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Eroding Franco

‘Eroding Franco’ is a documentary photography project that relates the silenced scientific archives during Franco’s regime with the current desertification state of Spain. 36 years of dictatorship legitimized a culture of destruction and abandonment of the territory in favor of economic growth. Today we know that 80% of Spain will become a desert by the end of the 21st century.

Spain will become a desert by the end of the 21st century, according to Spain’s Environmental Ministry. The genesis dates back to our arrival in the Iberian Peninsula (46,000 years ago), however, the gears that turned Spain into a ‘desertification machine’ were established during Franco’s regime and ‘Transición’ (1939-1982), with special intensity in southeastern Spain, the driest region in Europe.

Francoism is usually associated with social repression but also established a state based on desertification, in which construction, agro-industry, or mass tourism were promoted as essential keys for Spain's economy. Commonly known as the ‘Spanish economic miracle’ (1959-1974), it turned to be a mortgage that all Spaniards would pay throughout the 21st century.

Strabo already described parts of central Spain as ‘arid sprawling plains’, but each concession to coastal tourism, agribusiness, ‘zombie reservoirs’, over-irrigation, overgrazing, abandoned quarries, rural depopulation... was proclaiming an accentuation and expansion of aridity around the peninsula, leaving a desertified future Spain.

During Franco’s time, several scientists studied Spain’s desertification and its implications, but the absence of empirical information in the regime's media regarding matters of popular interest helped to legitimize this culture of desertification in favor of economic growth. The Spanish society was not well informed, while later generations inherited ignorance and a culture of habitat destruction.

But how were these scientific alerts related to the current desertification state of Spain? 'Eroding Franco' represents a real opportunity to demonstrate a silenced past, its present consequences, and a future that is as discouraging as it is uncertain.