverse epochs had an influence on each other. They are made of survivals [*pervivencias*], originated in different times, updated in some others or totally forgotten for long periods. This plasticity pictures have is crucial to understanding the concept of visual formula, rooted in the *Pathosformeln* that Aby Warburg started to reflect on in the nineteenth century. These formulas are interesting to understand social memory and oblivion, but mainly they allow us to work with pictures of apparently unrelated times. A *Pathosformel* is a conglomerate of shapes, which are determined firstly by the time in which they were created, expressing the ambiguous emotions of the culture that gave birth to them. But they are also transmitted across generations, including latency periods or metamorphosis that these shapes might suffer along the way (Burucúa, 2007, p. 16). From this point of view, pictures are an organ of social memory, as stated by Giorgio Agamben (2008), who analyzed Warburg's work. This German author built up an Atlas called *Mnemosyne*, after the Greek goddess of memory¹⁶. The Atlas gathered and condensed tensions that had shaped Europe's memory and history from ancient times until Warburg's day. Spiritual concerns and beliefs of different European peoples could be felt and evoked through visual and textual material once they were put together in the Atlas (their montage), despite their diverse origin. Agamben speaks of an “energetic current” that animated the cultural and unsolved conflicts of Western peoples and their social memory (2008, p. 172).

14 Some of the most important magazines were *La ilustración infantil* (The Child Illustration), 1886-1887 and *Diario de los niños* (Children's Newspaper), 1898.

15 I follow the translation by Peter Mason (see <https://es.scribd.com/doc/269151046/Didi-Huberman-Before-the-Image-Before-Time-the-Sovereignty-of-Anachronism> access 20/08/21)

16 This project was interrupted after Warburg's death in 1929.

This is the reason why we need to go back to the nineteenth century, and we could go even further, to apprehend the power the internet meme of Zamba has (Picture 2). It does not respond only to a critical point of view of the Peronist government in charge (2003-2015) when the character was made; or to a contemporary understanding of popular childhood. The strength of that picture can be seen and *felt* better if we unveil the whole constellation of images from past times which contributed to shape this particular visual formula of dangerous and uneducated poor children. The creators of the meme, anonymous as are most of the pictures of the digital diaspora, need not have seen directly the exact illustrations we are considering here; they are not even quoting a previous experience straightforwardly¹⁷. The way in which visual formulas work is much more complex, as they are a part of an iconic memory that society shares, not without tensions. Hans Belting speaks of a “remembering look” [*mirada recordante*] (2007, p. 269), through which we see the world. It is with the eyes of our memories [*los ojos del recuerdo*] that we actually observe what surrounds us. The trace certain formulas leave makes them remnants that belong to an iconographic repertoire, which is always updated or activated in the present, going beyond the time in which they originated, but keeping some of their primary energy. This is why they are still efficient and work as a guide of our actions, although they might suffer alterations¹⁸. In the case of children's iconography, we should not be surprised when we find affinities between a 1900s handbook and an internet meme made in 2021, in this case with relation to working class children and the role school has to prevent them from taking “the wrong way” and becoming dangerous. The devices change, but not necessarily the *gaze* that animates them. We will now pay attention specifically to Zamba's character and what it triggered in Argentina.

Pakapaka, Zamba and a regional screen: more than a TV Project

As we have already said, Zamba was created in 2010 as part of a programme called *The amazing Excursion of Zamba to the Cabildo*¹⁹ (original name, now it is just *The amazing Excursion of Zamba*), broadcast in the first channel for children of South America, *Pakapaka*. The programme told the story of this school boy, who went on different educational trips with his teacher and school partners. These excursions turn into something magical as he does not only travel from one province to another (in general, to Buenos Aires), but also in time. Zamba travels to the past. He

17 There were different memes prior to the one we analyze here that stigmatized working class children by using Zamba *turro*'s figure, but they only post the same picture, not older ones. They also criticized Peronism -and mostly, the governments of Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003-2015)-, as there is a linkage between these political projects and poor children. An account that published many of them is “El Brian Zamba”, on Twitter (see: <https://twitter.com/antibrancatelli?lang=en> access 25/08/21). Brian is a male name usually related to working-class kids. This account, which has operated since 2012, is extremely discriminative and violent.

18 During the twentieth century, the changes introduced by the peronist governments also generated particular formulas related to children, including adaptations of old ones. Due to the length of this article, they will not be addressed here. I will focus on the survival of the visualities from the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century that help understand the internet meme shared in 2021.

19 Spanish title: *La asombrosa excursión de Zamba en el Cabildo*. Produced by *El perro en la Luna*, a company directed by Sebastián Mignona. Fernando Salem and Argentinian historian Gabriel Di Meglio were part of the original project (Smerling, 2021, p.127).

gets to know historical characters who were important to achieve the political independence of our provinces in the nineteenth century, such as Manuel Belgrano or José de San Martín²⁰.

In these particular trips, he also meets a black girl from the beginning of the nineteenth century, whose father was a slave taken away from her when she was really young. She sells food in the streets and has also worked from an early age in houses of aristocratic families. She did not have a name at the beginning (she was “*la niña*”, the girl, as called by her “masters”), but in 2020 she changes a little her appearance and started to be called Nina²¹, following the debates about gender equality and identity rights taking place globally. As we can see, this idea of poor children working in the streets of Argentina’s capital city (or as domestic servants) appears here once again.

After the huge success the programme had, more episodes were released, widening the adventures these children experienced. They started talking to and visiting more varied characters, including international ones, such as Karl Marx or Frida Kahlo. They also revisited more recent episodes of Argentinian history, such as the last dictatorship (1976-1983), the Falklands/Malvinas war (1982) or the attack on AMIA (*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*) in 1994. Besides, it is not only a TV programme: there are games and online activities on the official website of the channel, or posters and drawings to download. Some of this material started to be used at schools. Moreover, some public shows were organized in places such as Tecnópolis, an enormous science exhibition inaugurated in 2011 in Buenos Aires²², under the same political sign of the administration that created *Pakapaka* and other national channels (educational channel *Encuentro* being the first of them in 2007). Sculptures of iconic characters of the programme were installed in Tecnópolis, until the change of administration in 2015. There are plenty of photographs of children embracing Zamba, Nina or even national heroes, who became really popular, even as toys. They were actually the distinctive signature of *Pakapaka*, even though the channel had different programmes produced in Argentina, Latin America or even in European countries.

The programme of Zamba and the whole channel are a clear expression of a concern that the national government then had: the need for a federal and regional view²³. The new contents they produced had to do also with the fact that *Pakapaka* answered to the national Ministry of Education (until 2016). Besides, in 2009 a major communicational change took place in the country: a new

20 In fact, the character was created the year in which Argentina commemorated the bicentenary of its Independence.

21 We can see here the play on words between “*niña*” and “*Nina*”, although “*Nina*” comes from Saturnina, the name of the girl. Due to the episode in which this change took place, the programme was awarded at the prestigious *Festival ComKids–Prix Jeunesse Iberoamericano 2021* (see <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/362094-premio-internacional-para-zamba> access 20/08/21). The chapter can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjKBJV1mOkE> (access 20/08/21)

22 Book about its tenth anniversary available online to download here: https://tecnopolis.gob.ar/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Tecnopolis_10an%CC%83os_Ok2.pdf (access 20/08/21)

23 After the independence of the Argentinian territory at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were many conflicts among the provinces and particularly with relation to the central place that Buenos Aires took. The centralization of this province is an ongoing problem in the country, not only in political terms but also for cultural production. The project of *Pakapaka* intends to show and favour the productions of all the provinces, often referred to as a process of “federalization”.

law of audiovisual communication services was promulgated²⁴, replacing the one Argentina had had since the last dictatorship. In this document, regional integration was established from the very beginning as a priority (as can be seen in Article 3 of the law), including the programmes for children (defined specially in Article 4). Although educational programmes existed before, even in Argentina, the channel wanted to go beyond school *curricula* (the same as *Encuentro*, often referred to as an “older brother” of *Pakapaka*, Salviolo, 2012) . This mixture between “education” and “entertainment” is known as “*edu-entretenimiento*” (edutainment) (Pauloni et al., 2017). At the same time, it intended to offer children a vision that reflected their lives and a new “aesthetic for children”, as former Education minister Alberto Sileoni said back in 2010, when he expressed the intention of creating the channel (Smerling, 2021, p. 124). Before *Pakapaka* existed, programmes for children on TV came mainly from the United States (Rincón, 2021), and were spoken in the same Spanish accent for all countries, recorded in Mexico, usually described as “neutral Castilian”. This gave a misleading idea of a unique Latin American childhood, which was not even portrayed from within the continent, and contributed to reinforce a *disneyfication* of the programming, already outlined by Henri Giroux (1994).

In 2017, the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television started a comparative study in which ten countries took part, including Argentina²⁵. The analysis coordinated by Maya Götz in the case of Argentina considered the period 2007-2017 and covered the production of three channels for children broadcast locally: *Pakapaka*, Cartoon Network and Disney Channel. Domestic production in this country represented only 5.9% in 2007, whereas it rose to 31% in 2017, after *Pakapaka* started transmission. Also, Latin American characters had a share in the screen: they were not present in the first sample, whereas they represented 16.4% of the characters in 2017, “[...]which makes Argentina the leader on the international level with twice as the average share of Latin American characters around the world” (Götz, 2017, p. 31). This meant that the number of white characters decreased: in 2008 they represented 90% of the local screen, as suggested by a previous study conducted by a similar research team in 24 countries²⁶, showing the predominance of Caucasian television, even in countries whose population was not mainly white. There was also a change in the proportion between child and adult characters in Argentina: from 62% adult characters in 2007 to less than 20% in 2017. Besides, our country had a high percentage of elder characters accompanying children (6.8% over an international average of 2.7%), making it the international leader in this category in 2017. At that time, *Pakapaka* offered non-fictional programmes for children as well, differently from the other commercial channels which had no such offer.

Being a public channel, *Pakapaka* was understood as a device to strengthen children’s citizenship. Cielo Salviolo, current director of the channel, says that what they are thinking involves both: a reflection about public media and a philosophy about childhood (2012, p. 122). Children are understood as politically active and members of their communities. According to her, it is not enough to see a child on screen to deduce that he/she is fully participating. Being the protagonist of

24 Ley 26.522 - Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual (2009): <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/155000-159999/158649/norma.htm> (access 20/08/21)

25 See <https://childrens-tv-worldwide.com/> (access 20/08/21)

26 See https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234143610_Gender_in_children%27s_television_worldwide_Results_from_a_media_analysis_in_24_countries (access 20/08/21)

the programmes requires different kinds of involvement. Following this idea, in April 2021 the Council of Children of *Pakapaka* began to work. Sixteen children between 7 and 10 years old from all over the country will take part in frequent virtual meetings to decide about the programming of the channel. Each committee team of the Council lasts nine months and is accompanied by two adults²⁷. The selected members had already participated in the Ministry's virtual educational project *Seguimos Educando* ("We continue educating"), developed due to the pandemic for primary and secondary schools (the role of national television in this context was fundamental). In August 2021 the Council took part in the *Bienal Latinoamericana y Caribeña de primera infancia, niñez y juventud* ("Latin American and Caribbean Bienal of Early Childhood and Youth"), where children discussed different affairs with their counterparts from Peru, Chile, Mexico and Colombia²⁸. As Salviolo outlines, *Pakapaka* interacts with schools but also with other dimensions of a child's life, which is not totally new in the Peronist tradition begun in 1945 (Cortelloni, 2020), although it is innovative as for television channels, in which children are not often treated as political agents. But mostly, the channel tries to avoid a view of "consumerist childhood", built up in the past decades mainly by the media (Duek, 2013; Salviolo, 2012). This is why *Pakapaka* does not include commercials that encourage a desire for buying certain products. Besides, most of these commercials tend to reproduce stereotypes that set up models of families or genders which are far from real (Duek, 2013). The authorities of the channel contrast then two conceptions about children: as "subject of law" or as "subject of consumerism". Of course, they have chosen the first one.

Exposing and exposed childhood: in and out of the screen

The internet meme that went viral in 2021 (Picture 2) took Zamba, or at least a particular portrait of him, as the symbol of the working class children who live in Argentina. As said before, it appeared after Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, the mayor of Buenos Aires, started an intense dispute with the national government about reopening schools last April. It is interesting to notice who the chosen subject was to picture the future problems children would face if they did not come back to a classroom. The damage caused to children, using the mayor's words, was incarnated in the body of a child belonging to the working class (not just any child). Zamba is not wearing his usual clothes (the school overall), but a typical sportsuit that has been associated in recent times with adolescents and children from the slums. The term "*turro*" (the name given to this character is actually *Zamba turro*) refers to them. The making of violent, rudderless and dangerous youths includes this particular outfit, as well as special hairstyles or accessories such as earrings. This stereotype spread by the media (Saintout, 2009) was accompanied in this meme by the use of a gun, seemingly the only destiny a poor child without school education could expect. The same fear found in the handbooks of the 1900s returns, aesthetically updated. As discussed above, visual formulas suffer metamorphosis along their way, and the displacements they express in each time allow us to connect different epochs and cultural meanings related to them (Didi-Huberman, 2015a). The stigma conveyed in that internet meme is long-lasting but also completely contemporary to us. It shows besides how Zamba penetrated not only a child audience, but a whole political debate that reached the adult world as well. It poses a question about visual regimes and their control (who decides what can be seen and how) and at the same time allows us to reflect on how people are *exposed*.

27 They have their one website: <https://consejo.pakapaka.gob.ar/que-es> (access 20/08/21)

28 See <https://consejo.pakapaka.gob.ar/que-hacemos/bienal-latinoamericana-y-caribena-de-primera-infancia-ninez-y-juventud> (access 20/08/21)

Zamba can be read as a part of a global conception of childhood, and in particular, one set in Argentina. His presence on screen induces a particular affection, which intertwines the fictional character with real children and the symbols of their everyday experience. He also gives space on television to children who are usually out of sight or stereotypically pictured (when they are), as we see in the meme. Didi-Huberman (2014) warns us about the complex exposure of the peoples around the world, mainly those sectors belonging to the working classes and/or ethnic minorities. On the one hand, they tend to be invisibilized (sub-exposed), as if they did not exist, or blurred. On the other hand, they are over-exposed, and their lives are consumed as spectacles. The images shown are not produced by them and in general give an exotic and stereotypical view of who they are or what they do. This is why these populations are *exposed* [*los pueblos están expuestos*]. Didi-Huberman chooses this term as it could also mean to be at risk, that is to say, in danger. We can think once again of the idea about poor children, considered both dangerous and endangered (at the end of the nineteenth century and also nowadays).

The regional production of audiovisual material for a child audience in *Pakapaka* could actually help to revert this sub- and over-exposition of working class children locally, for example, in the changes the channel's programming introduced. Also, the participation of children in the channel's council heads toward the concept of child protagonism, which is defended by many social organizations and scholars who work with children (Morales & Magistris, 2018). Their voices are listened to and they can also see on screen girls and boys who share some features and lifestyles with them. Being heard and being seen, according to Didi-Huberman, come hand by hand. Visual sovereignty involves precisely this linkage. The latter is not a minor detail when we talk about children, as we live in a system that can be characterized as *adult-centric* [*adultocéntrico*]. This socio-political and economic system consists of asymmetric power relations in which adults, mostly male and white, impose the set of rules by which a whole community must live. It is, thus, a domination structure that outlines who can access certain positions and products, and how (Morales & Retali, 2018, p. 120). Generations are not equal, as there exists a discrimination according to age, which operates in parallel to other social impositions related to gender, class, ethnicity, among others. In the case of popular childhood, all of them must be considered as a whole. This is why having a Council of children to decide what to show in a public TV channel is extremely important to value their political voice, and not only to think of them as receptors (let alone, consumers). They start to be recognised as a collective and political subject in the state view, and as builders of their own image (towards the visual sovereignty I already mentioned). Zamba is a symbol of the children addressed and imagined by the channel, but also of the working class the Peronist governments in different times chose as main interlocutors. A clear example is the magazine *Mundo Peronista* (*Peronist World*) (1951-1955), which also had a special page that talked to children straightaway (*Tu página de pibe peronista* – “Page for the peronist child”). The relation between Peronism and popular infancies in Argentina has its own history, usually despised by political opponents, who claim the Peronist administration manipulated the youth through indoctrination (Plotkin, 2013). This conception speaks about children but also about the power associated with pictures, as I will explain below.

The idea that a child's mind can be easily shaped responds to the modern conceptualization of children as incomplete beings, yet-to-be, and incapable of making decisions on their own or participating in their communities. They appear to repeat the adults' words, as if they had no chance to analyze and produce their own speeches (once again, we must return to the etymology of “*infancia*” mentioned at the beginning of this article). The old metaphor of “*tabula rasa*” applies perfectly to this innocent infant popularized in the nineteenth century. Politics is out of the question

when it comes to children. We can see it at present, for example, when part of society claims that teachers or professors “ideologize” their classes and the *curricula*, as if schools were not political spaces or children were not citizens who could actually discuss political affairs²⁹. When the age to vote in Argentina was lowered to 16 years old in 2012³⁰ (although it is not compulsory until people turn 18), some voices posed doubts about whether the “youth vote” [*voto joven*] would actually be autonomous and free or not³¹.

On the other hand, the power conferred to pictures and their capacity of imprinting ideas and sentiments in people’s minds was present also from an early time. Even in pedagogy, the usefulness of images to teach was recognized by famous Czech pedagogue Johannes Comenius in the seventeenth century (Chalmel, 2004). His famous handbook *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* is a clear example, as it combined pictures with texts, stating that images could move children’s imagination and therefore expand their horizons to learn new things (Peña et al., 2007). The whole modern aesthetics gained a significant space in education studies, which paid (and still pay) special attention to learning environments and their iconographies (Pineau, 2018; Szir, 2006). This effect was also understood negatively, when the pictures shown were considered to be imprudent from a moral point of view. This was dangerous especially for children and their “shapeable” mind. A classic case was what happened with the cinema at the beginning of the twentieth century, considered an immoral spectacle for children, who could drift away from the behaviours society expected of them after seeing certain films (Sosenski, 2006). A similar debate occurred when the cinema arrived finally at schools, with upholders and detractors (Serra, 2012), and we can find analysis alike when it comes to television (Fuenzalida, 2006), videogames (Duek, 2021), and the time children spend in front of a screen (Duek, 2013). I will explore below how this argument about improper pictures addressed at children was updated after the political change Argentina suffered in 2015. In particular, the argument about children’s innocence and their exclusion from political discussions was reinforced. Zamba played a central role in this (adult) debate.

After national elections held in Argentina in 2015, there was a significant political change as the Peronist government lost and a new conservative administration arose. In 2016, the public state-funded channels were transferred to the Secretary of Public Media, independent of the Ministry of Education. Not only did the programming change, but also many workers were fired and the budget was abruptly reduced year after year³². The head of the Secretariat, Hernán Lombardi, echoed the

29 One clear example was what happened in Buenos Aires, after Santiago Maldonado’s disappearance during Mauricio Macri’s government in 2017. The local ministry of Education criticized teachers who talked about this topic in class and an old telephone line, created in 2012 under the same political sign, became popular again. Parents could call this number whenever they thought teachers at school were indoctrinating children politically. There was a hashtag that worked as a “warning” back then, #*ConMisHijosNo* (“not with my children”), showing clearly this idea of kids as belongings of their parents: don’t you dare mess with “my” children. See <https://www.agenciapacourondo.com.ar/sindicales/censura-en-las-aulas-por-parte-del-gobierno-de-cambiamos> (access 24/08/21)

30 See <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/interior/subsecretaria-de-asuntos-politicos/voto-joven> (access 24/08/21)

31 See for example https://www.clarin.com/opinion/voto-joven-debe-autonomo_0_r1ZNjE5iv7x.html (access 24/08/21)

32 See <https://ladescamisada.com.ar/paka-paka-esa-otra-television-que-fue-posible/> (access 24/08/21)

voices of those who thought certain contents were not supposed to be reaching children. He said in a radio interview that although the original idea of Zamba was right, it was then “ideologized” and was an attempt at “inserting children in politics” [*meter a los niños en la política*]³³. This purity and innocence linked to children was not a figure of speech and it did not end there. In 2016 several photographs were published, showing the destruction of the sculptures of Zamba, San Martín and Belgrano, which were placed in Tecnópolis³⁴. The new administration said firstly that they were repairing them, but a year later they appeared once again in similar conditions, although in a new place: the offices of *Educ.ar*, originally in charge of these TV channels, located in a former centre of torture and extermination of the last dictatorship³⁵. This sinister place had been recovered and converted during the Peronist government (2003-2015) into a place of social remembrance and activism, as part of its memory politics [*políticas de memoria*]. The fact that the sculptures were “missing” (establishing a strong bond with the idea of “*desaparecido*” of the military forces in the 70s) and turned up there, totally destroyed, was symbolic and macabre. The election results in 2015 were not enough: the whole cultural model had to be erased and Zamba was a clear symbol of it (Winckler, 2019).

This iconoclast gesture is not new in politics, rather the opposite. As pointed out by David Freedberg, in the Greco-Latin world it was usual to erase the memory of an enemy by destroying and humiliating their symbols and pictures. This practice was called *damnatio memoriae* and intended to eliminate the mere register of a rival’s existence (Freedberg, 2017, p. 43). Axel Nielsen and William Walker (1999) already talked about “ritual conquest” in the field of archaeology, which meant that when a community defeated another one, the control over the political and material infrastructure was never enough. The symbols had to be under control of the victorious side too. The Peronist movement itself suffered from this kind of attacks, for example, after the *coup d’état* in 1955: not even the word “Perón” could be mentioned and thousands of pictures were burnt and destroyed. The intention was to revert a so-called “*peronización*” of Argentinian society (Cosse, 2006). Iconoclast gestures are a strategy to control and limit presences and absences in public spaces, which means that they are a mechanism of the political struggle (Otero, 2013). The way the destruction of Zamba’s sculptures was exhibited is not referring only to the TV character, but also talks about the prototype the image represents: middle and working class children. They are disposable, the same as the social classes Zamba embodied, as we can see with the rise of cases of trigger-happy havoc [*gatillo fácil*] between 2015-2019. This practice implies that the police force uses their firearms in an abusive way, leading to suspects’ severe injuries or death. According to CORREPI [*Coordinadora contra la Represión Policial e Institucional* -Coordinating Committee against Police and Institutional Repression], in those four years, the statistics of police abuse were the worst since the return of a democratic system in Argentina in 1983, and 27.32% of these crimes were trigger-happy cases. 43% of the deaths corresponds to people between 15 and 25 years old, generally from the working class³⁶.

33 See https://www.diarioregistrado.com/politica/lombardi-critico-a-encuentro-y-dijo-que-zamba-metia-a-los-nenes-en-politica_a56cdf57f740ad0945d5662ff (access 24/08/21)

34 See <https://www.nueva-ciudad.com.ar/notas/201604/25694-sacaron-los-munecos-de-paka-paka-de-tecnopolis-con-zamba-destrozado.html> (access 24/08/21)

35 See <https://sintinta.com.ar/2017/04/17/munecos-de-zamba-destrozados-en-el-predio-de-educ-ar-dentro-de-la-ex-esma/> (access 24/08/21)

36 See the whole report here: <http://www.correpi.org/2019/archivo-2019-cambiamos-nos-deja-una-muerte-cada-19-horas/> (access 24/08/21).

One scandalous case to highlight was Facundo Ferreira's one, in 2018. He was 12 years old and was shot in the back by the police force of Tucumán, a province in the north of Argentina. The police gave contradictory statements at the time, saying that he was thought to be a thief usually known as "moto-chorro", which means they rob people in the street onto a motorbike. Facundo was with a 14-year-old friend at night driving a motorbike, but merely taking a drive. The stereotype of a disadvantaged dark-skinned boy, without adult company at night in the street, operated not only at the time of his death, but also in the media speeches the following days. Questions such as "What was he doing at night in the street?", "Where was his mother/family?", "Why was he roaming around?" and others³⁷, showed the long-term ideas that we could identify at the beginning of the twentieth century about urchins or vagabonds. The victim seems to be guilty or, at least, trapped in the fatal destiny working-class young people are bound to face. Needless to say, Zamba and Facundo belong to the same popular childhood of the countryside. What places can poor children inhabit? What can they wear? How are they politically addressed? Imagined? Portrayed? The internet meme we see here is more than a mere or harmless (even humorous) expression of the digital culture, with no counterpart in physical reality. Online and offline scenarios are completely connected, and they reproduce most of the time long-lasting perceptions about traditional topics. The meme, as a particular virtual image, may have its own characteristics (Shifman, 2013), but in this case, it brings to the present an ancient visual formula of working class children. As Beltings says, a new device does not necessarily renew the perception about certain topics or subjects (2011, p. 188).

Final words: of mirrors and projectors

When the meme of Zamba *turro* was spread, there was also an immediate reaction criticizing it³⁸. A local magazine, called *Sudestada*³⁹, and a social organization that fights against racism, called *Identidad Marrón* ("Brown Identity")⁴⁰, published the original image that a teacher had created after re-imagining Zamba in 2014. It was, indeed, the same kid as in the meme, but without a gun and, of course, without a legend that depicted him as a school deserter turned into a criminal. The teacher who invented this Zamba *turro* did it with affection, as she was moved by the character and what he represents. After the violent and discriminative use that emerged in 2021 of this drawing, she wrote a letter that several web sites shared, telling the real intention behind the image and even showing a tattoo she had, copying this picture (Picture 5). It was a recognition to all the children ("all the Zambas") that she worked with (and even herself), mainly coming from the slums and inner cities (just like Facundo). She was happy to see actually one child like them on the TV screen and was proud of it. The meme that came afterwards was a reproduction of an old stigma, always preying upon popular childhood in this continent.

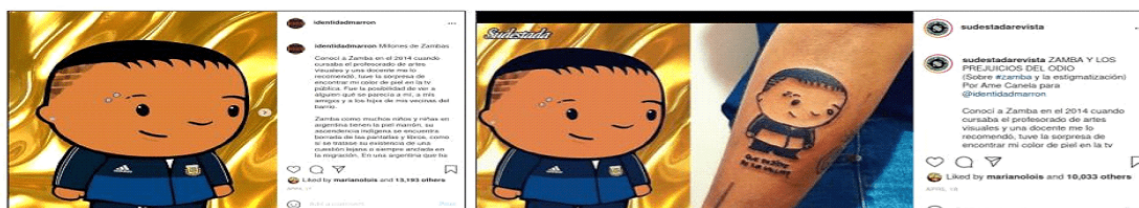
37 See https://www.clarin.com/policiales/crimen-facundo-ferreira-ano-negros-barrio-puede-justicia_0_id0HFQ0oz.html (access 24/08/21)

38 See for example <http://cordon.unlz.edu.ar/2021/04/16/un-meme-para-el-racismo-agazapado/> (access 24/08/21)

39 See

<https://m.facebook.com/sudestadarevista/photos/a.198226366881250/3930612830309233/?type=3&source=57> (access 24/08/21)

40 See <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNwHpsPgt-4/> (access 24/08/21)



Picture 5: Screenshots of the Instagram accounts that published the original image of Zamba *turro*, from the loving and caring view of the teacher who wrote the letter after the meme was spread in April 2021.

In 2019 a coalition mainly formed by the Peronist movement that had previously governed between 2003 and 2015 won the national elections, and the creator of *Encuentro* back in 2007 is now the head of the Ministry of Culture. Tristán Bauer, in one of his first acts after being elected, went to see the destroyed sculptures of Zamba and the national heroes from the chapters of the programme⁴¹ (Picture 6). In a video released by the Ministry of Culture, Bauer touches Belgrano's head, lying on the floor, and establishes a parallelism between re-building the country after four years of neoliberal measures, and raising those figures forgotten after Lombardi's management. Seeing San Martín standing on his feet, he said, would be a symbol of the country that had to come back to its feet as well. Although the connection between childhood and the future of a nation is not new, it is interesting to notice that the child that could embody that hope (rebuilding the country) comes from the working class. Peronism, and mainly the project whose heads were Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), current vicepresident, recognizes once again its link with the popular childhood, already present in the first government back in 1945.



Picture 6: Photograph of the video launched by the Ministry of Culture three days after Peronism took power in December 2019. Tristán Bauer went to see the destroyed sculptures of Zamba after Mauricio Macri's government (2015-2019).

Pakapaka was re-shaped again, after the changes introduced by Macri's administration. Originally, in 2010, the slogan of the channel was *The power of imagination (El poder de la imaginación)*. Today the slogan is *Inventing the world (Inventar el mundo)*, which is coherent with the new role many children are having, for example through the brand new Council. This does not mean that all the measures of the new government follow the idea the channel conveys or that adult-centrism is over (far from it). But it is also undeniable that what the public channels produce, and most of all the channel aimed at children, outlines the model of childhood a government imagines. The way

41 See the act here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL1TyIP0KHk> (access 24/08/21)

childhood is socially and theoretically understood shows us the desires, fears and thoughts of a whole society as well (Carli, 1999). The destructions of Zamba's sculptures, apart from being an iconoclastic act, responds to an understanding of working class sectors, in particular, children. Attacking the images that represent them or portraying Zamba as a school desertor and a criminal reinforce stereotypes that support conservative political measures. Visual imaginaries are inseparable from cultural and social conceptions that lead to concrete actions.

This article, the same as Zamba, travelled in time without ever leaving the contemporary scenario behind. This means that we went to the past and looked at some particular visual formulas of popular childhood with the eyes of the present, so as to understand our current times. An internet meme, typical of our digital culture, revealed a long-lasting gaze [*mirada*] that has shaped working class childhood for centuries. This is why a picture produced in 2021 could dialogue directly with a 1900s handbook. We could see how a TV character aimed at children went through the screen and activated affective inductions not only in the intended audience, but also in the adult community. The power of visuality and images was evident along the way, and exhibits how important it is to analyze the visual imaginaries that shape popular experiences and visibility regimes. They are not just illustrations: they co-create realities. But, the same as the working class children, they are also at risk or in danger: they could be always used to discriminate, dominate or stigmatize the population. However, as we also saw, they are never under total control “of the enemy”, to quote Didi-Huberman (2015b, p. 28). This author encourages us to produce critical images or at least critical montages that could prevent a total instrumentalization of pictures against the people.

Even though some pedagogic formulas have existed for a long time, such as the national heroes within the classic iconography for children in and out of school; each project and epoch transformed the relation boys and girls established with them and the role they played in the making of a national discourse. Álvaro Fernández Bravo asks a fundamental question: which is the body of a nation? How does a nation build a self-representing image of its collectivity? (2000, p. 15). If we revise the statistics about television production for children in Argentina, and probably for adults too, before *Pakapaka* existed we could see a Caucasian offer, mainly produced in the United States, spoken in a neutral Castilian. The screen was not then a *mirror*, but a *projector*, with little connection to the Argentinian peoples (“peoples” in plural, as the population is extremely varied). The model that started with *Encuentro* and continued with the new public TV channels had that reality in mind and set the making of a regional production as a main goal, reinforced by the new law promulgated in 2009. Sovereignty was understood also visually, as a right to children's own image and not an imposed and almost illusional idea exported from North America. In the case of children, usually not considered as a collective subject, this matter seemed even more urgent.

The Zamba *turro* that became also a tattoo on the body of a teacher is a possible sign of a successful transformation: children from the countryside might be closer to seeing themselves on the screen. Of course, this process is not harmonic, as shows the internet meme attacking this same social actor (the popular childhood) by using an old and stigmatizing visual formula or Pathosformel. The reactions online as well as the renovation of *Pakapaka* going on now are, perhaps, the way to fight against the violent instrumentalization of images, warned by Didi-Huberman. The fact that a children's television channel was then and is now in the centre of the debate when it comes to contesting political models can give us hope about the place and roles children started to have in the society. The Council of Children heads in that direction. This is possible because there are several social projects and organizations that have been working along with them to claim against this adult-centric system (Morales & Magistris, 2018), which is still strong. This struggle aims to

include children in that self-representing image of the plural Argentinian nation, as makers not of a bright future, but of their present. They are not citizens-to-be: they are full members of their community. As the teacher in her letter said, let us hope there will be millions of Zambas everywhere to take this process even beyond the screen, so that popular childhood is not disposable anymore.

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