

Written Master's Thesis

**The rural Spain as a photographic subject and
its contemporary representation: Cristina
García Rodero and *España oculta* (1989)**

Cristóbal Mora Bieli-Bianchi

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COLLEGE

Abstract

This project presents a historical journey of Spanish rural photography throughout the 20th century. From Luis Escobar in the 20s, through W. Eugene Smith in the 50s, to Cristina García Rodero and her *España oculta*, published in 1989 and considered as one of the greatest photo books of Spanish documentary photography. This thesis proposes to look for those common traits in Spanish rural photography, a minor genre, but of great repercussion due to those who have photographed these areas of the country, the weight of myths and stereotypes in their representation, and their cultural and academic importance in the current Spanish rural context. Through a historical analysis, an interview with Cristina García Rodero, and a content analysis regarding the different photographs, the main objective is to discover how the Spanish rural reality has been represented throughout the last century and how *España oculta* managed to break, in a way, with a tradition rooted in Spanish culture, such as the *España negra* myth.

Key words: Spain, photography, rural, Cristina García Rodero, *España oculta*.

Resumen

El presente proyecto plantea un recorrido histórico de la fotografía rural española a lo largo del siglo XX. Desde Luis Escobar en la década de los 20, pasando por W. Eugene Smith en los 50, hasta Cristina García Rodero y su *España oculta*, publicado en 1989 y considerado como uno de los grandes libros fotográficos del documentalismo español. Esta tesis plantea buscar aquellos puntos en común en la fotografía rural española, un género menor, pero de gran repercusión debido a quienes han fotografiado estas áreas del país, el peso de los mitos y estereotipos en su representación y su importancia cultural y académica en el contexto rural español actual. A través de un análisis histórico, una entrevista con Cristina García Rodero y un análisis de contenido respecto a las diferentes fotografías, el principal objetivo es descubrir cómo se ha representado la realidad rural española a lo largo del siglo pasado y cómo *España oculta* consiguió romper, en cierto modo, con una tradición arraigada en la cultura española, como es el mito de la España negra.

Palabras clave: España, fotografía, rural, Cristina García Rodero, *España oculta*.

Acknowledgements

In the last years, the rural areas in Spain started to complain about a historical abandonment they suffered and keep suffering somehow regarding services and opportunities. I am glad to present this project, which talks about how rural Spain was represented along the 20th century through photography and focusing on the extraordinary job made by Cristina García Rodero in *España oculta*. The main personal goal is to show this hard reality abroad and it is also an invitation for whoever reads this paper to know a face of Spain that is not well-known. I live and enjoy my life in a rural city, and I can say proudly that I am rural, even with all the problems that these areas of the country have. It is worth it to fight for this land because it is also an alternative for the future not just in Spain, but in every country with similar problems of rural development.

I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Dr Stuart Franklin. His guidance helped me to develop this project with a correct approach and with a strong theoretical base, together with his help to make an interview with Cristina García Rodero. I also want to thank Professor Lars Julius Halvorsen for his suggestions and availability to discuss the project when it was needed. I would like to add deep gratitude to Cristina García Rodero for the time she gave me to talk about her work. It was a rich and nice experience and I learned a lot about Spain from the interview.

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Cristóbal Mora Bieli-Bianchi

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“El hombre moderno vive ajeno a esas sensaciones inscritas en lo profundo de nuestra biología y que sustentan el placer de salir al campo.”

“Modern man lives oblivious to those sensations inscribed in the depths of our biology that sustain the pleasure of going out to the countryside.”

Miguel Delibes

Spanish writer

(1920 - 2010)

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1. Introduction

In 1989, while Spain was getting ready to host the Olympics in Barcelona and the Universal Exposition in Sevilla in 1992, Cristina García Rodero, 40 years old back then, was launching



Picture 1: García Rodero, C. (1978). *En las eras*.

her first photo book. A work of 15 years approximately that showed already in that time the huge contrast between two different countries: on one hand, a Spain with colour, progress and looking to the future after Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) and, on the other hand, a country still living close to old traditions, in black and white and unknown for the other half. In

other words, the big cities, being the centre of Spain's progress during the post-dictatorship, and the countryside, historically forgotten by the different regimes of the country during the 20th century.

The title of García Rodero's book is already a little explanation of this reality. *España oculta* (1989), or *Hidden Spain* in the English edition, shows through 126 pictures in black and white, the relationship between people and their different religious rites and traditions, mostly in the countryside (**picture 1**: *En las eras* shows a girl sleeping on a threshing board while her parents work in a chickpeas field. As Guerrero (2020) suggests, this picture shows a kind of agriculture that will not be there for long). Since most of the pictures taken by García Rodero were in little towns in the rural areas of the country, the photographer was able to show the contrast between cities and countryside in Spain. García de León (1996) suggests that this book is an effort to show a world that is disappearing little by little in front of a huge process of industrialization that Spain was living during the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, García de León (1996) adds that people living in the Spanish countryside was always represented in culture through the stereotype of a hick, while Cristina García Rodero was able to show them completely far from the stereotype, showing the Spanish rural areas as a more complex, traditional, dark and nostalgic reality, but without leaving in any moment her main topic and what followed her future work: the relationship between people and rites.

It has been already 32 years since the book was published and the situation in the countryside in Spain is similar or even worse. This thesis project has the aim of going further than just an

analysis of García Rodero's pictures in *España oculta*. Her work could be put in context with the reality of the Spanish countryside along the 20th century. To do that, it is important to understand the social, demographic and historical context of these regions in Spain, otherwise, it would be very difficult to understand how photography or other cultural disciplines, like painting or cinema, showed and represented the Spanish countryside along the 20th century, or even before, as it is possible to see further in this piece of work, regarding the *España negra* (black Spain) myth and its influence in the culture and the representation of the Spanish rurality.

In the first decades of the last century, photographers like the German Kurt Hielscher and his book *Das Unbekannte Spanien* (Unknown Spain - 1922) took a more ethnographic vision of the rural areas. Others, like José Ortiz Echagüe followed the aesthetics of the *España negra* myth, extended in that time. Luis Escobar deserves a parenthesis by himself with his work in some rural towns of Albacete. López Mondéjar (1980) mentions that he opened the door to a style far from the stereotypes and showing the diversity and traditions from people living in towns, but with a clear political intention in some cases, as we will see later in this project. The author defined Escobar as “the photographer of people”.

But maybe the works made during the dictatorship deserve to be more highlightable. Franco's regime hid and destroyed some archives, while a lot of photographers working on the Republican side lost their working permission, they were put in jail or they were killed. In this repressive context, in which the regime did not want to show the flaws of Spain, some photographers from abroad took a kind of ‘leadership’ to show the Spanish rural areas and their reality.

Perivolaris (2003) makes a comparison between *Spanish village* (1951), the project made by W. Eugene Smith for LIFE magazine and *España oculta* (**picture 2: The wake** is the final picture of Smith's



Picture 2: Smith, E. (1950). *The wake*.

reportage. There it is possible to see a family, all of them wearing black clothes, witnessing the funeral of the grandfather. As will be explained later, this picture, as the whole reportage, shows a dark vision of the Spanish rurality, even if it is a work coming from a foreign photographer). In the end, no matter the time when the pictures were taken, what each photographer shows

about the Spanish countryside is the struggle and poverty of these rural areas, since this is the reality that the people living there had at that time. However, Susperregui (2009) analyses Smith's work in Spain and some of the reactions the project had in the country. In general, it is considered a piece of work without respect for the territory and its inhabitants. In *España oculta*, the respect for the people living their lives in these areas is clear. Perivolaris (2003) says that what Cristina García Rodero did is to give humanity to those people.

Thematically talking, and getting closer to the respect of the characters showed by García Rodero in her photo book, Inge Morath showed during her trips to Spain, at the '50s and the



Picture 3: Morath, I. (1955). *Las Hurdes*.

beginning of the '60s, the lifestyle and some traditions from some towns at the rural areas around the country. The influence of Henri Cartier-Bresson, who also visited Spain, is present in her work: catching the moments with a special touch and technique. Ruiz Franco (2007) explains that, during her second trip in Spain, in 1954, she visited *Las*

Hurdes, worldwide famous for the documentary *Las Hurdes, Tierra sin pan*, made by Luis Buñuel in 1933. Even if it is still possible to see the same kind of poverty seen by Buñuel 20 years before, Morath managed to show a higher grade of humanity in her pictures, especially the ones where children were the main characters (**picture 3**: Inge Morath gives a new perspective from *Las Hurdes* and the Spanish rurality during the years she visited the country. In this picture, it is possible to see a group of children, with dirty faces and clothes and with a poor wooden structure behind them. Even if the poverty affecting that area can be seen in this picture, Morath gives more humanity to the characters, something that shows a contrast regarding other photographers working in the rural areas in Spain at that time).

With a more ethnographical point of view but keeping respect for the land and the people living there, it is possible to find Piedad Isla. She is almost an extraordinary case of a Spanish woman photographer working around this topic in the '50s. As Barrios Felipe and Sáinz Vidal (2011) mention, she worked just in one area during her career, but with a global vision about the conservation of the rural heritage.

However, as Cristina García Rodero suggests, one of her biggest influences is the School of Madrid, also known as *La Palangana*. Parreño (2014) highlights the difficulty to find accurate

data about the group, but what is clear is that it was established in 1959 by some members of the Royal Photographic Society (picture 4: The picture took by Francisco Ontañón, showing pictures of the founder members of *La Palangana* inside a washbowl is simple, but it shows already the style followed by the School of Madrid, where photography was the most



Picture 4: Ontañón, F. (1959). *Integrantes de La Palangana*.

important topic and they had a clear aim of innovating in the Spanish photography from the beginning of the '60s). In the following years, some of them would abandon the group and others would join it. With only one exposition made as a group in 1963, apparently, it did not work for a long time or with a huge presence, but their influence was big, considering from where the Spanish photography came and where did it go after the appearance of these modern groups or schools. Parreño (2014) continues saying that *La Palangana* looked to show the reality as it was, being subjective and rejecting the reigning, or imposed perfection from the portrayers, still, the main photographic work in Spain in the '50s, even if the rest of Europe was already walking another path after World War I.

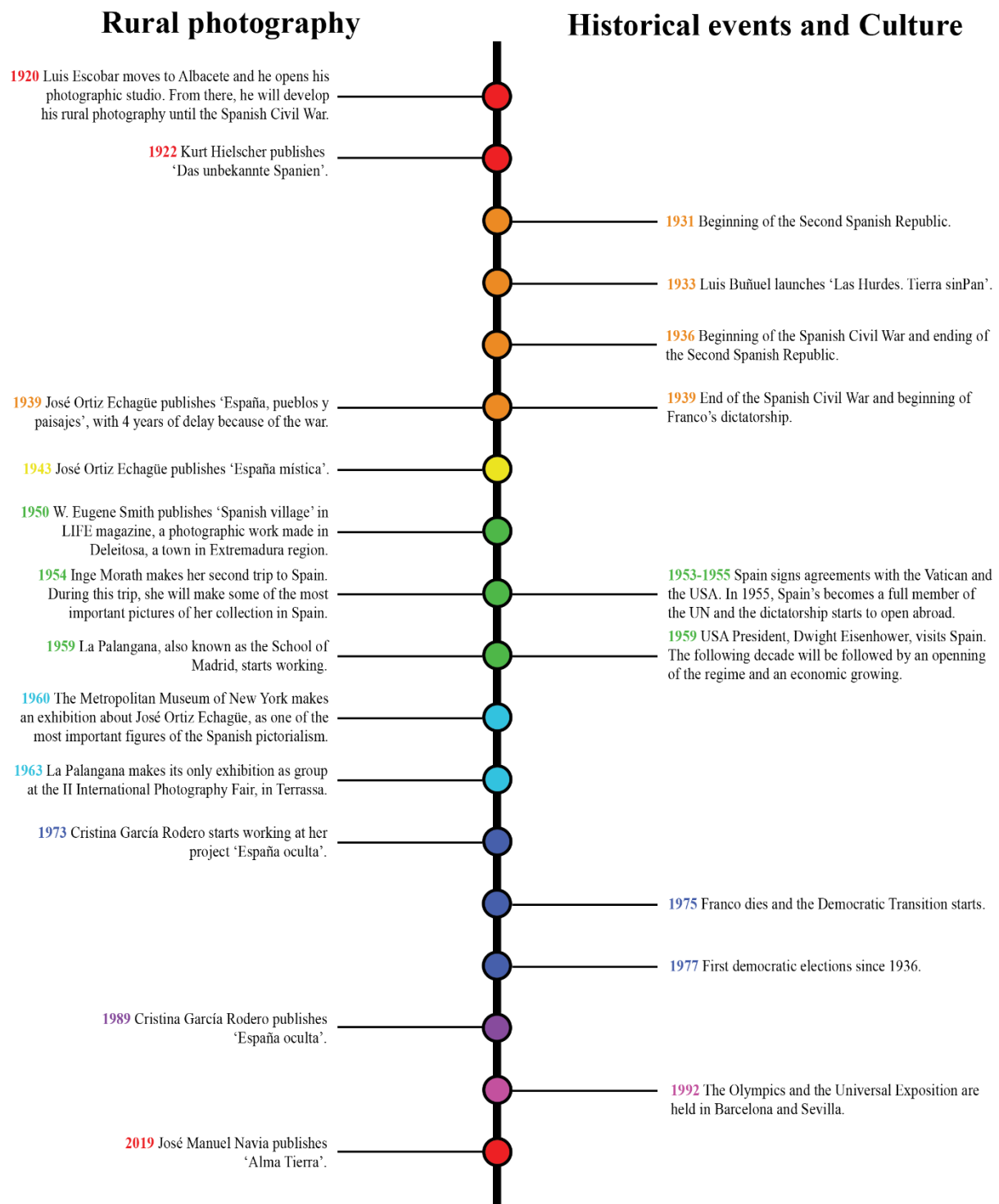
Once Franco's dictatorship ended, in 1975, photography suffered a change led by a new generation of young photographers. Esparza (2020) mentions the *Quinta generación* (the fifth generation of Spanish photographers), a group of young photographers that after 1975, or even during the last years of the dictatorship, changed the mode of representation in general that came from the classic models from the Dictatorship. Perivolaris (2003) suggests that the problem with the representation of the Spanish countryside is the fact that is a poor region, even today. What changed is the message behind each picture. From Echagüe in the '20s to Cristina García Rodero in 1989, Spanish photographers of the countryside passed from a speech in which the *España negra* was dominant, to a more vindictive message, in which the photographer looks to show the inequalities of this land, showing its traditions and culture to general public and being respectful with people and the atmosphere of the place.

España oculta fits in all this context as a complete and complex work about the traditions of the little towns of Spain. Guerrero (2020) explains that the fact this project was developed over 15 years is important to show not just the reality of the Spaniards and their relationship with the traditions, but also a close vision of the new and the old. As a matter of fact, Cristina García Rodero became the first Spanish photographer member of Magnum Photos. García de León (1996) highlights how important her work in *España oculta* was, not just in Spain, but also abroad because it showed a rural world that was disappearing back in 1989.

This work aims to explain the relationship between these photographers, their work and how they showed the rural areas in Spain. The focus is García Rodero, that is why the research is limited to the photographers before named because they were the ones with a highlightable role regarding the rural photography in Spain during the 20th century. In the end, Cristina García Rodero mixes styles, topics, methodologies, and approaches from all the other photographers. Some are considered as a referent by García Rodero herself, while others, even without sharing some elements, are a base for the photographic work made in rural Spain since the '70s. Each photographer has a personal style, but common traits could be found throughout this project regarding what the Spanish rural photography during the 20th century could be, until we arrive to García Rodero and her *España oculta*, as a unique piece of humanized representation of the Spanish rurality through the traditions and rites.

1.1. Timeline

The following timeline is a visual guide to understand better the photographers and dates explained in the last chapter. The main goal of this timeline is to give more order to the data and show the relationship between some of the most important events taking place in Spain along the 20th century and what was going on in the country regarding photography.



1.2. Literature review

To understand rural photography in Spain and how rurality has very specific connotations in this country. First, we need to understand better what is the origin of the relationship that photography has with rural areas in Spain. To do that, it is necessary to come back in time and look at the pictorial art in Spain in the last years of the 19th century. In this moment of history, the concept of *España negra* was born in cultural disciplines like painting and literature. A concept that would follow the rural areas in Spain during the following decades. Bozal (2020) makes a study about how art and society were related to creating *España negra*, the myth that helped to split somehow the country into two parts: one more developed and established in the cities, and the other half (*España negra*) was poor and underdeveloped. The culture showed the reality of the suburbs and the rural areas, but with a negative narrative. Something that would not change until the '60s.

Regarding theories that could be used throughout this project, rurality is one of the main ones. Thomas et. al (2013) make a deep essay about what is exactly rurality, taking as a base for their study some areas in the inner region of New York State, in the United States. Rurality is not an easy concept to be defined because its conception is different in practically every country. Following what these authors, or others like Chigbu (2013) being mentioned regarding rurality, the concept is not just to describe a rural area, and culture is included as a key element in the rural societies, so the way their rites and traditions are represented and shown is also important to describe correctly rurality. Following this idea and to explain better what is considered rural in Spain, the work made by Collantes and Pinilla (2019) is also highlightable in this literature review. Both researchers are well-known in Spain regarding population, social and geographical studies regarding the rural depopulation and its history in the country, so their work is also important when it comes to talking a very specific reality, like the Spanish one.

The modes of representation are also important throughout this research. Barthes (1990) developed concepts related to more philosophical studies around photography, as the *punctum*, and the communication process a picture could have, depending on its context and the reality that shows. With similar philosophical arguments and from different approaches, it is possible to find authors such as Sontag (2005) or Flusser (2000). Inside this explanation of the modes of representation, the role of myths is the most highlightable in the current paper. Barthes (2013) explains myths as a complex communication system, where all kind of elements could play a part on the representation of a specific myth, which it is not necessary a full reality. The

importance of this theory in particular answers to the fact that the *España negra* myth has a big weight on the Spanish cultural development along the 20th century, and of course on the photographic work made in Spain, especially the one related to rural areas.

When it comes to talking more in detail about photographic works made in rural areas in Spain, the book written by López Mondéjar (2005) is key in the Spanish context. The author is one of the best photographic historical researchers in Spain and his work is a whole history of photography in the country, mentioning all the photographers being studied in this project. López Mondéjar (1980) is more focused on the photography from the last decade of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century, giving special attention to Luis Escobar, of whom López Mondéjar (2001) talks entirely about. Regarding José Ortiz Echagüe, Domeño (2009) gives clearer ideas about the styles and the work of this photographer, while Herradón (2006) is a good base to understand Kurt Hielscher's photography in Spain.

Susperregui (2009) makes a big research about *Spanish village*, the reportage made by W. Eugene Smith in Spain in 1950. Parreño (2014) does something similar regarding the work made by *La Palangana* between 1959 and 1963 approximately. Barrios Felipe and Sáinz Vidal (2011) made a study about the photographic work made by Piedad Isla in Palencia, while Ruiz Franco (2007) studies the work made by Inge Morath in Spain during the '50s.

Regarding Cristina García Rodero, Guerrero (2020) analysed her work in *España oculta* in depth. At the same time, the essays made by García de León (1996) and Peralta Barrios & Menéndez-Menéndez (2017) focus more on the work made by García Rodero throughout her career as a photographer, her style and the composition and topics from her pictures. López Mondéjar (2005) has also some mentions to García Rodero and her work in *España oculta*.

In the end, the books, articles and essays mentioned above are some of the most important used in this research, but there is more material, including the pictures from each of the photographers being studied. This literature review works as a summary to show the knowledge done regarding the topics of this project, from a more theoretical point of view, with rurality and the myth as the main theoretical base for the project, while the material added to sustain the analysis of the pictures and photographers is important to give a solid base to the research study.

1.3. Research questions and objectives

This thesis project focuses its attention on a key element about photography: **its social role and messages. In this case, focusing on the work made by Cristina García Rodero and the representation of the Spanish countryside and its inhabitants along the 20th century.** The major research questions of this project are described below, all of them related to this main idea above-mentioned.

1. *Why is *España oculta* important regarding a humanized message of the Spanish rurality?*
2. *How did photography show the Spanish rurality along the 20th century? What are those common elements found between the different works made?*
3. *What relationship is it possible to find between the work made by García Rodero and the work made by other photographers in the rural areas of Spain along the 20th century?*
4. *Is it possible to put García Rodero's work in context with the current Spanish rurality?*
5. *How are the rural culture and society in Spain and its relationship with photography?*

As it was mentioned during the introduction, photography has a special relationship with the Spanish rurality and the way it was showed to the rest of people, not just in Spain, but around the world. Through the analysis of pictures, the research of the different links that exist between the works and the context, and also, with the testimony of Cristina García Rodero, this research looks to answer the questions and relate García Rodero's work with the social role of photography portraying the rural areas in Spain, putting her work in a context that is more complex and deeper than just the moment in which the book was published.

At this point, just talking about the contrast *España oculta* showed back in 1989 in the Spanish context, García Rodero's book managed to give voice again to those traditions and places that the rest of the country was forgetting. Spain's origins are closely related to the rural development and the culture of these areas of the country, even if historically there was and there is a state of abandon of these regions for different reasons. The Spanish culture had always a close relationship with its rural areas. Susperregui (2009), quoting Gaspar Gómez de la Serna from an article published at the Spanish newspaper *ABC* in 1950, shows the feelings Spanish people have around this topic. Still today it is not difficult to find a similar narration sometimes:

"(...) We assume with respect and pain the data about its existence [regarding the poverty at the rural areas]. (...)." (Susperregui, 2009, p. 150).

1.4. Limitations

Even if *España oculta* was one of the reflections of a message that was changing at the end of the 20th century, the reality is that it is difficult to establish how big this change could have been. Even more, if we consider that culturally talking, the rural areas lived a renovation during the '90s and the first decade of the 21st century, but the society did not act enough, as it will be briefly explained in chapter 5.

Moreover, one of the limitations of this work is the period being studied. We will face, through the work made by different photographers, almost 100 years of Spain's history. The problem is not that much the number of years, but the limited material regarding the message of the Spanish rural areas using photography. This is a problem created by the dictatorship. With the cases of W. Eugene Smith and Inge Morath, it is not difficult to find multiple pieces of information, but the Spanish photographers suffered censorship in the best case. Spain lived almost half of the 20th century under Franco's regime, so it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that it is difficult to get to some specific archive, like in this project. That is why the works made by *La Palangana* have even more merit in this context. Before the Spanish Civil War, which, photographically talking, was a parenthesis of new influences in Spain, the problem is also related to the age of the archives or the pictorial styles Spanish photography had until then. Therefore, Luis Escobar and José Ortiz Echagüe are highlightable regarding the rural photography of the years before the war and the dictatorship.

Because of all of this, it is important to establish the different relationships between the photographers who worked on this topic. The study of these different examples will help to study better the different messages regarding the rural areas, how they evolved through the years and what the role of photography could be regarding social problems like rural development, and what could be its impact on society. This paper will conclude with a current state of rural photography in Spain, talking about *Alma Tierra*, a photo book published by José Manuel Navia in 2019, with pictures taken in one of the most depopulated areas in Spain, the *Tierras Altas* county, in the province of Soria.

2. Theoretical approach

In order to approach in a correct way, the topic being studied in this piece, different theories will be used. Starting from those topics more relevant, in this case, photography and its messages, the main theoretical approach will be modes of representation, to understand better what is behind the pictures being studied throughout this project. The most important mode of representation being mentioned through the next pages is the **myth**, as Roland Barthes suggested. He says that myths are a complex communication system and semiotic elements created by people. Myths will depend on their context to be created in a way, so practically whatever could become a myth if it has the conditions to become a myth.

We cannot understand the history of contemporary rural Spain without talking about the *España negra* myth and its importance in the construction of a semiotic structure of the Spanish countryside, which was very influenced by the culture of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. This myth became anachronistic thanks to Franco's dictatorship and the abandon the rural areas suffered by the 'urban Spain' during the last decades, as we will see later in chapter 5. Throughout this paper, it will be possible to see how during the whole 20th century a similar frame when it comes to showing the Spanish rurality and even if the intentions of each photographer changed over time, the myth managed to adapt itself to changes.

Then, **rurality** and **ethnography** will be used together later to study the messages and their effects from a point of view closer to culture, since the rural photography in Spain is closely related to the culture taking place in each town or area, their monuments, the way the people wear or their jobs and lifestyle. The use of these two theories is linked to the fact that there are no clear definitions about what rurality is, but the cultural approach to it, through ethnography, can give better clues to its importance in the current project.

In the Spanish case, and focusing on photography, most of the works mentioned along the introduction could be considered as ethnographic material to study the rural societies, even if that was not the intention of the photographers at the beginning. However, we need to say this carefully, because the topic being studied is sensitive, subjective and social and, as it happened with W. Eugene Smith after he published *Spanish village*, we cannot fall in a wrong approach when it comes to **the relationship between Documentary Photography and Photojournalism**. Both genres will be studied, and it will be possible to see how some works could fall into a generalization of the subjects, thanks to the influence imposed by media, as Kratochvil and Persson (2001) suggest.

2.1. Modes of representation and the myth

Modes of representation theories talk about the implicit messages, in this case in photography. What can we see from a picture? Barthes (1990) suggests in *Camera Lucida* how photography is more ‘subversive’ when it *thinks*, instead of when it scares or stigmatizes. Following this idea, Price and Wells (2009) say that in Barthes’ work what is represented in the image is what really catches our attention, and not the photographic material itself, so what we see and how we analyse that specific image is what it is really important to study. This concept was defined by Barthes (1990) as *punctum*.

In the end, we are talking about how different contexts could also affect the interpretations that we made of a picture. Sontag (2005) suggests how people accept a picture as an exact portrait of reality, but the author says how this is far from a true comprehension of that reality. We never know all about something if we just look at a picture, even if it helps to ‘fill’ the spots without images. As the author mentions, this happens because a picture must hide a bigger part of that reality than what it is showing. In the case of rurality in Spain, photography showed a unique reality for a long time, without changing the speech or the frame. Following what Barthes says, photography in rural Spain stigmatized for a long time the territory and its inhabitants.

The Spanish rural photography was also an important part of the representation of a poor and underdeveloped country in its beginnings, evolving into a more vindicative photography in the last decades of the last century. The problem is that the original modes of representation remained strong because of the historical context, and stereotypes came together with that, creating a powerful model of representation, which survived a couple of generations. Sontag (2005, pp. 25) talks about how photography gives us knowledge based on ‘sentimentality’ when she mentions the true levels of perception of the reality that photography gives us. So, it is not hard to conclude that the messages behind the pictures being studied here could have very different interpretations depending on their context and the experience of every person. However, we can find common traits between them.

Flusser (2000) talks about photographs that become a social model. In the end, the problem is not the work (in this case, photographic), or tools, as the author referred to photography, but it is a matter of the models. In the case of the messages related to the Spanish rural areas, the problems are not the photographic works themselves, but the model and social construction becoming from that and other cultural work done along the 20th century related to the rural

areas. In the end what is needed is to change the model and not the tools, following what Flusser says. In that way, we can change these social structures and myths related to rurality in Spain. García Rodero's work and other similar works made by other contemporary photographers of her, like Koldo Chamorro or José Manuel Navia, did this step and they looked to change the messages, more than these 'tools', as we will see later in this project. They showed a rural reality far from the stereotypes and the classic ways of representation of the countryside, looking to humanize its inhabitants and the culture they have.

Modes of representation are an important point to understand the myth, as a theory because without understanding the context and how we represent a place, we cannot understand how a myth is built. The myth has a special and important role in this project. Barthes (2013) suggests that the myth is a communication system, and consequently the myth is also a message and a social construction.

Following Barthes's theories about myths, everything with a narration behind could become a myth. What makes myths more special are their historical relationship with what they tell because myths are not just messages coming from the nature itself of the objects or subjects being described. Barthes (2013) continues by saying how myths are not just oral expressions. As messages, myths could be also written or represented, like images. Pictures are susceptible to be read in different ways. Semiotics become an important part then, where we can find different meanings from one image.

Following this explanation, it is more difficult to relate the myth in images (painting or photography) than in other artistic disciplines, like literature because of what was mentioned before about the contexts and how a picture can be interpreted. However, it is possible to find common traits between the different photographers analysed in this project for during almost a century the representation of the rural areas in Spain was, in most cases, related to the development and construction of the *España negra* myth.

All this theory related to myths, deeply developed by Roland Barthes, helps us to understand what *España negra* is: a myth, but not a myth as the ones from old times, even if similar somehow. ***España negra* is a mental construction and a speech developed around the decadency of the country, which found on the underdevelopment of the rural areas and the suburbs developed thanks to migration waves from the countryside, one of its best images to be represented, closely related to the cultural, artistic and philosophical waves taking place in Spain at the end of the 19th century.**

Coming back to Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1990), he talks about how a picture is always related to its referent, something that it will be possible to find throughout this work with the different photographic works being studied. The pictures analysed along this project are somehow always related to the myth, considering the myth as a referent and a fundamental part of the communication process that photography has. In the end, that black Spain is just one possible interpretation and way to look at the poverty and underdevelopment the Spanish countryside suffered. The problem came when the historical context itself did not help the myth to evolve. As it is possible to see later in this paper, the external coming from abroad influence would be key in the evolution of the myth since the '60s.

2.2. Rurality and ethnography

Rurality is a theoretical concept without a clear definition nowadays. As Chigbu (2013) mentions, this happens because the rural areas, rurality and policies related to the countryside are different in every country. Anyway, Chigbu (2013) continues analysing different definitions of rurality made during the last decades and he defines rurality as: “*A condition of place-based homeliness shared by people with common ancestry or heritage and who inhabit traditional, culturally defined areas or places statutorily recognised to be rural*”. Following this definition, it is a mistake to understand rurality as a concept just related to geography, sociology, or economy. Following Chigbu’s definition, rurality is also a cultural concept, talking about the traditions and the common heritage in a specific geographic area. In the end, culture is more important than space. This is something we can find in most of the photographic work being studied in this thesis, and especially in *España oculta* because of the main topic Gracia Rodero talks about in the book: people and their relationship with traditions (**picture 5: ¡Viva el Santo Cristo!**, a picture took in Peñas de San Pedro in 1978, is just one example from *España oculta* where



Picture 5: García Rodero, C. (1978). ¡Viva el Santo Cristo!

Cristina García Rodero shows the deep relationships between people and rites. In the picture, it is possible to see a group of elderly women and a figure of Jesus Christ hanging in the cross behind, out of focus, during a procession. The main character of the picture is the woman in focus and her reactions. The holiday and Christ are not as important as the relationship, attitudes and devotion shown by people). How people behave when these traditions take place is one of the focus of García Rodero’s work through the years. Her work is considered a valuable piece of ethnographic study of the Spanish traditional culture.

But, as it was mentioned before, rurality is a difficult term when it comes to its definition. Thomas et al. (2013) suggest that more than looking for a precise definition (because it does not exist), we should look at how sociology studied it and how it was defined over the centuries. It is clear though, that rural is not a synonym of agriculture. It involves more concepts, like society, culture, economy or perceptions. This last characteristic is important, and it is probably

the one where there are more discussions. The authors continue explaining the construction of the rural myth in America. A romantic and idyllic place where families have their orchard, little towns and communities, but on the other hand we find some stereotypes making company to these images: dangerous, wild or hicks, for example. The book focuses on the inner areas of New York state, but these images are not something far at all from the Spanish image. As a matter of fact Thomas et al. (2013) suggest that this is something common in the wealthiest countries of the world, where nowadays more people are living in urban than rural areas for the first time in human history.

The reality is that rural areas are much more than these images mentioned. Thomas et al. (2013) say that, even if we think about agriculture as a part of rurality, the reality and “irony” is that maybe modern agriculture is closer to the industry than rurality. Rurality theories were born to find a way to fight against these stereotypes, good or bad ones. In the end, the idea is to show this reality as it is, more complex and with different contexts depending on the area we are working on and the approach to the topic. In Spain, some of these stereotypes are closely related to the old rites and traditions, together with the image of the “hick” with his beret.

Related to rurality, ethnography becomes also an important theoretical approach of this project. Bartolomé (2003) suggests a contemporary use of ethnography, in which the cultural knowledge of rural communities could help to create better speeches regarding their development problems. Alonso and Macías (2014) highlight the fact that a better knowledge of the territories is key, to create better cultural policies against depopulation and inequalities in rural areas in Spain. Feito (2005), following the ideas suggested by the rest of the authors, mentions that ethnography could be useful to build a detailed frame of the towns or villages in rural areas.

Observation and interviews are so important because they give the knowledge of the true reality of these places and, in that way, the creation of policies to help the people living in rural areas could be more efficient. If we take these suggestions, some closer to political or social science area, more than photography, we arrive to the conclusion that a better knowledge of the reality in these areas could help to make the message stronger, maybe not just politically or socially talking, but also culturally.

Peralta Barrios and Menéndez-Menéndez (2017) mention García Rodero’s ability to show the daily life of people in rural areas in her work in general, combining the reality of the characters and their spirituality, through her focus on the rites and traditions from the different places that

Cristina García Rodero visited during the development of *España oculta* and her later works (**picture 6**: *Gitanos en la procesion* shows a group of young *nazarenos* (members of a confraternity) playing around, probably gipsies if we follow the description given by García Rodero at the title. Two of them are dragging a third one in the ground, while the rest of the



Picture 6: García Rodero, C. (1977). *Gitanos en la procesión*.

group laughs and looks at the scene. There is a little child not wearing the traditional clothes, who also joins the group. Again, as it happens with picture 5, the religious elements are in background with less importance. The attention focuses on the characters, their relationship between them and

the rite taking place and what they are doing). Herradón (2006) mentions the use of photography in Spain as valuable ethnographical material, to understand how the culture in different areas of the country was or is. In a similar way, Brandes (1996) highlights the use of photography as a media itself in ethnographic investigations, since it is the best way to show the reality that is being analysed.

Photography then could be more than a useful tool to make an ethnographic analysis. Quirós (1992) mentions that, even if the number of photographic works directly related with the rural areas are less than the ones related with urban areas, when it comes to talking about geography, history or ethnography, pictures could be an important and valuable material to analyse the rural societies, their traditions, their behaviours and their spaces. Naranjo (1997) suggests the idea that Spain is a curious case of ethnography since it is one of the few countries in the Western world that is, at the same time, observed and observer, since Spain also did ethnographical studies in the rural areas, but mostly at the ex-colonies.

All the photographers' work being studied throughout this paper, at a lower or greater level, could be considered as ethnographic pieces. From different approaches or topics, but if we take the ideas above-mentioned, all these works approach to the rural areas and they show events or people who could be analysed to understand better some rural cultures in Spain. Something like this was made at the documentary *España insólita* (1965), made by Javier Aguirre. Afinoguénova (2012) suggests how the documentaries made by Franco's dictatorship to

promote tourism in Spain during the '60s had, behind the layers of propaganda to avoid censorship, a clear *auto-ethnographic* intention was present on them. As the author says, this is something that also the regime was following. Even if showing the old traditions was opposite to the modernization the dictatorship wanted to expose, these holidays became a touristic attraction too, even if the documentaries as *España insólita* just focused on the cultural aspect and not so much on people, keeping them closer to the stereotypes and myths before mentioned (**picture 7: *España insólita*** (it could be translated as Unusual Spain) is an approximation to the different realities of the country. As it was mentioned, the



Picture 7: Aguirre, J. (1965). Frame from *España insólita*.

propaganda and the impulse of tourism are seen along the documentary but it showed already in that time some valuable traditions of the Spanish culture, like the one in the frame, probably from a Carnival holiday in Galicia, Asturias or the northern areas of León, Palencia and Burgos, where Carnival has deep roots in pre-Christian traditions).

In the end, the use of these theories is key in order to develop correctly this project. They will be used throughout the analysis and the whole research process. The approaches each one gives are being taken into consideration for each analysis and explanation of photographic work, especially from chapter 6, where it is important to find the relationships between the pictures taken by the different photographers being mentioned along this project and the theories. Rurality, myth, and ethnography will be used in the historical analysis and the analysis from the messages given by each work studied. The option of mixed use of these theories could take place during the development of the project, but their main areas of use are very delimited by the own structure of the project, in this way it is possible to give a better order to the research process and give sense to each analysis.

3. Methodology

This research will be based on 3 main areas or methods of analysis. The operationalization of this project will be done using qualitative methods. This is the best way to approach this topic, since we are in front of cultural and social studies and, as Descombe (2017) says, an in-deep focus could help to understand better the relationship between the different phenomena. In this case, the pictures made by Cristina García Rodero in *España oculta* and the messages given by other photographers regarding the Spanish rurality 2 “sub-topics” that need deep research to be understood and show the relationships between them.

3.1. Research methods

To make the analysis, the research will be divided into 3 methods, related to these “sub-topics” before mentioned. In an early stage, it is important to talk about a historical context of the cultural vision of the Spanish countryside. In order to do this, and understand the problem, an in-deep literature review will be done, in some data about the rural areas in Spain, but also using other elements, like the *España negra* myth. Books and articles that could explain the relationship between culture and the countryside in Spain will be used throughout the research. This part of the project should work as a kind of introduction and context of the main research topic.

Esparza (2020) mentions the importance of the *España negra* myth in the perception of the countryside in Spain during the whole 20th century. Esparza (2020) explains *España negra* (it could be literally translated as “black Spain”) as the cultural phenomenon born in Spain after the defeat of the War of Cuba, against the United States, in 1898, together with the loss of the Philippines and Puerto Rico. These events created an identity crisis in the country and writers and artists started to look for “*the reasons of the debacle and the essence of Spain in the landscape of Castilla*”.

Second, to focus purely on photography, a qualitative content analysis from pictures taken by Spanish or foreign photographers in the rural areas of Spain will be done. The method will help to make a deep and meticulous analysis of the text possibly removable from the different photographic works presented in this project. This will give the specific context of rural photography in the country, explaining their influences and the common characteristics between each picture, even if there are a lot of years of difference between some of them. This should help to introduce the analysis of *España oculta*. Here, the content analysis continues, but only focusing on the pictures from this specific piece of work and author, since it’s not only

the work on which this project focuses but also one of the most important works made about countryside and traditions in Spain. Both content analysis will be also based on the bibliography that helps to explain the works made by the photographers, giving also a deep theoretical base to the analysis. Descombe (2017) suggests that the use of content analysis is helpful in research with images and text since it gives the opportunity to “disclose ‘hidden’ aspects”. The author gives the advantage of the use of this method process, where the research could have a solid base theoretically talking and it is a method accepted and respected by other researchers.

Last but not least, an interview with Cristina García Rodero will take place, to talk about the influence of her work in *España oculta* and the development of this project and her career after this book. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggest that interviews are a good way to make qualitative and social studies since they help to understand the world from the point of view of the *subjects* or participants in research. In this specific investigation, it is important to know how photographers look at their own works and the relationship between what they do and the reality that they try or want to show. The interview could be interesting to also make a review of her book and the situation of the Spanish countryside after 30 years since the book was published. Descombe (2017) explains that the use of this or other qualitative methods give the research a good level of detail and richness regarding the data and, at the same time, it is possible to give an alternative or deeper explanations about a phenomenon.

This mix of methods will help to delimitate each level of analysis for each of the “sub-topics” since each of them needs a different approach. This is important because each topic or question needs to be answered with a method that fits the best possible to it, so it is necessary a combination of the different method in order to give a solid base to the project and the things being discussed here.

3.2. Disadvantages of the methods used

However, this research also presents some challenges. The first of them is the amount of bibliography to work with. Since the topic is very specific, it is very difficult to find specific papers that talk about the topic, apart from the different photo books or reports. To have enough bibliography to develop the research, the above-mentioned division in “sub-topics” is even more important. It is easier to find a bibliography about Cristina García Rodero and her work than works about the relationship between photography and the countryside in Spain, even if there is a relationship, as it was mentioned before. At the same time, as it was mentioned before,

the lack of a 'powerful' Spanish archive regarding this specific topic, thanks to the dictatorship and the styles, does not help to have a huge volume of very specific bibliography but is it possible to find supporting material, which mixed with the specific one helps to create a better analysis.

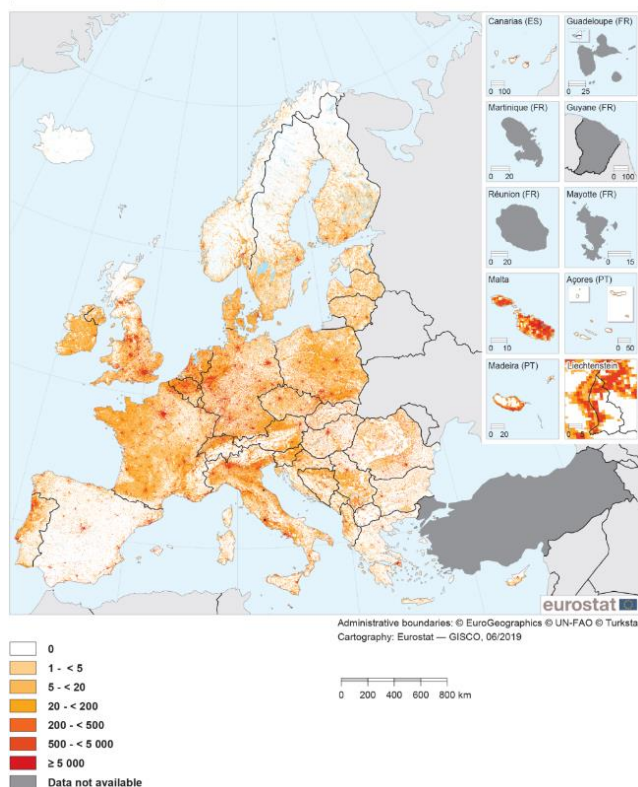
To keep an objective vision during the whole research process will be also a challenge. The fact that I am the only researcher in this project forces me to put aside, the best that I can, my own opinions about this topic, especially when we talked about the depopulation crisis in the rural areas in Spain. Since it is a sensitive topic for me because, somehow, I am living it, it is necessary to keep an objective focus and let the experts and bibliography talk more than my opinions. On the other hand, we are in front of a social and newsworthy problem, so the ethics around the treatment of the information should be done carefully because this reality affects people in their everyday lives.

Descombe (2017) also suggests the disadvantages of the qualitative methods. In the book, the author says that there is a tendency or danger to generalize some of the findings, there is also a danger of taking the data out of context, the own identity of the researcher could have a role when it comes to the creation and analysis of the different data and finally, the fact that the analysis could take longer than using other methods, like the quantitative ones. However, the researcher must try to keep away from these 4 dangers to make a correct development of the research.

In the end, the last challenge could be the preparation of the interview. To find what I am looking exactly for in this research, the questions should be well prepared before the meeting. I will be in front of the author of the most important work being mentioned in this research, so the respect and previous knowledge of the interview must be deep. Following the criteria for the development of a good qualitative interview, described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), I will need to have long answers from the interviewee (in this case Cristina García Rodero), in which I could find enough material for the further analysis related with the rest of the research. To do this a good previous preparation must take place. Moreover, the interview cannot be biased and, exactly like the rest of the research, I must keep an objective focus all the time to develop a correct investigation.

4. The rural areas in Spain: general context of a national problem

Population density based on the GEOSTAT population grid, 2011
(number of inhabitants/km²)



Picture 8: Eurostat. (2019). Population density in Europe based on the GEOSTAT population grid 2011.

considered a demographic desert. In Spain, there are entire provinces under this condition. We cannot understand how culture relates to the Spanish countryside without knowing from where all these perceptions are coming from.

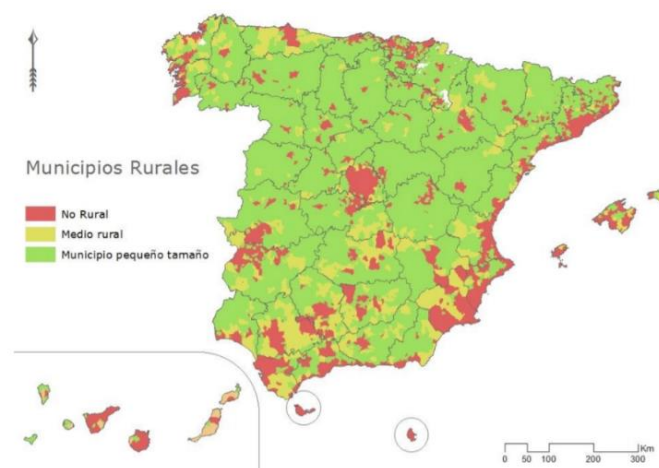
Spain's history was always related to its rural areas, even if it was always a country without a big population for its geographical area. As a matter of fact, its development and repopulation were a key element during the almost 800 years the *Reconquista*² took place. The Kingdom of León used to settle peasants in abandoned rural areas, especially the ones on the border with the Caliphates, a practice known as *presura*. *Presura* helped to create a huge rural society

¹ Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación – Gobierno de España. (2010). Capítulo 1: Situación y diagnóstico del Medio Rural en España. *Programa de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible 2010-2014*, 4. From <https://www.mapa.gob.es/es/desarrollo-rural/planes-y-estrategias/ley-para-el-desarrollo-sostenible-del-medio-rural/prog-desarrollo-rural-sostenible/>.

² The Reconquista is known as the long process in which the different Christian kingdoms in Spain fought against the different Caliphates around the Iberic Peninsula after the Muslim conquest. The Reconquista started between 718 and 722, with the first Christian victory, by the Kingdom of Asturias in the Battle of Covadonga, and it finished in 1492 with the definitive conquest of the Emirate of Granada, the last independent Muslim state in Western Europe, by the Catholic Monarchs.

around the country, which persisted strongly even at the beginning of the 20th century, but the industrialization and the new opportunities the big cities offered, created big migration waves from the '50s. Collantes (2007) highlights the quick change of the rural areas in Spain from the second half of the 20th century, following a quick process of industrialization in the urban areas and the coastline made by Franco's dictatorship. He explains that industrialization did not come together with strong rural development, making the inhabitants of these regions leave and go to cities like Madrid, Barcelona or Bilbao. Together with that, we can find a lack of good services, infrastructures, underdevelopment, and poverty affecting the rural areas back in that time. Even if some of these problems are solved if we compare it with the situation in the '60s, the reality is that some stereotypes and myths remained in the collective picture of the rural areas in Spain.

Nowadays, these rural areas are becoming empty because of an accelerated process of depopulation, ageing and an abandon, mixed with other factors. Following the data published by INE in 2020 (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística* – National Statics Institute of Spain), 62% of the 8.131 townships in Spain has all together just 1,5 million inhabitants, the



Picture 9: INE. (2016). Map of rurality in Spain.

3% of the total population of the country. In other words, around 20% of the population lives at 80% of the geographical territory, as the map in **picture 9** shows, where green and yellow areas are considered as rural. Collantes and Pinilla (2019) suggest that historically, the European governments did not have enough data to talk about the development processes in the countryside, but even with that, in general, the societies themselves started to organize a different kind of networks to work for their land, and consequently the governments started to care more about it. In Spain, even with some data, there was never a real strategy regarding the solutions for rural areas and the effects of industrialization and the territory affected is that big that it is even difficult to create a homogeny strategy. As a matter of fact, the percentage of the rural population in Spain decreased from 68% in 1900 to 24% in 2001 but actually, the rural population increased during the first half of the 20th century, and not even the Spanish Civil War affected this phenomenon.

In the end, Collantes and Pinilla (2019) suggest in another text that this lack of attention created inequalities and a huge disbalance between urban and rural areas in Spain, not just regarding population, but also regarding services and policies. The solutions are not only more policies but better ones, taking under consideration all the factors that created this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the law from 2007 above-mentioned never was completely applied by the administration, even if it was passed by the Congress. And like this one, it is possible to find a lot of examples of bad implemented policies or projects around the country nowadays, and not focusing on what is important for the people living in there.

It is true that during the last years, there is an increasing conscience about the depopulation and inequalities that exist in the countryside, but it is still difficult to see clear solutions. The Spanish countryside is facing a dangerously quick depopulation and ageing process, which threatens some rural societies to disappear in the next 20 or 30 years. Sánchez-Mesa (2019), focusing more on the heritage and culture, talks about the need to create strong policies in Spain to fight against the depopulation crisis in the rural areas and the recovery of the cultural heritage of these areas.

Even if the concept changed, when people read about an empty, mystical, unknown, hidden, vanishing, dark or black Spain, all these words are synonyms somehow. The reality is that the Spanish countryside is 'unknown' even for the ones who live in this country. More than sad, it is a dangerous situation for the countryside. There is nothing worse than people who do not know where you live, deciding the future of your land, thinking that all the rural areas in the country are the same. The truth is that in every province there are different traditions, culture, geography, demography, or other aspects that make that area special from the next one. The photographic work done over the 20th century help us to understand this better because we can look at the differences between one place and another, even if they are close geographically talking. Photography could be very useful, as it was possible to read during the theoretical approach, to develop cultural studies around these societies, but it also could have a social role about how the rural areas are shown and seen. The importance of the cultural history in Spain, especially during the last years of the 19th century directly hit the way people look at the rural areas, as it is possible to see throughout the next chapter.

5. The relationship between culture and the rural areas in Spain: the influence of *España negra*

As it was mentioned in chapter 3, Esparza (2020) explains the cultural phenomenon of the *España negra* (black Spain) myth. The style was born at the end of the 19th century, as an answer from the intellectuals in Spain after the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in 1898, during the Spanish-American War. The conflict would create a great shock mostly on the intellectual population since big percentages of the population was not concerned about the war because they were illiterate. After just 3 months of war, Spain saw how the last parts of the empire in America vanished and the country just kept the African colonies in Morocco and Guinea, As Roberts (2013) says. The pessimism that the aftermath of the war took to Spain would make in these intellectual social classes to separate their work from classic modernism and *Generación del 98* would born in the cultural level. As Roberts (2013) suggests, after the war, it was evident that the Restoration of the monarchy after the First Spanish Republic (1873-1874) was not going well because of the political corruption and the false stability. The *España negra* myth, as a characteristic of the artists from the *Generación del 98*, would be the way to show through culture what was not working in Spain, as also Preston (2021) suggests.

Artists related to *España negra* were looking to find the spirit of Spain in very dark and unstable times for the country. As a cultural movement, it was based on the *Black Paintings* of Goya (a very specific style of the artist developed between 1819 and 1823). The paintings made by Goya related to the countryside in that time used to show this area as an underdeveloped part of Spain, dark and even depressive sometimes as it is possible to see in paintings like *La romería de San Isidro* (**picture 10**: Even if Goya is not part of the generation of artists and intellectuals from 1898, his black paintings made in the last stage of his work are the artistic base for what *España negra* would become in the first years of the 20th century. *La romería de San Isidro* is one of Goya's most recognized paintings from this specific period of his career).



Picture 10: Goya, F. (1823). *La romería de San Isidro*.

But we are not just in front of a myth. *España negra* became the term used to describe that half of the country far from progress, even in big cities like Madrid, Barcelona or Bilbao. Bozal (2020) suggests that the myth has two, or maybe three different periods. The first of them, during the first half of the 19th century, when Spain's colonies in Latin America became independent. The second, during the second half of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century. This period is more highlightable because it follows the ideas from the first one but including more artistic fields on it (literature became more important than painting, which shared space with the first photographic works), with a social context constantly changing. During these years it is possible to find travel guides made by some artists. In books like *España negra* (1899), made by Darío de Regoyos and the Flemish poet Émile Verhaeren, the reader can see how the authors portrayed these areas, but also some little capital cities along their trip across the country. Something similar it is possible to see at *La España negra* (1920), written by José Gutiérrez-Solana.

The last period, without being completely included in what is described as the *España negra*, is the post-Civil War period, between 1939 and the beginning of the '60s approximately. Summarizing, we find out that this myth or mode of representation of certain realities in Spain was a powerful speech developed during most of the 19th century and, at least, half of the 20th.

The artists and some thoughts used to change through time, but in general, the content of the message did not change, and that is what makes special this mode of representation: we can find Spanish artists with very different styles, talking about similar topics. De Regoyos, Gutiérrez-Solana, Ignacio Zuloaga or Isidre Nonell are some examples of artists closely related to the myth (**picture 11**:



Picture 11: Nonell, I. (1899). *Esperant la sopa*.

Esperant la sopa (waiting for the soup) shows how the painters from the last years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century showed Spain. Poverty and its victims were some of the main topics, while the use of dark colours was also highlightable, following what Goya did with his black paintings. Isidre Nonell or Ignacio Zuloaga are two of the main referents of this style in painting).

As Bozal (2020) mentions, the myth is not just related to the rural areas. The first exodus from rural areas to cities changed completely the shape of the big cities. In Barcelona, *l'Eixample* (translated as expansion from Catalan) is the biggest transformation the city suffered. They went out of the historical walls of the city to build a completely new city, following the styles of the time. Around this 'new' city, new neighbourhoods built by poorer people working in industries also appeared. The same phenomenon happened in Madrid, especially in the southern districts of the capital. Here, the urban *España negra* started to appear around 1860.

Regarding the rural areas, the topics related to industrialization change. The rural areas are seen during this time as places still closed to old traditions, underdeveloped, and far from the noise of the cities. Bozal (2020) suggests that rural Spain is a land where time stopped completely, and we can clearly difference two different times from two different Spanish realities. *España negra* is the thoughts about the decadency of a country related with its traditions, with pictorial art as the main source during the first half of the 19th century, and more diversified culturally talking after the industrialization.

“España negra is an ideological construction and it is also a picture.”

(Bozal, 2020, p. 27).

To understand the relationship between Spanish photography and the Spanish countryside, we need to go back to 1898. Esparza (2020) highlights this date as the beginning of a clear cultural vision around the Spanish countryside. It was mentioned before that the cultural movement born from the losses of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines were focused on looking at Spain's "essence" in the rural areas, mostly in Castilla.

The Generation of the 98, represented by some of the biggest writers in Hispanic culture (Antonio Machado, Azorín, Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno or Ramón del Valle-Inclán, among others) showed the reality of a country divided in two. On one hand, the miserable and poor *España real*, and on the other hand the *España oficial*, a fake country. The *España real* was represented mostly in the countryside. One of the best examples are the poems written by Machado in *Campos de Castilla* (1912), during the time he lived in Soria.

Esparza (2020) continues, mentioning the importance of *España negra* in all this vision. With the unstable period that followed the first decades of the 20th century, not even new generations of artists, politicians and philosophers in 1914 (Joaquín Sorolla, Ignacio Zuloaga, José Ortega y Gasset or Clara Campoamor, among others) and 1927 (Federico García-Lorca, Luis Buñuel,



Picture 12: Ortiz Echagüe, J. (1926). *Molino andaluz*.

Salvador Dalí or Rafael Alberti for example) changed the vision of the countryside. The myth persisted and photography was no stranger to this reality, as we will see later with the example of José Ortiz Echagüe, considered as the best Spanish pictorialist photographer (**picture 12**: José Ortiz Echagüe was the most recognized Spanish photographer from the

first half of the 20th century. His work shows clear connections with rural areas and the people living there. However, his strong pictorialist style, together with the influence of *España negra*, make him show a dark reality of the rural areas, sometimes even sad and without an aim to know the background of the people being portrayed more in-depth).

During the Republic (1931-1936) some tries to bring progress to the rural areas took place. Related to cultural expressions in rural areas, maybe the most famous material made in times of the Republic was the documentary *Las Hurdes, Tierra sin Pan* (Las Hurdes, land without bread), made by Luis Buñuel 1933. Even if it is considered a masterpiece of surrealism and the idea was the denounce the lifestyle of people living in that area of Extremadura, close to the border with Portugal, it was a continuation of the myth and the documentary was censored in Spain. Buñuel just limited himself to show the darkest face of the region and the rural reality, even faking some scenes, as Susperregui (2009) explains about a little girl appearing at the documentary, who following what the narration tells us, died a couple of days after the shooting. The reality is that the same girl was still living 20 years after the documentary (**picture 13**). The music and the narration not even helped to light a bit the weight of the images.

As a matter of fact, still today Buñuel's documentary flights around the collective idea of Las Hurdes and its inhabitants in Spain as an extremely isolated place.

Las Hurdes became worldwide famous thanks to Buñuel, but it became the paradigm of the rural underdevelopment in Spain, even before 1900. Multiple writers and artists came to this land to show the hard



Picture 13: Buñuel, L. (1933). Frame from *Las Hurdes, Tierra sin Pan*.

lifestyle of the people living there and show them from the perspective of different fields. As a matter of fact, in 1922 the king Alfonso XIII visited Las Hurdes after the first road to the area was built. But it is also a fact that until the '50s Las Hurdes did not have a telephone or light. Bozal (2020) suggests that even if there is a lot of different material about Las Hurdes, with different ideologies and approaches. In the end, they always look the same because of this feeling of a place where time goes by and nothing changes. Miguel de Unamuno talked about the existence of other Hurdes in almost all of Spain.

However, Collantes (2007) mentions that the decline of the economy and the lifestyle of the rural areas in Spain started during the second half of the 20th century, with the economic boost that the Dictatorship gave to industry and tourism in big cities or the coastal areas of the country. This created a huge migration movement from the rural areas to these areas. In 1940, just one year after the Spanish Civil War, half of the working-age population worked in the agricultural industry, but at the same time, this industry just represented 1/3 of Spain's GDP. Bozal (2020) talks about a bigger exodus during the '50s and the '60s. Around 1.800.000 people changed their residence during the '50s and more than 1.000.000 just between 1962 and 1965. Most of them moved from Castilla and Andalucía, to the big industrial poles.

At the same time, as Esparza (2020) mentions, culture, with cinema as the maximum exponent during the Francoist dictatorship, continued showing the countryside in the same way, using traditional elements used by people living there, like berets, to show a stereotype of the people living at the countryside. They were shown as hicks, or people without any kind of education or manners. Esparza (2020) also mentions that Franco's dictatorship wasn't interested in changing this point of view, so until the end of the regime, in 1975, the myth persisted strongly.

Probably the last 2 writers to show this reality, and the last shadows of the old myth before the comeback of democracy, were Camilo José Cela (literature Nobel prize in 1989) and Miguel Delibes. The myth was different though. *España negra* was not anymore just a mode to represent the poorer part of Spain because now a social and dignifying speech also emerged from the original myth. Cela showed a raw and extremely hard social reality at *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942) and *Viaje a la Alcarria* (1948).

Delibes focused most of his work on the countryside. In *Los santos inocentes* (The holy innocents - 1981), Delibes described the reality of the relationship between landowners and a family of servants during the '60s, a kind of relationship with deep roots in some areas in the south of the country. In his book, Delibes was able to dignify the servants more than the



Picture 14: Camus, M. (1984). Frame from *Los santos inocentes*.

landowners, giving the first ones a true connection with the land they inhabit and humanizing them. A homonym movie was made in 1984, directed by Mario Camus (**picture 14**: *Los santos inocentes* is the story of a family working as servants for a family of estate managers. During the development of the story, the family suffers repeated humiliations. While the parents

accept this reality, their children aim for a better life far from the estate. Delibes shows in this story the generational and social change taking place in the '60s in the rural areas, humanizing the servants and being critical of the reality of some regions through fiction). Here we find the last examples of the *España negra* myth. From the second half of the '70s, the cultural speech will follow what Delibes made in his book. A bigger feeling of respect for the people from rural Spain and their traditions. As a matter of fact, Bozal (2020) says that, even if it is fiction, that reality existed in Spain.

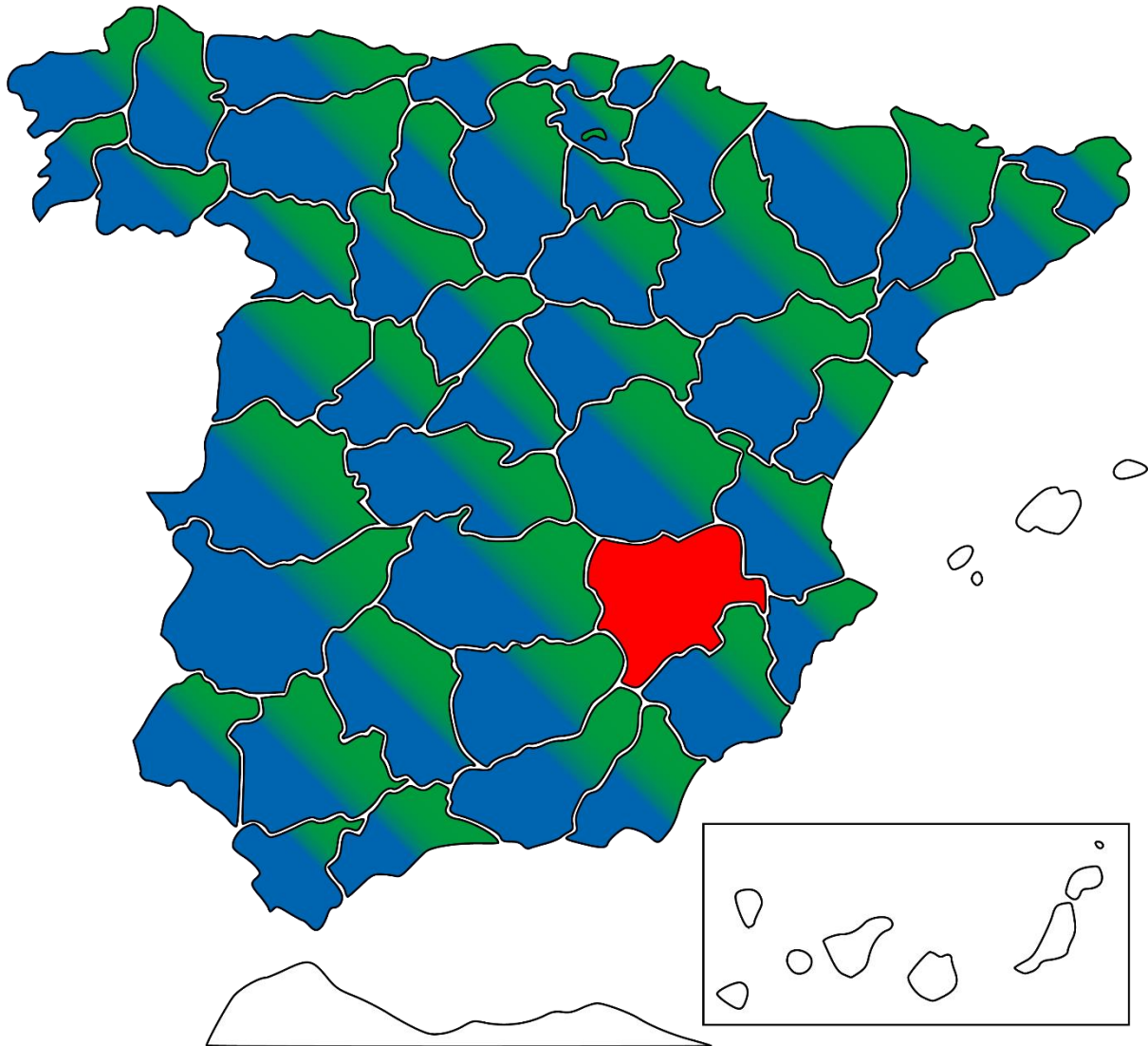
Summarizing, Esparza (2020) concludes that a clear change of this vision was not possible until the Democratic Transition, in 1975. Focusing on photography, Esparza (2020) mentions that photographers during the 20th century were not far from these styles and ways of thinking related to the *España negra* myth. It was a cultural wave and it is possible to see that in the examples above-mentioned, like the pictures of José Ortiz Echagüe or Buñuel's documentary. It is important to highlight that during the Dictatorship, Spanish photographers suffered censorship and, consequently, photographers from abroad showed in a better way the reality of the country during that period. We cannot find strong and new photographic expressions made by Spanish photographers until the '60s, with groups like *La Palangana*, or even during the last years of the dictatorship, in the '70s with a new generation of young photographers, which includes García Rodero. However, she rejects any relationship with the *España negra* myth:

"I hate when someone compares my work in España oculta with the España negra myth. Buñuel showed the worst about those places and he framed Spain negatively. They were indeed very poor towns, but his work was so sensationalist. He did not lie, but he moved in just one direction. I think we need to be fairer."

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

6. The rural Spain as a photographic subject through history until the end of the dictatorship

6.1. The pre-dictatorship rural photography: Luis Escobar, Kurt Hielscher and José Ortiz Echagüe



Picture 15: Self-elaborated map of Spain showing the approximate geographical positions of the photographic works mentioned along chapter 6.1. In the cases of Kurt Hielscher and José Ortiz Echagüe, their work was developed for years, traveling around the whole country.

■ Luis Escobar ■ Kurt Hielscher ■ José Ortiz Echagüe

The photography made during the first third of the 20th century was done, in most of the cases, following two basic styles: portraits and pictorialism. However, some photographers tried to escape, in their own way, from these models of representation. Regarding the rural areas, it is not easy to find photographers who wanted to go deep into this reality of Spain. Sánchez Vigil (2013) suggests that the beginning of a stronger photographic industry in Spain,

around 1910, was the starting point to the opening of schools, more studios or a bigger interest in photography in the Spanish society.

Sánchez Vigil (2013) highlights the fact that even if pictorialism or portraiture were forgotten in Europe after World War I (1914-1918), in Spain it is difficult to find these changes, more related to modernism or the beginning of photojournalism, until the late '40s or even the '50s.

The selection of the next 3 photographers to talk about rural photography in Spain before the dictatorship, or even the Civil War, follows some of these criteria mentioned. The importance of the aesthetics of the time and how they manage to show a different reality from the same country, far away from the monuments of Madrid or the modernism of Barcelona.

6.1.1. *Luis Escobar*

Luis Escobar was born in Villalgordo del Júcar, a town at the north of Albacete, in 1887. However, his photographic career started in Valencia around 1903. As Tébar (2012) says, the huge competence between photographers in the city made him come back to Albacete, a prosperous province capital in those years, and open his own photographic studio in 1920.

Back in the '20s, the case of Escobar was not unique. As López Mondéjar (2001) suggests, a lot of less known photographers used to go to little towns to make



Picture 16: Escobar, L. (1927). *Luis Escobar (left) in one of his trips as itinerant photographer.*

portraits to keep their businesses working, something known as 'itinerant photographers' (**picture 16**: As it was mentioned, Luis Escobar used to travel around the province of Albacete, offering photographic services. In some areas, more isolated, he needed to travel by donkey, an animal used typically in that time in Spain for these kinds of tasks because of its resistance). In any case, Tébar (2005) mentions that Escobar used to travel a lot to his hometown, even before coming back to Albacete, and he used to take pictures of the people, events and monuments of the town every time.



Picture 17: Escobar, L. (1928). *Señoritas de 'El alto de la villa' in Albacete.*

Most of the work developed by Escobar was from 1920 until the end of the Spanish Civil War, in 1939, in an area known as La Manchuela, between the provinces of Albacete and Cuenca. López Mondéjar (1980) tells that Escobar's photography managed to show the daily life and the culture of these towns, some of them closely related to the labour movement because of the existence of some little industries in the area. Escobar was able to show how the rural areas had their own voice, with very intimate pictures, in which portraits were the base of his photographic work. The author highlights Escobar's ability to get closer to the subjects he portrayed and the composition of his pictures, creating a special witness of the life at the towns of this area during the '20s and the '30s. López Mondéjar (2001) talks about Escobar as *the photographer of the people*. He portrayed everybody, from politicians to workers, or from prostitutes to elderly people (**picture 17**: In this picture Escobar portrayed a group of prostitutes in Albacete. This is a picture that shows his aim to develop social photography where all people could be included as part of the cultural narrative of that area of the country).

The rural photography made by Escobar is related to the political activism of those times and the intention to show the people working in the countryside. Not even during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930), Escobar stopped with his activity, even if there was censorship in the press, as Tébar (2012) suggests. Escobar was very active politically talking, especially during the Republic and the Civil War. It is common to see throughout his work portraits of a whole collective, workers or neighbours, but all the pictures seem to tell us something else than just to show a specific event or celebration. The people from the pictures seem to want to talk to us, the viewers, and explain us their stories (**pictures 18 and 19**, in the next page: in picture 18, Escobar portrayed a procession in a town, including different characters from the rural reality in just one picture. Escobar was also one of the first photographers to make an ethnographic work regarding tradition in rural areas of Spain. In picture 19, he portrayed the Socialist Association from his hometown, showing already in 1920 his political commitment). The rites and traditions are not common topics in Escobar's work,

but he shows the relationships established by people in different contexts. Even the pictures were taken in Albacete, which we should not consider completely rural, seem to take the viewer to the moment and place in which the photographer is taking his picture to interact with the ones looking at us.



Picture 18: Escobar, L. (1926). *Procesión de la patrona.*



Picture 19: Escobar, L. (1920). *Asociación Socialista de Villalgordo del Júcar.*

Escobar's work is not just rural. Probably his rural photography was a consequence of his need to have work and the will to come back to visit his hometown. Throughout his work, we can find studio portraits, some holidays pictures in cities and towns, or political photography during the Second



Picture 20: Escobar, L. (1937). *Mitin en la plaza de toros de Albacete.*

Republic and the Spanish Civil War (**picture 20**: During the Spanish Civil War, Escobar's work will focus on the political photography from the Republican side, always from Albacete. In this picture it is possible to see a mass of people attending a rally at Albacete's bullring). However, even if he moved around different topics and places, there is a common thread between the pictures, and the photographer aims to portray the daily life in these places. This way of looking at the rural areas, trying to show their whole reality and life, was not something common among the Spanish photojournalists and portrayers from the beginning of the 20th century. Escobar's work is not far from the rural vision we can see at García Rodero's work.

López Mondéjar (2001) talks about the difficulties to recover Escobar's archive. Most of the pictures taken by the photographer are disappeared. During the Civil War, Albacete became the 'capital' of the International Brigades³ and Escobar worked portraying them. His work as a photojournalist at the Republican side during the war took him to jail for a couple of years after the conflict and his archive was requisitioned by the new dictatorship. Researchers like López Mondéjar worked to recover the pictures made by Escobar. Luis Escobar is just one example of the many photographers who could not work in the same way again after the war, but his work is highlightable in this project because of his will to show the reality of the rural areas through his lens, combined with some strong political values, which also helped to give richness to his work. Luis Escobar died in 1963 in Albacete. López Mondéjar (2001) describes his work as an important source to understand the society from La Mancha in those first decades of the 20th century and describes Escobar as the best photographer in the area during that time.

³ During the Spanish Civil War, Communist International set up military units with volunteers coming from countries around the world to help the Republican side. They were called International Brigades and between 40.000 and 59.000 people came to Spain to fight. The headquarters of this force was in Albacete.

6.1.2. Kurt Hielscher

As Sánchez Vigil (2013) suggests, during the last years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, photographers around the world, some of them amateurs, created travel photo books to show the interesting spots to visit around the world. Something similar to the travel guides made during Romanticism but using pictures as a basic base to develop their work. In this context, it is possible to find Kurt Hielscher. This German photographer was born in 1881 and he travelled around Spain during World War I, specifically between 1914 and 1920 because, as Hielscher's himself explains in the prologue of his book, the war forced him to stay in Spain. Sánchez Vigil (2013) explains that what makes unique Hielscher's work in



Picture 21: Hielscher, K. (N. D.). Aldeanueva de la Vera

Spain was his ability to avoid the monuments and get closer to the “roots” of the country. Hielscher was able to show the people living in the rural areas of Spain and some of the traditions taking place there. Sánchez Vigil (2013), quoting Hielscher, says that the photographer thought about Spain as “a big museum outdoors”.

Hielscher published his book *Das Unbekannte Spanien* (translated as *Unknown Spain*) in 1922. A collection of 304 pictures made during his stay in the country. During the prologue of the book, Hielscher gave some technical details about the project. He took more than 2.000 pictures, travelling more than 45.000 kilometres around Spain. It is difficult to put his work in a very specific place, even if some of the more highlightable pictures are the ones taken in areas of Extremadura, Andalucía and Salamanca. Herradón (2006) highlights how similar the words written by Hielscher were to an extensive travel diary, giving to the whole work a more personal and subjective approach, which helps to understand better his work too (**picture 21**: Kurt Hielscher did not just travel around Spain, but he portrays the realities of different areas. In this picture, taken in Extremadura, the same region as Las Hurdes, Hielscher shows an interest in the people, but also the environment involved, showing the street and the structure of the houses more than the characters. He aims to show the whole reality of this unknown Spain through his lens).

Hielscher's book is kind of unique when it comes to talking about foreign photographers in Spain before the Civil War. Quirós (1992) mentions Hielscher's work in Spain as an example of an ethnographic work made from pictures, portraying urban and rural areas, with their different characters, something that made his work about Spain more special. In Hielscher's pictures, we can see some curiosity from the traveller facing new things, but at the same time, we can look at the people living in that rural areas, most in southern Spain, and their relationship with some traditions, the architecture of the time, the monuments of their daily life. There are no political messages, like in Escobar's photos, or it is not extremely artistic photography, like in Ortiz Echagüe's. Hielscher seems to show what attracted his attention during his trips and he mentions this at the prologue:

"(...) Everything that impressed and attracted me was fixed in my photographs: the works of art as well as the beautiful landscapes, both the geographical peculiarities and the interesting traditions. And guided by the same spirit, I have made the choice for the photographs published in this work. I have given it the name "Unknown Spain", and indeed many will find completely new things in it." (Herradón, 2006, p. 267).

Herradón (2006) highlights Hielscher's ability to uncover some realities, especially the ones in deeper rural areas, completely unknown at that time in the rest of Europe, where the lack of



Picture 22: Sorolla, J. (1914). Guipúzcoa. Los bolos.

knowledge about Spain created a huge interest in these pictures.

Hielscher was moved by curiosity to develop this project, the first one of his photographic careers, but this did not mean that his work was not interesting in artistic and cultural circles around Spain. Herradón (2006) continues, mentioning how the pictures from *Das Unbekannte Spanien* were used as material to make ethnographic studies already during the '20s. Hielscher published some of his work before the book was published. That gave him some credit for the Spanish cultural societies of the time. The author suggests how the painter Joaquín Sorolla could inspire himself in Hielscher's work for his series *The provinces of*

Spain, made for the Hispanic Society of America (**picture 22**, on the previous page: Sorolla, as a Luminist painter, is far from the *España negra* myth. However, he has some paintings with rural subjects, showing them more humanized than Nonell or Zuloaga. The same happens when we compare Hielscher's pictures with the ones taken by Ortiz Echagüe, or to a lesser extent, Escobar). This institution from New York has one of the best collections of pictures taken in Spain (more than 1.600). The Sorolla Museum in Madrid has also some of Hielscher's pictures.

Hielscher's work in Spain is special. He was a foreign photographer, without the influence of the *España negra* myth and that is possible to see in the pictures from his book. Even if some of the places he visited were poor or suffered all the symptoms mentioned throughout this project, this German photographer managed to show things differently. Maybe not optimistic, but with the curiosity of someone visiting a place for the first time, and respecting what people were doing there. Navascués (2001) talks about the pictures taken by Hielscher as pieces with great sociologic value but showing material and spiritual poverty in this *Unknown Spain*.



Picture 23: Hielscher, K. (N. D.). *Hurdanos en la fuente*.

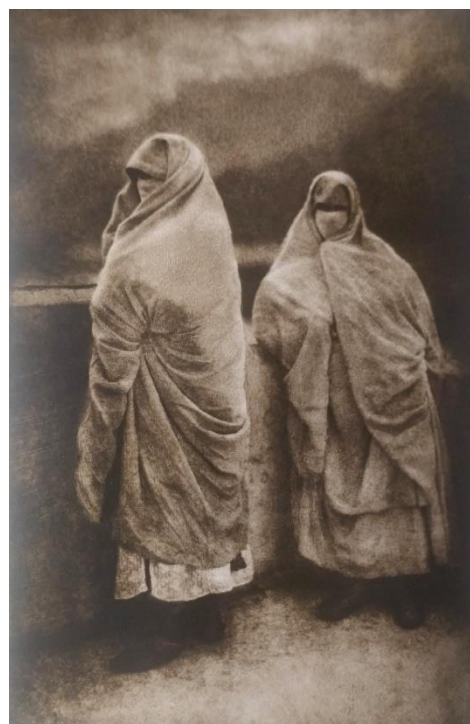
At this point, it is important to highlight his visit to Las Hurdes. But even if he visited it, there is just one picture in the whole book and collections from that place (**picture 23**: people from Las Hurdes taking water from the common fountain with big jugs. Hielscher keeps far from the characters, but portraying them and the task they are doing, giving value to it). Herradón (2006) suggests that Luis Buñuel could also inspire some of Hielscher's pictures. This fact shows the importance of his work in Spain, even if there are not many current studies about it.

After Spain, Kurt Hielscher worked around Europe making similar works in Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, Romania or Yugoslavia, some of them with great success. As it was mentioned before, even if his work could be considered important ethnographically talking, the studies about his work in Spain are just a few, something that also Herradón (2006) highlights. After World War II, his work was forgotten, and an important part of his archive was lost. He settled in the German Democratic Republic and died in 1948.

6.1.3. José Ortiz Echagüe

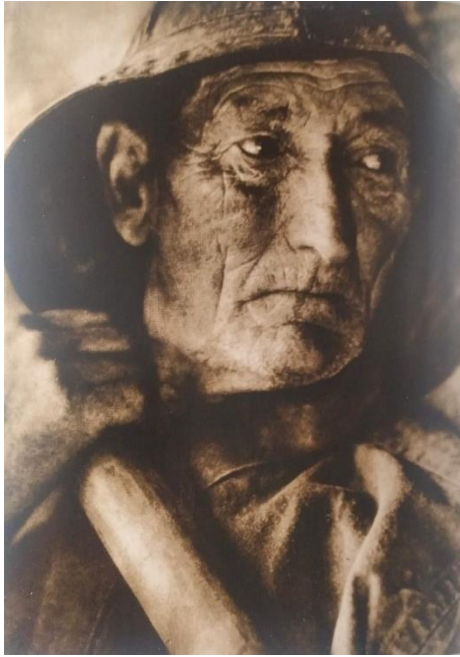
The first important fact to highlight about Ortiz Echagüe is the difficulty to place his work in a precise period. This is because he did not dedicate completely to photography, even if it was his biggest hobby since he received his first camera in 1898 when he was 12 years old. Domeño (2009) talks about the life of this Spanish photographer. In 1903, Ortiz Echagüe started his career as an engineer in the army. At this moment, photography became a secondary part of his professional life, even if he was a collaborator of some important foreign magazines, like *Photographs of the year*. As a matter of fact, Ortiz Echagüe would be the third person in Spain with an aviator's license, he also established the first aeronautic company in Spain, and he was also the founder of the automotive company SEAT.

As Domeño (2009) mentions, even if Ortiz Echagüe was an innovative engineer, his photography looked most of the times at the roots and the traditions of the country. This is something that he started to practice on a deeper level during his stay in Morocco with the army, between 1909 and 1915, during the Rif War (1911-1927) (**picture 24**: During his stay at the Rif, Ortiz Echagüe developed his pictorialist style. This picture, of two covered women, shows already this. The picture seems almost like a drawing or a painting because of the techniques used during the development). His interest in the past and the traditions is not something exclusive from his photography. As it was mentioned before, *España negra* and the artists related to it, looked at the origins of the country to explain Spain's decadency.



Picture 24: Ortiz Echagüe, J. (1910). Moras del Rif.

The Rif War, even if it is not so mentioned sometimes, it is one of the most important historical events in Spain related to this decadency of the country. Francisco (2014) says how lots of people in Spain looked at this war as something practically unnecessary and it was a fight motivated by pride in the northern region of Morocco, even if it was one of the last Spanish colonies. At the same time, as Domeño (2009) says, Ortiz Echagüe was a big follower of writers like Ortega y Gasset, Unamuno, Azorín or Machado, some of the above-mentioned writers related to the *España negra* myth.



Picture 25: Ortiz Echagüe, J. (1931). *Remero vasco*.

Once Ortiz Echagüe came back to Spain, he travelled around the whole country with his camera during the following decades, approaching as much as he could to the characters and places described in the books he used to read. Domeño (2009) explains how the photographer used to talk to the people he portrayed. As a matter of fact, close-up portraits are abundant in his work. In this way, he managed to show more psychological aspects from the subjects and consequently, he also dignified anonymous people in his pictures (**picture 25**: Even the dark look of the portrait of this Basque rower, it is possible to see a recognition to his work and life by the photographer). In 1929, he made his first personal

exposition in Berlin, which became his first photo book: *Spanische Köpfe*. In Spain, it would be published as *España, tipos y trajes* (1933).

Domeño (2009) says that the work done by Ortiz Echagüe is based on 4 main ‘research’ areas, done on purpose by the photographer to order his work: the outfits, the places and landscapes, religion and castles and monuments. He summarized all his work in that first book, which talk about the outfits, and in the following books: *España, pubelos y paisajes* (1939), *España mística* (1943) and *España, castillos y alcázares* (1956). The last two books were published after Ortiz Echagüe recovered his seized photographic archive after the Spanish Civil War, as Sánchez-Vigil (2013) explains.

In his pictures about religion, it is possible to find true connections and similarities between his work and the pictures made by Cristina García Rodero in *España oculta*, regarding the aesthetics, the kind of subjects being portrayed and the topics, even if there are 35 years of difference between both pictures (**pictures 26 and 27**, on the following page: Traditions, especially Christian rites, are an important part of Ortiz Echagüe’s work, while they are the main approach in García Rodero’s. The similarities of *Cruceros de Roncesvalles* and *La Trinidad* are not just regarding the topic or the content of the pictures, which show a procession of people carrying crosses in a countryside area. Both photographers stress the skies with an abundance of clouds at the lab to increase certain feelings and give a more artistic or pictorial look to the pictures. In Ortiz Echagüe this is a resource often used, that gives a darker look to his work, together with the angles, as the low angle in this picture).



Picture 26: Ortiz Echagüe, J. (1945). *Cruceros de Roncesvalles*.

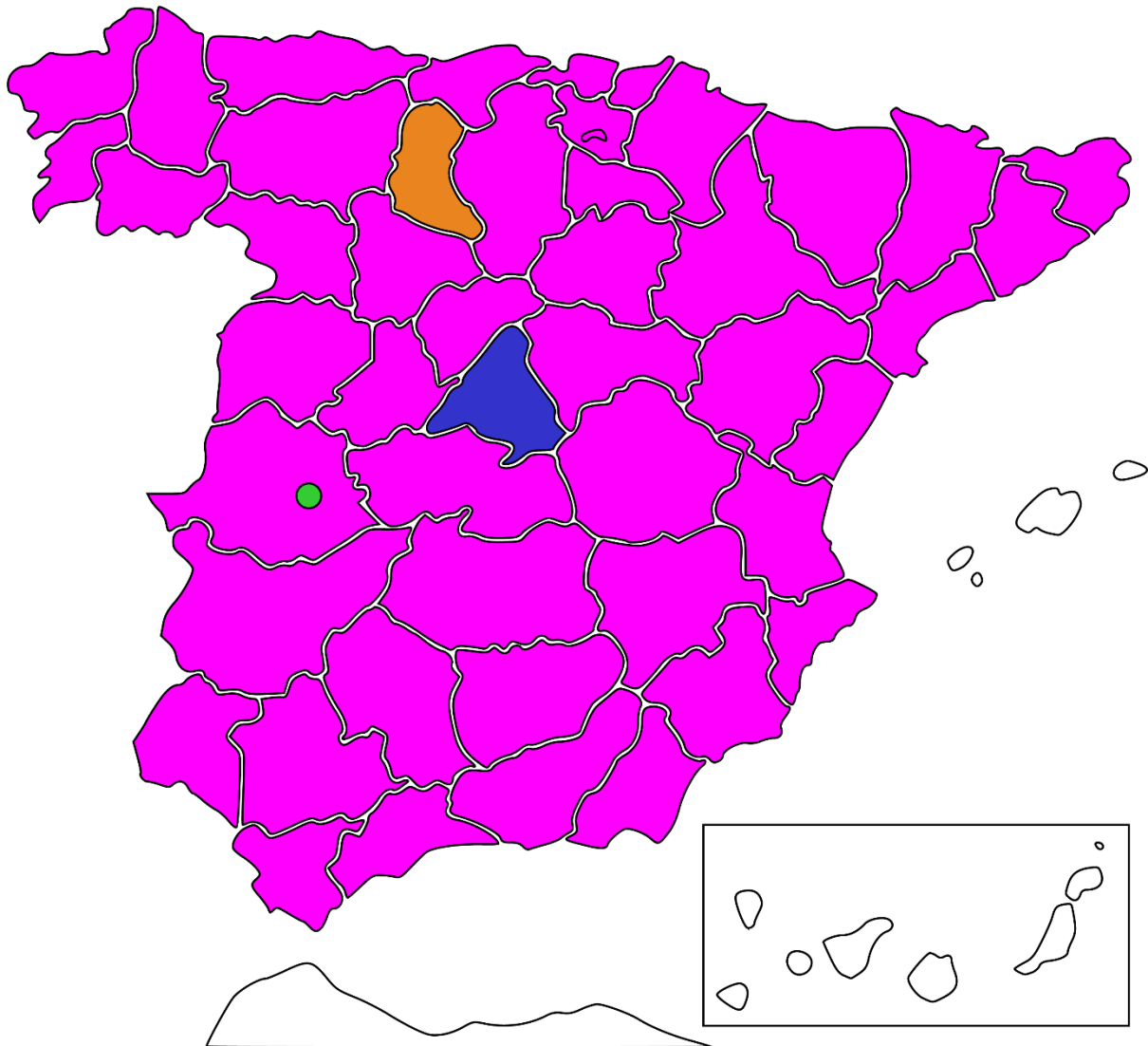


Picture 27: García Rodero, C. (1980). *La Trinidad*.

However, what makes Ortiz Echagüe's work unique in his time is the technique used. Considered in Spain and abroad as the best Spanish pictorialist photographer, he used “*a carbon-direct Fresson paper technical process, which incorporated pigments into the gelatine emulsion to produce images that seem more like charcoal drawings than conventional pictures.*” (Domaño, 2009, p. 7). Ortiz Echagüe worked throughout his life with this technique with the aim to ‘elevate’ photography to art. As a matter of fact, Sánchez-Vigil (2013), quoting the photographer, suggests that Ortiz Echagüe did not like to be considered as a pictorialist because the work behind this technique requires “respect for the photographic background”.

He is considered a pictorialist and his work became famous not just in Spain, but around the world, with expositions at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, or the Royal Photographic Society in the United Kingdom. Nowadays, his archive is saved and being studied at the University of Navarra. The fact Ortiz Echagüe did not change his style, even if pictorialism declined after World War I, make his work highlightable in Spanish photographic history.

6.2. Photography of the rural Spain during the dictatorship: W. Eugene Smith, Inge Morath, Piedad Isla and La Palangana



Picture 28: Self-elaborated map of Spain showing the approximate geographical positions of the photographic works mentioned along chapter 6.2. In the case of Inge Morath, her work was developed for years, traveling around the whole country.

■ W. Eugene Smith ■ Inge Morath ■ Piedad Isla ■ La Palangana

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) meant a full stop to the cultural development made during the Second Republic (1931-1936), as Pantoja (2007) suggests. Regarding the rural areas, the republican governments had plans to develop the region, but with the short time they had, all of that vanished during the war, and it was forbidden after it.

However, if there is a cultural industry that lived an improvement in Spain during the war, that was photography. The political photography made during the republic by Spanish photographers became war photography, most of the times, made on the republican side.

Together with the Spanish photographers (like Luis Escobar in Albacete during the war, for example), some others from abroad arrived in the country to cover the conflict, like Robert Capa or Gerda Taro. The styles and aesthetics of the photography from the Civil War would have an impact on the pictures taken during World War II (1939-1945) but, ironically, the impact was not that strong in Spain. Pantoja (2007) says that the Spanish Civil War worked as a “training ground” for the photojournalism developed during the world war, but the censorship and propaganda stopped its progress in Spain.

Franco’s dictatorship made photography come back in time. The new regime preferred a kind of aesthetic far from what photography was already in the ‘40s. Martínez (2009) mentions that the aesthetics of these period were like the classic photography from the ‘30s, or even before: the use of fixed-focus lenses and photographic studios was significant. Classic portraits were the main photographic style after the war. Photographers working for the republican side lost their license, they lost their archives, or they suffered censorship. As Martínez (2009) adds, portraits show exactly how the highest class of the regime used photography. Not even the introduction of colour during the ‘50s altered this model, which died during the ‘60s thanks to the economic recovery, which meant an “opening” process of the dictatorship, and the popularization of photography.

All these elements created a context in which is difficult to find pictures taken in rural areas by Spanish photographers until the second half of the ‘50s, almost 20 years after the end of the Civil War. The only ones working more freely in the poorest areas of the country were photographers from abroad. They avoided the censorship and their work showed to the world the traditions and those spots that, years after Echagüe, Escobar or Hielscher, still seemed the same. In some cases, getting extremely close to *España negra*, while others managed to show a more humanized version of the same reality, as it is possible to see in this chapter.

6.2.1. W. Eugene Smith

Extremadura became the land that represented (and still today represents in some specific fields) the underdevelopment of the rural areas in Spain. There are not so many places as isolated and forbidden as this region. Coincidence or not, this place became a cultural and dark symbol of the worst face of the rural development in the country. The land of the most contemporary *España negra*, even if its neighbours never asked for it.

Deleitosa, the little town chosen by W. Eugene Smith to portray the rural life of the Spanish people under the new political regime, is in Extremadura. The same region as Las Hurdes. Just

160 kilometres separate them. It is not a coincidence because of Buñuel's work in *Las Hurdes*. *Tierra sin pan* was famous worldwide, and probably inspired somehow Smith's work in Deleitosa, as Susperregui (2009) suggests.

W. Eugene Smith arrived in Deleitosa in 1950, sent by LIFE magazine. Spain was in a difficult economic situation back then. The post-civil war and the Second World War did not help to a quick recovery. Franco's dictatorship was isolated from any international alliance, it created an autarkic system and Spain was not included in the Marshall Plan, after the world war. In the early '50s, since the new "enemy" of Occident was communism, the United States looked in Spain as a country that could help in its fight during the Cold War. During the whole decade of the '50s, the Francoist regime would receive more international support and economic aid, as Susperregui (2009) explains.

Ortiz-Echagüe (2014) talks about how important Smith's political commitment was during the development of his work in Spain. The photographer was against the American support of Franco. Even if LIFE sent him to Spain to make a reportage about the huge drought of 1950, his true intention was always to portray a reality that shows the worst face of a dictatorship that was having stronger international support. As a matter of fact, Smith came to Spain with permission of the Spanish embassy in Paris, where he suggested making a project showing a positive side of the dictatorship, something that the regime did not regret because it was a way to make international propaganda.

Far from all this context *Spanish village* was born, the 10-page reportage made by Smith in Deleitosa, being published almost one year after his visit, in 1951. Deleitosa, far from all that context, was a little town with around 2.300 inhabitants at that time, fully dedicated to the agriculture and farming industries. Without a telephone, an old water system, practically no cars and where the mail arrived by donkey. This place was Smith's "scenario" to show his own version of the *España negra* and he portrayed the daily life of some of its inhabitants, especially a couple of families, and the importance of public figures in the Spanish rural reality like the doctor, the policemen or the priest.

Spanish village starts with the picture of a little girl (Lorenza Curiel), with her first communion dress, surrounded by little children and her mother (**picture 29**). What makes special this picture is the contrast between Lorenza's clothes, all white and well dressed, with the other children and the environment itself. It is clear the poverty of the place looking at the dirty clothes of the girl standing behind Lorenza, the naked child or even looking at the house's structure. However, this picture shows already the importance of a tradition with deep roots in Spain, like the first communion. Nowadays, girls still wear dresses like the one in the picture when this rite takes place.



Picture 29: Smith, W. E. (1950). *First communion dress*.

The rest of the reportage, with 17 pictures, will focus always on the daily life of the people from Deleitosa, explaining each photography with a little text. As Ortiz-Echagüe (2014) mentions, each picture works by itself, with an own narrative, but with some geometric relations between them to give unity to the whole block. However, Brandes and de Miguel (1998) suggest that the fact the first communion is the first picture and the funeral of the grandfather (**picture 2, page 7**) the last one, also creates a narrative following the life cycle.

Coming back to picture 29, Smith's working method is different from the one used by other photographers from those years or later, like Cristina García Rodero. Smith is far from Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment", and he stages his pictures, he prepares the scene and at the end that makes his work less objective because he is portraying what he thinks is better for his work. As a matter of fact, Susperregui (2009) mentions that Lorenza Curiel had the first communion months before Smith arrived in Deleitosa, but the photographer wanted to take a picture in which poverty and faith could mix well. Ortiz-Echagüe (2014) says how Smith



Picture 30: Smith, W. E. (1950). *Small boy's work.*

the Spanish dictatorship (**picture 30**: Eleuterio Curiel, five years old, is sweeping up manure from the street without shoes. Susperregui (2009) mentions how Smith rejected to portray the boy with shoes, even if the family bought them. Another important element is the boy's name. Even if his name is Eleuterio, he appears as Lutero (Luther in English) in the photo essay).

Spanish village would be published in 1951, with W. Eugene Smith making a first selection of the pictures that he thought showed better what he wanted to transmit, as Susperregui (2009) says. Ortiz-Echagüe (2014) mentions how the essay received good critics in the United States, influencing public opinion, and photographers. Robert Frank considered it as one of the best photo essays published in LIFE. However, Smith's work was harshly criticized in Spain. Of course, it did not like to the dictatorship, even more considering that some important projects regarding development were taking place at the same time Smith was in Deleitosa, as Susperregui (2009) highlights. As a matter of fact, and probably also because of the essay, Deleitosa would have a telephone from 1953.

Susperregui (2009) talks about how the Curiel family suffered the consequences of the photo essay. After the family appeared in nine pictures, they were excluded from the community and their animals were killed, so they needed to leave Deleitosa because they had not a job and money to survive.



Picture 31: Smith, W. E. (1950). *Guardia Civil.*

The three policemen (**picture 31**, on the previous page) or *Guardia Civil* were assigned to Africa, according to the neighbours.

Spanish village is a special case. It is probably the closest photographic work to the classic *España negra* during the second half of the 20th century. Paradoxically, it is a work made by a foreign photographer. Smith's strong ideology ideas regarding the American help to the Francoist dictatorship affected his work in Deleitosa.

Brandes and de Miguel (1998) suggest how photojournalism could show us a reality but, at the same time, it could lie. *Spanish village* shows a reality with a biased point of view of rural Spain. There was poverty, lack of development and other problems, but W. Eugene Smith arrived to manipulate pictures to show what he wanted, an almost miserable reality. This photo essay helps to introduce the rural reality during the '50s in Spain, but also to show how was the American point of view regarding other countries back in that time, without discussing the quality of the pictures taken by Smith, as Brandes and de Miguel (1998) say. Deleitosa today has 687 inhabitants and its fight is different, but as it happens with Las Hurdes, Smith's work remains alive in the collective memory.

6.2.2. *Inge Morath*

In 1952, Inge Morath visited Spain for the first time as an assistant of Henri Cartier-Bresson, during the development of *The Europeans* (1955). After that, she would come back to the country on different occasions in the following years. López Mondéjar (2005) describes Morath's work as a portrayal of the Spanish society more honest and far from the pictorialist and dark vision of the Spanish photographers of that time.

As López Mondéjar (2005) continues, Inge Morath made her deepest work in Spain between 1954 and 1957, without a clear plan. Ruiz Franco (2007) highlights the fact that the more highlightable photographic work about the '50s Spanish reality came from foreigners, like Morath or the above-mentioned W. Eugene Smith.



Picture 32: Morath, I. (1955). *La Alberca, Salamanca*.

Inge Morath visited most of the Spanish geography during her trips. As it was mentioned in picture 3, during the introduction, Buñuel's documentary in *Las Hurdes* also influence Morath's work. She visited *Las Hurdes*, *La Alberca*, or other towns from that area that also appeared in the documentary (picture 32: This is one of the pictures Morath took in *La Alberca*. The roads and the houses already suggest a place that did not change much since Buñuel was there, 20 years before. The characters, especially the women and children, are humanized and dignified even the apparent poverty of the place. Morath is just catching a specific moment in time, without preparing the picture and letting the characters continue with their routine). In her pictures taken in Spain, it is possible to see poverty and underdevelopment in a country still living the results of the Civil War, but what is a difference between Morath's pictures and the works made in Spain in that time is the 'methodological approach' the Austrian photographer had. She did not use poverty as part of her message. Of course, she could not hide it, but she got closer to the characters appearing in her pictures, showing their daily life and being respectful with their reality, in a country that the photographer described as "mysterious", as Ruiz Franco (2007) shows.

This approach to people is what makes Morath's work close to what Cristina García Rodero did. The respect for people and their traditions above everything else is one of the main characteristics in both photographers, as it will be possible to see regarding García Rodero in chapter 7. Inge Morath also shows interest in the tasks made by women, who were displaced in society during the dictatorship, having a secondary role. Morath's photography is humanist.

"I was never interested in the topical as Spain's image."

(Inge Morath in Villena, 1997).

As Ruiz Franco (2007) suggests, Inge Morath escaped from the stereotypes of what Spain was at that time, portraying people and traditions and focusing on what she was looking for. Catching those decisive moments, probably something influenced by Cartier-Bresson, or other photographers from Magnum Photos, where she



Picture 33: Morath, I. (1954). Guadix.

was invited by Robert Capa to join as a photographer in 1953, before travelling to Spain (picture 33: In Guadix, a town from the province of Granada, Morath portrayed a group of children, with the town behind them. Even if they look to the camera and some of them seem to pose, they act naturally, without giving a feeling of a prepared portray. As a matter of fact, children are a basic element that change the weight of the *España negra* myth and the stereotypes, as it is also possible to see with Cristina García Rodero in chapter 7). In 1955, she would become a full member of Magnum Photos and one of the first women members.

Her pictures from Spain, which have a great historic and social value regarding ethnographic studies, as Ruiz Franco (2007) concludes, are far from the *España negra* myth and the official narratives from the dictatorship. She humanized the Spanish society through her camera, and especially in those pictures taken in rural areas, the ones living more than any other place the weight of those stereotypes and the myth. Cristina García Rodero did something similar almost 40 years later (considering the publication date of *España oculta*). Her work in Spain would be published in different monographs throughout her career, but *Spain in the fifties* (1994) would be the book that put her work in Spain together, 50 years later her first trip alone at the country.

6.2.3. *Piedad Isla*

Piedad Isla is practically the only Spanish woman who worked on rural photography during the hardest years of the dictatorship, or at least, the most highlightable. Isla, not as known as other Spanish contemporary photographers, focused her efforts in a particular and specific region of the country: the province of Palencia, and more specifically, the *Montaña Palentina*, at the north of the province. An area historically isolated because of its geography. Here, the highest peaks of the Cantabrian range can be found, but also here Piedad Isla was born and decided to work in her hometown, Cervera de Pisuerga.

Barrios Felipe and Sáinz Vidal (2011) show Isla as one of the pioneers of the new photographic styles in Spain, but the decision to work from her hometown created difficulties in her path. When it comes to having photographic material, it hardly arrived in this area of the country, even more during the autarky years and the post-war. As a matter of fact, the authors mention how Isla needed to travel, especially during winter, to the Kodak headquarters in Spain, in Madrid, to order material.



Picture 34: *Isla, P. (1962). A huebra limpiando el monte.*

Piedad Isla makes two approaches in her work. On one hand, she defends the culture and heritage of the region as a key element of development through tourism. An idea not so popular during the '50s though. On the other hand, the fact that she knows the region well and some of the people she portrays, makes her know better the whole reality and problems of these rural areas. As Barrios Felipe and Sáinz Vidal (2011) suggest, she became the guardian of the collective memory of this part of the country (**picture 34**: A huebra is a Castilian concept used to describe the work done by some people to benefit the whole community. In this picture, one of the most famous made by Piedad Isla, the photographer shows a group of men and women cleaning the mountain. This is a classic work done in rural areas. Isla dignifies the work and the people

appearing in this picture. The poses and light help to increase a feeling of respect and certain epicism of the characters).

At this point, it is important to remember that the '50s and the '60s are the decades of modernization, industrialization, and rural depopulation in Spain. The reality and society she knew were disappearing in front of her eyes and she acted to preserve the heritage of that area, giving her photographic work an ethnographic point of view, but also a sensitivity to the territory, the people and the traditions.

Barrios Felipe and Sáinz Vidal (2011) mention that Piedad Isla, even if she has some similarities with the Italian neorealist photographers, she did not even know them well. She is an autodidact most of the time and it is the environment itself and some courses that she made which helped her to develop her style. Travelling around the *Montaña Palentina* with a Vespa, portrays were one of the bases of her work, also because it was the main source of income for photographers during those years. But when she could work freely, she made social photography not seen until then in this area.

Piedad Isla would not publish her pictures in monographs or photo books. A little part of her work would be published in the province newspaper, *As Alvoz* (2017) shows. But her influence when it comes to taking care of the culture of her region is highlightable. Barrios Felipe and Sáinz Vidal (2011) talk about the parallel work Isla did, recollecting objects used in different tasks in the countryside, which today are exhibited together with her pictures at the *Museo Etnográfico Piedad Isla*, a museum opened in her house in Cervera de Pisuerga in 1980. Her role in the preservation of the heritage of this specific rural area in Spain is important, but she is not that known and there are not a lot of studies about her work, as Alvoz (2017) says. However, after she died in 2009, the provincial deputation of Palencia started to give a photographic prize with Piedad's name, which was won by Cristina García Rodero in its first edition.

6.2.4. *La Palangana*

During the second half of the '50s, photography started to become more popular in Spain and the dictatorship was being accepted by the international community every time more. In this context, the Spanish photographers were looking to modernize the style and techniques of the photographic work. Back in that time, it was still closed to more classic styles, like pictorialism, while there was a predominance of salons and photography was used by the political regime as a propaganda tool, as Parreño (2014) mentions.

Following what Parreño (2014) says, even if a sector of photography was looking for an improvement more related to what other countries were doing, these critics were shy. As a matter of fact, the author explains how *Arte fotográfico*, the main photographic magazine during that time, showed a shy criticism of the state of photography in Spain and they even supported “*salonismo*”⁴. However, little groups of photographers, critics with how things have been done until then, started to appear. In Spain, the work made by groups of photographers like AFAL (*Asociación de Fotógrafos Almerienses*) or the documentary photographers from Catalonia. In Madrid, these groups came from the Spanish Royal Photographic Society.

In 1959, a new group of photographers emerged. All of them were members of the Royal Photographic Society, but in its composition was different from other groups. The group was known as *La Palangana*⁵ or the School of Madrid and it worked for just 4 years. Together with the other groups that appeared during those years, they were part of the late renovation of Spanish photography. Parreño (2014) adds that, even if *La Palangana* did not have a strict structure or a manifest by itself, they showed an aim to renew the Spanish photography, following the models of representation coming from abroad and escaping from the old styles still popular in Spain, in some cases with a surrealist photographic work. Its first members were:

- Leonardo Cantero
- Gabriel Cualladó
- Paco Gómez
- Ramón Masats

⁴ Term used by Oriol Maspons to define the photography made in salons in Spain during the '50s.

⁵ As Parreño (2014) mentions, the name came from the fact that the founding members decided to call the group like that and say that the pictures from all the members needed to fit in a *palangana*, what is the Spanish name for a washbowl (look at picture 4, in page 7).

- Francisco Ontañón
- Joaquín Rubio Camín

In the following years, other 4 photographers would enter or collaborate in different grade with the group:

- Juan Dolcet
- Fernando Gordillo
- Gerardo Vielba
- Sigfrido de Guzmán

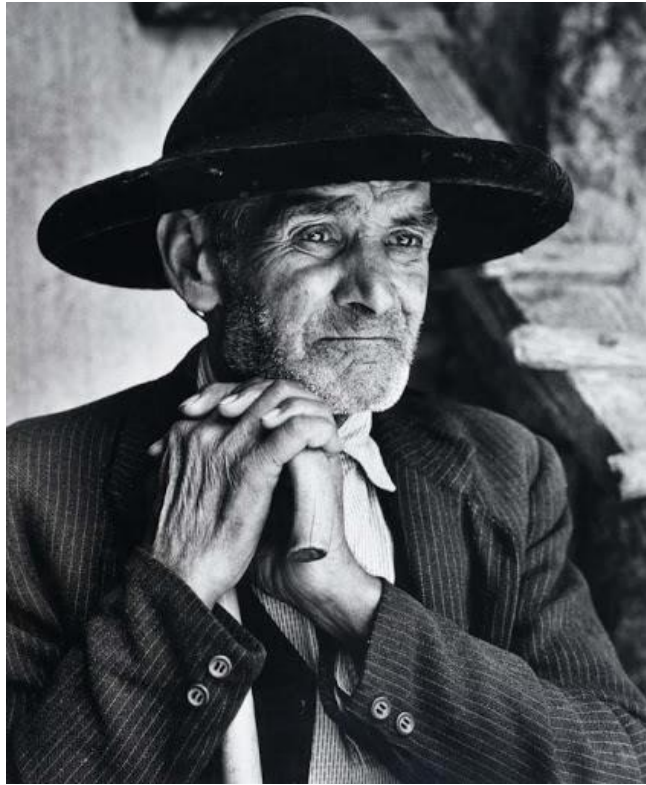


Picture 35: Dolcet, J. (1968). *Las comadres*.

Further than the style and technique that each of these photographers had, what makes their work as a group highlightable are the topics that affected their work. Parreño (2014) mentions how the end of autarky and the opening process of the dictatorship helped to the arrival of photographic work from abroad. Without going any further, the work made by W. Eugene Smith, mentioned before in this project. Those works gave them the impulse to make a different kind of photography. But probably the most important event that affected their work was the migration from the rural areas to the cities, which increased during the '50s as never before.

La Palangana had a commitment regarding what rural depopulation meant in that moment. A cultural loss and a quick expansion of the cities with people looking for better opportunities. The photography made by this group tries to reflect the reality of men and their circumstances, as Parreño (2014) says, quoting Fernando Gordillo. Their pictures are subjective and humanist, closely related and inspired by the Italian neorealism or the *Nouvelle Vague* (**picture 35**: the picture taken by Dolcet shows two women talking, but the other three paying attention from the windows of the house. *Comadreo* is a colloquial Spanish word that could be translated as gossip. This picture, even showing a hard environment, shows the daily life and naturalness of people in rural areas).

In the pictures taken by the School of Madrid the viewer can look at different approaches to the changes Spain was suffering, from the point of view of each one of these photographers. But their vision, as it was said before, is not related to the modernization process of the country, but they follow the characters and traditions from the little towns surrounding Madrid or the new suburbs of the capital, who will become marginals with the new order of things. Even if all the member from *La Palangana* made rural photography, Fernando Gordillo is probably the one with a bigger work with



Picture 36: Gordillo, F. (1960). *Retrato de José*.

rural people, traditions, and landscapes (**picture 36**: Gordillo has some portrays like this one, where he is not just looking to show a specific character, but to show respect for them. In *Retrato de José*, the photographer is not just showing an old man, but a lifestyle that looks the present, and not the camera, with a certain level of sadness, after years of effort, staged in wrinkles in face and hands).

Quoting Ramón Masats, *La Palangana* was “a group of friends that met to drink some beers”. This simple idea can also be perceived in their photography since it is difficult to find a strong political speech. There is empathy and an aim to show the reality, but not an intention to make a criticism about the dictatorship. As a matter of fact, they never suffered censorship of their work, politics was not a topic in their debates, and they were not members of any political party from the opposition. However, as Parreño (2014) continues, their portrays, even without a political speech, show the contradictions of an unequal development and the situation of parts of the Spanish population that the dictatorship was leaving behind.

In any case, even if they were pioneers in the improvement of new rural photography in Spain, *La Palangana* would have only one exposition as a group, in 1963. After that, as Parreño (2014) mentions, there are no clear clues about what happened to the group, while each of its members continued their photographic careers alone. *La Palangana* in the end was a group of friends, as Masats said, but their work was key in the historical development of photography in Spain. It

was during these years when the pictorialism of Ortiz Echagüe started to lose importance in a regime that used to make politics out of everything. Groups like *La Palangana*, AFAL, among others from different places in Spain, or even other groups from the Royal Photographic Society, were the inspiration and base for the generation coming with *Nueva lente* during the last years of the dictatorship, in the mid '70s. As a matter of fact, Cristina García Rodero mentions *La Palangana* as one of the inspirations for her work in *España oculta*.

“(...) While I was in Italy during my exchange, I started to look at the work of the Italian neorealist photographers, especially Mimmo Jodice or Ferdinando Scianna. When I came back in Spain, I also looked at the work made by La Palangana.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

What makes the work made by these photographers highlightable is that they escaped from the city and the apparently new progress of the country to show the reality of the ones remaining in the countryside, or those new inhabitants of the city, living in suburbs. All of this without giving a clear political speech and showing exclusively the reality of the rural areas and the people living there, giving importance to the culture and traditions of the people. *La Palangana* were pioneers and, as Parreño (2014) says in his conclusion, they took the change just in time when the country needed these new approaches.

7. Cristina García Rodero

Cristina García Rodero was born in Puertollano, a little city at the province of Ciudad Real, Castilla-La Mancha, in 1949. She studied Fine Art in Madrid and photography was one of her major passions even before she won the Juan March Foundation scholarship in 1973. This event moved Cristina completely to photography and *España oculta* was born at that moment, while she also started her academic work as a professor, as Peralta Barrios and Menéndez-Menéndez (2017) say. García Rodero explains that the project started as an idea when she was in an exchange in Florence, Italy, where she missed Spain and she decided to do something about her home country when she came back.

“España oculta is the result of a period of loneliness in my life, while I was in Florence in an exchange. The school there was so bad. I was disappointed and I started to miss Spain so much. I quit school and I used to go a photographed the almost daily demonstrations, something that I never did in Spain because it was way too dangerous at that time. (...) It was the first time I was that far from home and I thought: ‘in Spain I have tons of things to do’.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

García Rodero is a member of the new young generation of Spanish photographers emerging in the last years of Franco’s dictatorship. But, escaping from what *Nueva Lente* was showing as a new photography in Spain and the most vanguardist movements born in Barcelona or Madrid, Cristina kept working for the next 15 years in just one project: a book of documentary photography about the rites and traditions in rural areas of Spain. Something apparently far from what was considered modern. However, this relationships between the divine and the earthly worlds would be the basis for her whole career as a photographer.

López Mondéjar (2005) talks about these photographers that escaped from the pictures made in a studio. A new generation of Spanish documentary photographers, highlighting García Rodero, Koldo Chamorro, Cristóbal Hara, Fernando Herráez, among others. López Mondéjar (2005) suggests that these photographers were honest witnesses of the changes that Spain was suffering, which were killing the rural lifestyle and its traditions. Photographers could not renounce reality and, at the same time, they were more analytic and conscious about subjectivity. As Velasco (2011) adds, Cristina García Rodero and these other contemporary photographers from the last third of the 20th century portrayed rites and traditions from the countryside in a more democratic reality. This new context democratized photography as never

before in Spain, and fields like anthropology or ethnography started to use photography as an extra tool in population and cultural studies.

“I had a lot of problems regarding the information available about the holidays because it was very limited at that time. That made the work more intimate, sometimes with a few photographers, working in a group, and other times going to the towns on my own. (...) We used to think that we were privileged to witness of a Spain that was changing.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

After the publication of *España oculta* in 1989, Cristina García Rodero would be the first Spanish photographer to be a full member of Magnum Photos, she also won the W. Eugene Smith Grant of Humanist Photography, also in 1989 and the National Prize of Photography in Spain in 1996. She would publish *España, fiestas y ritos* in 1992 and after that she would work around the world, always showing the rites, traditions and the relationship people have with them.

7.1. Analysis

7.1.1. *España oculta*

España oculta (or Hidden Spain in English) was published in 1989 by Lunwerg Publishers. The book has a prologue written by Julio Caro Baroja, a Spanish anthropologist and ethnologist, who studied the traditions and holidays taking place around the country. As a matter of fact, García Rodero recognizes that some of Caro Baroja's work was the theoretical base for her photographic project.

“Perhaps some Spaniards who examine this collection of photos will surely find that it reflects lives, societies that are completely unknown to them. Some may even conclude that it is a forced point of view of reality. But which one is not? (...). There are many kinds of Spanish and Cristina García Rodero is interested in one. She has a perfect right to it, and we are also some of us who do the same. Using an old expression, someone could say that Cristina's vision is the one from the ‘España negra’. Someone more modernist, would use an ‘underdeveloped Spain’. The fairest and most exact way to characterize it is to use two already used words: traditional and popular.”

(Julio Caro Baroja – Prologue of *España oculta*, in: García de León, 1996, p. 264).

The book includes 126 pictures, all of them in black and white, taken around all Spain. The project started around 1973 and García Rodero took pictures of what the book would be until 1988. It was her first project and already the name suggests what we can see in its pages. *España oculta* tells a human story about the people living in rural areas in Spain but, putting the focus on their relationship with traditions that have deep and old roots in the Spanish society.

“I worked for 15 years because for me the most important thing was to compare different holidays. It is kind of what Caro Baroja used to teach because he looked for those relationships to find the origins of these holidays. (...) It also took that much because once I was teaching at the university, I just had the weekends to travel and Spain is a big country, not as much as Brazil or India, but it is so big and rich, and my perfectionist behaviour made me think that I still needed to visit more places.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

In the end, the project developed by García Rodero is ethnographic, studying those rites and how people behave during their celebration. The holidays as a big meeting point in Spanish

society, where people forget for a while about their daily problems. The vision of the photographer helps us to understand that a humanized vision of the countryside is possible. A new Spain that you can see through the characters that García Rodero portrayed, but also an old and still poor country in its rural areas. She was able to show a more complex reality, that could fit with the styles and modes of representation used by the new generation of photographers that emerged after Franco's dictatorship, as Esparza (2020) mentions too.

“España oculta is a work based on freedom, honesty and love for my country. Freedom because I paid practically all of it on my own, so I had the opportunity to choose what, how and when to do my work. It was my personal fight and conquest and I did not need to please people with my work. It was a Spain that no one showed interest in, unknown, poor and hidden. (...) España oculta is a unique work for me because as a Spaniard I did not know my country well; I was a beginner in photography, and I had the absolute privilege to meet the people from these towns. And that Spain had also positive things.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

Peralta Barrios and Menéndez-Menéndez (2017) say that Cristina García Rodero is seen as a master of Spanish documentary photography, even if her work is not well known by a more general public. What makes Cristina's work special, and it is something that she worked during the development of *España oculta* is to dignify the people being portrayed, no matter their feelings and what they are doing. People, as in an anthropological or ethnographic work, are her main focus along her work not just in *España oculta*, but also in the works made by García Rodero after the book.

Guerrero (2020) highlights the importance of people more than rites throughout the development of the project. They are Cristina's main characters in her story, so along the book it is noticeable the presence of women, men and children practically in equal parts. The book tells a story about a country that not even a part of the Spanish society knew completely well. A country that was vanishing because of the quick modernization taking place during the second half of the dictatorship and the comeback of democracy. As Guerrero (2020) also mentions, García Rodero focused her attention in those holidays with deep roots and with something special to tell, as it is possible to see in the picture *Una promesa a la vida*, being analysed later.

“I said no to do something general. I wanted to focus on the holidays, traditions and rites because they are not well-known, and we have a treasure there. On every holiday I

discovered, I was astonished about what I found there. (...) It is a work that makes you feel curious because with the excuse of portraying how people behave in some contexts, in the end you also started to know yourself better.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

López Mondéjar (2005) highlights García Rodero’s talent and interest to show this relationship between the earthly and the divine worlds. Her work in *España* oculta became worldwide important when it comes to talking about Spanish photography from the last decades of the 20th century. As a matter of fact, the book would win the prize for the best photo book at the *Recontres d’Arles*, in France, in 1989. However, García Rodero herself explains how she does not care about publishing her work.

“I never cared about outputting my work. (...) A friend of mine and historian, Publio López Mondéjar knew my work and he liked it. He was making a research about photographers in Spain and he introduced me to his editor, and this man always tells me that when he saw my work, he got excited and he believed in me and what I was doing.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

However, it is important to highlight that the book was published in a moment that the contra-cultural movements, like *La Movida* in Madrid, were dominating in Spain. And in 1989, as it was mentioned before, Spain was getting ready to host the Olympics and the Universal Exposition in 1992, in Barcelona and Sevilla. The country was trying to look forward after almost 40 years of dictatorship, and a book showing those old traditions and that for some people was the worst face of Spain, managed to have success, as Guerrero (2020) says.

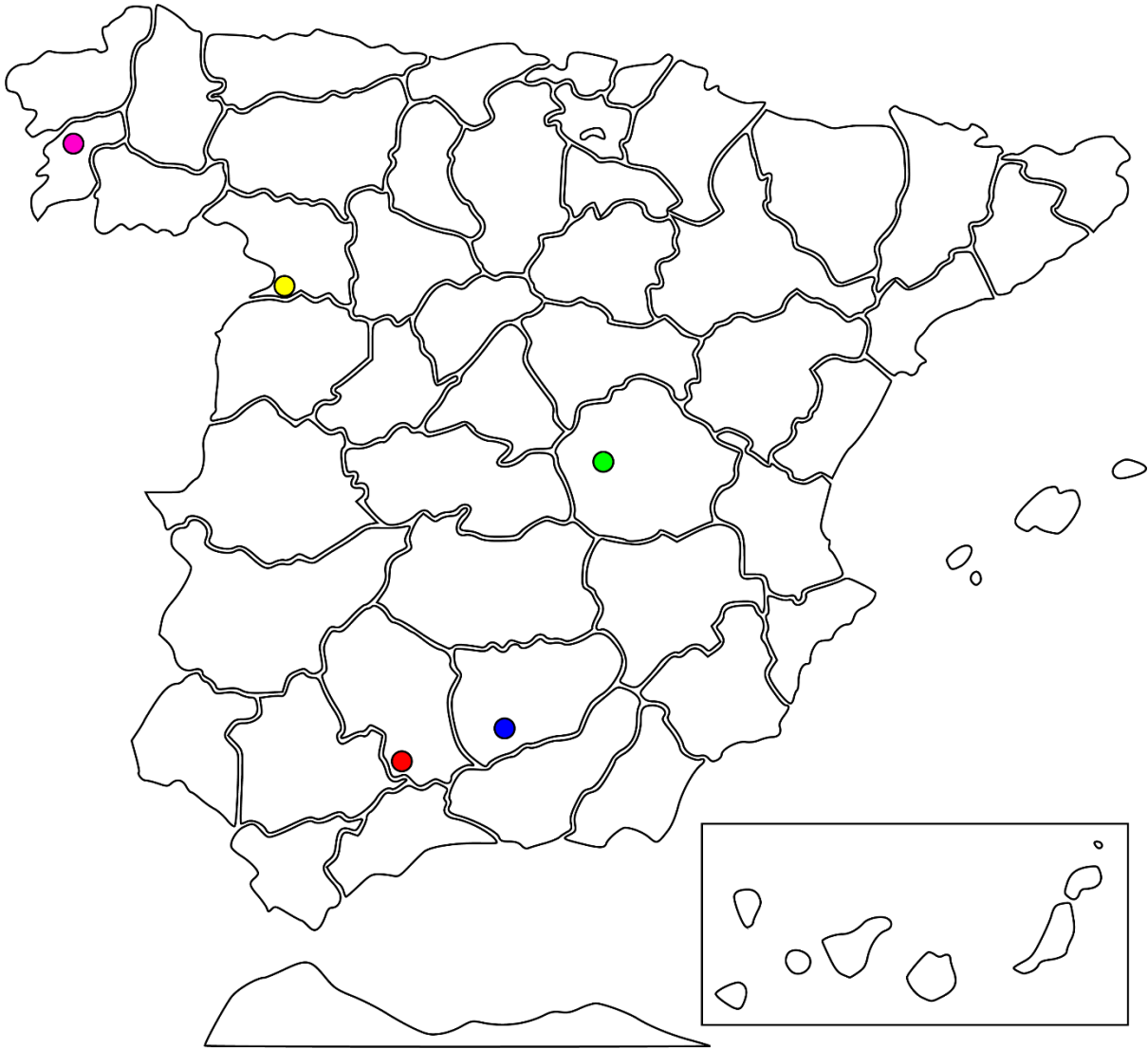
“The work made by me and other photographers was neglected because in that time, during the ‘70s and the ‘80s, Spanish photography needed to live up to Europe’s trends. The photographic magazines refused all what could make remember Franco or that it could be old-fashioned, but all these traditions are much older than Franco. (...) No one cared about us. In that time, it was more important to be modern, and I wanted to make a deep research.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

In order to make a deep analysis of the content shown by García Rodero in her book, the present work is analysing 5 of the 126 pictures from the whole book. The pictures were chosen following certain characteristics that can help to explain better the topics and aesthetics that the

photographer used along her work. In that way, the pictures mentioned along this chapter will analyse the ability of Cristina García Rodero to catch moments, expressions, and attitudes in the different characters along her work. Later, the analysis of the pictures will show the main topics shown by the photographer: spirituality and Christian rites, bulls and the holidays related to them, non-Christian traditions, the importance of children as an element of humanization of the rural areas along the whole book, or the daily life of people.

The map on the next page will help to locate the pictures analysed along this chapter in a map of Spain, following the order that the pictures themselves have on the book.



Picture 37: Self-elaborated map of Spain showing the approximate geographical positions of the pictures made by Cristina García Rodero that are being analysed along the current chapter.

	<i>Las Potencias del Alma</i>
	<i>El danzante azul</i>
	<i>La tarde</i>
	<i>El salto del maletilla</i>
	<i>Una promesa a la vida</i>

- Las potencias del alma



Picture 38: García Rodero, C. (1976). *Las potencias del alma*.

Title	Las potencias del alma (the powers of the soul)
Year	1976
Author	Cristina García Rodero
Place	Puente Genil (Province of Córdoba – Andalucía)
Holiday	Easter
Focus of the analysis	Catching the moment.

Las potencias del alma is the 10th picture in *España oculta*. In the frame, we can see 3 men, two of them wearing the typical clothes wear by *nazarenos*, members of a confraternity of penitents, during Easter. These clothes are typical from Easter in Spain, and practically in every

region it is possible to see processions. However, in Andalucía is where people have a closer relationship with the traditions taking place during Easter. The processions in Sevilla are worldwide famous, but as we can see in García Rodero's picture, celebrations also take place in littler towns, like Puente Genil.

It is possible to look a celebration. It is not a moment as solemn as the procession itself and the relaxed atmosphere of the characters shows that. Behind the two *nazarenos* it is possible to see a third character, dressed as a soldier. He is crossing his legs and he is supporting his back in a white wall of a building that it is not possible to know what it could be exactly. As relaxed as the other two characters, the soldier is smoking, holding the cigarette in his hand.

Coming back to the *nazarenos*, it is possible to see that same relaxed attitude on them. The one at the right is drinking wine or any similar liquor. The one at left looks to the sky, with a peaceful expression and holding what it looks like a terrestrial globe.

Last but not least, the white pigeon flying just above the head of the *nazareno* looking at the sky shows us different things. On one hand, it is easy to relate the figure of a white pigeon with concepts like peace or God, even more considering the context in which the picture is taken. But looking at the pigeon together with the man below, it is possible to perceive a connection. The *nazareno* is not just looking at the sky, but he also looks at the pigeon and it seems like he is having a connection with God, while the other two men continue with their life on earth, looking oblivious.

There are not complex manipulations in García Rodero's pictures. Her technique is based on the art of waiting until things happen. There is not possible manipulation on the faces of those three men and the appearance of the pigeon. Guerrero (2020) highlights that Cristina García Rodero does not prepare the pictures and all of them are the result of patience.

In any case, Cristina follows constantly a good aesthetic result in her pictures, with very closed compositions in these early stages of her career, as also Guerrero (2020) suggests. In this picture we can clearly see how García Rodero is closing the composition following the frame of the opened door behind the characters and the lines of the tiles in the floor. The photographer herself explains that the lack of photographic education made her develop her whole technique along the 15 years she worked on *España oculta*.

“(...) Together with the lack of information, I did not even have a photographic education, so I also spent a lot of time to have a simple technique, as most of the people from my

generation did because the only option was to study by mail. There was not a photographic school back then, so the learning process was slow. I would have liked to have a solid base, but in this way the vocation becomes stronger.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

Summarizing, *Las potencias del alma* shows a connection between the divine and the earthly worlds. Together with that, it is possible to see an informal face of the Christian holidays in Spain, making the characters to be the main focus of the action, taking care of the composition and the action, to show a specific moment in time.

- El danzante azul



Picture 39: García Rodero, C. (1980). *El danzante azul*.

Title	El danzante azul (the blue dancer)
Year	1980
Author	Cristina García Rodero
Place	El Hito (Province of Cuenca – Castilla-La Mancha)
Holiday	Fiesta en Honor de La Virgen de la Encarnación - March 25 th
Focus of the analysis	The role of children in <i>España oculta</i> .

Children play an important role in *España oculta*. They appeared in a good amount of the pictures from the book. As a matter of fact, the picture of the cover shows a girl playing at the

entrance of the local cemetery. The 36th picture of the book is *El danzante azul*. In this picture it is possible to see a group of children with typical clothes from a holiday in honour of the Virgin Mary in El Hito, a little town in the province of Cuenca. They are walking through an unpaved road, but the boy in the first term is the more highlightable character of the picture. Our attention goes directly to him and how he dances instead of walking. As a matter of fact, that is the reason for the name of the picture.

Children play a fundamental role in rural development and Cristina García Rodero showed that through her pictures. One of the elements that make her work in *España oculta* more highlightable than others is the appearance of children. In a narration that tells us things about spirituality and culture, children appear as a pure element, the ones that will continue those traditions and the future of the rural areas. Guerrero (2020) mentions that 48 out of the 126 pictures from the book show children. This fact demonstrates how important are children for García Rodero. Guerrero (2020) continues saying that Cristina herself thinks that children are natural, acting far from the drama played during the celebrations and children also show spontaneity.

As in *Las potencias del alma*, in this picture García Rodero closed the composition again, using the margins of the path and the clouds to do it. *El danzante azul* also shows another important element regarding Cristina's work. The sky, and especially, the skies with an abundance of clouds. This is something coming from her background as a Fine Art student. The mass of clouds helps to give more expression to the whole picture and, as Guerrero (2020) mentions, Cristina García Rodero modified and stressed the skies at the lab.

Coming back to the narrative aspect, a stronger sky and full of clouds could help also to show that a kind of divine power is present in the pictures, making company to the people, who keep always as the main characters.

- **La tarde**



Picture 40: García Rodero, C. (1978). *La tarde*.

Title	La tarde (the afternoon)
Year	1978
Author	Cristina García Rodero
Place	Campillo de Arenas (Province of Jaén – Andalucía)
Focus of the analysis	Daily life.

Cristina García Rodero also portrayed the daily life of people in the places she travelled, even if these pictures are not a majority throughout the book. *La tarde* is an example of these quotidian pictures. Guerrero (2020) suggests the similarities that this picture has with the Genre paintings from the Baroque of the 17th century, where the painters showed an aim to “show Spain through the characters in the pictures” (p. 119). Probably these similarities come also because of Cristina’s studies in Fine Art.

La tarde shows two old people. The man, seated in a chair outside a white house, and looking at something out of frame. There is also an old woman, inside the house, looking at the camera and holding on to the bars of the window. White houses are typical in towns in Andalucía and the door opened with a curtain is typical in practically every town in Spain. Even the clothes

of both characters help us to see that we are not looking at a rural scene, since the black dress wear by the woman is characteristic in rural areas in Spain until the last decades of the 20th century. Regarding these pictures, not directly related to holidays, Cristina García Rodero says the following:

“In the end, it was about what I was finding and how I felt about it. I did not care if it was the most important moment during a holiday. I wanted to portray what arrived at my heart, and some scenes did that without being completely related with the town or the holiday itself.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

What makes special this picture is the composition and the balance between the different elements. Following what Guerrero (2020) says, Cristina García Rodero took care of the frame and the composition in this picture. On each side of the picture, we find the different characters with their respective space and attitudes. At the same time, the frames of the door and the window help to delimit the space and the position of the different elements give balance to the whole scene. It is important to highlight that there is a diagonal on the composition, which unifies both characters and increases this feeling of a balanced image.

In the end, the compensation of elements and the control of the whole composition, together with a soft light (probably the reason for the name of this picture) create a calm atmosphere, as Guerrero (2020) suggests. Further than the similarities that could be found with Baroque paintings, Cristina García Rodero also adds a more social narrative in this picture. It is possible to perceive a message regarding the differences between men and women in rural areas, almost feminist. It is needed to highlight at this point that, even if this is just an interpretation from the picture, we cannot forget that Cristina García Rodero belongs to a generation of young photographers with ideas of change after Franco's dictatorship, so social messages like feminism are more than possible to be found in this specific work or other pictures taken by contemporary photographers of Cristina.

- **El salto del maletilla**



Picture 41: García Rodero, C. (1975). *El salto del maletilla*.

Title	El salto del maletilla (the jump of the maletilla)
Year	1975
Author	Cristina García Rodero
Place	Fermoselle (Province of Zamora – Castilla y León)
Holiday	Fiestas de San Agustín - Second half of August
Focus of the analysis	The figure of the bull in the Spanish culture and other non-Christian traditions.

Bulls are practically a unique tradition in Spain. They became worldwide famous thanks to *San Fermín*, in Pamplona, but even if nowadays some holidays related to bulls are considered as animal abuse, these holidays were an important part of the Spanish culture during the 20th century. In *España oculta* there are 10 pictures related to bullfighting traditions and holidays, like *Bous a la mar* (Bulls to the sea), in Dènia, Alicante, one of the most famous holidays related to bulls in Spain.

El salto del maletilla is one of the examples in the book where Cristina García Rodero did not respect completely her formality regarding the compositions. This picture, taken in the biggest holiday of Fermoselle, a town in the province of Zamora, shows a mass of people, including

some bullfighters looking at a man jumping over a bull. Maletilla, in the bullfighting world, is a young person without means who wants to participate in bullfights, so to do it the person needs to show his abilities in littler events.

Even if the holidays in Fermoselle are dedicated to Saint Augustin, we do not see any religious symbol in the picture. This demonstrates that bullfights by themselves are an independent holiday and tradition, even if they could be part of a bigger Christian holiday, like in this case. The picture focuses all the attention on the Maletilla and the bull. Their fight is the main topic of the picture and, as one looking at the picture, the bullfighters and people at the background are just testimonials of what is happening.

Cristina García Rodero shows in this picture again the ability to wait and catch the precise moment when something different is taking place in front of her camera, as it happens with *Las potencias del alma*. Regarding the compositions, as Guerrero (2020) says, in pictures where a mass of people appears, Cristina usually did not close the composition that much. She is not following an extremely formal style in this picture. The cuts are not clear, and the main focal point is at the centre, with the bull and the maletilla.

El salto del maletilla shows a different face of Cristina's work. Less formal in the style, being able to experiment, but keeping the waiting and patience to have a good picture, catching those unique moments. Regarding the content, she keeps people as her main topic, as it happens in the rest of the pictures, but the ones about bullfighting with bulls in the frame also show the animal as an important element of the holiday and as equal as people. The holidays are important because they give the background, but the people participating in these events are more important and that is one of the main messages the photographer wants to give with her work. As a matter of fact, along the book it is possible to find other celebrations, like the Carnival in the northern provinces of Spain (especially in Galicia, Asturias, León, Burgos or Palencia), which keeps nowadays relationship with non-Christian traditions and rites.

- **Una promesa a la vida**



Picture 42: García Rodero, C. (1975). *Una promesa a la vida*.

Title	Una promesa a la vida (a promise to life)
Year	1975
Author	Cristina García Rodero
Place	Amil (Province of Pontevedra – Galicia)
Holiday	Romería de los milagros de Amil - the Sunday following September 8
Focus of the analysis	Deep spirituality and Christian holidays or rites.

As it was mentioned along the analysis of other pictures from *España oculta*, spirituality is one of the main topics Cristina García Rodero talks about along the book. How people live their rites and traditions and how they behave in these situations. In pictures like *Las potencias del alma* it is possible to look at a more relaxed atmosphere and behaviour. The same happens with children because of their naturality, but there are some pictures that show deeper feelings and atmospheres. We always look at people, but the attitude changes when the rite is taking place, and that is what happens with *Una promesa a la vida*.

In Amil, a little town part of the township of Moraña, in the province of Pontevedra, people celebrate every year the *Romería de los Milagros*, one of the most special and popular

pilgrimages in Galicia. A *romería* is a typical short pilgrimage made in Spain and Portugal with a sanctuary as destination. Further than just a religious event, people use to participate in other kinds of social events during the development of the *romería*. The Virgin Mary is consecrated and carried in procession in Amil. The *Virgen de los Milagros*, as it is known, is covered with banknotes and people come massively to this town. This is something that it is possible to see in another picture from *España oculta*. In *Vigen con impermeable*, taken in 1985, it is possible to see some banknotes behind the plastic that covered the Virgin Mary because of the rain. This picture was taken by García Rodero in La Franqueira, not far from Amil.

Coming back to Amil, García Rodero has 5 pictures from this town in the book, all of them at the last pages, taken between 1975 and 1980, also showing her interest in these processions in Galicia. In *Una promesa a la vida* shows a group of people carrying a coffin with a man alive inside. This is something kind of traditional in this area of Galicia, where there are more processions, some even bigger than the one in Amil. This is the way people thank the Virgin Mary or other saints after having been close to death or having had a very difficult personal moment. It is not a holiday about death, but about resurrection. As García Rodero says, pictures like this one show the contrast between the urban and rural areas and show that ‘hidden’ Spain closely related to its traditions.

“Someone from a capital, in an office, who never care about visiting these towns, would get scared looking at a person inside a coffin just to revive the drama they lived, but it is their tradition and the way they live it. (...) It is necessary to give freedom to people to live their faith the way they want.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

Una promesa a la vida follows the composition style that García Rodero prefers to use when it comes to portraying a big number of people, as Guerrero (2020) suggests. As it happens with *El salto del maletilla*, there are not clean cuts since some faces are not complete in the shot and the picture becomes a work of catching a specific moment more than a picture taken with more patience and preparation. At the same time, the long candles on the left help to close the composition and focus our attention on the man inside the coffin. The hands of the man in the coffin have a similar task as the candles, since they are more in focus than the face of the man behind the coffin on the right.

Both the man in the coffin and the one below, carrying the coffin, give a sense of abstraction from what is going on around them and a direction. It is lighter on them than in the rest of the people appearing in this picture, who look in other directions or straight to the camera, as it happens with the two people on the left of the picture, behind the candles, and other three behind the coffin, even if those are out of focus and they lose importance. Again, what is important about this picture, as it happens in the rest, is the relationship that people have with a rite as deep as this one. In this picture, the solemn tone of the Christian rite can be perceived, and it is also a different point regarding other pictures from the book, which show an “earthly” relationship with the rites.

7.1.2. *The impact of España oculta in the current rural photography in Spain*

It is important to highlight that it is difficult to talk about a huge impact when it comes to *España oculta* because it is something subjective. However, in the Spanish photographic world, García Rodero's work became an important reference for the new photographers emerging in Spain in the last 20 or 30 years, approximately.

“There is a group of photographers that keep travelling around Spain and there is a big friendship with them. They told me many times that they learned with España oculta or that my book made them be photographers. España oculta has 30 years and sometimes these people tell me to go with them to a specific place. When I'm there I realize about how much things have changed in this time.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

Since the '90s, as del Río and Delgado (2020) say, more photographers tried to show the contrast between urban and rural areas, or the different and new conceptions of the Spanish territory linked to economic progress during the last decade of the 20th century and the first of the 21st, looking for the limits between the urbanized and the wild spaces. Esparza (2020) talks about the '90s as the time the *España negra* myth was weaker than ever before. Velasco (2011) adds too that social and political context deeply affects the ways and models of representation of the popular culture. García Rodero's work came out in a period when Spain was advancing and there was progress, while the traditions started to be respected.

However, and following these ideas, Esparza (2020) suggests a return of the *España negra* myth as a result of the effects of the economic crisis



Picture 43: Rota, S. (2010-2016). Instant village.

from 2008 in Spain: “(...) *The fallout of the crisis has been perceived in many parts of the Mediterranean as a new opportunity for self-flagellation. We thus ironically find ourselves once more defined (and defining ourselves) in terms of a mythical España negra supposedly palpable in daily life (...).*” (pp. 54). As del Río y Delgado (2020) suggest, the photography from those years would focus its interest in the reinterpretation of ruins, a change of perspective and the bordering scenarios between urban and rural (**picture 43**).



Picture 44: Navia, J. M. (N.D.). Parada de bus en Olmedilla de Eliz.

When it comes to talk about a pure and recent rural Spanish photography, the name of José Manuel Navia needs to be highlighted. His book *Alma tierra*, published in 2019, shows the rural lifestyle at *Tierras Altas* county, in the province of Soria, one of the most affected by the current rural depopulation in Spain. Navia is a photographic reporter. In recent years,

after travelling around the world because of his job, Navia became a photographer with a more intimate work, caring about the significance of his work, and always working in colour. *Alma tierra* shows what is the Spanish rurality nowadays, with still clear connections with its traditions, but giving importance to the current demographic crisis, which is transforming those towns full of life in *España oculta* into places without people practically (**picture 44**).

“(...)While urban and peripheral Spain are growing at an exorbitant rate, the interior and rural areas are dying to extremes that the Spaniards themselves would be surprised if, in addition to talking about depopulation and abandonment as they often do lately, they dared to see for themselves the seriousness and extension of these two phenomena.”

(Julio Llamazares – Prologue of *Alma tierra*)

Finally, regarding García Rodero’s work, after she published a second book about Spain with pictures in colour, in 1992, she would dedicate her future works following similar topics, but in other places around the world.

“All what I did, and what I am doing now is the result of España oculta. (...) After España oculta I wanted to work with the Mediterranean culture, but if just Spain took me 15 years, all the Mediterranean would have been my whole life. I decided to focus on Southern Europe, then Center Europe and East Europe. Later I went to the Caribbean, from there to Latin America and now I am working with Asia. (...) I have been to Manila and Luzon island. There, men dress up like women and some of them carry a cross or flagellate themselves. You realize how the connections are not in the origin of the holidays, but in what they are celebrating and how they want to celebrate it. (...) I will continue working until my body allows it and I think I will also continue photographing Spain.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

8. Conclusions

Rural photography in Spain evolved during the 20th century, even if that evolution was slow and it cost years to change that vision that made the company to the rural areas since the end of the 19th century. *España negra* was the way artists found to complain about the problems the country was facing and with the pass of time it was used to represent the poverty the rural areas suffered. Along the century, the myth will return to the general cultural narrative, even if the styles changed.

This paper is a historical analysis of the situation of the countryside in Spain from a photographic perspective, but also an analysis of the photographic work made by Cristina García Rodero in *España oculta* and how her work was an important point of view regarding a renovated vision of the Spanish rurality, something that, even with the current demographic crisis, it changed since 1975, culturally talking.

Following the main goal stated at the beginning of this work, which was: *to explain the relationship between these photographers, their work and how they showed the rural areas in Spain*, the following research questions were made:

1. Why is España oculta important regarding a humanized message of the Spanish rurality?

It is difficult to show the true impact of *España oculta* in certain contemporary messages regarding the Spanish rurality. However, it is clear, following the analysis of the pictures and what Cristina García Rodero says, that the pictures from this book need to be put in the historical context of Spain during the '70s and the '80s, when Spain suffered a lot of changes after Franco's dictatorship.

Cristina García Rodero mentions how she was not the only one working in the rural areas at that time, but she was the one working in Spain for the longest time with these topics. She describes the Spanish traditions as a 'treasure', and this definition fits perfectly with this humanized photography she develops, closely related to what Inge Morath made almost 20 years before, or what some members from *La Palangana* developed from their more surrealist photography. The referents and inspirations could be different, but all three are not far from the tradition started by Henri Cartier-Bresson and his 'decisive moment'.

That human treasure represented as a lifestyle and traditions is also a way to talk about ethnographic studies regarding the Spanish rural areas. All the photographic works followed

during this research are valuable material to understand the rural life in Spain during the 20th century. The rural areas were poor, and as it was mentioned many times, the *España negra* myth has a big weight on the way rurality was represented. Even if there are always points of view and visions that could distort the work, in general, it is possible to say that there is honesty and respect in most of the works developed, elements that helped to show fairly this Spanish rurality, where traditions and religion have a weight as big as the pessimist myth.

España oculta is one of the most important works when it comes to talking about photography and culture further than dark representations of the rural lifestyle in Spain and, even if its impact or influence in society is not big, its influence in the Spanish photographic world is highlightable, creating a school of new contemporary photographers during the '90s and the beginning of the 21st century.

2. How did photography show the Spanish rurality along the 20th century? What are those common elements found between the different works made?

The appearance of photography in Spain, during the last third of the 19th century did not help to a positive representation of the rural areas. The historical context, marked by the constant loss of the American colonies along the century, would create this huge feeling of pessimism in the country, especially in the cultural societies and intellectuals. Goya represented that feeling already at the beginning of the 19th century and the writers and artists from different disciplines from the last years of that century would create the *España negra* myth, a concept basic to understand not just the representation of rural areas, but also certain ways of thinking that Spanish people have about their own country.

The myth is not just the social construction of the Spanish national pessimism, but it was used as a tool to show the problems the country had, but without giving clear solutions to them. Photography then, plays a key role in the representation of the Spanish rural areas, being a substitute of painting as the more visual way of representation. In general, it is possible to say that poverty is one of the few elements always repeated in all the pictures from the 20th century, with different approaches to it, though. While W. Eugene Smith focused most of his attention on this element, Cristina García Roderó did not use it that much and, as a matter of fact, she talks about the richness these places and people have through their popular culture.

However, Spanish traditions are probably the most common topic used by all the photographers mentioned throughout this thesis. All of them approached the holidays and old rites, Christian or not, to represent the rural areas too. These photographers became ethnographers during their

work. The case of Piedad Isla is clear, making a collection of objects used in the countryside during her life. These photographers tried to understand and respect the land they were portraying, using the lifestyle and the traditions as an important tool to understand the life in this ‘unknown’ Spain, a country to be discovered and that fascinated who decided to work there, as both Hielscher and García Rodero said, even if more than 50 years separate their work at rural Spain.

3. What relationship is it possible to find between the work made by García Rodero and the work made by other photographers in the rural areas of Spain along the 20th century?

Cristina García Rodero managed somehow with her work in *España oculta* to put together the tradition of Spanish photography from the 20th century. There are three important elements regarding this: topic, style and message.

Using the Spanish Civil War as the historical event that parted the Spanish photography in two different processes, it is possible to find similarities in García Rodero’s work with the photographers from the beginnings of the 20th century. With Ortiz Echagüe she shares certain artistic styles, like the use of cloudy skies as an element to give certain feelings and tridimensionality to the images. However, following what Cristina mentions during the interview regarding her photographic education, it is difficult to establish a true connection between both photographers. What seems more probable regarding these similarities is the fact that Ortiz Echagüe is a pictorialist, following a style closely related to art and give the appearance of paintings to the pictures, while García Rodero has an artistic background thanks to her Fine Art education. So, it is possible to affirm a connection because of art, but not because of a direct influence. Moreover, focusing just on Ortiz Echagüe’s pictures about religion, it is also possible to find similarities with García Rodero’s work, but just because of the topics. The approaches are different because Ortiz Echagüe was closer in time to *España negra* in its origins, a powerful myth showing Spain in a pessimistic way. On the other hand, García Rodero humanized similar subjects to the ones in the pictures made by Ortiz Echagüe. As a matter of fact, she denies her work to be compared with the myth.

Regarding the other Spanish rural photographer from this first period, the similarities and relationship are less clear. With Luis Escobar, it is possible to talk about this concept of humanization of rural subjects. Escobar, thanks to his strong political commitment, was able to show people from the areas he portrayed in Albacete in a more humanly, especially the ones in rural areas, where he also portrayed some holidays and traditions. However, his archive is

limited and still being studied, and even if he worked in the area for around 20 years, some of the most highlightable pictures taken by Escobar were the ones during the Civil War.

During the second period of Spanish rural photography, something similar to Escobar's photography happens with Piedad Isla. Her work, like the one of the photographer from Albacete, is very limited when it comes to space (a very specific area in just one province in both cases), but Piedad Isla insists more on the rural lifestyle as the main subject of her photography. What makes the work of these two photographers like the one made by Cristina is how they humanized the people living in rural areas. In the cases of Escobar and Isla is possible that this vision of the rural areas and its inhabitants comes from the fact that they worked in the places they were born and lived most of their life. The feeling related to their hometown and the people they could know is something possible to see in their pictures. Something similar happens in García Rodero's images, since a similar feeling came from her experience in Italy, which helps to give this humanized vision of rural Spain, more common on photographers from the last third of the century though.

When it comes to *La Palangana*, Cristina García Rodero suggests them as part of her inspiration. It is not a surprise when she also mentions the Italian neorealist photographers as her first models to follow. *La Palangana*, as it was mentioned, showed deep care for the rural areas, but with a new kind of photography, more surrealist and far from the techniques and styles used in Spain at that time. As a matter of fact, some of the photographers from *La Palangana* are considered as some of the most important Spanish photographers from the '60s and the beginning of the '70s, before Franco's death and the appearance of the new generation of photographers mentioned along this work. The compositions used by some members of *La Palangana* are some things shared with Cristina García Rodero, but their relationship is more related with the respect for the characters and their work as the first base of the changes the Spanish photography would suffer from the '60s and deeply in the '70s.

Foreign photographers deserve a different paragraph. Their background is different, and they acted in different ways. With Kurt Hielscher, one of the most important things to highlight was his ability to travel before 1920 around the whole country, showing those towns, places and traditions far from what appeared in the travel guides, which usually mentioned Madrid and Barcelona. Hielscher is not coming from the school of the strong Spanish pictorialism with Ortiz Echagüe or the studio photography and that is possible to be seen in *Das unbekanntes Spanien*, through pictures that show the reality, still far from the humanism from the following

decades, but showing a different reality of the Spanish rurality, not as dark as the Spanish photographers, who were influenced by the *España negra* myth.

The case of Inge Morath is different. The Austrian photographer would travel many times and for years around Spain. Her work should be framed as images taken by someone surprised about the things she found in Spain and treating people with respect. This is probably the biggest relationship between Morath and García Rodero because also Cristina explains how she respected people, traditions and places she visited. In both photographers it is possible to see influences of Henri Cartier-Bresson and the ‘decisive moment’ in a picture, and even if Morath’s work is so broad because she visited all that she could visit without a unique focus, she managed to show a different vision from the post-war Spain, full of respect and working as a truly ethnographic material from the reality of the ‘50s. In García Rodero’s work, it is possible to see that respect too for what she is portraying, even if she is focusing most of the time on rites and traditions.

“In my opinion, what happens to photography is that it is so visible, and it arrives at everybody’s heart and they can understand it. But if the work is made with honesty and the research is good, then this kind of work could be done from different points of view. In the end, I think photography is about emotion and it is like a mirror.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

Finally, W. Eugene Smith is the paradigm of a foreign photographer that worked the *España negra* myth with its darkest face. Deleitosa was poor and most of the data mention in the reportage is true, as Susperregui (2009) mentions, but that does not mean that the pictures represented well the reality of that place. What is dangerous about Smith’s work in Deleitosa is the vision his work created about Spain, just because of his political ideas. *Spanish village* is considered one of the masterpieces of photojournalism, but even considering the good quality of the photographic work made by Smith, it is not easy to forget how he manipulated pictures and created a biased essay just to be a critic of the Spanish dictatorship. However, as Caro Baroja says in *España oculta*’s prologue, it is a different point of view and it should be respected, but in opposition to *Spanish village* we can find *España oculta*, a book that humanizes people from rural areas, that shows and respects their relationships and their deep traditions. Smith shows in some pictures similar topics like the ones shown by García Rodero, but with a different result, darker and more pessimistic about people and their place.

Summarizing, there are possible connections between all the photographers mentioned throughout this work and Cristina García Rodero, some regarding the art and style behind the pictures, as it happens with Ortiz Echagüe, and others with opposition in the treatment of the subject, as it happens with Smith.

4. Is it possible to put García Rodero's work in context with the current Spanish rurality?

Cristina García Rodero was a witness of the changes the rural Spain suffered during the first years after the dictatorship fell. Her work must be put in that specific context, which is highlightable in Spain's history because of the comeback of democracy and the deep changes in practically every aspect of the social life of the country, including culture. However, even if traditions started to be more respected, the Spanish rurality was still considered as something old and far from the new waves, as Cristina describes.

"I enjoyed Spain at the same time a lot of people were horrified about it because it smelled like a priest or like Franco, but that was the country we had. Religion and politics influenced a lot. To have those two elements together is the worst thing that could happen to a country because they can control your life on every single level. Over the years, things started to change, and those holidays and places are seen as backwardness were considered as part of the roots and identity of the Autonomous communities, so we needed to protect them."

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

García Rodero's work needs to be studied because is a complex portrait of the rural reality during a complex time in Spain, but that does not mean that her work could be put in context with the current situation of the rural areas. Even if the messages are similar, the situations are different. Nowadays, the complaints coming from rural areas are more regarding to the services and equality of them in comparison to rural areas. Culture is different now. The festivals, holidays and processions Cristina used to visit are now mass events calling tourists, one of the main sources of income for the towns. The poverty described in the rural areas during the 20th century practically does not exist anymore, or it is a different kind of poverty. The fight now is more related to attract people to live and move to rural areas, which are becoming empty because of the lack of solutions for this land for decades. As a matter of fact, following the data published by *INE*, the National Statics Institute of Spain, around 20% of the Spanish population lives in 80% of the geographical territory. Works as *Alma tierra*, the book made by José Manuel Navia, are more close to the current problems than *España oculta*, even if García Rodero's pictures are important in Spanish contemporary photography.

5. How are the rural culture and society in Spain and its relationship with photography?

The *España negra* myth and its weight in the Spanish culture from the 20th century is so highlightable and it is impossible to understand the models of representation in Spain without understanding it. The myth managed to evolve and adapt to new generations, people and situations. It even appeared in works made by foreigners because in the end the *España negra* myth is basically a pessimistic way to show the problems Spain faced along the last century in moments of crisis. Even if Cristina García Rodero does not consider her work as part of *España negra* because she humanized the countryside and its inhabitants, it is also possible to say that the background itself does not help to escape completely from the myth. Cristina probably made the first steps for a humanized rural photography. In the same way, *La Palangana* made the first steps for a stylistic change of photography in Spain during the '60s.

“Spain cannot come back to the España negra myth because now there is education and education democratizes a country more than politics, even if the use of the myth has been beneficial for some people always.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

Photography managed to show along the 20th century a different Spain, far from typical traditions known worldwide, like *San Fermín*. A country that not even some people in Spain knew well. If during the first half of the century rural photography was always more pessimistic and dark, the styles being used from the '60s started to respect and show in a different way this other half of Spain, forbidden but so rich, culturally talking. Photographers understood their role as witnesses, and they showed to the world a rurality that was vanishing. In the end, Cristina García Rodero is the result of the evolution process of Spanish rural photography.

“Because all these things are popular and ephemeral art. (...) Above everything else, it is history, tradition and feelings.”

(C. García Rodero, personal interview, January 8, 2021)

It does not matter if we talk about a black, vanishing, hidden, mysterious or unknown Spain. In this context all these words become synonyms. Rural Spain is all this because its own circumstances created that. The poverty, lack of education and other historical issues regarding rural areas in Spain were exaggerated using the *España negra* myth, which helped to increase the negative feelings regarding the countryside. Since some problems persist, the myth manages to evolve and persists too, but weaker than 100 years ago.

8.1. Scope for a future research

There is an important possibility to scope this topic for future research. Rurality keeps being represented with certain stereotypes currently, but rurality is also a possibility of future development for countries around the world. Photography in Spain managed to change certain pessimist messages regarding rurality and its inhabitants. The analysis of this photographic work is important to understand the people's behaviour in certain societies, their traditions, and the history of those places. Ethnographic studies using photography as the main source to understand the culture of a country and know better the roots.

This project just focuses on the study of rural photography in Spain along the 20th century. There are options to study rural photography from the first decades of the 21st century, with a different context in comparison with what it is possible to find along the last one in Spain. Together with that, rurality and the problems, solutions, speeches, and approaches to it are also a phenomenon taking place in other countries around the world. There is a scope to study the role of rural photography in other countries, where rurality was or is strong, and with a photographic background. This could be done to find similarities or differences in the social role of rural photography in different countries, since the concept of rurality is not uniform and universal, and it has a different definition in every country or region of the world.

Regarding the Spanish rural photography, there is a possible approach to it with a more delimited period or focusing on fewer photographers or others that are just being mentioned throughout this project.

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