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***Mundo Hispánico* versus *Life*: “Spanish Village” by W. Eugene Smith and the Debate over Spain in Illustrated Magazines (1949-1952)**

***Mundo Hispánico* versus *Life*: “Spanish Village” de W. Eugene Smith y el debate sobre España en revistas ilustradas (1949-1952)**

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**ABSTRACT:** Around 1950 there was an intense debate about U.S. aid to Francoist Spain. American magazines such as *Look* and *Life* devoted attention to the Spanish issue, and used *photo essays* to visually argue their positions. This article seeks to examine how this controversy was created through these *photo essays* that appeared in American magazines, the reaction of the Spanish public, and the response to American critics by magazines such as *Mundo Hispánico* and *Semana*. These cases demonstrate how part of the debate was also an image campaign structured around *photo essays* published in said illustrated magazines.

**RESUMEN:** *Alrededor de 1950 se produjo un intenso debate sobre la ayuda de EE.UU. a la España franquista. Revistas americanas como Look y Life dedicaron atención a la cuestión española, y se utilizaron ensayos fotográficos para argumentar visualmente sus posiciones. Este artículo tiene por objeto examinar cómo se creó esta controversia a través de estos ensayos fotográficos que aparecieron en revistas americanas, la reacción de la opinión pública española, y la respuesta a los críticos americanos en revistas como Mundo Hispánico y Semana. Estos casos demuestran cómo parte del debate fue también una campaña de imagen estructurada en torno a ensayos fotográficos publicados en dichas revistas ilustradas.*

**Keywords:** W. Eugene Smith, “Spanish Village,” illustrated press, francoist propaganda, photo essay.

**Palabras clave:** W. Eugene Smith, "Spanish Village", revistas ilustradas, propaganda franquista, ensayo fotográfico.

### 1. Introduction

“Photography is a potent medium of expression –wrote W. Eugene Smith–. Properly used it is a great power for betterment and understanding; misused, it can kindle many troublesome fires.”<sup>1</sup>

When Eugene Smith said this in 1948, photography already had a notable public presence. Photojournalism was established during the inter-war period, when the first generation of graphic magazines was developed, alongside the first lightweight cameras such as *Leica* and *Ermanox*. Towards the end of the thirties, these publications were substituted by a new generation of magazines that would dominate the post-war period. In just a few years, *Life*, founded in 1936, would acquire an enormous amount of power thanks to its popularity. Before the television was introduced, illustrated magazines occupied a fundamental role in contemporary visual culture. “In recent years, periodicals have devised a technique of blending pictures with words to create a new means of communication”<sup>2</sup>, wrote Daniel Mich in 1945.

The model established by Robert Capa –deceased, 1954– and other great photographers that participated in the Spanish Civil War and later in the Second World War, popularized the profession of photojournalism, which mixed commitment and adventure. In that way, in the decade of the 1950’s, a consolidated concept of photography was understood as the new “global medium of communication”<sup>3</sup>. This idea was at the foundations of *Life* magazine’s project, one of which’s sources were the ideas of Daniel Longwell, who described photojournalism as “a new language, difficult, as yet un-mastered, but incredibly powerful and strangely universal”<sup>4</sup>. This same idea was the inspiration for *The Family of Man*, an

<sup>1</sup> EUGENE SMITH, W., “Photographic Journalism”, *Photo-Notes*, June, 1948, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> MICH, Daniel D., *The Technique of Picture Story*, McGraw-Hill Company, New York, 1945, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> LEBECK, Robert, and DEWITZ, Bobo von, *Kiosk. Eine Geschichte der Fotoreportage 1839-1973*, Steidl, Göttingen, 2001, p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> LONGWELL, Daniel, *Four Hours a Year: a Picture-Book Story of Time Inc.’s Third Major Publishing Adventure: The March of Time*, Time Inc., New York, 1936, p. 3. For the relationship between Longwell’s ideas with *Life*, PETERSON, Theodore, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1964, p. 349.

exposition-manifesto organized by Edward Steichen in 1955, which lasted for a time<sup>5</sup>. Still in 1989, John Szarkowski referred to photography as “the visual *lingua franca* of modern life”<sup>6</sup>. Alongside this vision, somewhat simple view of the visual culture of the Cold War, recent revisions of this topic have attempted to restore the fundamental role that the public played in the viewing of photography.<sup>7</sup> During this historical context, magazines such as *Life* would play a paradoxical role. On the one hand –as Mary Panzer pointed out– “they advertised the modern, sophisticated, international aspect of the particular nation or region of their publication”. However, on the other hand, the mission would be “to promote and consolidate national identities with stories about media stars, revered monuments, politics, the landscape, local heroes and scandal, applying distinctly national perspectives to international events and issues”. She then concluded: “Photojournalism may be a universal language, but the uses to which it is put invariably remain local”<sup>8</sup>.

This can be clearly seen when taking into account the public of the large illustrated magazines that were published during the Cold War. Benedict Anderson pointed out the role of the “lavishly illustrated books for public consumption” in the configuration of the “imaginary nationalist”<sup>9</sup>. According to Anderson, the spreading of specific images, through postcards, art catalogues and illustrated magazines would be one of the means in which Nation-States would create “imagined communities”, which were actually contemporary nations. The main illustrated magazines of the post-War period held an important role in this process.

From this point of view, this article will review a few cases of the photographic debate that took place between the United States and Spain towards the end of the forties. The possibility of giving economic aid to the Spanish regime quickly converted into a public discussion: if it would be politically beneficial, the fact that it meant cooperating with a former ally of the Axis powers, and that it would help a country with no democratic rule. Illustrated magazines introduced this discussion through images. In April 1949 Dimitri Kessel published a photo essay in *Life*, and in January 1951 *Look* published another, much more critical than this first, by Ivan Massar and Leonard Schugar. However, out of all these photo essays, “Spanish Village”, by W. Eugene Smith created the most impact. Published by *Life* in April 1951, Eugene Smith’s photo essay was extremely successful in the United States, but its Spanish reception was, logically, much more problematic.

The image of Spain offered through these photo essays, more or less critical, openly contrasts that of the principal Spanish magazines. Among them, *Mundo Hispánico* [Hispanic World] was the magazine that Francoist authorities utilized as a means of expression in the presence of North American publications, by using photographs and controversial articles that aimed to dismount critiques against Franco’s Spain.

<sup>5</sup> BACK, Jean, and SCHMIDT-LINSEHOFF, Viktoria, *The Family of Man 1955-2011. Humanismus und Postmoderne: eine Revision von Edward Steichens Fotoausstellung*, Jonas Verlag, Marburg, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> “A remarkable number of the photography teachers who established the new programs of the 1960s had been students of the Institute of Design, and they preserved that school’s basic posture, teaching photography not as a professional speciality but as the visual *lingua franca* of modern life”, SZARKOWSKI, John, *Photography Until Now*, MOMA, New York, 1989, p. 269.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, reception of *The Family of Man* in SANDEEN, Eric J., “The International Reception of The Family of Man”, *History of Photography*, vol. 29, n° 4, Winter 2005; or the study of the reception of the magazine *URSS en construcción*, WOLF, Erika, “When Photographs Speak, to Whom do They Speak? The Origins and Audience of SSSR na stroike (USSR in Construction)”, *Left History*, vol. 6, n° 2, Fall 1999.

<sup>8</sup> PANZER, Mary, *Things as They Are. Photojournalism in Context since 1955*, Chris Boot, London, 2005, pp. 19 and 10.

<sup>9</sup> ANDERSON, Benedict, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 2006, p. 182.

In this context, this article will use the existing historiography of “Spanish Village” in order to highlight the reaction of the Spanish regime and its attempt to refute, with its own images, what the North American press publicized. In this way, Spanish media, mainly through magazines such as *Mundo Hispánico* and *Semana*, [Week] offered abundant responses to the photo essay published in *Life*, by way of response articles as well as numerous letters to the editor that were published. Other photo essays, like those of Massar and Schugar, published in *Look*, were the object of similar reactions.

Along with these critical reactions, personal papers of Eugene Smith have been found that include correspondence showing the reaction of his friends and other photographers to the photo essay published by *Life* in the case of “Spanish Village”<sup>10</sup>. This allows for the contrasting of the reception, openly opposing, to the photo essay within diverse contexts. The comparison of this material will provide a better understanding of the images used in the debate over the Spanish regime during this time period.

## 2. The “Spanish world” on paper

*Mundo Hispánico* was the highest quality magazine published in Spain towards the end of the forties. It was a publication created in 1948 by the Institute of Hispanic Culture with the objective of spreading “Hispanic” ideology, as opposed to Soviet communism and United States liberalism. Subtitled, “the magazine of 23 countries”, its public was, from the beginning, ambiguous: on the one hand, the “inner circle” was comprised of Spaniards; and on the other, the vast community of Hispanic-Americans and Spanish residents throughout the rest of the world. The goal of the magazine was to “reflect in its pages the subtleties of the life, culture and spirit of the Hispanic peoples”<sup>11</sup>, meaning that its objective would be to foster a certain group conscience that, in the midst of the two-sided logic of the Cold War, was neither Anglo-Saxon nor Soviet.

To promote the spread of said “Hispanic” ideology in Francoist Spain was a delicate task, as one must keep in mind the regulations in force during that time period. In 1941, an order from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explicitly prohibited “the free use of the world Hispanic”, using the argument that it was obligatory “in each moment safeguard the respect and decorum of everything symbolizing the State, National Movement and our historical and spiritual values”<sup>12</sup>. Accordingly, this word meant “the group of nations integrated in the Hispanic world” and “its peculiar spirit and understanding of life, common historical tradition and superior universal destiny”. These prohibitions were issued upon request by the Council of the Hispanic World, which in 1946 was changed to the Institute of Hispanic Culture, to which “corresponded safeguarding the spirituality of the word *Hispanic*”<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> For “Spanish Village” see: HUGHES, Jim, *W. Eugene Smith: Shadow and Substance. The Life and the Work of an American Photographer*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1989; WILLUMSON, Glenn G., *W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; BRANDES, Stanley and DE MIGUEL, Jesús M., “Fotoperiodismo y etnografía: el caso de W. Eugene Smith y su proyecto sobre Deleitosa”, *Revista de dialectología y tradiciones populares*, vol. LIII, nº 2, 1998; DE MIGUEL, Jesús M., “W. Eugene Smith y España”, in *W. Eugene Smith*, Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, 1999; and FERNÁNDEZ, Horacio, *Variaciones en España. Fotografía y arte 1900-1980*, La Fábrica, Madrid, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, October, 1949, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> “Orden de 17-5-1941 del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores por la que se prohíbe el libre uso del vocablo Hispanidad”. Archivo de la Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, Madrid [henceforth AAECI]. Section 238 (3379).

<sup>13</sup> “Minuta”, 17-2-1962. AAECI. Section 238 (3379).

As a representative of this Institute, *Mundo Hispánico*, in whose name the prohibited word could be found, held an important role. According to its directors, the magazine should direct itself to Spain and Latin-American countries, without appearing to be propaganda. They would try to “avoid suspicions from rivals, who if they suspected [it] was financed by the State, would order a boycott against the magazine [...]. If we give any reason for this suspicion to be created, the consequences could be catastrophic”<sup>14</sup>. This was extremely important during a time that was of utmost difficulty for Spanish international relations, even in Latin-America. As the Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs relayed to the Spanish Ambassador in 1945, during that time period, “not even one Latin-American country was pleased by Franco’s regime”<sup>15</sup>.

In any case it should be pointed out that –as can be seen– *Mundo Hispánico* was an official publication, without massive diffusion, but nonetheless reached a select and influential public through diffusion by Spanish Embassies, and by individual subscriptions and those of cultural institutions. As an “official” publication, it cannot be considered a reflection of the so-called “public opinion”; in fact, the existence of public opinion is doubtful during Spain’s forties, as a censorship system was in place from 1937 –during the Spanish Civil War– until 1966.<sup>16</sup> *Mundo Hispánico* served as a vehicle to spread a vision of the country that most interested the regime, through the Institute of Hispanic Culture.

The image of Spain portrayed in the pages of *Mundo Hispánico* was specific to its historical time period: attempts were made to define this “Hispanic” ideology as a third way of being, somewhere between the two opposing forces of the Cold War. In synthesis, it was a defence of “pan-Hispanicism, Catholicism and authoritarianism in the face of pan-Americanism, laity and democracy of the United States”<sup>17</sup>. The historical references were indispensable, because they attempted to represent continuity with the Spanish cultural tradition. For this reason, *Mundo Hispánico* was predominated by historical and traditional issues over allusions to current Spanish topics in its search for a national essence. In this manner each issue of the magazine published stories about Spanish and Latin-American historical monuments with the objective of underlining the links that united these peoples, thereby justifying the promotion of a certain unity between these different countries.

The photo essay published in 1948 about Enrique Larreta’s visit to Ávila proves a solid example. Larreta had just been given an award, the Great Cross of Alfonso X the Wise, as he was considered an example of “fidelity to the Hispanic spiritual tradition”<sup>18</sup>. The text exalts the work of the celebrated Spanish-Argentine, who had dedicated part of his literary work to Ávila. The images (fig. 1), signed by Lara, show the great monuments of the city, in line with tourism guides of the area and the traditional architecture of the zone. Above all, an ample panoramic view of the walls over the Castilian landscape can be seen, with the footnote: “Preserved within the walls is the spirit of the City of the Knights, intact.”

<sup>14</sup> Following this, he indicated that “under no circumstances should the magazine indicate that it is a representative of the Institute, but that, on the contrary, it should appear to be edited by a private company, with its Board of Directions, writers, managers, artistic office, photographic department, commercial department, etc.”, Alfredo Sánchez Bella and Manuel Jiménez Quílez, “Anticipo de informe sobre *Mundo Hispánico*” sent to Joaquín Ruiz Giménez, San José de Costa Rica, 30-6-1947. Archivo General de la Universidad de Navarra / Archivo Alfredo Sánchez Bella [AGUN/AASB].

<sup>15</sup> Conde de Bulnes, letter to Alberto Martín Artajo, November 1945, cited in PORTERO, Florentino, *Franco aislado. La cuestión española (1945-1950)*, Aguilar, Madrid, 1989, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> On this topic, see SINOVA, Justino *La censura de prensa durante el franquismo (1936-1951)*, Barcelona, Debolsillo, 2006; and the first person account by DELIBES, Miguel, *La censura de prensa en los años 40 (y otros ensayos)*, Valladolid, Ámbito, 1985.

<sup>17</sup> TUSELL, Javier, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial: entre el Eje y la neutralidad*, Temas de Hoy, Madrid, 1995, p. 246.

<sup>18</sup> “Enrique Larreta y su novia para siempre”, *Mundo Hispánico*, September 1948, p. 7.

Fig. 1: “Enrique Larreta y su novia para siempre”, *Mundo Hispánico*, September 1948, pp. 8-9



In this way, the story resembled in no way a documentary: it was a series of photographs of traditional monuments, not interpreted as a record of a precise moment in time, but as a reflection of a “spirit” (in a declaration that responded point by point to the belief in “spirits”, that Karl Popper would later define as “historicism”<sup>19</sup>).

The Spanish press presented an idyllic and archaic image of the country that corresponded in very few circumstances to what was actually happening within the country. Indirectly, this could explain itself through the previously mentioned censorship system that did not limit itself to prohibiting certain contents, but also spread others. This could explain the uniformity with which *Mundo Hispánico* was dedicated to spreading an idyllic and timeless image of a country through which time seemed not to pass; and likewise, its monolithic reaction to certain issues, as this article will soon explore.

### 3. The Debate over Franco’s Spain

In Spain, this Latin-American propaganda was created in order to “counteract the influence of the United States”<sup>20</sup>, and also to legitimize the Spanish regime as a continuator of a “universal mission” whose reason for being was most important in Latin-America<sup>21</sup>.

By 1948, when *Mundo Hispánico* came into being, Spain found itself in a difficult situation, marked by autarky and isolation. The Spanish regime was, by the standards of the international public opinion, a fascist stronghold, and as such would be difficult to defend<sup>22</sup>. In March 1946, the French, United Kingdom and United States governments issued a

<sup>19</sup> “Now I have not the slightest sympathy with these ‘spirits’ [of an age, of a nation, of an army] –neither with their idealistic prototype nor with their dialectical and materialistic incarnations- and I am in full sympathy with those who treat them with”, POPPER, Karl R., *The Poverty of Historicism* [1957], Routledge, London, 2002, p. 138.

<sup>20</sup> Alfredo Sánchez Bella, note for the Head of State explaining the Institute of Hispanic Culture’s plan of action for 1949, cited in DELGADO, Lorenzo, *Diplomacia franquista y política cultural hacia Iberoamérica 1939-1953*, CSIC, Madrid, 1988, p. 161.

<sup>21</sup> See DELGADO, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> See PORTERO, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

Combined Declaration in which they publicly condemned the Spanish regime<sup>23</sup>. In December of this same year, because of its failure to recognize freedoms such as those of religion, expression and gathering as fundamental rights, the UN condemned Franco's regime and recommended that Spain be excluded from international organizations and its embassies be removed.<sup>24</sup> This resulted in political consequences which very soon became economic consequences, because it meant Spain's exclusion from credits and official aid from the United States. This issue of the Spanish regime was one of the unresolved problems of the Second World War.

However, this situation could not last long. In a cold-blooded display, Franco declared that the United Nations' tactic of isolation "had calmed him down"<sup>25</sup>. On the one hand, the situation presented itself as a prolongation of a heroic Spanish tradition of resistance against overwhelmingly superior enemies which had its beginnings in the roman era, Arab invasions and Napoleonic Wars; on the other hand, in more practical terms, Franco was convinced that, amidst the conflict between Washington and Moscow, his regime was necessary. The fact that the UN condemnation was exclusively diplomatic, with neither direct economic nor military sanctions, was proof that there was no intention of restoring the republican regime. In this way, the situation became one of wait-and-see.

By 1947 the Cold War logic was already in place, meaning the abandonment of the alliance system used during the Second World War. The United States began to assume the role of superpower and positively value a stable and radically anticommunist Spain. Franco's regime was not viewed with kind eyes, but disestablishing it would create tension in the Mediterranean and make the situation even worse. In this way, by the end of the forties, the possibility of collaborating economically with Spain, whose opposition to communism and possible cooperation in military issues compensated for its lack of democratic rule. "The Pyrenees will be a great help in a moment of conflict between Russia and the occidental world"<sup>26</sup>, wrote Jim Farley in the *New York Times*.

All this created a debate over Francoism in the United States.<sup>27</sup> Despite the strategic opportunity of an alliance with Spain, the North American public opinion was opposed, in general, to a dictatorial regime and former ally of Nazi Germany. For this reason, the Spanish regime put into place what was called the *Spanish lobby*;<sup>28</sup> led by José Félix de Lequerica, it was dedicated to defending Spanish interests in the United States (and one of whose collaborators was the recently mentioned Jim Farley).

In what refers to photography, the American press addressed the so-called "Spanish issue" in April 1949, when *Life* magazine published an ample photo essay about Spain. The photo essay was signed by Dimitri Kessel, a photojournalist of Ukrainian origins, who would

<sup>23</sup> Complete text in LLEONART, Alberto and CASTIELLA, Fernando M., *España y la ONU*, vol. I, "(1945-1946): La 'cuestión española'. Documentación básica, sistematizada y anotada", CSIC, Madrid, 1978, pp. 61-62.

<sup>24</sup> See LLEONART and CASTIELLA, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-388.

<sup>25</sup> PRESTON, Paul, *Franco. A Biography*, Harper Collins, London, 1993, p. 563.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, August 4, 1948, cited in JARQUE ÍÑIGUEZ, Arturo, "*Queremos esas bases*". *El acercamiento de Estados Unidos a la España de Franco*, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Alcalá de Henares, 1998, p. 231.

<sup>27</sup> A summary of this journalistic debate from the period can be found in "La Spagna e la stampa internazionale", *Relazioni internazionali. Settimanale di politica estera*, n° 26, 1-7-1950.

<sup>28</sup> On the lobby and its formation, Theodor Lowi, "Bases in Spain", in STEIN, Harold (ed.), *American Civil-Military Decisions*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1963, pp. 675-676.

become one of *Life's* main reporters<sup>29</sup>. According to Kessel, his intention was to “do an essay about Spain, to show how the country appeared ten years after its brutal civil war”<sup>30</sup>.

The first page of the photo essay featured a photograph of a Civil Guard looking at the camera, alongside a road that ran off into the distance of an immense plain (fig. 2). The caption indicated its already ambiguous message: “Franco’s regime, slightly mellowed, looks west for friendship and aid”. Despite the fact that it would later describe the regime’s problems, the title indicated a favourable view of conceding aid to this country that had been excluded from the Marshall Plan<sup>31</sup>.

The text’s author –who remained anonymous– sized up the controversy from its beginning: according to the text, conservative circles valued Franco’s regime and had a positive view of its international acceptance. However, for many others the memory of the Spanish Civil War and Spain’s alliance with the Axis powers made collaboration impossible. “Franco remains a symbol of evil”, he recognized.

Fig. 2: “Spain’s: Franco’s Regime, Slightly Mellowed, Looks West for Friendship and Aid”, *Life*, 4-4-1949, pp. 110-111



Despite these issues, Spain was more than its leaders and the rest of the photo essay showed contrasts evident in a country much needing assistance. The next page showed two very different, opposing realities (fig. 3). In the upper part of the page, a title indicates: “The Church is powerful”, a message that serves to illustrate a photograph of Cardinal Primate Pla y Deniel, with the caption: “In his luxurious Toledo palace”. However, the message that it sought to convey was clear: the Church’s attitude –it stated– was not to intervene in politics, except “to prevent the rise of a communist or socialist government”. This meant that the Church would also be a convenient ally in the fight against the USSR.

<sup>29</sup> “Spain’s: Franco’s Regime, Slightly Mellowed, Looks West for Friendship and Aid”, *Life*, 4-4-1949, pp. 111-123. About *Life's* attitude before Spain, see SWANBERG, W. A., *Luce and his Empire*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1972, pp. 137-141.

<sup>30</sup> KESSEL, Dimitri, *On Assignment: Dimitri Kessel Life Photographer. Foreword by Edward K. Thomson. Text by Dimitri Kessel*, Harry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, New York, 1985, p. 171.

<sup>31</sup> See PORTERO, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-313.



Fig. 3: “Spain’s: Franco’s Regime, Slightly Mellowed, Looks West for Friendship and Aid”, *Life*, 4-4-1949, pp. 112-113



The bottom part of the page contained a reference to agriculture: “The good earth is hard”, read the text. The photograph of the vast extension of olives would serve as a way to indicate the richness of the Spanish soil, meanwhile conveying its need for assistance: “What is desperately needed is a vast irrigation program to reclaim millions of acres which are now yielding nothing neither to rich nor poor”.

This same message would reappear at the end of the photo essay, in a page that contrasted the Barcelona outskirts with the luxurious palace of Julio Muñoz (fig. 4). The contrast of the images could suggest a rather simplistic message, one of opposition of rich and poor. However, the text served to better explain the issue: “This poverty intensifies Spain’s desire for aid, sharpened by the stagnation of the cities themselves, particularly the seaports”. These seaports, especially Barcelona’s, were once well-functioning thanks to people such as Julio Muñoz, but “the export trade that made the city great has virtually disappeared as a consequence of Spain’s political unpopularity”. This was a perfect example of how Spanish entrepreneurs were able to initially achieve success and generate wealth, but economic blocks on the country impeded any growth.

The photo essay did not negate the political difficulties of the country, but clarified them. One page, for example, was dedicated to the political prisoners including two photographs of people under arrest in Franco’s prisons, and the magazine’s text pointed out the fear they suffered. However –the article indicated–, the situation was getting better: the number of prisoners had decreased from 270,000 in 1939 to 37,000 in 1948, while the number of executions –50 daily while the Spanish Civil War ended, according to *Life*–, now did not even reach 50 annually. If Spain did not respect human rights yet, at least it was changing for the better.

In this context, the image of Franco that *Life* offered was no less ambiguous (fig. 5). *El Caudillo*<sup>32</sup> appeared as a friendly athlete who enjoyed hunting. “A true Spanish gentleman”<sup>33</sup>, wrote Kessel, which is how Franco was described in the article. The photo essay recognized

<sup>32</sup> *Translator’s note*: El Caudillo, signifying the Commander and country’s leader, Francisco Franco.

<sup>33</sup> KESSEL, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

that Franco “has executed and tortured a great many people”, but his character was very different from that of the histrionic Mussolini: Franco, instead, led a sombre and Spartan-like lifestyle, and in the face of reporters, what attracted their attention was his simple friendliness.

Fig. 4: “Spain’s: Franco’s Regime, Slightly Mellowed, Looks West for Friendship and Aid”, *Life*, 4-4-1949, pp. 122-123



Fig. 5: “Spain’s: Franco’s Regime, Slightly Mellowed, Looks West for Friendship and Aid”, *Life*, 4-4-1949, pp. 114-115



*Life's* photo essay was quite ambiguous. A quick look at the photographs could give a negative impression: government officials, businessmen and clergy living in palaces, while others worked arid and infertile land, survived in slums and simply watched time pass in prison. The text, however, added a series of nuances that smoothed this interpretation: in reality, there were businessmen and people who were concerned about social welfare and with open-mindedness –among them Cardinal Herrera Oria–, who needed help in order to get ahead.

In any case, it did not appear that the Francoist authorities were bothered. In fact, historical documents show that during this trip, authorities tried to ease any possible financial and customs issues that might arise for Kessel. This occurred when others had difficult experiences: for example, the magazine *US Camera* told of photographer Howard Byrne's trip to Spain in 1948, and the constant difficulties he met while trying "to focus his camera lens on anything that was not the happy side of Spanish life"<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4. "Black Spain" according to Eugene Smith

The conclusion of Kessel's photo essay is that, despite its government officials, aid was necessary for Spain. During the same dates that this photo essay was published, Eugene Smith began to work on another photo essay about Spain that would also be published by *Life*. Smith's objective was to speak of the supply problems of the country, in the context of the debate over the concession of economic aid to Franco's Spain. The public opinion regarding this issue was complicated. The magazine *Time* –which pertained to Time Inc., as did *Life*, and founded by Henry Luce– summarized this issue in August 1950:

Most Americans don't like Francisco Franco, never have and probably never will. They didn't like the way he got to power with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, or the dictatorial way he stayed in power. In his favor it could only be said that, along with his fulminations against democracy, he had also been anti-Communist. There was one other thing to be said for Franco's Spain: its location.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of the conflict with Russia –recognized *Time*–, many United States soldiers thought of Spain as a possible place for a naval base. In that manner, though ideologically condemnable, Francoist Spain became more and more opportune.

At the same time, the United States public opinion with respect to Spain was beginning to change: in a poll taken November 1948, which surveyed the attitude of citizens to Franco's regime, 86% said they were in favor of Spain's incorporation to the UN; 65% were convinced that, in the case of war, Spain would be important to the United States; only 8% were against sending an ambassador to Madrid.<sup>36</sup>

Eugene Smith, radically against Franco and conscious of the persuasive capacity of photography, decided to enter this debate with his photographs. He travelled to Spain in May 1950, a few weeks before the US Senate began debating over the end of its Spanish boycott, and the possibility of granting it economic aid. Smith summarized the matter:

The loan to Franco, now being reviewed by the United States, is, I think, for purchasing fertilizer. The majority of people with which I have worked think that (...) any loan by the United States will not benefit the Spanish people, but that it will be wasted through

<sup>34</sup> "Inside Spain with a Camera", *US Camera*, May 1948, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> "A Fee for Franco?", *Time*, 14-8-1950, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> See PORTERO, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

administrative inefficiency and bribery (...). A loan is clearly an insult to these oppressed people<sup>37</sup>.

If Kessel's photo essay was ambiguous, Smith made sure that his was not, in any way. "I am going to go into a Spanish town, and really do a job in the poverty and the fear brought by Franco"<sup>38</sup>, he wrote. Also indicating, that "under individual pictures I have not placed political opinions", though his political position was no secret: all of the protagonists –he assured– "have been touched by the oppression, the imprisonment, and the murders that must be charged to the government and its supporters –the people to whom we are preparing to give a 100 million dollar helping hand"<sup>39</sup>.

"Spanish Village" was published in *Life* in April 1951<sup>40</sup>. Unlike Kessel, Smith did not attempt to explain the relationship between rich and poor, or the contrast between Spanish regions, but focused on only one case. The idea came to him in an article that appeared in *ABC* in May 1951, in which Gaspar Gómez de la Serna spoke of "a nameless village": these forgotten villages in which it was possible to "suddenly feel immersed in the most common aspects of a Spanish community". Smith underlined the following text from the article: "*This modest hamlet, simple down to the poverty-line, is shouting from out of its unheard silence, is the modesty of Spain itself*"<sup>41</sup>. The photographer scoured the Peninsula in order to find a similar place, and finally found it in a village called Deleitosa in the region of Extremadura, Spain.

A photograph of the First Communion of the Curiel-Montero daughters opened the first page of the photo essay. The Curiel-Montero's were one of the families that collaborated closely with Smith (fig. 6). The photograph shows the mother closing the door to her home while her five daughters await her. One of the girls, Lorenza, was dressed in white, ready to go to the local church to receive Communion. The ground appeared to be rocky and the walls more or less dilapidated. Overall, what drew the readers' attention were the boys, who, not only not dressed for the occasion, but are completely naked. The photograph perfectly illustrates its title: a "Spanish village" living "in ancient poverty and faith".

Fig. 6: W. Eugene Smith, "Spanish Village. It lives in ancient poverty and faith", *Life*, 9-4-1951, pp. 120-121.



## Spanish Village

IT LIVES IN ANCIENT POVERTY AND FAITH

The village of Deleitosa, in the region of Extremadura, Spain, is a place of ancient poverty and faith. It is a place where the people have lived for centuries in a state of constant struggle and hardship. The village is a place of simple life, where the people are content with their lot and find meaning in their faith. The photograph captures a moment of daily life in this village, showing a woman closing the door to her home while her five daughters await her. One of the girls, Lorenza, is dressed in white, ready to go to the local church to receive Communion. The ground appears to be rocky and the walls more or less dilapidated. Overall, what drew the readers' attention were the boys, who, not only not dressed for the occasion, but are completely naked. The photograph perfectly illustrates its title: a "Spanish village" living "in ancient poverty and faith".

<sup>37</sup> W. Eugene Smith, as cited in BRANDES and DE MIGUEL, *op. cit.*, p. 148. Some similar opinions expressed in the North American press, in JARQUE, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>38</sup> W. Eugene Smith, letter to his wife Carmen, March 1950, cited in HUGHES, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>39</sup> W. Eugene Smith, as cited in WILLUMSON, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>40</sup> EUGENE SMITH, W., "Spanish Village. It lives in ancient poverty and faith", *Life*, 9-4-1951, pp. 120-129.

<sup>41</sup> GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA, Gaspar, "Meditación de un pueblo sin nombre", *ABC*, 25-5-1950, p. 3.

The next pages review diverse aspects of life in the village, under a markedly critical point of view: the roman plow still in use, fights over the dividing of plots, the traditional spinning wheel (fig. 7) and the threatening presence of the Civil Guards, frowning and positioned against a rear lit background (fig. 8).

Fig. 7: W. Eugene Smith, “Spanish Village. It lives in ancient poverty and faith”, *Life*, 9-4-1951, pp. 124-125.

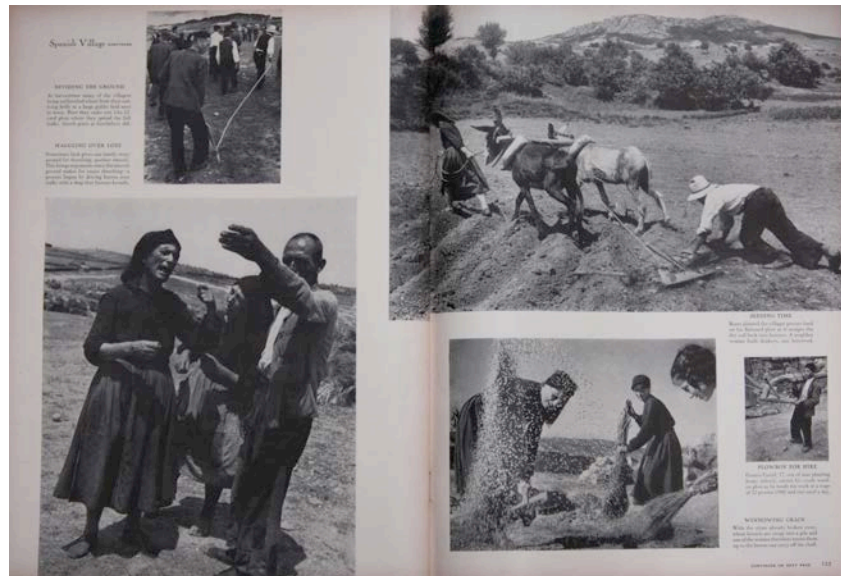


Fig. 8: W. Eugene Smith, “Spanish Village. It lives in ancient poverty and faith”, *Life*, 9-4-1951, pp. 126-127.



What appeared in the magazine was a result produced by Bernard Quint, who chose the images from Eugene Smith’s photographs<sup>42</sup>. To reduce Smith’s more than one hundred images to just the seventeen that were published, Quint threw out a narrative treatment of the images that would only show a local reality, and could not really be considered representative

<sup>42</sup> On this aspect, see FERNÁNDEZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

of what was happening in Spain. In the final elaboration, each photograph would appear as a unique piece, because none of the photographs would be the same size. More than a narration, the photo essay presented each photograph as an independent “symbolic entity”, which established a series of “geometric relations”<sup>43</sup>, thereby giving unity to the whole.

This could be explained by the fact that, in reality, what Smith did was not look for subjects (as Henri Cartier-Bresson proposed when speaking of the “decisive moment” that meant that photographs are created in the viewfinder, without any intervention on the external reality). More precisely, his work method consisted in careful selection of subjects and staging on scene. Ted Castle, one of Smith’s assistants in Spain, remembers: “We spent approximately one whole damned day carefully preparing the scene, and the photographing took at least three hours”<sup>44</sup>. The people being photographed later realized how much work was dedicated to setting the scene. Lorenza Curiel, the girl that appeared in the first image of the photo essay, for example, had received her First Communion a month earlier, which meant that when Smith arrived she put on her white dress exclusively for the photograph, while her sisters and brothers were dressed –or not dressed– as if it were any other day.<sup>45</sup> The photography was more of a symbolic illustration of “poverty and faith” than a document in the strictest sense of the word. Smith, however, had no problem recognizing that to him, it was much more interesting to offer an “honest” image, in accordance with his principles, than aspire to “objectivity” that, in practice, was unattainable<sup>46</sup>.

The photo essay, for these reasons, was far from being objective, but it did have extraordinary images. This can be seen in the photographs of the Civil Guard authorities, comparing the photographs of Eugene Smith with others of the same theme: for example, the previously mentioned photograph that opened Dimitri Kessel’s photo essay, or the photograph of the friendly Civil Guard published by Cartier-Bresson in *Les Européens* (fig. 9). Smith had photographed two authoritative people, in cold and dry backlighting, making them “seem stronger, more powerful”<sup>47</sup>, while both Kessel and Cartier-Bresson showed smiling young men in uniform.

Fig. 9: *Les Européens. Photographies par Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris, Verve, 1955*



<sup>43</sup> Bernard Quint, as cited in HUGHES, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

<sup>44</sup> Ted Castle, as cited in HUGHES, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>45</sup> The story of Lorenza Curiel can be seen in the documentary by Lluís Jené y Oriol Gispert, *El Americano*, included in the DVD edition of the program by Jorge Reverte, *El laberinto español*, RTVE, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> “The journalist photographer can have no other than a personal approach; and it is impossible for him to be completely objective. Honest –yes. Objective –no”, EUGENE SMITH, “Photographic Journalism”, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> W. Eugene Smith, as cited in HUGHES, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

### 5. “The best photo essay ever published by Life”

The result of the photo essay was of extraordinary quality, and it was very well received in the United States. An internal report for *Life* indicated that the April 9 issue had not produced any great controversies, and that Smith’s photo essay had attracted public praise: “The sensitive artistry of Eugene Smith’s photographic essay on a Spanish village received the highest praise, even from those who called the story unfair. His pictures are compared to the great works of an old master and the death scene is called ‘truly a cut gem in cameo’”<sup>48</sup>.

Effectively, that same week *Life* received fourteen letters that praised the artistic quality of the images. However, there were also other opinions. Five readers signalled that the selection of the photographs was tendentious, because “there is no country in the world, including our own that could not furnish a photographer with an album of similar scenes”. Another four thanked Spain for its fight against the “reds”, and three thought that Deleitosa was the spiritual health that was lacking in contemporary society. This was another interpretation: “In countries where religion has the most hold on the people –wrote a reader–, they make less progress, are more ignorant, breed more dictators than in the countries or nations where people are less religious”. It was concluded with a question: “Which comes first to a country: predominant Catholicism or predominant poverty?”<sup>49</sup>. The images, as can be seen, were impacting, although the interpretations they received were far from being uniform.

However, in the photography world the reaction was one of unanimous enthusiasm. In Robert Frank’s opinion, “Spanish Village” was “the best known photo essay that had been published in *Life*”<sup>50</sup>. In the coming weeks, Smith received a rainfall of letters congratulating him on his work. Many of these letters were from photographers and friends.

The photographer Ansel Adams, for example, wrote to Smith telling him that his photo essay on Spain was “one of the *great jobs*”: “When I saw it I found myself proud of my profession. We get immersed in theory and commercialism and criticism; then something like ‘Spanish Village’ shows up and the real focus of the photographic potential is renewed”<sup>51</sup>. Haniel Long assured him that, through his photographs, “you put me in touch with our basic human destitution and moral poverty”<sup>52</sup>.

Ralph Samuels, Dean of the New York Institute of Photography, wrote to *Life* saying that, “in its simplicity and strong composition”, the photographs of Smith’s suffering farmers reminded him of works by Van Gogh and Daumier. “It would be difficult not to read into his pictures the untold part –the pulverizing of a democratic nation under a ruthless dictator, and the abysmal human fried wrought by fascism”<sup>53</sup>.

In the same year, 1951, Smith’s images were selected by Edward Steichen for an exposition in New York’s MOMA, in a collection about the photographic archives of *Life*; the next year *US Camera* reproduced the photo essay in its entirety<sup>54</sup>. The magazine *Modern Photography*

<sup>48</sup> Mabel Schubert, “Life Letters Report Summary: April 9, 1951 issue”, 27-4-1951. Center of Creative Photography Archives, Arizona [hereafter CCPA].

<sup>49</sup> The “Domestic Life Letters Report, for the April 9, 1951 issue” indicates that this week it received 28 letters relative to Eugene Smith’s photo essay. *Life magazine* archives are not accessible to the public, so I must thank Regina Feiler for granting me access to this information, via personal communication, 19 September 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Frank, letter to W. Eugene Smith, 3-6-1952, cited in FERNÁNDEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>51</sup> Ansel Adams, letter to W. Eugene Smith, San Francisco, 5-7-1951. CCPA.

<sup>52</sup> Haniel Long, letter to W. Eugene Smith, Santa Fe (New Mexico), 7-8-1951. CCPA.

<sup>53</sup> Ralph Samuels, letter to *Life Magazine*, 12-4-1951. CCPA.

<sup>54</sup> See *Memorable Life photographs*, New York, MOMA 1951; and MALONEY, Tom (ed.) *US Annual Camera 1952*, US Camera, New York, 1952, pp. 149-159. A summary on the repercussions of Smith’s photo essay in the United States in WILLUMSON, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

published a selection of Smith's images and added a few that had not appeared in *Life*, indicating: "There are no long captions in this portfolio, no extended discussions of the fine points of each photograph. The pictures speak for themselves and *Modern* is proud of the opportunity to show them"<sup>55</sup>.

Similar enthusiasm was not exclusive to the world of photography that saw the photo essay with regard to its aesthetic and technical qualities. Even common magazine readers appreciated Smith's work. A few weeks after the publication, *Life* included a series of letters to the editor about "Spanish Village". A New York reader, for example, wrote in saying that Smith was more than just a photographer: "Eugene Smith's series of photographs ("Spanish Village", *Life*, April 9), out-*Life*'s even *Life*. Mr. Smith probably classifies himself as a photographer. This I challenge. Only a head-to-toe artist –selective, sensitive– could have captured what these superb photographs convey"<sup>56</sup>.

Another reader enthused that she was "overwhelmed by the pictures of the Spanish village", and praised the emotion and dignity "that can only be seen in the greatest artwork". A third reader, a Canadian, thought that the photographs were "absolutely stupendous", capable of representing nothing less than "the soul of Spain"<sup>57</sup> (this recalled the "spirits", ever so frequent in *Mundo Hispánico*).

Of these testimonies, two conclusions can be made. On the one hand, the unanimous enthusiasm that Smith produced in many photographers through his work; and, on the other hand, the strictly formalist reading these images received in the world of photography. Of all the commentaries, only Ralph Samuels paid attention to the content of the images and their political context, and not one personally reacted saying that aid to Franco's Spain should be halted. Some images could be comparable to painting masters, and that is how they were read: like technical and aesthetical master works of photography, out of the path of political implications that a magazine such as *Life* entailed. This was a uniformity of opinions that did not exist in the general public, though the magazine was not interested in such information.

## 6. Spain is not like that

A Canadian might think that "Spanish Village" was an accurate representation of the "soul of Spain". However, the reaction throughout Spain could not have been more different. In the first place, the Spanish Embassy in Washington faced the situation calmly: the same day that "Spanish Village" was published, April 9, the Embassy reportedly sent copies of the magazine to Madrid, without giving it much importance. "The photo essay does not seem to have any political intention, and in it one can see that the conditions of the Spanish population, quite precarious, have always been the same"<sup>58</sup>.

It is not clear up to what point the photo essay made its way through Spain, as the censorship criteria for foreign publications was the same for national publications. In fact, during the same month of April 1951 the magazine *Modern Photography* was removed from Spanish

<sup>55</sup> *Modern Photography*, vol. 15, nº 12, December 1951, p. 79.

<sup>56</sup> HURST, Fannie, "Letters to the Editor", *Life*, 30-4-1951, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Cfr.: RONKIN, Silvia, "Letters to the Editor", *Life*, 30-4-1951, p. 4.; DE MERTEN, M. "Letters to the Editor", *Life*, 30-4-1951, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Eduardo Propper de Callejón, letter to the General Director of Foreign Politics, Washington D.C., 9-4-1951. AGA (10), 54/12769, folder "Propaganda anti-española".



kiosks, because of nude images that appeared in its pages<sup>59</sup>. *Life* was no less affected by this surveillance<sup>60</sup>.

In any case, what is clear is that a week after its publication, copies of the magazine began to circulate through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Spain. In just a short time, a series of telegrams was sent asking for information: on April 30, José Félix de Lequerica asked if Deleitosa pertained to the region of Las Hurdes, bringing up the controversy brought about by the film by Luis Buñuel about the same region<sup>61</sup>. Four days later a negative response arrived from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alberto Martín Artajo; in the letter he indicated that Smith's photo essay was being managed by some of the highest ranking Spanish authorities. A few days before, May 1, the Washington Embassy had sent the previously mentioned letters to the editor that appeared in the April 30 edition of *Life*, all of which coincided "in considering the photographs to be works of art"<sup>62</sup>. This raised attention only because one of them was signed by the well-known novelist Fannie Hurst.

The Spanish authorities that received copies of the magazine did not react with as much unhurriedness. In Spain, Eugene Smith provoked one of the "troublesome fires" that he had spoken of. The situation worsened to such a point that the photographer Robert Frank, who was in Valencia at the time, wrote to Smith to inform him of the situation: "In Spain, *Life* – thanks to your "Spanish Village" – is known as communist press! The police have asked me more than once if I worked for *Life* and if I knew Eugene Smith. I really like Spain –especially the people, so friendly and kind–, but it's very sad that they can't get rid of Franco"<sup>63</sup>.

This indicated up to what point the authorities were preoccupied by Eugene Smith's activities and it is not surprising that the reaction was a product of official orders sent to the press.

Negative responses were not few. *Arte Fotográfico*, the most important photography magazine in Spain at the time, revealed the "unpleasant surprise" it felt upon seeing that "Spanish Village", was "cited as a model to follow" in the Honorary Pages of the World Exposition of Photography of Lucerna. For the critic, however, it was an "indignant and sorry" photo essay:

It is supposed to be a series of "organized" photographs of a town in Extremadura by the North American W. Eugene Smith. Pretty poor photographs, by the way, of sweaty farmers and famished, emaciated and tattered children, hurried priests, civil guards and other cliché anti-Spanish propaganda [...]. A photo essay this terrible and partial, is for that reason in no

<sup>59</sup> This was indicated in a letter by the Provincial Delegate of the León Press, 23 April 1951, AGA, (03) 49. 1, box 21/2044, folder 106: "En el día de la fecha y con ocasión de una inspección ordinaria cursada en los kioscos de venta de periódicos y revistas de esta Capital, han sido retirados con carácter provisional y previo recibo dos ejemplares de la revista *Modern Photography* correspondientes al mes de abril [...]. La citada publicación contiene diferentes desnudos, de realización técnica unos y bastantes más en recuadros de tipo reclamo de propaganda comercial".

<sup>60</sup> Indicated by the General Director of the Press in a letter to the Head of Foreign Press, Madrid, 4 August 1949, AGA (03), 49.1, box 21/2044, folder 162: "Ten la bondad de explicarme cómo es posible que la revista *Life* esté autorizada en agosto del 47, según me dices en tu nota [...], y lleve, por consiguiente, dos años circulando sin que tu Sección se haya enterado ni hayas adoptado ninguna medida para que se ejerza la censura correspondiente".

<sup>61</sup> This reference is interesting, because it utilizes the same arguments against *Las Hurdes* by Buñuel and "Spanish Village" by Eugene Smith: the partiality of the selections. Buñuel stated: "¿Por qué enseñar siempre el lado feo y desagradable? –preguntó [Gregorio Marañón]-. Yo he visto en Las Hurdes carros cargados de trigo [...]. ¿Por qué no mostrar las danzas folklóricas de La Alberca, que son las más bonitas del mundo? [...]. Respondí a Marañón que, al decir de sus habitantes, cada país tiene los bailes más bonitos del mundo y que él demostraba un nacionalismo barato y abominable. Después de lo cual me marché sin añadir una palabra y la película siguió prohibida", BUÑUEL, Luis, *Mi último suspiro*, Plaza & Janés, Barcelona, 1989, pp. 167-168.

<sup>62</sup> Eduardo Propper de Callejón, letter to the General Director of Foreign Politics, Washington D. C., 1-5-1951. AGA, (10), 54/12769, folder "Propaganda anti-española".

<sup>63</sup> Robert Frank, letter W. Eugene Smith, 3-6-1952, cited in FERNÁNDEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

way a model to follow, because the first condition for photojournalism is it they must be objective and impartial<sup>64</sup>.

The critic accepted the only positive point the photography of the burial (fig. 10), and recognized it as “magnificent” (“only from the photographic point of view”; once again, emphasis in the formal). Although in the end he accepted that “the composition and effects of light [...] makes one think too much in calculated staging”.

This was not too far from reality, but should not have been surprising either, as it was a habitual practice among the Spanish and international press at the time. In a text from 1942, for example, Arthur Rothstein accepted without issue the necessity of good staging, which for him meant “to influence not only the subject present in front of the camera, but also the person who would observe the final photograph”<sup>65</sup>. Even Eugene Smith recognized that the “majority of photo essays required a certain amount of planning, adaptation and direction of the scene, to achieve a graphic and editorial coherence”<sup>66</sup>. It was not necessary to go far to find examples: this was exactly –as has been seen– what he did in “Spanish Village”.

Fig. 10: Eugene Smith, “Spanish Village. It lives in ancient poverty and faith”, *Life*, 9-4-1951, pp. 128-129



Much more interesting than the question of staging were the critiques of the photo essay for its thematic selection. The magazine *Semana* considered that “the graphic information used by *Life* tries to make Spain look ridiculous, and in that way, makes a display of naivety and ignorance that we claim to be false”. A similar photo essay could have been created of any other country:

A photographer, travelling to any part of Spain, and reaching a place where he could take these sad photographs would have had to cross ample zones of cultivation that compare to the

<sup>64</sup> DE LA FUENTE RUIZ, Antonio, “La exposición mundial de fotografía de Lucerna (Suiza)”, *Arte Fotográfico*, July 1952, p. 267.

<sup>65</sup> ROTHSTEIN, Arthur, “Direction in the picture story”, *The Complete Photographer*, 1942, cited in LUGON, Olivier, *Le Style Documentaire. D’August Sander à Walker Evans 1920-1945*, Paris, Macula, 2001, pp. 108-109.

<sup>66</sup> EUGENE SMITH, “Photographic Journalism”, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

best in North America. Of course, we have, and not just a few, magnificent tractors from the United States, England and Germany [...] or is it that *Life*'s informer believes that we are so dumb as to send the best of our incomparable car industry [...] and therefore neglect the powerful and modern mechanization of other countries?<sup>67</sup>

Of all the responses to the photo essay by Eugene Smith, the most systematic was that of *Mundo Hispánico*, to which it dedicated a practically monographic issue in July 1951. The journalist Gaspar Gómez de la Serna –an involuntary and partial inspiration to Smith's photo essay– wrote an ample commentary regarding the publication. In the first place, he recognized what was truthful with regard to the issue:

What has been recorded by your [Smith] photographic lens is the tremendous life of some few Spaniards in their lost corner. Don't think that it is news or novelty. We all know well these lost and humble corners of Spain, so perfectly, like you pretend to know what has fallen beneath the area of the powerful informational influence of your dollars. We know which towns are those that have withstood the test of time, in the same conditions of material existence for the past four-hundred years<sup>68</sup>.

However, there was a difference: “With respect and pain we take in that terrible reality, which hurts us horribly, fills us with shame of our collective life”. Contrastingly, *Life* had made “shameless use and scandalous sensationalism” of the situation. The same could be applied “to the last hold-up of the streets of Chicago with its gangsters, or of any erotic setback to one's conjugal life in Movieland” (here he may have been thinking of *Cinelandia*, the novel by his cousin Ramón Gómez de la Serna published in 1923). But the poverty of Deleitosa was “quite more respectable than all of this. When this town is someone's, then, more than respectable, it is deeply tragic and vitally rooted in our own personal destiny”. In that way, De la Serna developed his response with a double argument. To begin, he indicated that the truth requires respect and integrity, which are violated when a photo essay like that of Smith's “takes images, sad images of the village of Deleitosa”, and hurls them away to “nothing more than the public's voracity”. Thus, the images could have been impacting, but did not explain anything about the causes of the lamentable situation in which many places throughout Spain found themselves.

After, he reiterated the partiality of Smith's photo selection. His photographs seemed to say: “This is Spain”, but effectively, Spain was much more than Deleitosa (it was enough to refer to Dimitri Kessel's photo essay to prove it):

His document is so biased –De la Serna continued– as if showing current Spanish life had the weakness of reproducing only images with the most splendid perspectives of our grand cities or of the luxury of our privileged classes. And no; Spain, being one thing and another, is not either one of the two. It will not serve you truthfully and faithfully, for your information, although I find it a confusing propagandistic proposal.

With this approach, the article continued talking about what the Deleitosa case represented for Spaniards, who saw it with a sensibility that was neither “patriotic, pure-blooded nor folkloric”, but as persons who were preoccupied “from the inside for a real recognition of Spain”. This preoccupation had its origin in the ideas of the '98 generation and literature

<sup>67</sup> *Semana*, 24-7-1951, pp. 17-19.

<sup>68</sup> GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA, Gaspar, “Carta al Editor de *Life*”, *Mundo Hispánico*, July 1951, pp. 17-19.

about the “Black Spain”<sup>69</sup>, and was seen continued by Eugene Smith’s “black photography”. This situated the problem in a much wider setting: in that of the “Spanish issue”<sup>70</sup>, that had its roots in a time much earlier, and so –opposing what Eugene Smith had said– could not be reduced to its link with Francoism.

In general, the reaction of international readers was similar to that of Gómez de la Serna: the “overwhelming majority” of the letters to the editor that the international edition of *Life* received insisted that “Spain is not all like that”, by one reader, and considered that Smith had selected “the most wretched village of the most sterile land of Spain. Do you think it is a good policy to humiliate the Spanish people?”<sup>71</sup>.

### 7. Where is modern Spain?

Readers of *Mundo Hispánico* complained that Eugene Smith had centered his photo essay exclusively on the most archaic and backward aspects of Spain. However, the same magazine did not offer an image any more modern of the country, which appeared as a picturesque place, filled with idyllic landscapes and historical monuments, through which time seemed not to pass. Some subscribers of the magazine were enthused with this vision. For example, in 1952 a letter to the editor from Chile was published:

What colorful pages, dedicated to the loveliest wedding of the century..., and those of Benemérita, and those of Madrid! What photographs of the memorable visit of The Commander to Portugal! What a great edition dedicated to the laborious region of Galicia... and of Seville with my *Tacita de oro!*<sup>72</sup>

However, the insistence on architectural tradition, regional dances and classical paintings resulted in a sensation of unreality. The modern world was moving in a completely different direction, and the Spanish press did not seem to care. On one occasion, *Mundo Hispánico* published a photo essay about medieval castles, inciting the response of a reader:

I am going to allow myself to make an observation. I am unsatisfied with the recent article by Fernández Figueroa about Castile, apart from its unquestionable literary quality that insists on the eternal topic of the ruin and desolation of this region. A topic that is not true anymore. It would be better to publicize, for example, with photographs and statistics, the industrial development of Burgos –which has doubled its population–, and speak of the industrial progress of towns such as Béjar, Miranda de Ebro, Reinosa and other regions of Castile, in

<sup>69</sup> This term has its origins in the book by Émile Verhaeren, *La España negra*, translated and illustrated by Darío de Regoyos in 1899, which opened a tradition which others continued, such as José Gutiérrez Solana in his book with the same name, published in 1920.

<sup>70</sup> The issue of national identity was one of the fundamental debates of the post-war period: from the fundamental proposals by Ramón Menéndez Pidal (*Los españoles en la historia*, 1947), Américo Castro (*España en su historia*, 1948), and Claudio Sánchez Albornoz (*España, un enigma histórico*, 1956), to the controversy that Pedro Laín Entralgo dealt with (*España como problema*, 1949) con Rafael Calvo Serer (*España sin problema*, 1949). On this topic, REDONDO, Gonzalo, *Política, cultura y sociedad en la España de Franco (1939-1975)*, vol. II-1, “Los intentos de las minorías dirigentes de modernizar el Estado tradicional español (1947-1956)”, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2005, pp. 39-78.

<sup>71</sup> “Summary International Letters Report for 1951, April 3, 1952”. The data and cited phrases come from personal communication with the author Regina Feiler, 19 September 2012, regarding documentation conserved in the Time-Life archive, which is not open to the public.

<sup>72</sup> CRUZ, Jesús (Santiago de Chile), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, August, 1952, p. 4.

which there is nothing left today of unchanged, old or sad, of the epoch in which these ideas were created<sup>73</sup>.

He was not the only reader with this opinion. Another letter arrived from Mexico, in which the author assured that, in his country, “there exists the belief, frighteningly erroneous, that all of Spain, in general, is behind in everything”. For example –he said– “the people of the middle and lower classes believe that Madrid is a very old town, with trains (streetcars) full of small mules and carriages carrying *chulapa* women dressed in shawls, etc.” He proposed the necessity of a change of image:

This horrible ignorance comes from a lack of modern movies, magazines, newspapers, photographs, etc., of short films in which modern things appear, because all of the short films that reach us end up being about villagers dancing or Holy Week in Seville or some farmhouse, and nothing modern ever reaches us [...]. Everything modern there: games, sports, shows, streets, cabarets, hotels; in short, everything MODERN, NOT OLD. This is what is needed for the masses to begin to admire the Mother Country again, which right now is forgotten or pushed to the background of our thoughts<sup>74</sup>.

The author of the letter attributed the problem to the existence of films such as *Currito de la Cruz* [Currito of the Cross] (1949), and illustrated magazines, which continued to spread cliché and picturesque visions of Spain. Another reader rationalized this approach:

What the letter says is pure truth, because here in Puerto Rico the same thing occurring in all Latin American countries is happening here, that the majority of the people think that in Spain people still travel by donkey, that there are no automobiles, and that the majority of people wear espadrilles, and other things just as ridiculous<sup>75</sup>.

The fault, in his opinion, was that of the magazines, because “it is strange to find a photograph in *Mundo Hispánico* that is of something modern, to demonstrate to the immense public that it is not what they believe, and the same thing is happening through films”.

These commentaries reveal up to what point the image portrayed by magazines such as *Mundo Hispánico* were effective. Its own directors were aware of it. Alfredo Sánchez Bella assured that the magazine had had “extraordinary acceptance, to the point that copies of the magazine ran out”. This was because “in the first editions it had an eminently artistic orientation, touching upon themes of utmost innocuousness, in order to facilitate an entrance, without animosity, in all republics”. For this reason, it was necessary to “increasingly change this aspect, substituting it for articles with greater density and content”, in order to “show the true Spain of today in all its essences and in all its achievements”<sup>76</sup>.

## 8. Against the “black photography” of Spain

One interesting aspect of this argument is that, from the beginning, the controversy developed, not only through verbal arguments, but with visual ones, too. For example, in the

<sup>73</sup> PEDRALBA, Íñigo, “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, October, 1949, p. 58.

<sup>74</sup> CORDERO, Germán (México D.F., 9-10-51), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, April, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> MARTÍNEZ, Genaro (San Juan de Puerto Rico, July, 1952), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, October, 1952, p. 4; Also see VILARÓ, César (Vigo, 13-5-52), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, August, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Alfredo Sánchez Bella, letter to Manuel Lora Tamayo, 27-9-1948. AGUN/AASB. Lora Tamayo was the secretary to the Board of Trustees of Juan de la Cierva of the Superior Council of Scientific Research.

previously cited volume of the magazine *Semana*, Wenceslao Fernández Flórez published another text that linked “the black legend to the black photography about Spain”. *Life*’s information –he assured– had been “concocted, unjust and biased”:

The photographs could be authentic while the information is still deceptive, and instead of being a relief from the fallacy, make its venomous premeditation more evident. In all parts of the world, in the heart of the most prosperous city it is possible for a photographer, without intending, to find emblems, scenes and corners that incite helplessness in those that later contemplate them. A beggar is never a paradigm for prosperity. Throughout the immense extension of the earth, without exception, beggars exist<sup>77</sup>.

The argument was the same once again: a similar photo essay could have been created about the United States. In order to demonstrate this, they compared the photographs of *Life* with others that refuted them: (fig. 11) beside a roman plow sat a modern tractor, the poor streets of Deleitosa juxtaposed with the clean streets of a recently built town, etc. The article by Fernández Flórez was illustrated with a photograph of a beggar, supposedly North American, accompanied by the following text: (fig. 12)

We toast both to *Life* and to the world of photography a photograph of a New York beggar. But this is more tragic, more indignant and incomprehensible than anything else, because he is an unhappy collapsed man in a park within this great city, not in the ditch of a solitary road, not in the vicinity of a sordid little village, nor at the door of a church, where other wretched people go with their faith and distress, but in the sumptuous foliage of a park, with an almost magical opulence of skyscrapers in the background.

That is to say: this was a photo essay taken in the United States, *equal* to the photographs taken by Eugene Smith in Spain. In that way the insistent argument of the Spanish press was visually demonstrated.

Fig. 11: Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, “Frente a una información amañada y ridícula. De la leyenda negra a la foto negra sobre España”, *Semana*, 24-7-1951, pp. 16-17



<sup>77</sup> FERNÁNDEZ FLÓREZ, Wenceslao, “Frente a una información amañada y ridícula. De la leyenda negra a la foto negra sobre España”, *Semana*, 24-7-1951, pp. 17-19.

Fig. 12: Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, “Frente a una información amañada y ridícula. De la leyenda negra a la foto negra sobre España”, *Semana*, 24-7-1951, pp. 18-19



Similarly, *Mundo Hispánico* published a large amount of images that would contradict those taken by Eugene Smith. Upon seeing the roman plow of Deleitosa, one of the writers boasted that it could not convince anyone, but that it would only cause laughter. The North American public –he said– “will understand the guffaw with which from the fields of Spain they respond to the pretentious photo essay, upon finding out the number of tractors that for years have crossed the unploughed land of Spain; and more than we thought to bring!”. He continued:

For the tranquillity of our North American friends, we all know that the influence of the famous magazine, for its technique as for its being tendentious, is insufficient when coexistence or lack thereof between countries comes into play. But, above all, what happens with this class of information is that the governments remain calm and the people feel attacked and bothered, without gain for either.

The reaction was one of pride regarding the Spanish situation, and it was *proven* through images. “If North America had a history as extensive as Spain –he concluded–, it would also have towns, small towns, villages and even ruins. But we have them, and what is more, reconstructed towns, new towns, like Brunete”.

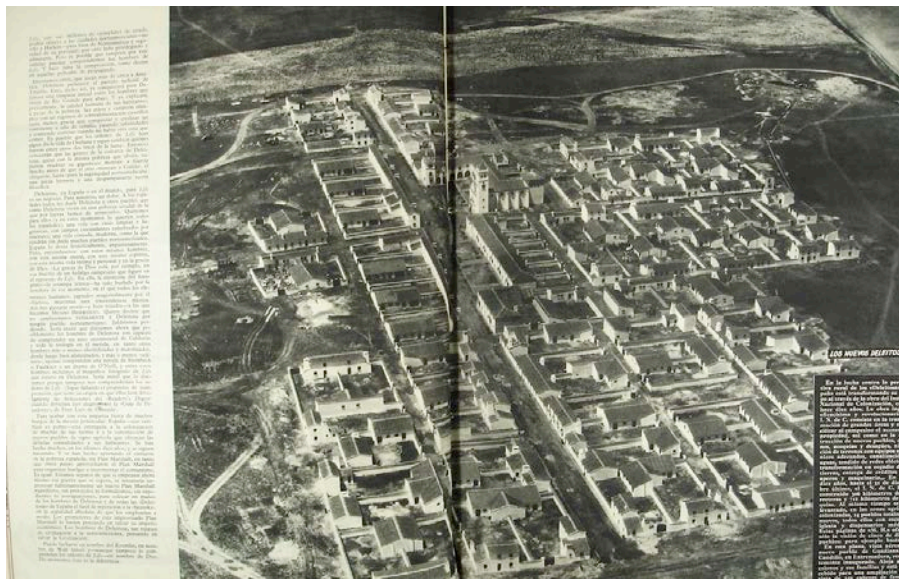
The images of these new towns were published as eloquent proof. The following pages had other texts: Jaime Suárez wrote a letter to North American students explaining the social doctrine of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the *Falange Española*, with which cases like that of Deleitosa would be solved<sup>78</sup>; another article insisted that, despite the real poverty that was reflected in the photo essay published by *Life*, the Spanish towns had an abundance of moral values that were lacking in the North American population<sup>79</sup>. What followed was a series of photographs about the social work of the regime –for example, the

<sup>78</sup> SUÁREZ, Jaime, “Epístola sobre la crítica de España a los estudiantes de castellano de USA”, *Mundo Hispánico*, July 1951, p. 20.

<sup>79</sup> “Deleitosa de *Life*. La España contra la que España lucha y los Deleitosa de la nueva España”, *Mundo Hispánico*, July 1951, pp. 21-24.

construction of the University of Oviedo— and a review of the “new Deleitosa” (fig. 13), which consisted in towns that had been reconstructed by “the enormous, efficient and revolutionary work” of the National Institute for Colonization. The images of aerial views of towns were spread across two pages, intending to transmit an image of modernity. In this way, it highlighted the recently built town of Bernuy, in Malpica del Tajo (Toledo). With the monographic treatment of this case, they created a short story parallel to what Eugene Smith had made of Deleitosa. Presenting some of its inhabitants, the photo essay showed the life of Bernuy: the main square, the tenant farmer that travelled in “the jeep that was not given to Spain by the Marshall Plan”, the town’s teacher, the “splendid harvest”, Sunday mass, and so on.

Fig. 13: “Deleitosa de *Life*. La España contra la que España lucha”, *Mundo Hispánico*, July 1951, pp. 24-25



Despite its attempts, the quality of the photographs and their composition throughout the pages could not compare to the photo essay featured in *Life*: the views were illustrative, but were distributed in a monotonous way throughout the two pages, and they were very much artistically inferior to those of Eugene Smith. As objective documents, they were no more reliable than those of “Spanish Village”, as they contained a similar dosage of the staging by Smith.

*Mundo Hispánico*’s response to *Life* gained, in Spain, a success similar to that of “Spanish Village” in the United States. During the following months, the magazine published some of the many responses it had received. Ideas about international conspiracy and Spain’s role in the fight against communism, so hackneyed by Francoist propaganda, repeated once again. The Hispanic-Uruguayan Feminine Cultural Circle sent a letter manifesting its satisfaction upon having received the response to *Life*. “Once again we have been able to live Spain’s reality, validate its vital patriotic sentiments and spiritual power, always alert and vigilant of the material world”. The organization also expressed its desire that “Spain continue to be, as it is in the present moment, the firmest stronghold of Christian civilization”<sup>80</sup>.

In the next issue, a Canadian reader wrote to Gómez de la Serna to “congratulate him most decidedly and unconditionally for his brilliant response” to Eugene Smith’s photo essay:

<sup>80</sup> Círculo Cultural Hispano-Uruguayo (15-11-1951), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, February, 1952, p. 5.



You sir, have accepted not only the defence of the core of Spanish dignity, but also that of its children: the incomprehensible and exploited, but thriving, Iberian-American countries, that are proud to be the owners of an enviable future and of the valiant work of its children, who fight tirelessly for the realization of its destinies, full of faith in its institutions, in its culture and in the Spanish tradition; with a sense of the life and values that have been rooted since its foundation, in 1551, by the Royal and Pontifical University of New Spain, when buffalos grazed the North American prairies<sup>81</sup>.

It is interesting to see that even on these occasions in which the intention was critical, it was still noted that *Life* photo essay was composed of “some beautiful photographs that, if it were not for the biased legends and the reason for which they were obtained, they would have resulted in positive works of art for whomever wished to view them with aesthetic sensibility”.

Perhaps the quantity of articles regarding modern aspects of Franco’s Spain can be attributed to the influence of Eugene Smith’s photo essay, because it attracted many readers. As the decade of the 1950’s began, *Mundo Hispánico* published a large amount of articles that recalled Spanish successes: from its modern cities (which complemented the archaic vision that was often noted<sup>82</sup>) to its recent cultural development (through initiatives by the Institute of Hispanic Culture and the appropriation by the regime of representative individuals of cultural modernity, such as Salvador Dalí<sup>83</sup>).

### 9. Aid to Spain: Who benefits?

Smith’s photo essay, published in April 1951, appeared in a critical moment for American public opinion. In September 1950 a credit of \$62.5 million was approved, and in November of the same year the UN terminated its boycott on Spain. During this time period, Time Inc.’s stance –and by association, *Life*– regarding this issue was one of unequivocal support of this aid.

Just four months before “Spanish Village” was published, another American magazine, *Look*, published a photo essay about Francoist Spain.<sup>84</sup> In this particular case, the article was written in reference to the economic aid to Franco’s Spain that had already been approved by the United States. “Franco’s Spain: poorhouse of the West”, read the title. Immediately the question was asked: “Under dictatorship, the plight of millions has become desperate. Will US dollars and the end of a four-year UN boycott help?” (fig. 14).

<sup>81</sup> DE SILVA, Ignacio (Ottawa, 13-10-1951), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, March, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> For example: DE LA SERNA, Víctor, “Madrid en la noche”, *Mundo Hispánico*, May, 1953, pp. 29-31; VEGA PICO, J., “Cuatro hombres cambiaron el rostro de Madrid”, *Mundo Hispánico*, July, 1954, pp. 26-28; CABEZAS, Juan Antonio, “Cuatro plazas, cuatro hitos madrileños”, *Mundo Hispánico*, May, 1955, pp. 29-35.

<sup>83</sup> See CABAÑAS, Miguel, “La reorientación de una convocatoria artística de orientación política: las Bienales Hispanoamericanas y los designios diplomáticos”, *Cuadernos de Arte e Iconografía*, vol. 7, nº 14, 1998, pp. 433-492. In the case of Dalí, see DALÍ, Salvador, “Picasso i yo”, *Mundo Hispánico*, January 1952, p. 37, in which a conference organized by the Institute of Hispanic Culture has been reproduced. On the context of this conference, see DALÍ, Salvador, *Obra completa*, vol. IV (Ensayos 1), ed. and notes by Juan José Lahuerta, Barcelona, Destino, 2003, note 624, pp. 1157-1158; and with a wider perspective, GIBSON, Ian, *La vida desafortunada de Salvador Dalí*, Barcelona, Anagrama 1998, pp. 563-620.

<sup>84</sup> “Franco’s Spain: Poorhouse of the West”, *Look*, 30-1-1951, pp. 21-26. Regarding the different stances of *Look* y *Life*, PETERSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-354. The collection of information about foreign press by AGA, (03), 49.1, 21/2324, conserves a copy and Spanish translation of *Look*’s article sent by the Spanish Embassy in Washington.

Fig. 14: “Franco’s Spain: Poorhouse of the West”, *Look*, 30-1-1951, pp. 20-21



The photo essay was the work of Ivan Massar and Leonard Schugar, and the image of Spain they offered was truly rough. Appearing on the first page were a group of gypsies –with a caption that claimed they “live better than most”– attempting to eat in the midst of rubble (fig. 15). In the photograph sat a woman looking straight at the camera, alongside food distributed on the ground, while some children, ragged and dirty, had something in their mouths. “At the curbstone, they dine on scraps salvaged from garbage cans”. These were the types of photographs that caused problems with the police: in the previously mentioned account from *US Camera* in 1948, Howard Byrne was photographing a group of abandoned children that lived in caves along the outskirts of Madrid when he saw two policemen direct themselves towards him; he barely escaped them, thanks to a nearby metro station.<sup>85</sup>

Fig. 15: “Franco’s Spain: Poorhouse of the West”, *Look*, 30-1-1951, pp. 22-23



<sup>85</sup> “Inside Spain with a Camera”, *US Camera*, May, 1948, p. 23.

The remaining panorama offered by *Look* was not much better: the country appeared to be a collection of tremendous poverty, full of beggars, lacking any type of sanitation; in its most well-to-do sectors, it was strongly watched by the regime’s security forces, which seemed to interfere in every aspect of the population (fig. 16). What was deduced from this was a strong doubt about whether the aid to the Francoist regime would actually help Spaniards: “The concern now is that US dollars will go not to those in need but to those in power”, claimed *Look*.

*Look*’s photo essay appeared in January. In April of the same year *Mundo Hispánico* responded through a photo essay that was very similar to the response against Eugene Smith’s, publishing photographs that showed images of poverty, disturbances and street crime.<sup>86</sup> (fig. 17) The response was successful, and a few months later a letter from a reader was published, this time a resident of the United States, who had cancelled his subscription to *Look* after reading the information about Spain, and reaffirmed his fidelity to *Mundo Hispánico*. The letter began the following:

I was educated in a Christian home, where it was not permitted to laugh at the expense of any other person, and, for that reason, the article you have written about Spain is not welcome in my home. If that is the only way that you can write in order to support yourself, I think it better that you abandon your career and try something else.<sup>87</sup>

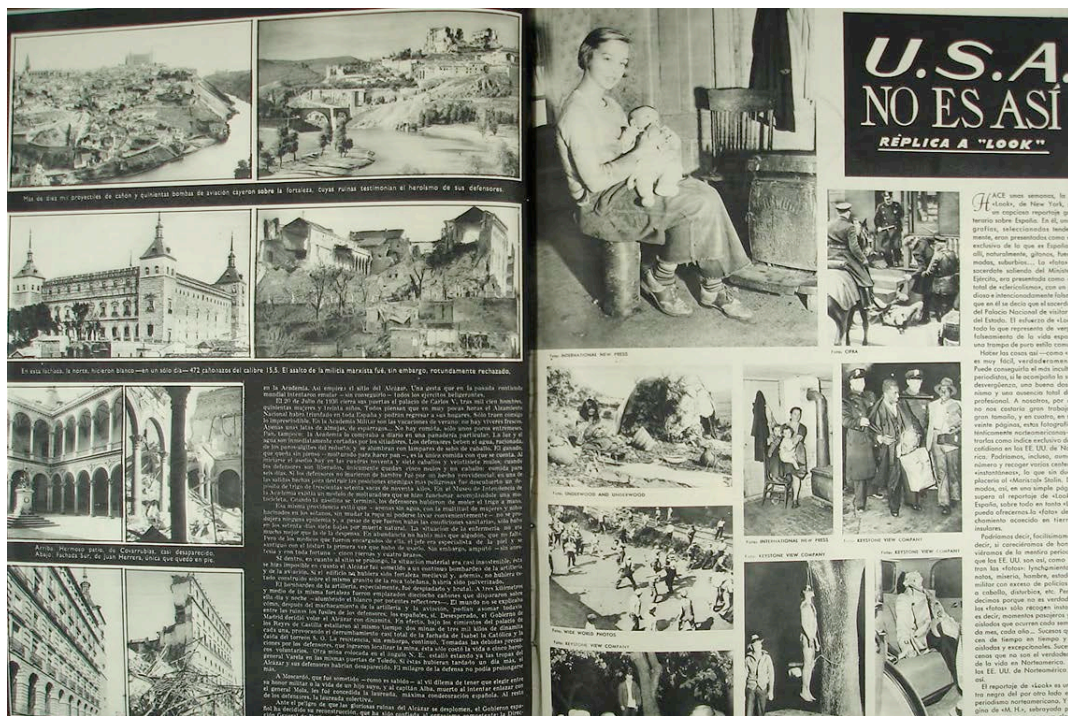
Fig. 16: “Franco’s Spain: Poorhouse of the West”, *Look*, 30-1-1951, pp. 24-25



<sup>86</sup> “USA no es así. Réplica a *Look*”, *Mundo Hispánico*, April, 1951, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> RENSHAW, Louis (25-9-1951), “Carta al Director”, *Mundo Hispánico*, February, 1952, p. 5.

Fig. 17: “USA no es así. Réplica a Look”, *Mundo Hispánico*, abril 1951, pp. 8-9



The way in which *Mundo Hispánico* had developed its response was an “indubitable test that the well-known Spanish gentlemanliness has not been destroyed”. Spaniards “continue to be [...] the most hospitable, most polite, most chivalrous and generous people in the world”. And “to try to make them look uncivilized, dirty, miserably poor, etc.”, as *Look* has done “is not very deserving of praise, particularly coming from a person of a certain intelligence and social position, from the first moment you knew it was not true”. To conclude, he returned to the principal political argument:

You should not forget that Spain is our first defence against communism, and if, due to unjust prejudices or malicious propaganda of the newspapers, we refuse to let Spain unite itself to the rest of the civilized world in its fight against communism, the day might not be far off in which you and I coincide working for a small piece of dirty, black bread in some concentration camp in Siberia.

It is not clear how the Spanish Embassy in Washington reacted to this controversy; in similar occasions it organized systematic campaigns within the American Catholic press in order to defend Spanish interests<sup>88</sup>. The only thing that can be pointed out is that in October 1951, *Catholic Action of the South* dedicated an entire article to the arguments, both journalistic and photographic, used by *Mundo Hispánico* against *Life* and *Look*, in order to support their argument<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> In AGA, (10), 54/12769, folder “Propaganda anti-española,” correspondence between Washington y Madrid has been conserved in which a campaign to refute the news about Spain spread by the magazine *Life* and news broadcast, *March of time* in 1943.

<sup>89</sup> PATTEE, Richard, “This World of Ours. A Reply to *Life* and *Look*”, *Catholic Action of the South*, 25-10-1951, p. 12.

### 10. *The end of a controversy: Spain for tourists*

Once US economic aid was given to the Spanish regime, the issue was forgotten. Despite the fact that Robert Frank had told Eugene Smith that *Life* was considered a communist publication in Spain, the reality was quite different. In fact –and in line with United States politics– the magazine changed its position regarding Spain in a short time: not even a year had passed before *Life* published another photo essay about Spain with a very different outlook.

In their photo essay in *Look*, Ivan Massar and Leonard Schugar ironically reminded readers that the little naked children seen in their photographs “see little of the ‘memorable beauty... gay fiestas and colorful folklore’ promised to US tourists by Spanish travel ads”. In December 1952, *Life* published a photo essay that focused exclusively on the excellent tourism throughout Spain. Any controversial message that could have been written by Eugene Smith, Massar and Schugar was left completely to the wayside.

The photographer of this new photo essay in *Life* was, once again, Dimitri Kessel, the same photographer that created the essay published in 1949. From the title one could perceive the change of position: “Spain: American Tourists Rediscover Treasure of Color and History”<sup>90</sup>.

“After 1936 –read the text– the borders of Spain were virtually barred, first by the civil war and later by exasperating skeins of red tape and a suspicious hostility towards foreigners who disliked the Franco government”. This had all changed: Spanish diplomacy was conscious that coexistence would facilitate tourism, invigorating the country’s economy and bettering its image<sup>91</sup>. Finally, according to *Life*, in February 1952, Spain decided to accept tourists without the necessity of a visa. The result –read the photo essay– was that roughly 80,000 American tourists travelled to Spain that year, in search of a town that still kept its religious traditions and conserved the footprints of distant civilizations.

The new photo essay by Kessel was dominated by the type of images that were no different from those that appeared in the pages of *Mundo Hispánico*: it opened with a panoramic view of the city of Ávila, very similar to the photograph about the town of Larreta from *Mundo Hispánico* (fig. 18). Following it were views of the Alhambra, medieval castles, fields of olive trees in Andalucía, religious processions in Seville and, to conclude, a Castilian view of a windmill against a sunset. More than just an informational photo essay, it attempted “to promote Spanish tourist attractions”<sup>92</sup>.

This radical political change by *Life* was in-line with the current political climate. In the same year, 1951, the United States granted millions in credits to Spain. This second photo essay by Kessel was published in August 1952, and in December of the same year *Mundo Hispánico* announced in its pages Spain’s entrance to the UNESCO<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> KESSEL, Dimitri, “Spain: American Tourists Rediscover Treasure of Color and History”, *Life*, 18-8-1952, pp. 50-61.

<sup>91</sup> See PACK, Sasha, “Tourism, Modernization, and Difference: a Twentieth-Century Spanish Paradigm”, *Sport in Society*, vol. 11, n° 6, November, 2008, p. 663.

<sup>92</sup> WILLUMSON, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>93</sup> “España ha entrado en la UNESCO”, *Mundo Hispánico*, December, 1952, p. 11.

Fig. 18: Dimiri Kessel, “Spain: American Tourists Rediscover Treasure of Color and History”, *Life*, 18-8-1952, pp. 50-61



### 10. Preaching to the converted

From 1945 to 1950, there was an intense debate throughout the United States regarding what was called the “Spanish issue”. Members of the Spanish lobby were in charge of spreading a favorable opinion of Spain throughout the North American press, with the argument was that not doing so would favor Moscow, as obstructing the country’s recuperation would give communism another opportunity for revolution and possible triumph<sup>94</sup>. Others, however, thought that the theory “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” was a fallacy and that it would only debilitate the morale of the United States as a defender of democracy: no substantial changes had been made to the Spanish regime, but it continued to be a “cruel government run by one party”<sup>95</sup>.

This article has attempted to demonstrate how this discussion was also translated into images: on the one hand, the photo essays published in *Life* and *Look* oscillated between the claim of the country’s “real” situation, and its final situation –in the last photo essay by Kessel– of a tourist paradise *sans* conflict. Spain was converted into an idyllic place, with an anomalous political situation, placed accordingly within a set of parenthesis. In reality, “Spain is Different” was the motto that excused it all.

One might ask up to what point these images influenced United States public opinion. Lincoln Kirstein congratulated Smith, telling him that “it must be an enormous satisfaction to you to know how deeply you have moved an enormous segment of the population of this

<sup>94</sup> See *The New York World Telegram*, 25 April 1949, and other press articles oriented like so, cited in JARQUE, *op. cit.*, pp. 242-243.

<sup>95</sup> See *The Washington Post*, 3 August 1950, and *Portland Oregonian*, 4 August 1950, cited in JARQUE, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

country”<sup>96</sup>. To him, “Spanish Village” was the only justification “of most of the horrors otherwise perpetrated in *Life*’s catch-all pages”.

However, it does not seem that the United States public opinion had actually been changed. Here we have seen how “Spanish Village” was positively valued in the United States, but in good measure was done with formalist criteria. In fact, the controversy ended with the granting of economic aid and the raising of the political blockade on Francoist Spain. Smith’s photo essay was a photographic and journalistic success, but its political objectives were far from being made realities.

With regard to the Spanish public, the situation was much more complex. On the one hand, it is clear –and can be seen through documentation– that neither “Spanish Village” nor other photo essays such as “Franco’s Spain” by Massar and Schugar, incited any change of opinion, but they did infuriate the dominant nationalist position even more throughout the country. The response was “reactive”: it was one that rejected the images, considering them to be partial and manipulative, in a climate of sceptical and suspicious opinions created by the excesses of propaganda.<sup>97</sup> There was a conscience of a lack of objectivity that graphic information had. In some way, instead of generating controversy, the images were used throughout Spain to foment a group conscience opposite the Anglo-Saxon world. The acceptance of the images that appeared in *Mundo Hispánico* and the rejection of the critical photo essay by *Life* and *Look* went hand in hand.

However, regarding this point it is necessary to remember that, because there was no freedom of the press in Spain at the time, it is hardly possible to know the real opinions of the Spanish public. The responses presented as spontaneous may have been, in many cases, forced by authorities. And, with the ruling regime of censorship in Spain, whoever might have been in favor of the political implications of the work by Eugene Smith, was, simply put, not given the opportunity to manifest it publicly. Regarding what was published in *Mundo Hispánico*, it must be remembered that the magazine was an official publication (that, as has been seen, was careful not to appear as propaganda, although in reality it was), and for that reason its reactions against North American publications could be considered more as a manifestation of the Francoist authorities’ opinions, than as a “spontaneous” expression of Spanish “public opinion”. What is more: the censure system included the obligation to publish certain contents (“slogans”), which raises the question of whether this is what actually happened in the reaction against “Spanish Village” (which would help understand the monolithic position held by Spanish magazines).

The only change that can be appreciated in the Spanish press was the change in direction, from a timeless image to an emphasis on progress and economic and cultural gains. The last photo essays in *Mundo Hispánico* attempted to renew Spain’s image in Latin America and within Spain. In the image of the paradisiacal and timeless Spain, many publications by *Mundo Hispánico* coincided –as has been shown– with the “touristic” vision of Kessel’s essay. This coincidence suggests a relationship between these types of contents promoted by Francoist propaganda, with the activities of the Spanish lobby in the United States, which could have ordered these types of photo essays.

During this entire process, the images served to reinforce different positions. Here we can apply the conclusions to which E. H. Gombrich arrived in his analysis over political propaganda. According to Gombrich, the fundamental function of images was “preaching to

<sup>96</sup> Lincoln Kirstein, letter to W. Eugene Smith, New York, 10 December 1951. CCPA.

<sup>97</sup> See SEVILLANO, Francisco, *Ecos de papel. La opinión de los españoles en la época de Franco*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2000.

the converted”<sup>98</sup>. Meaning that, more than to convince, the images were meant to consolidate the ideas of those already convinced: “To renew and reinforce the ties of common faith and common values that hold the community together”.

It seems clear that something like this happened while reading “Spanish Village”: the photographs valued the technical and formal aspects of the images, while the Spanish press (which cannot be identified directly with “public opinion”) reacted by reaffirming its opposition to North American propaganda. Viewing the images would have to be related to the consolidation of a determined identity in the readers, which the official publications were interested in promoting.

Translated by Winifred G. DeSimone

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<sup>98</sup> GOMBRICH, E. H., “Magic, Myth and Metaphor: Reflections on Pictorial Satire”, in *The Essential Gombrich: Selected Writings on Art and Culture*, ed. by Richard Woodfield, London, Phaidon, 1996, p. 340.



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