

Deciding Where to Belong. Gender Differences in Educational Trajectories and Migration in a Rural Spanish Town.

Nancy Konvalinka

Departamento de Antropología Social y Cultural, UNED. España
nkonvalinka@fsof.uned.es

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Resumen/Abstract

From an anthropological perspective, formal post-secondary schooling is not an abstract entity with an intrinsic value that everyone finds desirable, but rather one alternative among many that young people evaluate from their different positions in the social field.

The problem discussed in this paper is the diverging life trajectories that young men and women in a concrete rural context, at the end of the 20th century, shape for themselves at the ages of 14-16, a moment of decision created by national legislation regarding mandatory education (LGE, 1970, *General Education Law*, and LOGSE, 1990, *General Organic Law of the Education System*). Despite a strong cultural norm of equal inheritance divided among all children, male and female, and despite the equal educational opportunities provided by the Spanish State, different meanings of possession and use-rights over land and the resulting culturally accepted gendered division of work converge to orient men and women differently towards post-secondary schooling.

Observation of the age, gender, and civil status structure of the population led to the preliminary query: Why do men and women, in this town, behave differently with respect to migration and marriage? The main hypothesis was that women's longer school trajectories and resulting migration and men's anchoring in the town and their higher rates of celibacy were not drastic changes in values, in the positional-relational sense of Bourdieu (1988, 2002), but the current outcome of previously existing dissimilar relations to property that produce dissimilar mobility. Through their schooling and work choices, young men and women, at very early ages, locate themselves in, or decide to belong to, different contexts that later reveal very different possibilities of finding marriage partners.

This paper is based on an ethnographic study of a small rural town (302 inhabitants in 1950; 193 in 2000) near Leon. Although this paper deals with the situation in the final decades of the 20th century, we must also consider the first half of the century, where some elements that shape this situation have their roots. Fieldwork was carried out between 1988 and 2001, in periods of differing length and intensity. The social subjects discussed here are the domestic unit and its component members. They were studied in conjunction, analyzing the life-trajectory decisions of specific persons in the framework of the domestic unit and the relations among people and property which comprise it.

The tried-and-true methods of ethnographic research –participant observation, interviews, and life-histories, etc.- were employed. Archival research was also important for producing demographic data. Demographic analysis, the analysis of the composition and transformation of domestic units, and the creation of life trajectories were among the principal techniques used. The theoretical analysis was oriented by Bourdieu's (2002) framework of the social field, habitus, and difference.

Palabras clave/Keywords: educational trajectories, gender, migration, belonging

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1. Introduction

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The theoretical analysis was oriented by Bourdieu's (2002) framework of the social field, habitus, and difference.



1.1 Previous key findings in literature

The necessary brevity of this article, and its nature as an analysis of a specific ethnographic case, precludes a proper discussion of the literature. To cite only some authors who have contributed to this field, I will mention two lines of research. First, there is the anthropology of education line, with such classic works as Wolcott (1967), Ogbu (1974), and Willis (1977), and more recently Díaz de Rada (1996) and Joks (1996), all holistic analyses of education within the societal context. I cannot stress enough the importance of the broader context within which young people make their decisions, for any study of school education.

The second line is a series of works that address various aspects of the issues discussed here. Bourdieu (1961) studied celibacy in a French village, linking it to the stem family configuration and to an argument concerning women's "taste" for modern urban life. We shall see that the actions of the men and women studied are largely the results of the convergence of previous structures and recent processes, although they are, in fact, expressed as tastes and preferences. Reher (1996) provides an excellent overview of Spain's demographic history from the perspective of the family. Brandes (1976) studied celibacy in a rural setting, relating it to cultural ideas of health and physical constitution and their hereditary nature, without emphasizing the social structure component. Another relevant area in Brandes (1978) is family migration patterns and chains. Douglass (1978) traced differential migration among men and women in a Basque village to their varying experiences of gender-specific temporary jobs, suggesting differences in men's and women's positions in the social field. Devillard (1985) studied rural celibacy as a strategy to limit the division of property, an aspect which could be considered in the present study. Sánchez Pérez (1990) researched the gendered division of activities and of space. Guinnane (1989, 1992, 1997) dealt with similar issues from the spatial-temporal context of early 20th century Ireland, highlighting the unforeseen consequences of early life decisions. Many more works should be cited than space allows.

2. Belonging: From non-decision to decision

2.1. Belonging as a non-decision during the first half of the 20th century

In order to clearly conceptualize present conditions, we must have a firm grasp on the situation in the past and the transformations that have shaped the present. We must take a look at property relations, the formation of the domestic unit, and the gendered division of work during the first half and into the second half of the 20th century. Because property relations are fundamental, I will concentrate on landowning families, who were the large majority of families in the town and occupied the prestige position desired by all.

Property relations and the formation of the domestic unit

As far as townspeople's memory reaches, divisible inheritance shared equally among male and female children has been the rule. People express a strong feeling that this is the correct way to proceed, and descriptions of inheritance processes confirm this practice.



This practice was the basis of the formation of new domestic units until the final decades of the 20th century. Marriage was the life-trajectory moment for creating a new domestic unit: the new couple became independent by means of the land that they had already inherited or would inherit in the future and were allowed to use meanwhile. Thus, in each generation, holdings did not remain the same but were divided among the children and united by the new couple at marriage; increasing land holdings to set the children up as farmers was a priority for the domestic units. The only way to become an independent adult was by marrying and forming a domestic unit, uniting husband's and wife's property. This is reflected in the high proportions of marriages between men and women from farming families within the town (46% of the married couples who are *labradores* or property-owning farmers in 1957 consist of spouses who are both natives of the town) and within a limited radius of neighboring towns.

Gendered division of work

Until the final decades of the 20th century, men and women in this rural context needed one another not only to provide sufficient property for independence but also to provide the labor force to carry out the work defined, culturally, as men's work and women's work. Both men and women could and did do all different kinds of work, when necessary. Nevertheless, men were generally in charge of planning and carrying out the principal agricultural labor. Women were in charge of work pertaining to the home and family care; in addition, they carried out agricultural labor in an auxiliary capacity, assisting men in tasks of principal importance (harvesting) or doing secondary tasks (removing stones from fields, weeding).

The extent to which women worked in the fields depended on the number of men in the household and on the status of the household: if there were sufficient men for the agricultural labor or if workers could be hired, the women devoted themselves mainly to household and family work. This produced a situation in which men tended to occupy a more exterior position and women a more interior one, spatially speaking (see Sánchez Pérez, 1990, for a discussion of interior/exterior positioning in an Andalusian town). The following quotes illustrate this:

Because like I said, maybe the husband left, or the husband and the sons, and she stayed at home and prepared what we called lunch; and if it was only her, well, she had to go and take the basket, or whatever, to take the lunch out to the fields. And afterwards she stayed to weed, or to harvest barley or wheat, when you did it with a sickle... (Older man, 1988)

... if there weren't men in the house, she had to go with her husband to load the wagon. Because he couldn't do it by himself. (Older man, 1988)

Gender differences in relation to the land

This gendered division of work was linked to a different relationship of men and women with the land. Men, whose main task is culturally specified as agricultural work,



use the land directly to create a family farm, while women, whose involvement in agriculture can be important but is always auxiliary to men's work, can only use the land, even when it is their own property, through a relationship with a man.

This is visible in one aspect of the formation of the domestic unit, residence. According to the older people, and various cases illustrate this point, property was definitely a consideration in choosing a marriage partner. Homogamy regarding property was not always possible, though, given the small size of this town and of the neighboring towns. When the spouses did not come from the same town, as a rule the couple took up residence wherever the spouse who had, or would eventually inherit, the largest holdings lived.

The strong tendency toward virilocal residence throughout the first half of the century is not accounted for by any detectable tendency toward hypergamy. It is, rather, accounted for by the fact that, while both young men and young women worked for their families of orientation, young men were often allowed to use a small portion of their future inheritance (a specific plot of land) for their own benefit, as a way to begin building their future family farm. Women, whose agricultural labor was auxiliary, worked for their families of orientation; later, they helped their husbands in their families of procreation. Although their property was necessary for forming their family of procreation, they did not work pieces of land themselves before marriage to accumulate property.

Thus, even in more or less homogamous marriages, the man tended to have the beginnings of his own family farm located in his home town, "anchoring" or "holding" him in place, while the woman, whose auxiliary labor was lent wherever she was living, was inherently more "mobile," moving to her husband's location. Even in the cases of marriages between natives of the town, this situation obtained; the woman might not have needed to physically move from one town to another, but her labor, not invested in her own interest before her marriage, was transferred to her new household upon marriage.

We can see that this culturally defined gendered division of work resulted in men and women having different relationships with the land. While men exploited it directly, as their main activity, forming their own family farms, women only exploited the land indirectly, as auxiliary workers on the family farm created and organized by men, albeit combining the inherited property of both men and women.

Life trajectories and moments of decision

During the first half of the past century, the elements just described came together to create a situation in which men and women needed one another, to contribute both the property and the work needed to run a domestic unit family farm. The resulting life trajectories for men and women were virtually the same (Figures 1 and 2).

At the age of six or so, children began school and continued until they were needed and able to assist with agricultural labor or housework or until they were 12 or 14 years old, when their schooling was considered to be over. Then they worked as required by their family of orientation, or worked for pay for others.

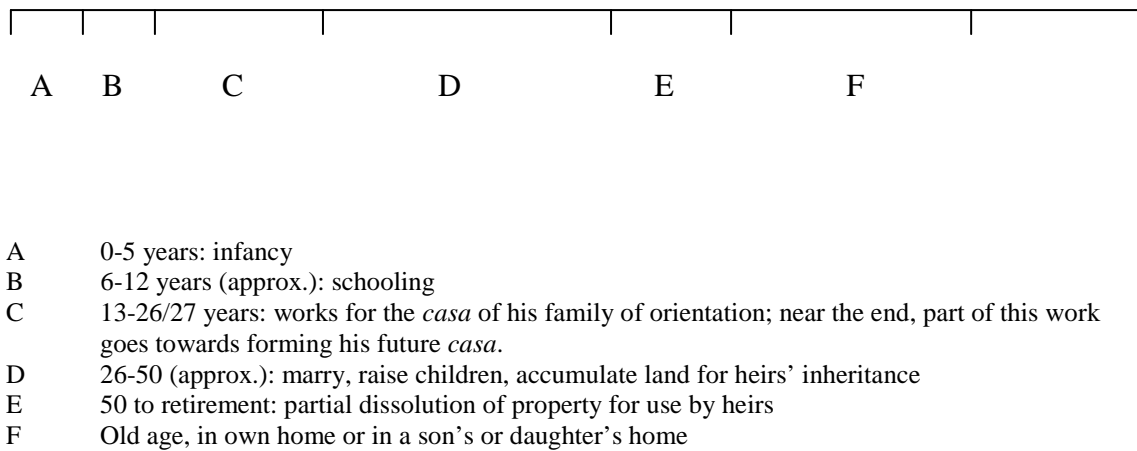


Figure 1. Life trajectory of a man who turns 19 between 1920 and 1950.

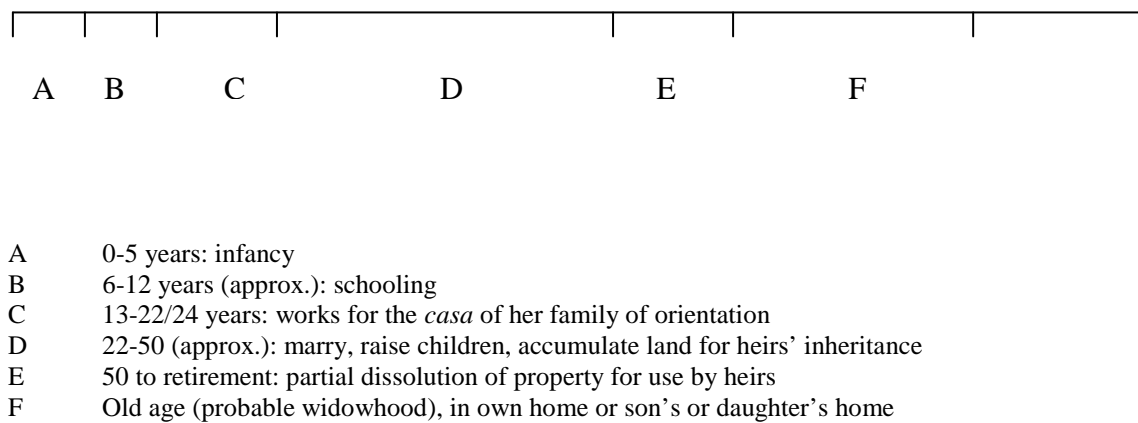


Figure 2. Life trajectory of a woman who turns 19 between 1920 and 1950.



This situation continued until marriage, the unique moment of decision in people's life trajectories, with decisionality limited to the moment at which one married. Virtually all farmers' children married and became farmers, so what to do for a living and whether to marry or not were non-issues; people from farming families that could supply some property uniformly chose to occupy the "valued" position of farmer.

The relatively late (compared with non-European societies) marriage age is consistent with Hajnal's (1965) model for Europe due to the need to accumulate property. The only real difference between men's and women's life trajectories was the difference of approximately two years at marriage; men's slightly higher age confirms the role described for them as needing time to accumulate resources to form their own family farm at marriage. We can see that men and women were basically on the same "schedules" as it were, that they "needed" one another to have sufficient property and to get the necessary work done, that they were physically present in the same geographical location when it came time to seek a marriage partner, and that they did, in fact, as the high marriage rates show, "find" one another for the purpose of marriage.

2.2. Processes of change: Emigration from the late 1950s to the end of the 1970s

Spain's late industrialization opens up a period of emigration that mainly affected the town starting at the end of the fifties. Depending on the quantity of land a family owned and the number of children among whom it had to be divided, emigration could appear more or less attractive to the inhabitants.

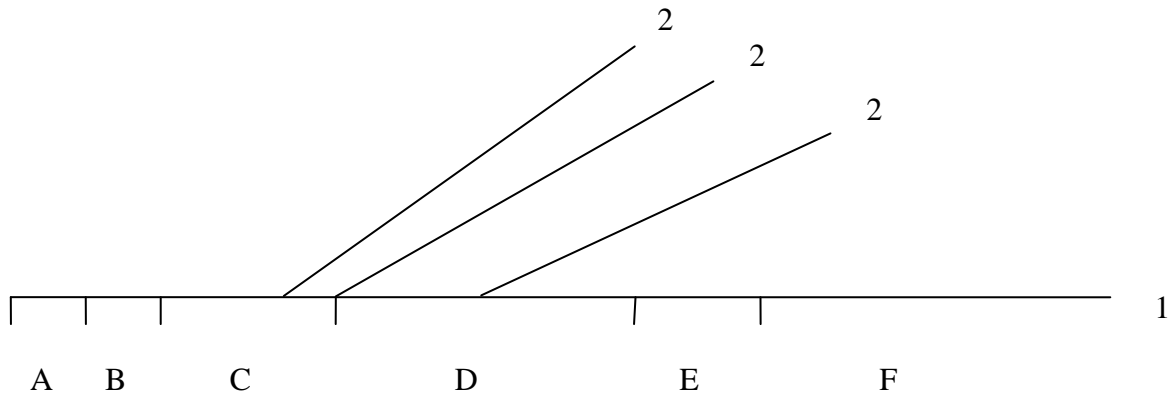
What emigration did do was introduce a bit of variety into the relatively homogeneous life trajectories we have seen, variety both in the sense of alternate possibilities to the earlier "non-decision" of becoming a farmer, and in the sense of new moments of decision.

Whereas the decisions to marry and become independent were actually one and the same, linked due to the need to combine property and work from both husband and wife, people could decide to emigrate at three different moments: when young and single, upon marriage (a marriage-emigration combination), or even once married, with family, and established in farming, although this was the least frequent moment. The life trajectories of men and women thus become more complex, with new options and new moments of decision (Figures 3 and 4).

During this time period, the town's population of landholders could be divided into two large groups, people who continued the previous pattern of marriage and family farm formation and people who emigrated. Even though the first group did not substantially vary its life trajectories compared to those described for earlier times, they were faced with new moments of decision. Remaining in the town in the position of "farmer" was no longer automatic, but the result of a conscious decision (or more than one, at different points in early adulthood and later), described using the categories of *preference* and *liking*.

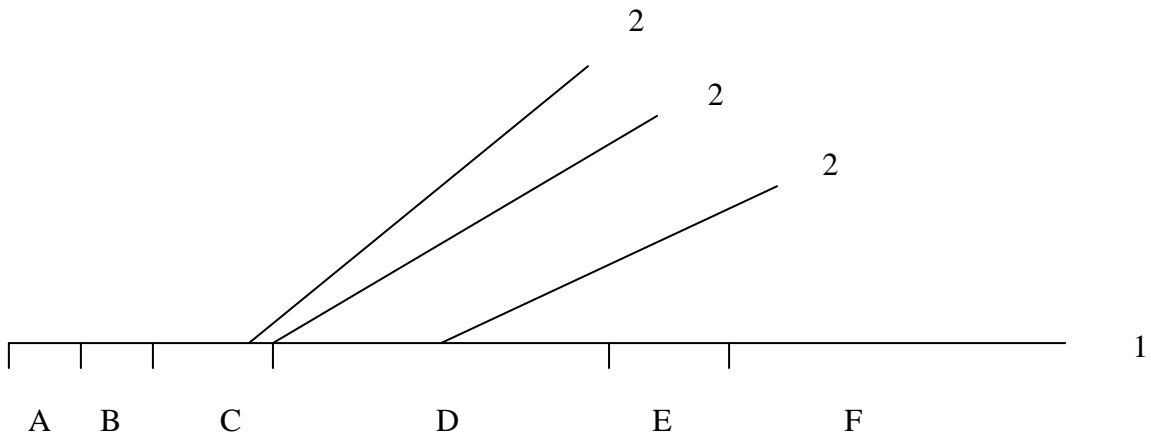
The second group, the emigrants, decided to seek their future in urban industry at different moments, with different consequences. The decision to emigrate during early adulthood, before marriage was a consideration, effectively located the emigrant's marriage circuit outside of the town. We must remember that distances that today are relatively insignificant used to be a serious limitation to social relations.

Another issue regarding the emigration of young single people was that, in any property-owning family, some men had to stay to work the land, even if others left.



- A 0-5 years: infancy
- B 6-12 years (approx.): schooling
- C 13-26/27 years: works for *casa* of family of orientation; near the end, part of this work is goes towards forming his future *casa*.
- D 26-50 (approx.):
 1. marry, raise children, accumulate land for heirs' inheritance
 2. - emigrate, single
 - marry and emigrate, raise children
 - marry, raise children, entire family emigrates
- E 50 to retirement: partial dissolution of property for use by heirs
- F Old age, in own home or son's or daughter's home

Figure 3. Life trajectory of a man who turns 19 between 1960-75.



- A 0-5 years: infancy
- B 6-12 years (approx.): schooling
- C 13-22/24 years: works for *casa* of family of orientation
- D 22-50 (approx.):
 1. marry, raise children, accumulate land for heirs' inheritance
 2. - emigrate, single
 - marry and emigrate, raise children
 - marry, raise children, entire family emigrates
- E 50 to retirement: partial dissolution of property for use by heirs
- F Old age (probably widowhood), in own home or son's or daughter's home

Figura 4. Life trajectory of a woman who turns 19 between 1960-75.

Because emigration allowed the men who stayed to accumulate the land of those who left (the use rights, but not legal ownership) and, with mechanization, to create more profitable family farms requiring a smaller labor force, an interesting relationship appeared: some men could stay because others left, allowing them to use large amounts of land, and some could leave because others stayed, shouldering responsibility for family property and elderly parents. Women, as auxiliary workers who could only use their land through the family farm created by their husbands, were in a sense “freer” to emigrate, leaving their future inheritance temporarily in the hands of father and brothers.

The combined emigration/marriage decision by young adults, on the other hand, was a moment of decision that paralleled the farm-formation/marriage decision described earlier. In both cases, marriage and independence coincided and the location of the husband’s work determined the married couple’s residence; the location of the woman’s work, whether her work in the home and family spheres or her “auxiliary” work either in agriculture or in industry, was determined by the location of her husband’s work. There was, of course, a difference: in the original situation, a woman was the owner of property that she could only work through the family farm set up by her husband, whereas emigration provided new employment opportunities. While some men gained mobility with emigration, all women continued their previous mobility, their residence determined by their husband’s job.

The third possibility, the decision of an already-established family to emigrate, was less frequent and only occurred if the family’s circumstances in the town were poor enough to abandon the effort already invested in the family farm. This choice reoriented the positioning and perspective of the children far from the town where they were born.

These three types of emigration do share one common aspect, linked to the aforementioned difficulties in transportation and travel. Although return visits were made, and people did return to their hometown if their emigration failed or upon retiring, the decision to emigrate was generally a long-term decision about where one’s future life would transpire, where to belong and where one’s children would grow up and, probably, situate their lives. Once the parents had emigrated, the next generation did not contemplate their parents’ hometown as a possible future context for their lives, even if their parents retained legal ownership of property there. Similarly, the decision not to emigrate was also a decision about where to belong and where one’s children would belong.

For the young adults who emigrated during this period, the role of schooling did not change significantly. Men and women attended school until they were needed to work on the family farm or at home; it was only later that they decided to emigrate. The schooling acquired was basic and its duration was not considered particularly relevant or pertinent to their future success, whether in farming or in industry. Schooling was not considered to serve a specific purpose related to obtaining employment in the future, nor did it create any specific moments of decision in people’s lives.

2.3. A decrease in emigration and an increase in schooling: The final decades of the 20th century

The decade of the 1980s brought about important changes that moved schooling to the forefront as an object of decision and an employment strategy. Previously, in



1970, the General Law of Education had made schooling mandatory to the age of 14, with the possibility of further voluntary academic education or professional training. This institutional regulation had the effect of constituting the age of 14 as a moment of decision in young people's life trajectories. While previously schooling had ended and work in the family farming enterprise had begun in a rather automatic fashion either when the student finished the grades available at the town school (at the age of 12 or 14) or when his or her labor was needed at home, the new system offered new options which could lead to jobs outside of agriculture.

In the latter part of the 1970s and in the 1980s, the economic crisis changed the conditions that had stimulated emigration. Emigration in search of unskilled jobs in industry, the objective in previous decades, was no longer an option due to the crisis. The decision about where to earn a living, where to plan to live one's life, could no longer wait until early adulthood or marriage, because by that time a person either had formal schooling that allowed them to look for an urban job or did not, and made a living in agriculture or dairy farming, which became popular in the 1980s. The moment of decision was brought forward significantly, to the age of fourteen, when young people had to decide whether to continue their formal schooling, leaving to study elsewhere, or to remain in the town and work on the family farm. One of the men, born in 1962, explained his experience of the transition from school to work in the following way:

And in [*the nearest larger town*], well, I don't remember what grades I did there. Two years. And then we went to Salamanca, to a school run by priests. They weren't priests, they were friars or missionaries, right? Well, Sr. Guillermo, he had a son who was a friar, and he came here. But in order to go, you had to say you wanted to be a priest. If you said you didn't want to be a priest, they threw you out. No, no, they didn't force me to go. I think we all went because, since four or five of us went, and we were all friends, well, that was probably why. The thing is that four or five of us went. You were in a boarding school, and there was supposed to be more discipline and you could study more and all. No, there, force us, they didn't force any of us. But anyway, in my house, they knew that me, a priest, no way. And the same for the rest of us. The thing is, if you said you didn't want to be a priest, or if you failed classes, automatically... I went until 8th grade of Basic General Education. No, I didn't start B.U.P. [*secondary school*]. It was probably only up to fourteen. So then, no, from there on, after finishing Basic General Education, until then, more or less, I think they knew that we kids who were there, I mean, we didn't have a vocation.

This group of young men faced a decision, when they were 14 years old, of continuing their schooling (studying for the priesthood) or returning to their town. A non-seminary education would have cost money that did not exist or at least was not earmarked for this purpose by their families. The decision to quit studying effectively channeled them into life in farming and dairy farming; a few years later, their lack of further schooling and the economic crisis, along with their full incorporation into the family enterprise, truncated any possibility of emigration. The same was true for other



young people who did not leave the town to study: at the age of 14, they made decisions that affected the possible directions of their life trajectories.

So the 1970 LGE not only had the effect of mandating schooling up to the age of 14, but it obliged young people to make decisions about belonging in one context or another. For the first time in this rural context, the moment of decision about where one's future life would take place was brought so far forward that it happened in the transition between childhood and adulthood, completely unlinked to any project of independence or marriage. Schooling had, previously, been a part of children's life, something everyone did, something everyone had approximately the same amount of, something equally relevant or irrelevant to everyone's life and future. From the 1970s onward, schooling beyond the age of 14 became a path toward an urban, emigrant future, a path to be chosen or rejected. The choice to continue schooling was always temporary and could be undone at any time, with the ex-student returning to join the family farming enterprise. The choice to discontinue schooling, once made, was nearly impossible to change.

In 1980, the Workers' Statute set the minimum age for working at 16, and in 1990, the LOGSE legislated education to the age of 16. This delayed the moment of decision by two years, but both laws combined to shape an important moment of decision at a very early age, compared to previous life trajectories and moments of decision.

The changes in the conditions of urban employment, which became more difficult to obtain without the proper school certificates, and in the age for making important decisions, came together to shape new life trajectories for men and women (Figures 5 and 6).

Life trajectories in the latter part of the 20th century differ in both the moments of decision and the contents of these moments, compared to the life trajectories previously studied: the moments of decision occur earlier, are strongly linked to schooling, and are unlinked to considerations of independence or marriage. More importantly, men's and women's life trajectories are different from one another in ways whose significance we will consider shortly.

First, however, I would like to point out that the differences between men's and women's life trajectories are the result of a situation that we already discussed regarding the first half of the century, namely the gendered division of work and the different relationships of men and women to the land. This can be clearly seen in the options available to men and women at different points in their trajectories.

The incidence of institutions in shaping life trajectories can be observed in the identical "A" and "B" stages. In the town, all children begin school at the earliest age allowed (at the beginning of the 21st century, at age 2, before at 3, 4, or 5) and continue until age 14 or 16, doing the last grades in the secondary school in the nearest large town. It is at the moment of decision at 14 or 16, when it is necessary to decide whether to continue schooling or not, that the options become different for young men and women and lead to a separation of paths. It is at this point that the elements described

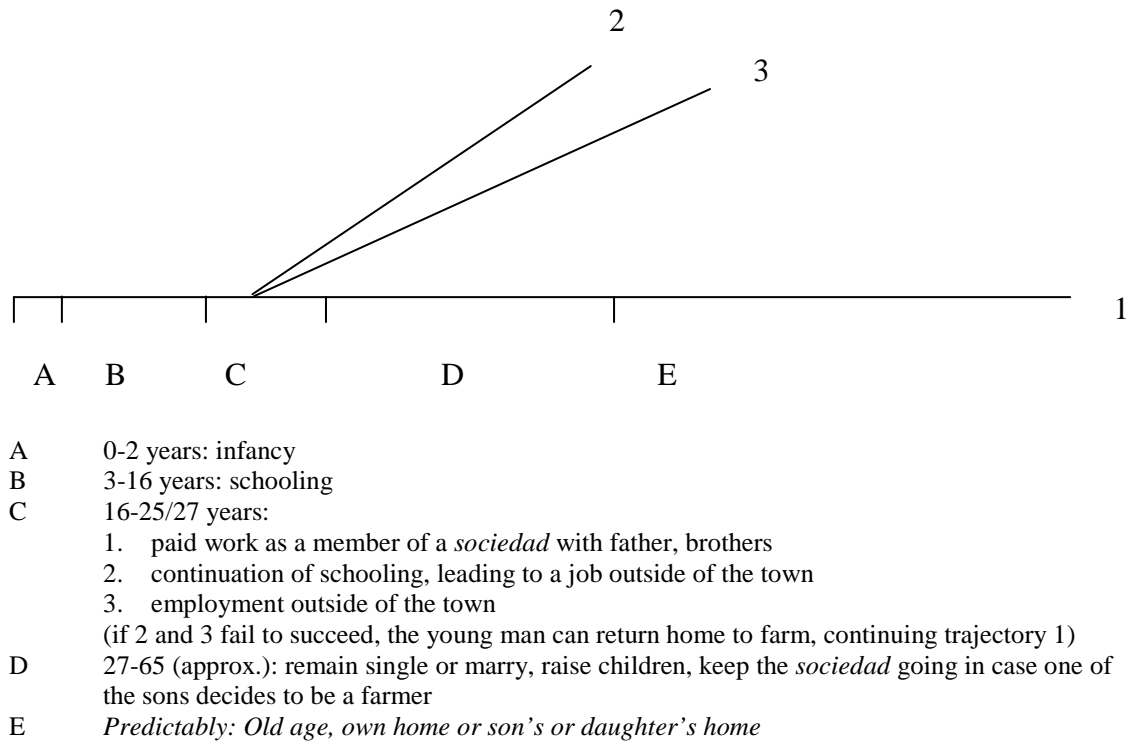


Figure XXX. Life trajectory of a man who turns 19 between 1980 and 2000.

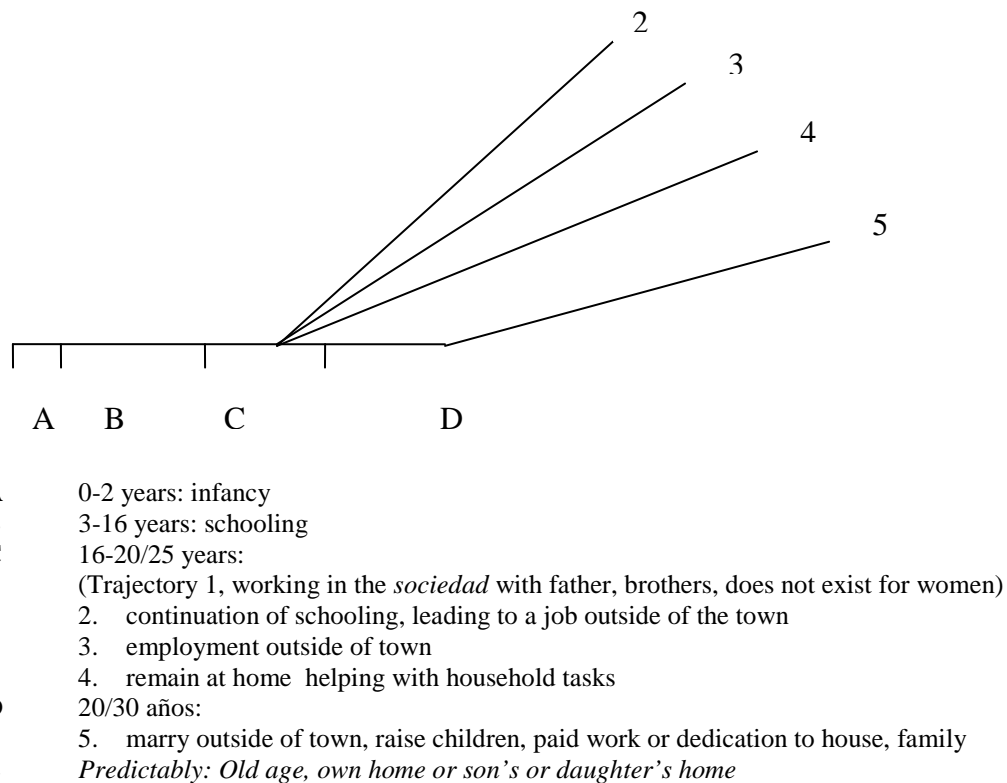


Figure XXX. Life trajectory of a woman who turns 19 between 1980-2000.



for the first half of the 20th century, the different relationship of men and women to land and the gendered division of work, make themselves felt.

The gendered division of work that we observed in the first half of the 20th century has become exacerbated by the end of the century. The change of focus from agriculture to dairy production redefines men's and women's tasks, at first situating men in the mechanized agricultural work and women in the less mechanized, incipient dairy industry, in a stable near the house and with tasks involving "caring," "cleaning," and "feeding." The people in the town were aware of these changes, as their descriptions and explanations show:

Now we women here in the fields, there's less and less work for us to do. Because what needs to be done in the fields is for the machinery and for the men. Machinery and men. Because before, more work was done bodily. People, bodily. But now, less and less. (Older woman, 1988)

Because those jobs aren't for them. It's preferable, and they prefer it, too, if they have to help, well, they go to the stable and help us. (Young man, 1988).

As time goes on, the single-family enterprises are, in many cases, restructured as *societies* in which a father and his sons hold and work their property together, as opposed to the previous system where the father was the legal owner of the property and the sons worked with him. This new figure, the *society*, is a result of the two factors we have just discussed, the economic crisis which made emigration less attractive and made sons decide to enter the family farming enterprise, and the early age at which the decision to continue schooling or start to work on the family farm must be made, an age at which independence of any sort is still far off. The *societies*, then, concentrate not only property but men's labor. This, along with the ever-increasing mechanization of agricultural work and the dairy business, eventually makes women's work outside of the home unnecessary, effectively excluding them from participation in any aspect of agricultural or dairy work.

Because of these processes, which have occurred on a base situation of a gendered division of work and a different relationship, according to gender, with the land, the positions of men and women and the options open to them at the age of 14 or 16, when they must make decisions that will affect their futures, are quite different.

What options are open to young men? A young man can join the family agro-dairy business, which the family will invest in, modernizing and improving it, to provide a livelihood for their son or sons. At an early age, the young man receives a salary from his father, later becoming a part-owner of the business and receiving the salary the men who work together set for themselves. Another option is to continue his schooling, with professional training courses or university-oriented studies. If he is successful, the only place to find a job will be outside of the town, and this will most probably lead to residence outside of the town. If he is not successful, he can always return to the family agro-dairy business. Finally, he can look for an unskilled job outside of the town, with the corresponding difficulties, uncertainty and instability.

What options are open to young women? Women, who not only have never, in this cultural context, farmed independently, but who have been excluded from farming

and dairy work by mechanization and the reorganization in *societies*, do not have the option of entering the family business. A woman can stay at home, helping to run the household. She can continue her studies, either professional training or university-focused, and later get a job outside of the town. Or she can directly attempt to get an unskilled job outside of the town, with the same difficulties as men. The basic mobility of women that we saw earlier, linked to marriage, becomes even more pronounced at the end of the century, where it is linked to employment as well as to marriage.

A few women have chosen to stay home and help run the household, an interim before marrying and taking on their own household. Most women either continue their schooling or look for work outside the town. In both cases, even if they continue to live in their parents' homes for a time, this choice situates them outside of the town for a large portion of the day. Whether they like it or not, they belong more and more to the context where they work or study and less and less to the rural context. Most of the women in the town eventually exit rural life and do not return.

A side effect of these differing decisions made by men and women is that, when their life trajectories advance and they reach the age to seek a spouse –an increasingly late age at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century- men and women from the town no longer coincide in the same geographical, social or conceptual context. They may see one another on weekends and during vacation periods, but they do not inhabit the same worlds. Thus, the women marry outside of the town, in the marriage circuits in which they move daily. As one young woman explained, when asked where she expected to be in the future:

Me, in Leon. Because my sisters have, they went there, all four of them are there. And, coming here, too, because of course, here I have, well, my place and group, and all that. But I don't know, they, they were sure, they left, I don't know how long... (Young woman, 1998)

Some of the men do manage to marry, usually women from other towns. But they have a hard time finding women who find the role of rural wife, distant from any urban context providing employment and, at the same time, excluded from the work of the *society* that her husband, with his brothers and fathers, works in, attractive. This situation is similar to the one described by Bourdieu (1961) for a rural context in France with different characteristics but similar results. The men who would like to marry but are unable to find a wife are, in a sense, victims of structural changes that fracture men's and women's positions along older lines of gender difference; however, the failure to marry and form a family is lived as a personal failure.

Curiously, the very differences that made men and women necessary to one another to form a family farm by joining property and labor, now separate them and prevent them from encountering one another for marriage.

3. Conclusions and considerations

We have known for a long time that equal measures, in education and elsewhere, do not necessarily produce equal results. In the case studied here, we have observed the



unequal effects that an institutionally created moment of decision concerning further schooling has on young men and young women due to the culturally constructed relations between the genders, and between each gender and land. The complexity of the issues involved, only the most salient points of which we have touched on here – property relations, division of work, mobility, emigration, economic crisis, changes in life trajectories and moments of decision, changes in the meaning and use of education, marriage circuits...- alerts us to the unexpected effects that we must learn to expect and attempt to foresee whenever a general change comes about in the context of a non-homogeneous group (as if any group were ever homogeneous).

In this particular case, what was earlier a relegation of women to an auxiliary status in farm work, which facilitated their mobility for marriage, became an exclusion from farm work that mobilized them right out of rural society when the moment at which the decision about where to belong was moved up to an early age by educational legislation. The relative advantage that men had that allowed them to begin to construct their own family enterprise before their marriage, keeping them tied to the land they would inherit, became, with the economic crisis that made emigration more difficult, an attractive way of beginning to earn a salary at an early age and building up a business with father and brothers, drawing them out of the school system and tying them in a sort of stranglehold to the land.

The innovative aspect of the present study is to be found in the linking of property relations and the gendered division of work with the early moment of decision created by the universalist State's laws on mandatory education, visible in a long-term view that extends from the previous conditions to the eventual results.

What I do wish to underline, in this specific context, is the bitter irony of the unexpected side effects that decisions made at an early age, determined by state legislation on institutionalized schooling, can have many years down the road. Women are not “allowed” to start farming at the age of 16, so they either continue to study or start to work, both activities which move them out of their hometown and place them in marriage circuits where they will meet and marry non-rural men. Men, on the other hand, have a ready-made family business to step into if they quit studying; what they do not realize at the age of 16 is that this choice places them in a no-go marriage circuit virtually empty of women.

In the case of women, there is not full freedom of choice, as farming is not an option for them, and they are, consistent with their historical “mobility,” aware that wherever their future may be, it will probably not be in their hometown. In the case of men, they are definitely unaware of, or unable at the age of 16 to give serious consideration to, the difficulties that they will have in finding a partner if they become agro-dairy farmers. By the time they do realize it, it is too late to do anything about it.

What does this so-specific, contextualized study offer from a broader perspective? I do not pretend to make any pronouncement on whether it is “good” or “bad” to continue schooling past the age of 16, nor whether it is “good” or “bad” to be interested or uninterested in agro-dairy farming as a way of making a living. I realize that, at present, all young people make decisions at early ages that affect their futures, and that these decisions often have consequences that cannot be undone later.

We are, by now, fully aware that equal educational opportunities are equal only insofar as the students approach the schooling system from similar base positions. This paper offers an analysis of different schooling choices and results *within* a single, small,



relatively homogeneous context, where the inhabitants share a similar cultural background. This vision of men and women in modern-day rural Spain making radically different choices regarding equal schooling opportunities –a situation in which it would never occur to us to postulate essential or cultural differences in initiative, ambition, or intelligence between men and women- can serve to sensitize us to the multiple and diverse aspects that must be considered to avoid producing simplistic explanations of different “ethnic” or “cultural” groups’ attitudes toward the schooling system, and their success or failure in it.

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