

The construction and representation of social stereotypes of peasants and the rural world: A comparative research from historiography to classrooms

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the construction and transmission of social stereotypes when teaching history through a specific topic; the rural world of Spain and France in the Early Modern Age. The starting point is the study of the historiographic reconstruction based on this topic found in the main scientific journals. This is followed by seeing how this knowledge is transmitted in the classroom through the curriculum and textbooks. Finally, we analyse students' perception of the social stereotypes related to the topic. The findings show that historiography is advancing in the opposite direction to the history knowledge taught in the classroom. There is also a noticeable difference between the representation of the urban and the rural world, which is due to the persistence of the theory of modernization in historical explanations.

Keywords: social stereotypes, history education, textbooks, peasantry, historiography.

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Introduction

Analysis and reflection on historiographic construction and the images created of the latest historical subjects, and how these are transmitted to society, are key issues in understanding past social phenomena. Transmitting this knowledge as stereotypes through history dissemination, teaching and even research is reason enough to demand that we reflect on these types of images and representations, which play a key role in how social reality is perceived (Araya, 2002; Blair & Benaji, 1996; Devine, 1989; Power, Murphy & Coover, 1996). It should not be forgotten that stereotypes make up thinking patterns which play an important part in processing information (Licerias, 2003). History research itself creates a series of images of the past in the way it builds up its discourse; these images are widely accepted by the scientific community and so constitute the basis upon which historical knowledge is reproduced and generalized through further research, and its transmission in the classroom.

Since the early 1990s, the debates about social history have placed a lot of emphasis on representation, in the ways of perceiving the world and social reality as a cultural product (Rorty, 1996). Indeed, the explanations of the past are no more than social representations (Banchs, 1988; Moscovici, 1979). The postmodernist influence, the importance of the historical subject and the weight of the representation of the world in individuals, versus socio-economic and political structures, have stirred up the historiographic debate in recent years (Lloyd, 2009; Sewell, 2005; Steinmetz, 2007; Tilly, 2005; 2007). However, when these representations become over-stereotyped, they can deform reality. The concerns about the discourse that the historian undertakes while using sources and his subjectivity when reconstructing the past, are features of this debate. Historians' backgrounds and environments mean that their approach will perforce be subjective. Carr (1987) is quite forthright in this respect: "The reciprocal interaction process between the historian and the facts [...] is not a dialogue between abstract and isolated individuals, but between the society of today and that of yesterday." In order to overcome the historian's distancing with an epistemological stance based on historical criticism, we need to analyse the images and topics transmitted by the narratives of the historian and other disseminators of historical knowledge. We will then be in a position to understand the breach between the past and its representation, between what was and the narrative constructions that seek to occupy the place of that past (Chartier, 1995; 2007).

The study of social stereotypes can be seen as a study of new areas and cutting edge research, a field of many issues, which makes it one of the most complex objects of historiography today. To understand it correctly, it is vital to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, to make the effort to break away from the traditional disciplinary limits, to cross sources and to make complementary use of various scales of observation and analytical perspectives present in the study of history today. Our study of social stereotypes is, in effect, a meeting point for the various research approaches (historiographic, epistemological, social and educational). In this sense, the rural Europe of the Early Modern Age is an exceptional historical scenario to analyse the construction of knowledge, the formation of stereotypes and the formal teaching of these.

The conceptualization of the peasantry, its world and its peculiarities has been a matter of debate for historiography since the 1970s (Bakx, 1988; Bernstein, 2000; Fontana, 1997; Guha, 2002; Wolf, 1971; 2001). Furthermore, any conceptualization needs to be understood through the dichotomy between the town and the country. The notion of otherness pervades historiographic paradigms, nurturing archetypal dichotomies and incorporating them into the various areas of the discourse. The historical construction of Europe, together with the triumph of the urban world and of liberalism, led to the creation of contradictory discourses about the rural world. Indeed, historians have traditionally considered peasantry and the bourgeoisie as two opposed worlds (García, 2014; Coauthor & Author, 2010). The greater or lesser proportion of individuals involved in farming activities has always been held up as one of the basic criteria when defining what is urban under the Ancien Régime. This may

explain why, although there has been recognition of the great influence of peasant groups in the pre-industrial cities, the studies on these population groups have tended to focus more on the craftsmen, the traders or the administrators.

Clearly, it is no easy matter to understand peasant sectors in the cities when the theory of modernization holds that the city is, perforce, the motor behind capitalist progress. The peasantry was continuously identified negatively with social and economic backwardness. Schematic and artificial oversimplifications have stressed distinctions and underscored differences in a prejudiced discourse nurtured by the privileged classes, in an attempt to give credit to an elitist vision of the social hierarchy, which the middle classes then picked up on when their own turn came. The distinguishing features of civilization were played off against the wild dark world that was full of ignorance, superstition and traditions, far removed from any move towards learning and education (Fontana, 1997). These ideas and the stereotypes associated with them (the organization of the family, work, economic relations and dependences), have been questioned and criticized by modern historiography. However, the history taught to society still retains certain images of the rural world that have now been surpassed. In-depth analyses of these discourses from their origins (historical research), to legislation (curriculum), to the classrooms (manuals and student perception), is a key field of research for understanding how historical knowledge is built and transmitted to society.

Methodology

Aims

The main aim of this study is to look at the historiographic construction of the rural world in Early Modern Age Western Europe, the creation of images and the transmission of knowledge and social stereotypes, with reference to France and Spain. This period was chosen because of the long-term continuities and the deep transformations resulting from the social, economic, cultural and political movements that spread throughout Europe during the transition from the Ancien Régime to the Liberal order. To tackle this issue, we formulated a series of specific aims:

1. To review the historiographic production of the last twenty years on the rural world in Western Europe in the Early Modern Age with reference to France and Spain, in order to analyse the construction of historical knowledge, images, stereotypes and social representation.
2. To analyse the transposition between research findings and teachable knowledge by studying school syllabuses and curricula in France and Spain, and the textbooks used by teachers and so to check the knowledge used in teaching about the rural world in the Early Modern Age, the images employed to illustrate this knowledge and the presence of clichés and stereotypes.
3. To carry out a comparative analysis of teaching about the rural world in the Early Modern Age in the classroom in France and Spain. A questionnaire was designed for secondary school students from various areas in both countries, in order to ascertain the enduring idea among students of certain images, clichés and stereotypes regarding the rural world.

Method and sampling

This study takes the form of a mixed or holistic research model that takes in both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches, so allowing us to make systematic and rigorous proposals for improvements, on the basis of the information gathered (Lukas & Santiago, 2009). Such an approach

combines the comprehensive potential of qualitative research with the explanatory value of quantitative research (Sabariego & Bisquerra, 2012).

The qualitative methodology perspective is taken as the phenomenological one, insofar as it seeks to describe, compare, explain and understand the reality of the study (the rural world in Western Europe in the Early Modern Age), from the perspective of historical research and the curricular and socio-educational legislation context in which the knowledge is transmitted. All of this is done according to a fundamentally inductive procedure following the recommendations of Sandín (2003) and Sabariego, Massot and Dorio (2012). The widely used Grounded Theory in social sciences is the analytical approach employed, as it explains the different aspects of the study (historiographic construction of the rural world and the teaching of the information through various images and stereotypes), so generating theories and models on the basis of the collection and systematic analysis of data (Flick, 2007).

The approach is quantitative, in that it seeks to identify the variables that are linked to the systematic analysis of subjects, clichés and stereotypes relating to the rural world. We will do this by comparing the frequency of these elements in the historical research of the last two decades with those found in curricula, manuals and the students' answers to our questionnaire. The correlation of these elements should allow us to identify factors and compare and relate them. The combination of such a quantitative and qualitative analysis is the key to achieving the aims of this project.

In order to achieve our first specific aim, we studied historiographic production on the rural world in widely subscribed journals. We analysed articles on rural history from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, published between 2000 and 2014. Articles on the nineteenth century were only chosen if they considered that century as a transition from the Early Modern Age to the Contemporary Age. Six journals specifically on Rural History were chosen (*Estudis d'Historia Agraria*; *Études Rurales*; *Histoire et Sociétés Rurales*; *Historia Agraria*; *Mundo Agrario* and *Rural History, Society, Economy and Culture*) and ten general journals that had published articles on the Early Modern Age and the transition to the Contemporary Age. Five of these were from France (*Annales de Demographie Historique*; *Histoire, Economie et Société*; *Histoire et Mesure*; *Revue d'Historie Moderne et Contemporaine*; *Revue Historique*) and five from Spain (*Hispania*; *Historia Moderna*; *Historia Social*; *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*; *Revista de Historia Económica*; *Studia Historica*). The selection criteria were that the journals were well ranked on the prestigious SCOPUS database and that they accepted papers on social and economic history.

For the analysis, we created a database in ACCESS with two related tables. Two types of information were inserted into these tables. One was information related to the identification of the article: the complete title, the journal, the year and the author. The other was the information necessary for the analysis: the century or centuries analysed in the paper, the period (Transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age; the Early Modern Age; the Transition to the Contemporary Age and the long term), the country of the analysis, the region analysed, the specific issues dealt with, and the broad lines of the topics. In this way, we analysed all the papers in terms of space, time and topic. We were then in a position to cross the data with the identifying data of the journal, year of publication, etc.

In order to analyse specific aim 2, we studied the Spanish and French curricula and made a selection of the manuals most used in each country. The contents proposed for the Early Modern Age and the transition to the Contemporary Age are identified, as well as the nature of the knowledge imparted (social, economic, political and cultural), the weight of the rural world in the knowledge taught and the stereotypes that are associated with this. The sample for the comparative analysis is made up of the French and Spanish syllabuses and the activities proposed by six of the most widely used publishing houses (Anaya, Oxford and Vicens Vives in Spain; Bordas, Belin and Lelivrescolaire in France). The sample comprised 1500 activities. Data were treated mainly quantitatively (systematization of the concepts and topics addressed in the activities in the manuals), but also qualitatively using content analysis, especially in the case of the school curricula.

For specific aim 3, a closed questionnaire for use in secondary schools in France and Spain was designed and validated by experts (two university lecturers, one from Teaching Social Sciences and the other from Sociology). The scale was a 1-4 Likert type. The scale was translated into French by an expert. The contents of the questionnaire were drawn up from common stereotypes about the rural world, which are taught under the theory of modernization, and also from the information on this area found in the textbooks. The sample comprised 830 students, mainly from the Spanish seventh and ninth grades and the ninth and seventh in France. The Spanish part of the sample was larger (80%), since the sample was not layered and was based on availability. Data were taken from small and medium sized cities and towns in both countries (Île de France, Bretagne, Murcia, Albacete, Cuenca, Valencia and Madrid).

Findings/Results

Specific aim 1

Between 2000 and 2014 the journals selected published a total of 4052 articles, of which 369 were devoted to rural history in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and to the transition to the Contemporary Age. These were then analysed through the database. Table 1 shows the percentage that these articles represent of the total number of articles published in each journal.

Table 1. Articles of Rural History (16th-19th centuries) in scientific journals (2000-2014)

Journal	Freq	Total	%
Histoire Et Societés Rurales	61	160	38.1
Estudis D'Historia Agraria	60	164	36.6
Historia Agraria	43	270	15.9
Rural History Journal	38	180	21.1
Annales De Demographie Historique	34	250	13.6
Mundo Agrario	26	270	9.6
Obradoiro De Historia Moderna	25	150	16.7
Revue D'Histoire Moderne Et Contemporaine	16	560	2.9
Studia Historica. Historia Moderna	13	180	7.2
Histoire Et Mesure	13	220	5.9
Hispania	11	405	2.7
Historia Social	8	308	2.6
Histoire, Economie Et Societé	7	352	2.0
Revista De Historia Económica	5	135	3.7
Revue Historique	5	280	1.8
Etude Rurales	4	168	2.4
Total	369	4,052	9.1

From the table, it is clear that productions on rural history in the Early Modern Age and the transition to the Contemporary Age has a moderate weight in journals specifically devoted to rural history and less in the more general journals, where we would highlight only Annales de Demographie Historique (France) and Obradoiro de Historia Moderna (Spain). We would also draw attention to the fact that the frequency of these articles rose from 2000 to 2007 (figure 1) but then started to fall off until 2014. While the Early Modern Age (excluding the last centuries of the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century) receives the most attention (56%), the eighteenth century is the period most addressed in scientific articles and the transition to the Contemporary Age (18th-19th centuries) weighs in with a hefty 30%. The least analysed period is the transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age (table 2). Likewise, there are five areas we can highlight which account for more than half of the

articles analysed: family (marriage, inheritance, women and daily life), crops and production, land ownership and its development, demographic and population issues, and landscapes and the environment (figure 2).

Figure 1. Evolution of articles about rural history (16th-19th centuries). Axis “X” year of publication; axis “Y”, number of articles published.

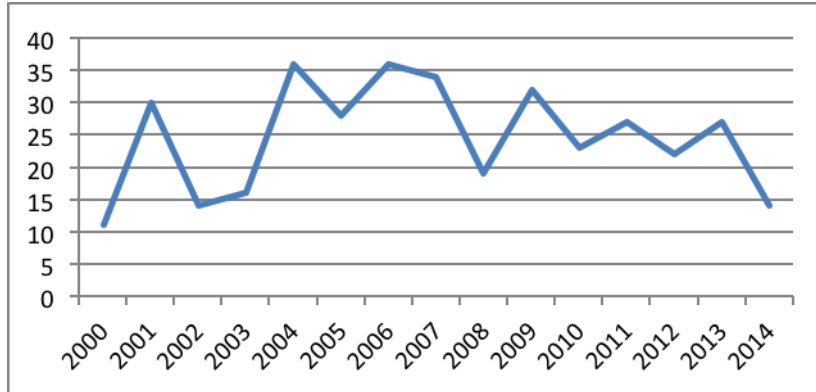
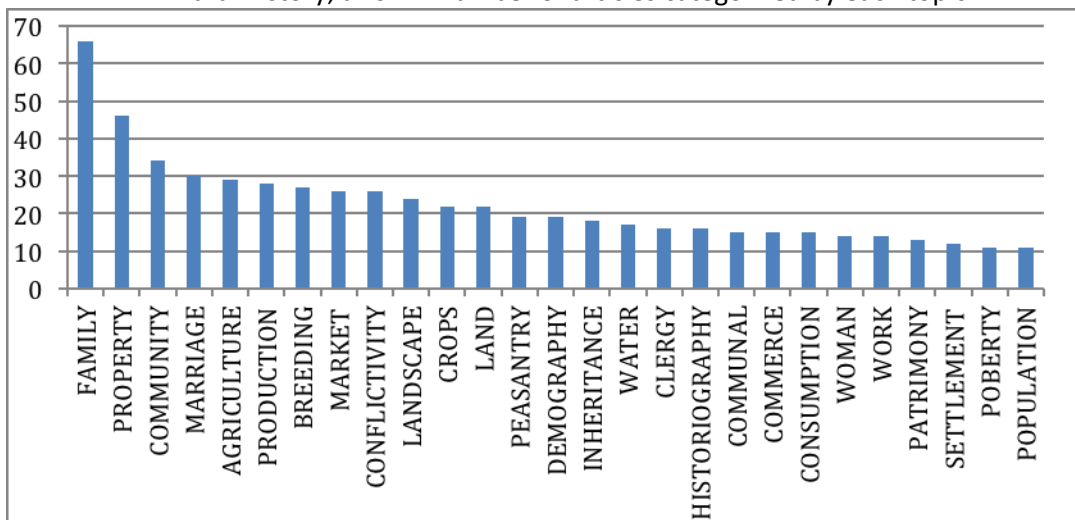


Table 2. Number of articles for period

Period	Number	Percentage
Early Modern Age	209	56.7
Transition to Contemporary Age	109	29.5
Long-Duration	40	10.8
Transition from Middle Age to Early Modern Age	11	3.0
Total	369	100

Figure 2. Main topics in articles about rural history (16th-19th centuries). Axis “X” topics about rural history; axis “Y” number of articles categorized by each topic.



Specific aim 2

The subject matter of the Early Modern Age is set out in the Spanish ESO Education Act for the seventh grade for the 16th-17th centuries and in the ninth for the eighteenth century. In France, the same subject matter is taught in the *quinzième de Collège* (16th-17th centuries), equivalent to the Spanish seventh grade, and the *quatrième de Collège* (18th century), equivalent to the Spanish eighth grade. The data analysed show that the historical knowledge taught to students continues to follow a single approach of a political and traditional nature, which has a heavier slant in Spain and is more qualified in France. The hegemonic historical discourse favours a positivist view of history that focuses on time as being linear and the continuous progress of civilization. The learning comes through the memorizing of kings, ministers, worthies, statesmen, dates of battles, wars and peace treaties (Author, 2014; Author et al., 2013). The pedagogical treatment of this content is richer in France, where there is a greater analysis of second order content (historical thought, historical sources, causes-consequences, etc.). In both countries, knowledge about society and the economy takes second place; at times, they are little more than anecdotic, complementary to the political and institutional discourse. There are some differences, too. While the Spanish syllabus and the school manuals follow a strict chronological order, in France there is a more transversal approach, which leads to a wide treatment of some interesting topics, such as slavery and the black slave trade, the Enlightenment, etc.

In Spain, the main subjects addressed relate to the discovery and conquest of America, issues to do with the Spanish Empire and European absolutist monarchies. Art and culture in the 16th and 17th centuries are also strongly present (Renaissance, Humanism, Baroque and religious crises). The economy takes a more secondary role and society is treated almost anecdotally. Society and the economy are addressed from a structural approach, and sometimes with hints about everyday life. The 18th century, which is taught in the Spanish ninth grade, has less specific weight. The War of the Spanish Succession, absolutism and the Enlightenment are treated as forerunners of the Contemporary Age. In France, more importance is given to the 18th century. The syllabus takes in at least five issues: Europe and the world in the early 18th century; the Enlightenment; slavery and the black slave trade; the problems of the reign of Louis XVI and the French Revolution.

A deeper analysis of the contents in the Secondary School textbooks in Spain shows how political and institutional history is at the top (45.6%), with art and cultural history accounting in all for 82% of the activities in the manuals (table 2). Social and economic history comes far behind, with just 17%. Political history and cultural and artistic history has a similar weight in France as in Spain (75%), whilst social and economic history account for little more (25%).

Table 2. Typology of historical knowledge in didactic units about Early Modern History in textbooks (Spain and France).

HISTORICAL CONTENTS	% Spain	% France
Art and Cultural History	36.9	35.2
Political and Institutional History	45.6	40
Social and Economic History	17.5	24.8
Total	100	100

Social and economic history is seldom present in classrooms, but the peasantry and rural society (who accounted for 80-90% of the Early Modern Age population) barely get a mention in Spanish textbooks and fare even worse in French ones. The main issues of rural history in academic journals do not appear in these textbooks, such as changes in land ownership, production and productivity, family and marriage and their relationship with the reproduction of the farms, conflicts with the commons, water and environment, etc. In France, the emphasis is more cross-sectional, (the Enlightenment, the

black slave trade ...) with almost nothing on rural society, which is left out of history. In Spain, the textbook space devoted to this is sometimes as little as one line. In most cases, the peasantry are directly associated with “poverty” and “exclusion”. Whilst textbooks treat poverty in the towns as being transitory or pertaining to a way of life, (rogues, tramps and the like), among the peasantry, it is portrayed as being almost innate to the whole group. The peasantry gets lumped together, when in reality there were internal differences that grew as the Early Modern Age advanced.

Oxford publications state that, in the sixteenth century, “The peasantry did not improve economically; wages did not rise in line with prices” (our translation). This is very general and supposes that all the peasantry earned fixed wages and merrily ignores the advantages to be had for the large or medium owners and lease-holders. Furthermore, the only mention that this group gets in the teaching unit on the seventeenth century is to say that “their economic situation worsened; during this century there was an increasing movement of peasants to the towns in search of work” (our translation). There is an almost cavalier neglect of the fall in population in many urban areas, from which, some never recovered. The Anaya publication qualifies some of these issues. For example, in the sixteenth century, we read that the peasants “worked their own lands or were paid wages by their lords” (our translation). There is an insistence that in the eighteenth century “their situation worsened due to wars, agricultural crises and increased rents to their lords” (our translation). Vicens Vives gives more information about the Early Modern Ages with some paragraphs on agriculture and the agrarian economy. Yet, when it comes to the peasantry, it merely says that it accounted for 80% of the population and that “their lives were lived in precarious conditions” (our translation). As for the seventeenth century, it says that by then “the peasants had lost their lands” (our translation), in an epigraph on social problems.

Moreover, when explaining society in such a rigidly compartmentalised way, the writers are falling into an error that has long been overcome, since the decision was taken to break out of the “structural jail” when explaining social phenomena and relations (Levi, 2003). Early Modern Era society was very porous and there was important mobility between the groups. The famous estates of society were a simplification of a much more complex reality in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Despite the scarce attention paid to the society and economy of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the urban world and the cities receive somewhat more attention than the rural world. The textbooks offer activities with questions like: “Find information about the life of rogues and delinquency in cities” or “Describe town life in the seventeenth century”. Secondary school textbooks, like that published by Oxford, devote several pages to the “renaissance city” or the “baroque city”. The role of rural society in the changes during the Early Modern era is clearly a secondary one. The middle class and the town dwellers are once again portrayed as the main agents of change, of the fall of the Ancien Régime, of modernization and liberalism and of the bases of today’s society. It is a discourse that responds more to the legitimization of the leadership of a specific social group in the past and its political and economic consequences (Marcos, 1996).

Specific aim 3

Table 4. Questionnaire about the images and stereotypes of the rural world.

BLOCK 1	BLOCK 2	BLOCK 2
<p>1. Rural society is more traditional than urban society.</p> <p>2. There are more superstitions in the rural world than in the urban world.</p> <p>3. The peasantry are more deeply rooted and travel less. City dwellers travel more and know more places.</p> <p>4. Families living in the rural world are larger and more members live in the same dwelling.</p> <p>5. There is more freedom in the town than in the country.</p> <p>6. Country folk are more religious.</p> <p>7. There is less culture in the country than in the town.</p> <p>8. Behaviours are more violent in the country and more civilized in the town.</p> <p>9. There are more possibilities to make money in the town; there is more poverty in the country.</p> <p>10. There are not so many economic differences in the country.</p> <p>11. Women in the country devote their time mainly to the house; women in the city work more outside the house.</p> <p>12. Women in the country are subject to greater social control than women in towns.</p> <p>13. Women who live alone (unmarried women and widows) are more frowned upon in the country than in the town.</p>	<p>14. The main revolutions have always been led by the middle class and town dwellers.</p> <p>15. The social pyramids depicted in textbooks always place the peasantry at the bottom.</p> <p>16. There are the same numbers of pictures depicting the rural world as the urban world in textbooks.</p> <p>17. Most of the peasantry in the Early Modern Age did not own lands and worked for the nobility.</p> <p>18. I have always studied the characteristics and the evolution of towns and cities in the 16th-18th centuries more than those of the rural world.</p> <p>19. In the Liberal revolutions of the 18th-19th centuries, the changes came from the towns.</p> <p>20. The peasantry was not interested in land ownership reforms.</p> <p>21. There were few improvements in the country in terms of crops and technology prior to the Industrial Revolution in the XIX century.</p> <p>22. The Age of Enlightenment (18th century) was a mainly town dwelling society.</p> <p>23. Economic growth in the 16th-18th centuries was driven by the urban economy.</p> <p>24. In class we have learned about the internal social differences among the country dwellers and the groups they comprised.</p>	<p>25. In the rural world of the 16th-18th centuries, people married younger than in the towns.</p> <p>26. Marriage in the rural world was based on interests; in the towns it was based on love.</p> <p>27. Marriages between relations were more common in the country than in the city.</p> <p>28. Newlyweds in the country lived in the houses of the parents, while in the towns they had their own houses.</p> <p>29. There was more privacy in the town than in the country.</p> <p>30. There were fewer young people in the country than in the town.</p> <p>31. The father of the family had more authority in the rural world than in the towns.</p> <p>32. Women in towns enjoyed greater freedom than women in the country.</p>

For specific aim 3, a closed questionnaire for use in secondary schools in France and Spain was designed. The scale was a 1-4 Likert type (0: not answer; 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: agree; 4: strongly agree). The contents of the questionnaire were drawn up from common stereotypes about the rural world which are taught under the theory of modernization and also from the information about this area found in the textbooks (table 4).

According to the answers (table 5), students have a very traditional perception of rural society both in historical perspective and today. With respect to block I, based on rural society today, students have a view of the rural world in which society is very traditional (figure 3), deeply rooted in its area (figure 4), with large families (figure 5), and fewer economic differences (figure 6). Although new technologies and advances in communication have broken most barriers between rural society and urban society,

still surviving are the stereotypes created from the theory of modernization: a closed, unchanging, traditional, religious rural society, based on family and neighbourhood solidarity.

Table 5. Descriptive results of questionnaire of stereotypes of the rural world

Ítem	N	Average	Ítem	N	Average
1	830	3.15	17	830	2.98
2	830	2.68	18	830	2.60
3	830	2.79	19	830	2.72
4	830	2.66	20	830	2.10
5	830	1.93	21	830	2.81
6	830	2.55	22	830	2.72
7	830	2.11	23	830	2.68
8	830	1.79	24	830	2.90
9	830	2.70	25	830	2.88
10	830	2.67	26	830	2.06
11	830	2.57	27	830	2.60
12	830	2.21	28	830	2.53
13	830	2.16	29	830	2.55
14	830	2.70	30	830	2.44
15	830	3.29	31	830	2.76
16	830	2.40	32	830	2.62

Figure 3. Rural society is more traditional than urban society. Axis "X" answers of students (0: not answer; 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: agree; 4: strongly agree); axis "Y" percentage of answers.

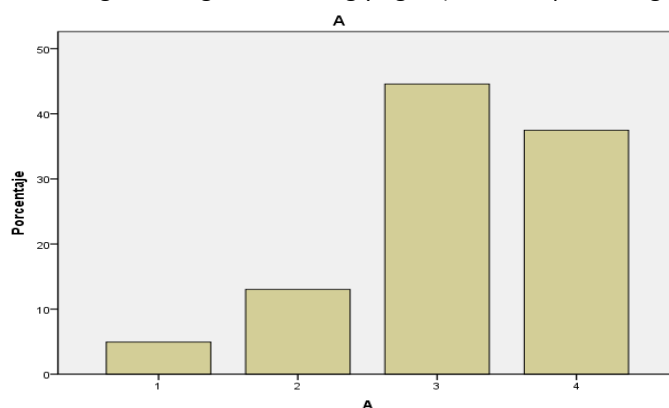


Figure 4. The peasantry are more deeply rooted and travel less. City dwellers travel more and know more places. Axis "X" answers of students (0: not answer; 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree; 3: agree; 4: strongly agree); axis "Y" percentage of answers.

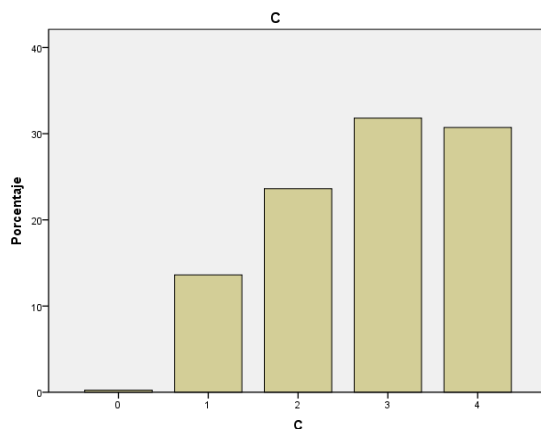


Figure 5. Families living in the rural world are larger and more members live in the same dwelling. Axis "X" answers of students (0: not answer; 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: agree; 4: strongly agree); axis "Y" percentage of answers.

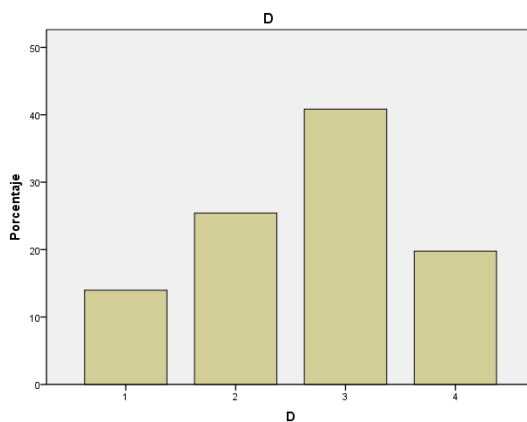
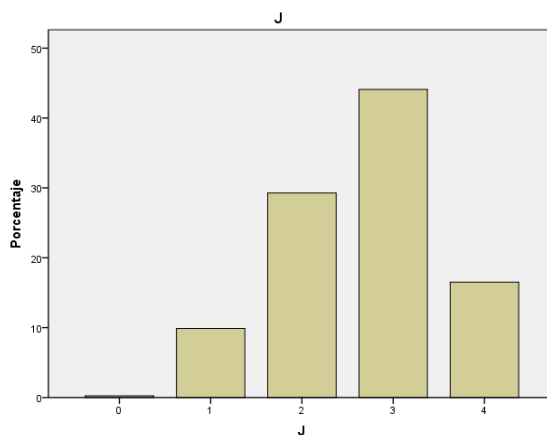


Figure 6. There are not so many economic differences in the country. Axis "X" answers of students (0: not answer; 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: agree; 4: strongly agree); axis "Y" percentage of answers.



If we review the responses to block 2 of the questionnaire, just as it is portrayed in the textbooks, students continue to view the urban world as the driving force of historical change. This is appreciated

in item 14, where the majority of students agreed that the main revolutions originated in the towns and cities (table 5). Moreover, they reproduce many of the issues that appear in the manuals which historiography has now clearly surpassed. Examples of this are that the students believe that the peasantry of the Early Modern Age did not own lands and worked exclusively for the nobility (item 17, table 5), or that the Enlightenment was principally for an urban society, (item 22, table 5), when the rural world represented 75-85% of the population in Spain and France.

Conclusion

Although there is an evident need to update the content of Secondary Education, regarding rural society in the 16th-18th centuries, we are aware that reducing the problem merely to this is to miss the point when it comes to teaching: scientific knowledge is not directly transformable into teachable knowledge. Rather, the students have to adapt it to their thought patterns and to their general or vulgar knowledge of history, which is heavily influenced by their audio-visual culture (Sáiz, 2010). The history taught and learnt before university is different from the historical knowledge produced by academic historiography. History at school gives a lot of meaning to the past when it has great public use in the present (Plá, 2012).

The contribution of substantive content to the historical literacy of the students needs to take into account the concept of historical significance (Seixas & Morton, 2013). The past and its knowledge should be presented as a non-static reality. The questions posed should respond to problems of clear interest for today's world or, at least, those of significant interest for today's students. Knowledge of rural society in the 16th-18th centuries can help to provide a critical understanding of today's issues. Key topics, such as social inequalities, differences between sexes and generations, family organization, networks of relations and social mobility processes, conflict, the material culture, are just some of the questions that the latest historiography is broaching and they are issues that can contribute to better and more up-to-date training in history of our students (Author et al., 2015).

However, our findings reveal a historiography that is travelling in quite a different direction to the historical knowledge proposed in Secondary Education. The analysis of curricula, manuals and students' perceptions show a dysfunctional knowledge about the peasantry and the rural world that has led to the reproduction of social stereotypes that academic knowledge has now surpassed. Very little space is devoted in Spanish school manuals and syllabuses to the peasantry and the rural world of the 16th-18th centuries. What information exists is highly stereotypical and often negative. All the manuals associate the peasantry and rural society with poverty and exclusion, with suffering and an almost servile status. It is claimed that the majority of peasants held no land and worked on the lands owned by the nobles. French textbooks devote less text and fewer images to the peasants than Spanish ones.

Perhaps, what is most worrying about these findings is the imbalance between the rural and the urban world. Urban society, in terms of texts, representations and images, is very present in the teaching units on the Early Modern Age. Urban society is, furthermore, associated with change, transformation, wealth, the triumph of capitalism and the disappearance of the Ancien Régime. The bourgeoisie is the leading player in the whole "positive" historical growth of the economy, society and culture of the sixteenth century but the middle classes are also represented as being key to understanding the economic growth of the eighteenth century, the cultural changes of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the political transformation of the Ancien Régime. Yet there are serious doubts about the role of this social group in the changes in Spain and the anachronistic nature of this version (Marcos, 1996).

Historiography on peasantry and the rural world has advanced in interesting areas in the last fifteen years. Among these areas are the family, women, daily life, the complex systems of ownership and their relations with inheritance. However, there have also been advances in the knowledge of

production systems and productivity, types of crops, unrest, the landscape and other key issues. Why do these differences exist between historiography and the history taught in Secondary Schools?

The historical interpretation in the textbooks, which is clearly reflected in the answers to the questionnaires on stereotypes, is closely bound up with the theory of modernization. The textbooks define traditional societies as closed, with religious values, a mainly agricultural economy, of rural character and with large families (Le Goff, 1988). This is in contrast to modern societies, which are industrialized, have open values, urban and with nuclear families. The rural viewpoint appears as an anachronism in the light of the Early Modern Era. Textbooks focus on the drivers of modernization, the middle class, trade, new political theories and urban society. Historiography has superseded these ideas but textbooks continue to insist upon them, so conditioning the students' perception of the rural world, as the questionnaire reveals. A brief look at the answers to the items that allude to the rural world as more traditional and religious bears this out, as do the items indicating that the towns and cities are the driving forces behind change and revolution. The students consistently respond in line with the images created by the theory of modernization and reproduce clichés that fly in the face of recent historiography.

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