



IMAGINARIES OF EMPTINESS:

*Exploring social imaginaries and concerns over
crisis in contemporary rural Spain*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relation between social imaginaries of emptiness and crisis in contemporary rural Spain. Particularly, it investigates the implications of framing a territory in process of depopulation or abandonment as empty/emptied throughout cultural representation. To do so, first, it examines the emptiness as a historical category to explore demographic trends as well as the representation of the rural world in the book *La España Vacía. Viaje por un país que nunca fue*. Second, based on Rancière's aesthetics, it studies the emptiness as an ideological tool that shaped imaginarily and morphologically the territories that are labelled as such. Under the category the *(re)distribution of the sensible* (Rancière, 2004,2010) it looks into what is made visible through the photo's different perspectives in the exhibition *Sand Castles I and II* and the main two characters in the novel *Los Asqueroso*. To read what both cultural representations made visible, an hermeneutic method is conducted to understand what are the *social imaginaries* (Castoriadis, 1987) that are inhabiting such territories. As a result, both abandoned territories unveil themselves as products of a historical past, and hence conformed by *instituted imaginaries*; but simultaneously, as a space to *instituting new imaginaries*, that is, as a place to imagine otherwise what is possible. Concluding that the emptiness symbolization of rural territories as in crisis belongs to exogenous voices, that by resorting to that emptiness, look for their own redemption in a future-yet-to-come.

ABBREVIATIONS

EU: European Union

INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadística

USA: United States of America

WHO: World Health Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

This project started in the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, it was a time marked by uncertainty and filled with memories of the past. The past turned out to be a space to return to in dead hours, and in those moments, a memory repeatedly haunted my mind. It took place in the Sierra de Albarracín region, in the province of Teruel in Spain. I was around 8 or 9 years old and, starting a few years prior, my mother, her partner and I regularly traveled from Madrid to spend a few days there in order to connect with my paternal roots. My grandfather was born in a village called Saldón, in the province of Teruel, where just twenty-four people live today. We always went to the same little hotel hidden between the mountains. To visit other places, we always had to take the car. One day we saw an old man of about 70 years of age walking alone on the road with a cap and cane. The next day, when we saw him walking again, we stopped the car. His name was Ángel. Ángel would walk from one town to another everyday “para estirar un poco las piernas” (to stretch the legs a little). He never let us drive him anywhere, except for one day when he accepted, and he began to tell us more about himself. He told us that he lived in the closest town to our little hotel with his two sisters. He had lived with them his entire life, because he had never had a girlfriend, let alone been married. He explained himself, saying there were hardly any ‘mozas’ (young and good-looking ladies) in the village. The three siblings were dedicated farmers and, if I remember correctly, Ángel was a shepherd. He would go for walks because he got bored in the village. According to him, those days there were fewer and fewer people and most of his friends had passed away. We saw Ángel a few summers after that, until eventually we just stopped going.

Angel’s story is not an isolated case in Spain. In the last decade more than 6.200 municipalities have been losing their population (INE). The countryside’s depopulation is not a new phenomenon in that land, but a process with more than a century of history. It is also not a phenomenon which occurs exclusively in Spain, but instead happens globally. In general terms, it responds to the global and capitalist technologies and logics which concentrate the capital in the cities (Rodríguez & Díez, 2021). Nevertheless, this tendency is materialized differently depending on the context. For that reason, this paper will focus exclusively on the case of Spain and will attend to its particularities. However, this is not a post-marxist interpretation of the de/re-population

and the rural world and its relation to capital accumulation. Even though I will briefly introduce the rationalities which have produced what would be later named as the Emptied of Spain, this will merely be a contextualizing framework. In particular, I will investigate the emptied Spain as a territory that breeds new ideologies and fictions, an emptiness that has been specially recovered during the COVID-19 crisis.

On March 11th, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) office declared the COVID-19 a global pandemic¹. The COVID-19 crisis has completely reshaped our paradigm, making evident what Butler named as our “global vulnerability” (2020, n.p.). Here, the vulnerability is understood as both the capacity to be affected (by a virus in this case) and as the interdependence with others (Ibidem). During this period, the cities in Spain (especially those highly populated as Madrid or Barcelona) were perceived as areas of high risk, since it was difficult to maintain the distance between the inhabitants in the public way or means of transport. To this it was added the enactment of three States of Alarm by the government (La Moncloa, 2020), in which the first one lasted from the 14th of March to the 21st of June. Among the measures taken, the obligation to remain inside the home constantly was highlighted. One could not leave the house to do sports or walk; only for justified activities such as going to work, grocery shopping or to a health centre (Ibidem). This placed city dwellers at a clear disadvantage compared to rural dwellers. Many people stayed for months isolated in flats between sixty and eighty square meters without a balcony. The rural world, especially those with a low demographic population, became perceived as safe spaces (without so much vulnerable exposure) and, of course, more liveable. This was represented in infinity of news about the potential of those areas. For instance, in *Los artistas se mudan al pueblo en Asturias*² (Villacorta, 2021), a family left behind their apartment in Madrid to live in Arbolea, a village of Cabranes with only thirty neighbours. As they said, “we already had the intention of coming before, but the pandemic precipitated everything. It was the kick in the ass that we needed”. Currently they find themselves “having found calm. In Madrid, we are all in a hurry. Here, the other day, a neighbour asked me if there was still a curfew in Madrid, and I didn't know what to answer him.” (Ibid: n.p.). This illustrates how the pandemic boosted certain images of the city and the rural world, the city as a comfortable but unpeaceful place, while the

¹ According to the WHO, a pandemic is “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people” (Kelly, 2011).

² *The artists move to a village in Asturias.*

village is perceived as a place of wellness: “we have less, but we are richer, and everything is more sustainable.” (Ibidem.).

After reading multiple articles of this type, watching news on the tv of the same nature, I observed that cultural consumption on issues about the rural world had skyrocketed. This does not mean that its creation increased, but that pre-existing debates of recent years were taken up again and located as central themes in public and social life, such as depopulation. For example, *Filmin*, a filming platform, created within its web page a subgenre entitled *La España Vacía (the Empty Spain)*, composed of 63 films about the rural world. Books such as *La España Vacía, Viaje por un país que nunca fue*³ (del Molino, 2020), *Tierra de mujeres. Una mirada íntima y familiar al mundo rural*⁴ (Sánchez, 2019), *Feria*⁵ (Simón, 2020), *Los Asquerosos*⁶ (Lórenzo, 2020) or *Un Amor*⁷ (Mesa, 2020) among others. Despite them having been published before the pandemic, their popularization did not happen until such. This shows two things, first, that the concern on the processes of depopulation, abandoned territories and demographic inequalities as well as the idealization of the rural world preceded the COVID-19 crisis; but also, that certain already existing imaginaries about the rural world were highly demanded and circulated around.? What were people looking for in those cultural representations? Why did they suddenly become so desirable?

Additionally, it should be kept in mind that immediately before and during the pandemic some social movements were gaining strength. For instance, the feminist movements in Latin America were experiencing historic demonstrations that exceeded hundreds of thousands of protesters (Villegas, 2020). To this was added, the burst of the social movement *Black Lives Matter* in USA in the 2020 summer after the murder of George Floyd (Campbell, 2020). Both movements gained strength at a global level, having demonstrations in other countries around the world, such as Spain (Quesada & Gómez, 2020) or Denmark (Macaraig, 2020). Thus, before the pandemic, the society was already immersed in a scepticism toward institutions and their socio-political and economical structures; not to mention the climate strikes that were also taking place such

³ *The Empty Spain: a Travel through a Country that Never Was*

⁴ *Land of women. An intimate and familiar look at the rural world*

⁵ *Fair*

⁶ *The Disgusting*

⁷ *A Love*

as *Fridays for Future*. The social protests and mentioned movements were pointing to several crises that were happening simultaneously, to which a global health crisis was added. In this context of global scepticism towards the old structures, and exacerbated by the COVID-19, the urban world was reframed in a narrative of disconformity and even health insecurity while the rural Spanish world seemed to be reconsidered: not because of its values nor culture, but its “emptiness”.

The emptiness or emptying of the rural Spanish territory was not a new social debate (as the previous examples illustrated), but either political. In 2019, thousands of people took over the streets of Madrid under the name *La Revuelta de la España Vacía* - *the Revolt of Emptied Spain* -- (Asunción, 2019). In the demonstrations, one could see banners such as “ser pocos no resta derechos”(to be few does not detract from right), which aimed to show the urgent need for a solution for the depopulation of the rural world (Ibidem.). The slogan the Emptied Spain (España Vacía) is the response to certain sectors of the viralized Empty Spain (La España Vacía), which was spread after the literary debut of *The Empty Spain: a Travel through a Country that Never Was* (*La España Vacía, Viaje por un país que nunca fue*). Whether rural Spain is empty or emptied, what all of them coincide is in the representation of a rural territory as empty, as a void, either by external factors or by the nature of that territory. In other words, the phenomenon of depopulation and abandonment has been framed within a narrative of emptiness. An emptiness that is referred to as a synonym of crisis, while at the same time, it is culturally demanded in a moment of global/urban crisis. What is sought in a supposed empty territory? Why does that search become “intensified” within a narrative of crisis? In order to understand this, throughout this project, I will explore the relation between the prevailing cultural representation of emptiness in rural Spain and the concept of crisis.

However, how could I work with the emptiness if there is nothing, supposedly? As Deleuze mentioned in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), about the canvas, before starting to paint you need to delete everything that was there before. Thus, as Ingala explains: “The painter is never faced with a blank canvas, but with a surface full of images, clichés, preconceived ideas. His initial task, therefore, does not consist so much in occupying a virgin canvas with ex nihilo lines as in emptying, removing debris, cleaning (...) The overpopulated landscape of the plate calls for, if you want to paint something more than clichés and common places, an exercise in asceticism that recovers the desert” (2010:134). Consequently, in order to understand how the concept of

emptiness is used to represent abandonment or depopulation processes in the rural Spain, one must previously investigate the clichés, the representations that are inhabiting in the supposed white canvas of the Emptied Spain⁸. That is, to study how the concept of emptiness is an ideological tool to interpret the territories, first I will explore the category of emptiness as historical and thus examine the representations that already inhabit these territories. In consequence, this project will be a development and an exploration of the following research question:

- How do representations of an Emptied Spain relate to concern over crisis and with what effect?

To explore this question, I will look into the social imaginaries of emptiness that are represented in parts *I* and *II* of the photographic exhibition *Sand Castles* and the novel *Los Asquerosos*. To develop this project, I will in the Method section, first examine my own positionality regarding the topic of rural depopulation/abandonment, and second, explain the methodologies applied in the analysis. On the one hand, I will work methodologically with Rancière's conceptual work on aesthetics to tease out the political underpinning of both artistic works. On the other side, once the political matter of the cultural representation is stated, I will apply an hermeneutic method to read the social imaginaries of both the photographic exhibition and the novel. Followed by this, the theory section will introduce a brief review of recent studies of the demographic trends in Spain and its cultural representation, followed by the presentation of the theoretical categories that will be applied in the analysis and discussion. These are: the Rancièrian categories of redistribution of the sensible; politics as police and politics as a process; the category of social imaginaries studies by Castoriadis and Durand; and the category of crisis by Roitman. To situate the object of research, I will briefly explore the imaginaries of emptiness in what del Molino called the Empty Spain in his book *La España Vacía. Un viaje por una país que nunca fue*. Having explored the emptiness as a historical category, I will move to its understanding as a concept that modifies the territory when applied to it. In the consequent analysis, I will explore how the different pictures' perspectives in *Sand Castles I* and *II* and the different main characters in *Los Asquerosos* redistribute the sensible, make visible different social imaginaries of depopulation, and unveil both abandoned territories as a territory inhabited by imaginaries (with instituted

⁸ From now and on, I will refer to the phenomenon as the Emptied Spain. Such a choice will be explained in the following sections.

imaginaries as Castoriadis explains) as well as a territory to instituting imaginaries. In the last section of the project, the discussion, I will draw on the movie *Amanece, que no es poco* and Rotiman's understanding of crisis as a narrative device that enables a look at the consequences of framing rural depopulation and abandonment as a crisis and symbolized as a problem of emptiness.

II. METHODOLOGY

In the following section I will illustrate the methodology applied in order to explore the aforementioned analytical questions. Before doing so, it is important to mention from which positionality (Secules, et al. 2021) the questions were produced; that is, to examine my own positionality regarding the chosen topic. Following this, I will introduce the methodological implications of using cultural expression as the main source of data in relation to Rancière's category of aesthetics. Afterwards, I will present the interpretative methodology to which belongs the hermeneutical method that I will use to read the representations of both the novel and the photographic exhibition. And finally, I will comment briefly on the relevance of my thesis's topic in a master's degree in International Relations and Development.

A. Positionality

What are the implications of a middle-class white woman, who is originally from Madrid but is currently living in Copenhagen during a global pandemic, of elaborating a project about the imaginaries of Emptied Spain? How could my background in philosophy, personal experiences (mainly in urban areas), and media influence in shaping the research questions?

To talk about positionality is to dissociate myself from the methodological hegemony of neopositivist empiricism (England, 1994). Feminism and the so-called postmodern turn in the social sciences have challenged this tradition by denouncing its dichotomic epistemology demarcating a clear cut between objective and subjective as a prior condition for objectivity. As England (1994) explains, "such an epistemology is supported by methods that position the researcher as an omnipotent expert in control of both passive research subjects and the research process" (Ibid:242). Consequently, under

these criteria, a *good researcher* would be the one that is impersonal, detached and objectively neutral to their study, being the personal a mere threat to objectivity (Ibidem.).

On the contrary, positionality “has been operationalized as reflexivity, an activity in which a researcher identifies, examines, and owns their backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and biases in an effort to strengthen research quality (Secules, et al. 2021: 21). The personal -myself-, my own positionality in the world is embraced to consider from which position I do research. The position is not merely geographical, but structural. Considering this, Secules, McCall and Mejia explore in *Positionality practices and dimensions of impact on equity research: A collaborative inquiry and call to the community* (2021) the five dimensions of positionality (research topic, epistemology, methodology, research-as-instrument, and communication) and frame five oriented questions to reflect about them. Taking into account that this project does not have direct involvement of participants (and use other sources as data), I will use the first three dimensions and their respective questions to examine my positionality. Those are:

- How does my positionality impact what research I choose to do? (research topic)
- How does my positionality impact how I know what I know? (epistemology)
- How does my positionality impact what I can observe as a researcher? (ontology)

The three dimensions enable me to wonder about different themes that, in the end, intersect between them. From the *research topic perspective*, I do reflect on my motivation/interests, the access to the topic and the emotional proximity to the topic. As I have explained in the introduction, the only direct contact that I had with someone that lives in a depopulated town was with Ángel and his province: Teruel. Teruel is a well-known example of depopulation: inhabited by a few and has some abandoned villages. These are covered by narratives of their traumatic experiences during the Spanish Civil War or Francoism exodus to the big cities (Martín, 2016) events that *Terulienses* affirm have left a mark impregnated in their remains. While some speak about ghosts, others do of haunted villages.

What is certain is that my direct experience with depopulation has been covered with an atmosphere of mysticism, connected with the abandoned as well as with the abandoned ones (by the institutions). However, it is not reduced to this. I idealized the holidays that we spent in Teruel. We escaped the big city to go into nature, to connect with green landscapes, my roots (as my grandpa was originally from Saldón, in Teruel), good and homemade food and more humble people (at least, in my perception as a kid). I remember that I lived those days as I was connecting with what is *truly* important: a *good* life. While I was immersed in this landscape, my hometown Madrid was presented to me as a corrupted place where everyone is rushing all the time, does not know their neighbours and what only matters is oneself. The big city became that place in my mind that stole from me the possibility of what *really matters*: the enjoyment of a peaceful, relaxed and collective quality of life. Thus, I perceived the Teruel as an *originary* place where the essential things of life were reachable for all who visited it, and the city as that perverse territory where the dispossession of all these qualities was justified by access to infrastructures such as a good education or culture. What it was, definitely, is a sentimentalist and romanticized vision of the rural world. But, in the end, they were *just* thoughts of a nine year old girl, were they not?

These were the first memories and feelings that came to my mind when I first read the slogan of the Emptied Spain. This slogan (among others such as the Empty Spain) has strongly (re)emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the lack of population, these territories were portrayed as a great opportunity to increase the quality of life during these times. The mix between these memories and the mediatization of the topic increased my interest in it: What are the images / representations that were appropriating that emptiness of Emptied Spain? Contrarily, while the pandemic shed light into this case, at the same time it did not allow me to travel there and do field work. As I was not able to do ethnographic fieldwork, I could not directly access any village nor its people.

In order to overcome this limitation of my research topic, I thought about my positionality but epistemological and ontological: *How does my positionality impact how I know what I know? and how does my positionality impact what I can observe as a researcher?*. What I knew (epistemology) about the emptied Spain was demarcated

primarily by my memory as a kid. To see how this could be useful as a researcher (ontology), I used autoethnography as a method (Addam, Ellis & Jones, 2017). To do autoethnography is “to use personal experience and flexibility to examine cultural experiences” (Ibid: 2). It is an exercise of identifying and interrogating the intersection between the self and the social. Historically, ethnographers have travelled to the unfamiliar to explore it *objectively* (Ibid:4). Opposite to this, to do autoethnography is to navigate *critically* the familiar, a familiar that in the end is not merely individualist but social, as it belongs to culture (Ibidem.). In this sense, I was not familiar with the experiences of the people of the rural world nor with their policies and their social and daily struggles. However, there is one thing that I have always been familiar with: its imaginaries. The imaginaries of the Emptied Spain that I watched in movies or in the media, read in books or found inhabiting my childhood memories, they were the intersection between myself and the social. Thus, to research about *social imaginaries* allows me to look for the representations of these areas and thereby, access them through reachable material and methods. Consequently, I used different artistic expressions such as the books, *La España vacía. Viaje por un país que nunca fue*, *Los Asquerosos*, and the photography exhibition *Sand Castle I and II* as my main sources of data.

Methodologically, *what are the implications of investigating imaginaries represented in different artistic expressions in Spain?* Logically, to demarcate a concrete topic implies leaving others out. Despite being relevant, this project will not cover other geographical areas, but Spain. Moreover, to talk about imaginaries entails to not include, for instance, historical development researches about subjects such as industrialization (Camarero Rioja, 1991, Laliena, 2015, Alamazán, 2020), urbanization (Cañizares & Rodríguez-Domémech, 2020, Campesino Fernández & Jiménez Barrado, 2018, Jieménez, 2018), demographic trends (Gutiérrez, Moral-Benito & Ramos, 2020, Urrecho, 2018), migration (Bayona & Gil, 2010, Miner, 2018, Llevot & Demba, 2017), tourism (Somoza Medina M. & Somoza Medina, J., 2020, Sarrión Garrigós, 2020) or revenue (Escribano, Gaspar & Mesias, 2020, Navarro & García-Azcárate, 2019). Furthermore, to analyse different artistic expressions, I will draw on Rancière’s aesthetics in relation to the categories of representation and social imaginaries. Therefore, aspects pertaining to art criticism, such as the art market and its exhibitions, will not be dealt with in this project. Instead, I will delve into a more theoretical branch of art to investigate its relationship with reality, that is, into aesthetics.

Thus, I understand the different artistic expressions as “an exhibition device and a way of making visible certain experiences of creation framed in the complex fabric of culture” (Arcas, 2009: 144)⁹. Art is the dispositive that makes visible the different expressions of culture. Following Jacques Rancière (2004), the exploration of artistic expressions permits access to the political, through the aesthetics’ regime. Based on Rancière, Arcas (2009) explains that aesthetics “is not a philosophical discipline in itself but *an identification regime specific to art*; that is, a set of rules and norms that make possible the visibility of the irrepresentable and its reception.” (Ibid: 140). Thus, for Rancière, aesthetics is not a specificity of the art world (it is not the thought of sensitivity) but is part of the set of aspects that govern every society and that affect the *sensorium*. The sensorium “implies corporeity and a myriad of relationships that emerge from it in the perceptual field, which, as we have seen, is not circumscribed to the circle of the arts but extends to the set of human spheres; in particular, to socio-politics - that is, to culture.” (Ibid:144). Consequently, when I interrogate aesthetically the different artistic works, I do it as aesthetic experiences that are framed in the sensorium and thereby intertwine with the social and the political. In this sense, “art is political insofar as, like politics itself, it bursts into the distribution of the sensible, generating new configurations of sensory experience”. (Capasso, 2008: n.p.). In the next section (Theory), I will further examine Rancière’s understanding of aesthetics paying particular attention to the concepts of *the redistribution of the sensible* and *the politics as a process* to understand the political implications of petrifying the representation of the rural world as emptied/empty in *Sand Castles* (2008-2018) and *Los Asquerosos* (2020).

B. Method and data

The last chapter introduced the relevance to explore aesthetically the different cultural representations as visibilization/invisibilization devices not only of the cultural but of the social and political. In this sense, the photography exhibition and the novels, despite having been written by a single man, are immersed, shaped and contest a socio-

⁹ To read more about the notion of *device*: *Rethinking the devices. Intonation, documentation, distribution, resistance and diversion in Early 21st Century mediated symbolic practices* (Atienza, 2013)

political reality. But once something is made visible, how do I approach such data? To do so, I will use an *interpretative methodology* (Bhattacharje, 2012), concretely a *hermeneutic method* (Lawler, 2008). *The interpretive research* is not merely a method but a research paradigm “that is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology), and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (epistemology)” (Bhattacharje, 2012: 103). Thus, contrary to positivist methods that believe that the reality is relatively independent of the context and hence can be synthetically examined with objectivity, the interpretive researcher perceives the social reality as being entrenched within and conditioned from the social settings (Ibidem.). Drawing on the interpretive paradigm, I will look at both artwork’s redistribution of the sensible not to test a hypothesis but to “make-sense” of them. Then, to make-sense of the data in the analysis, I will pay attention to the narratives of *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos*. Based on the interpretative method, these narratives are drawn as social and cultural production, and consequently embed us with a historically and socially constituted world (Lawler, 2008: 33).

To make sense of the narratives does not involve the study of what composed structurally such narratives (as narratology studies has made), but rather to explore what they *do*. The narratives are used to make the world intelligible (Ibidem.), but in this process they operate as sense-making, and thus give a determinate shape to that world. By paying attention to the narratives of *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos*, I will examine the representations (as sense-making) of the abandoned/depopulated territories of rural Spain. Considering this, I am less concerned about what happened to the territory to be labelled as Empty/Emptied, than what is the significance of this event. For that reason, I will study the social imaginaries of emptiness rather than its demographic trends.

To develop such project, I will use as primary data the book *La España vacía. Viaje por un país que nunca fue*¹⁰ (2020) to set the object of study and to explore how these low or unpopulated have been culturally represented throughout Spanish history. Moreover, to explore the contemporary representation of the social imaginaries of emptiness, I will use the photographic exhibition *Sand Castles* I and II (Redondo, 2008-2018) and *Los Asquerosos*¹¹ (Lorenzo, 2020) in the analysis. In both cases, I will explore

¹⁰ *The Empty Spain: a Travel through a Country that Never Was*

¹¹ *The Disgusting*

these narratives by implementing a hermeneutic method (Lawler, 2012). While in *Sand Castles* would be the photos the instrument for meaning making – and thus I will *read* rather than *see* them; in *Los Asquerosos* will be the novel's own plot. The compositional level of analysis of the photos would be exclusively examined through the perspective from which are taken as a device of redistributing the sensible. Sand Castles I and II differ from the perspective taken, as each of them redistribute distinctly the sensorium and thus tell different stories.

The primary data will be complemented with secondary data such as the movie *Amanece, que no es poco* (Cuerda, 1989) through which I will investigate those social imaginaries and voices that are not involved in the previous analysis. Moreover, the topic of depopulation will be touched upon mostly through qualitative data such as scientific papers (i.e. Capasso, 2018), newspapers' articles (i.e. Quesada & Gómez, 2020) and documentaries (i.e. Comando Actualidad, 2019); but also quantitative data such as state statistics (i.e. INE).

C. The relevance of studying social imaginaries of emptiness in GRS field of study

Since it is not common to do an analysis of cultural expressions in a Master of International Relations and Development with specialization in Global Refugees Studies and could be seen as unrelated, I will briefly explain how culture, social imaginaries and some topics touched upon the program are interlinked.

As mentioned before, culture is not a disconnected field from reality. Rather is embedded within the social and political, meaning that is not only a source for ideological discourses but a set to contest or escape them. Moreover, the topic of depopulation is related with one of the main topics seen along the program: the topic of internal displacement. By using social imaginaries as means to make sense of the phenomenon of depopulation – and in some cases abandonment –, I dig into the dreams, hopes and images that actually displace people. That is, how certain representation of a rural territory, in this case as empty, is perceived as potential space for living differently. Thus, the social imaginaries are studied as schemes of action, that is, as a means to understand the world (epistemologically and morally) and based on it, take actions. I do believe that the study of imaginaries of emptiness pays attention to both: the remains of those depopulated

territories, and their future potentiality. The social imaginaries signify those territories, thus opening a symbolic consideration of those terrains. I think that the consideration of the dreams, imagination and the symbolic representation embedded in social imaginaries, consequently relates to the topics of development, collective memory and displacement.

III. THEORY

As I indicated in the section before, to draw on Rancière's aesthetics opens the possibility to study the political dimension of the artistic works. This does not mean to analyze artworks that are political in themselves, that is, that are means for certain ideologies. But rather, to explore them as sides of a contestation to the representation of Emptied Spain. In the following paragraphs, I will first briefly contextualize my project within the recent studies about imaginaries of the depopulated areas of Spain and situate Rancière's argument within other contemporary interpretations of aesthetics. Secondly, I will explain Rancière's concepts of the *distribution of the sensible* and *politics as a process*. Drawing on this theoretical framework, and with the intention to further contribute to the existing research, I will investigate the categories of *social imaginaries* (Castoriadis, 1987, 1997, 1998, Durand, 1994, 2000) and *crisis* (Roitman, 2014).

A. Contextualizing the research: a review

The topic of the Spanish rural world and its increasing depopulation has been highly studied in certain fields of social sciences. For instance, the demographic, sociological and political investigations are abundant. Among them prevails: historiographic studies of the applied policies (Ayuda, Sáez & Pinilla, 2001, Gómez-Limón, Atance & Rico, 2007), population investigations (García, 1999, Rico & Gómez, 2003) and studies of revitalization of those territories (Saco, 2010, Palacio, 2021). More recently, new repopulation trends (commonly with an anthropological angle) have been found with a special focus on the phenomenon that became known in the eighties as neo-ruralism (Rodríguez Eguizabal, Trabada Crende, 1991, Valle Ramos, 2019).

These themes have been portrayed too in literature and cultural studies. One example is Vicente Luis Mora and his paper *Neo-rural Escape Lines in Spanish Contemporary Literature* (2018), where he explores the neo-rural logic within some contemporary readings of the rural world as a pretext to deepen in the structural tension of the *glocal* (the tense coexistence between the global and the local). Continuing this line of study, Camarero Rioja (2019) examines the heritage of the depopulation through the symbolic diversity that inhabits that vacuum. Regarding the construction of the image of the rural territory and the identity of those who inhabit it, Aida Antonio I Queralto (2016) navigates different movies “to demonstrate the cultural and artistic value of the cinema as well as its value as a source of knowledge for the construction of the discourse of the Spanish countryside popular classes marginalized from the official History.” (Ibid:15-16). Moreover, specially centred in the notion of *collective imaginaries*, Entrena-Duraán (2012) studies the conservative mystification of the Spanish rurality. Thereby, I see a certain tendency to study the imaginaries of the rural world and the de/repopulation within cultural studies and artistic works through social and historical understanding of the imaginaries. My intention is to connect both fields in this project. By doing so, I do not only want to defend the artworks as sources of knowledge but as sites of political contestation (or appropriation) where what is (re)presented, it (re)distributes the imaginaries of Emptied Spain. To develop such a design, I will primarily shift the discussion into a more philosophical ground: the realm of contemporary aesthetics.

In the 1980s, a new theoretical paradigm known as postmodernity emerged in both the social sciences and the humanities. In the philosophical realm, the analytical and continental tradition address it differently. The analytical currency tended towards a more relativistic philosophy in which aesthetics was condemned (Arcos, 2009). For instance, Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1997) categorizes aesthetics as an anachronic and idealistic pseudoscience which downplays discourses on art. Along with this position, Alain Badiou (1998) argues that aesthetics is “a discipline that subjects art to a speculative logic, leaving at a disadvantage the philosophy of art, which, ultimately, it should be at the forefront of such reflection” (Arcos, 2009: 143). Jacques Rancière also participated in this discussion about aesthetics, but with a starting point in continental philosophy, criticizing, among others, Schaeffer and Badiou’s arguments. Contrary, to Rancière, aesthetics is something that is still in force, but understood within a social and political reality.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) Rancière claims that “aesthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships” (Ibid: 21). It is, hence, in its political role that the aesthetic regime of art has capacity of drafting maps of visibilization, making and being. Thus, the relationship between aesthetics and politics lies in “a tension between the policing of a particular distribution of the sensible and a constant struggle of subversive and progressive redistribution of the sensible” (Brambilla & Pötzsch, 2019: 80). To further understand this, the next section will explore the relationship between aesthetics and politics, particularly to the politics of aesthetics, through the categories of the *distribution of the sensible*, *politics as police* and *politics as a process* (Rancière; 2004, 2010).

B. Exploring Rancière’s categories

If for Rancière politics is a matter of re/distribution of the sensible, *the politics of aesthetics* should be understood as “the practices and modes of visibility of art that re-configure the fabric of sensory experience” (Rancière 2010: 140-141). It is important to note that Rancière’s understanding of the politics of aesthetics has nothing to do with Benjamin’s aestheticization of politics¹². Rather, as the author suggests (2004), if there is an analogy in the comprehension of aesthetics is in a Kantian perspective re-examined by Foucault. That is, to understand aesthetics as the system of *prior* forms “determining what presents itself to sense experience” (Ibid: 13). In other words, it is the condition of possibility, which based on a certain distribution of the *senserious* (and not another), makes certain experiences possible while it makes others invisible. The re/distribution of the sensible, thus, is the re/organization of the sensory experience in delimited spaces and times and the delimitation of the visible/invisible and the speech/noise (Ibidem). This logic simultaneously shapes politics as a form of experience. Therefore, politics is about what “is seen and what can be said about it around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Ibidem). For

¹² As Rancière clarifies “the aesthetics should not be understood as the perverse commandeering of politics by a will of art, by a consideration of the people qua work of art” (2004: 14)

instance, not only what is portrayed in the media about the rural world is a political matter, but also who has the power to talk about it. In the light of this, I will investigate in the analysis not only what are the social imaginaries that are made visible by certain spatial-temporal distribution of the sensible, but also who has the property or capacity of doing so.

To further explore the political dimension of aesthetics and how this challenges the hegemonic understandings of politics, I will follow Rancière's concepts of *politics as police* and *politics as process* (Rancière, 2010). He calls *politics as police* where there is a constant (re)production of the division between relevant/irrelevant, the seen/unseen and speakable/unspeakable based on a petrified distribution of the sensible. Similarly, Judith Butler in *Frames of War* (2009) explores which lives are *grievable* or *ungrievable*. Both authors investigate forms of deconstructing or abolishing the hierarchical relationship of these dichotomies and the logics that make intelligible (epistemological and political) certain lives while not others. In Rancière, the ultimate goal of *politics as police* is to establish "the social body in a particular objectified configuration" (Brambilla & Pötzsch, 2019: 82). In short, the *politics as police* is the petrification of certain political structures based on a statistical distribution of the sensible which categorically establish what (or who) can be seen and what cannot.

Opposite to *politics as police*, Rancière proposes *politics as a process*. Conceiving *politics as a process* rather than as police involves endowing political structures with a contingency, and therefore giving aesthetics a central role in it. As Brambilla and Pötzsch (2019) points out, *politics as a process*, "involves the constant inclusion of something new that ultimately prevents the emergence of a sedimented, objectified political structure. As such, constant processes of contingent negotiations and renegotiations replace the reified idea of neatly bounded socio-political entities." (Ibid:82). In this sense, politics is defined by the precarious and temporal condition of any social order which implies the contingent and continued process of re/negotiation. Consequently, the processual understanding of politics entails breaking with the order of police by inventing new subjects based on Rancière (2010:139). Nonetheless, I will not orthodoxically follow Rancière's argument, but I will use the categories of the *distribution of the sensible*, *politics as police* and *politics as process*, to explore the renegotiation of the emptiness represented in Emptied Spain in relation to the category of *crisis*.

With the category of the (re)distribution of the sensible, I will show how the different angles from where *Sand Castles*' I and II pictures are taken redistribute what is visible in that abandoned territory, that is, what is (re)presented. While in *Los Asquerosos*, such (re)distribution will not be developed visually, but through the narrative embodied in the two main characters of the novel. In each redistribution a different representation of abandonment will take place, opening the space for the second level of analysis: the social imaginaries of emptiness. Both artworks will challenge such emptiness and frame it rather as a contested space, where multiple interests take place and shape what I named the social imaginaries of emptiness. In short, with both categories of the redistribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004, 2010) and social imaginaries (Catoriadis, 1987, 1997, 1998) I will show that, as the Deleuzian white canvas which is actually inhabited in various shapes and colors, the abandoned territories are not only occupied by a memory of past but also of the future. And it is in relation to the latter that social imaginarios, not as pure representations of reality, but rather as a constituent of reality in itself have a fundamental role.

In the second part of the analysis, I will engage with the categories of politics as police and process in relation to the category of crisis. In this section, I will show how the representation previously examined corresponds to a social imaginary of emptiness which is dependent on a context of crisis.

C. The Social Imaginaries

In the following section, I will explore the category of social imaginaries in relation to the notion of the territory to investigate the supposed emptiness beyond its materiality, within the realm of symbolic, and therefore the imaginary. As del Molino (2020) will explain in the next section (*Framing the object of study: a brief genealogy of the Empty/ed Spain*), materially, the low-density population in addition to the great distance between the villages, created the perception of being a desolate, empty territory. However, they were not the only reason, through a cultural analysis of literature, movies and newspapers, del Molino investigates how this void is constituted as an idea, which has justified different structural changes in the same territory. In that sense, I will show how the materiality of the territory cannot be truly conceived without its symbolic significance,

but either its symbolic realm cannot be totally grasped without attending to the materiality. Taking that into account, I am to illustrate how both the material and symbolic dimension constitute the reality of the Emptied Spain. To do so, I will first introduce the category of the *social imaginaries* along different authors: Castoriadis (1987, 1997, 1998) and Durand (1994, 2000). Secondly, I will connect my final understanding of social imaginaries to the notion of territory.

1. The social imaginaries: beyond the material reality into the symbolic realm

The concept of *social imaginaries* emerges through the work of the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis (1987, 1997, 1998). He argues that any society has neither a metaphysical nor biological fundament. In that way, delegating to the human beings the responsibility of configuration through social praxis “certain forms of coexistence, which are none other than imaginary-social institutions, that is, forms accepted intersubjectively.” (Aravena & Baeza, 2015: 151). In that sense, social coexistence depends on the *imaginary institutions* that maintain it, that is, through the social imaginaries people institute shared worlds. In the light of this, one could argue that the imaginaries are themselves intersubjective insofar they depend on social constructions that are subject to a historical place and moment. However, to understand the social imaginaries as conditioned by a determinate historical moment does not mean that they remain encapsulated in that concrete period; rather it is to conceive them as transhistorical (Sánchez Capdequi, 1997: 151). For instance, the romantic conception of love as a conquer (to conquer someone) is something that still persists in the contemporary imaginaries despite not being originally from it. Nonetheless, its persistence throughout history implies its reinterpretation from each time in regard to the rest of social imaginaries that inhabited it. Even though the romantic representation of love as conquer is not the same as in the eighteenth century, its imaginaries remain still nowadays within the postmodern paradigm. In view of this, the social imaginaries are at the same time: forms already *instituted* and an *instituting faculty*. Therefore, the social imaginaries are composed of a tension between “heteronomy (or inherited thinking) and autonomy (or creative ability).” (Ibidem.). While the first refers to what Castoriadis has called, *reproductive imagination*, the second pertains to the so-called *radical imagination*.

In *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987), Castoriadis investigates how the history of western philosophy has engaged with a *reproductive imagination* rather than *radical*. For him, the *reproductive imagination* has been conceived, along the history of philosophy, as an obfuscator of truth; as being completely banalized for the ‘real’ knowledge and for the reason, “for being linked to the sensory domain and having merely a reproductive character” (Ibidem). On the contrary, the *radical imagination* does not have a reproductive function but an ontological function. Rather than reproducing reality, the radical imagination is the condition of possibility of such reality: of the social reality (Ibidem). Moreover, the radical imagination is linked to what Castoriadis calls the *instituting imaginary* and *instituting society* (Castoriadis, 1987). It is the instituting capacity of this imagination that enables “the autonomous action of societies to question institutional paradigms and create new social imaginaries within the social historical domain” (De Vivanco Roca Rey, 2009: 219). Thus, *the radical imagination* is the condition of possibility to transcend the given reality and its social imaginaries and, by doing so, institutes new social imaginaries which, in the last instance, reshape the reality and the collective identity (Sánchez Capdequi, 1997: 152).

More clearly, this means two things: first, the social imaginaries do not obscure the reality or truth and as such, do not create parallel dimensions, but emerge from and within a certain historical domain with the intention of making collective *sense* of the existence and the world. Hence, everything that occurs socially and historically is linked to the symbolic¹³. As Cegarra explains “each object and act exist per se, regardless of what is the perception of them, although their existence basically depends on the symbolic web in which it is inserted” (Ibid: 9). For instance, a chair is a chair, but it can symbolize power if it refers to the throne of a king. That chair poses a signifier (power) regardless

¹³ When talking about symbolic, it is relevant to clarify the difference between signs and symbols. The imaginary in relation to the symbol digs into the gradual way in which the conscious arranges images to bond with the world (De Vivanco Roca Rey, 2009: 219). In this gradual scale, the sign is at one end and the symbol at the other. There is a sign when the signified and the significant have an adequate relationship due to “the significant refers to a reality that, even though is not present, is always able to present” (Ibidem.) While the symbol is based on a relationship of absolute inadequation between the signified and significant (idem). The symbol always evokes “something absent and impossible to perceive” (Durand, 2000: 13). Thus, it opens a space for sense, for the imaginary, in other words, expands the experiential universe giving room to the imaginative spectrum that draws new existential plans. In Duran’s words, the imaginary “makes a secret sense appear, it is the epiphany of a mystery” (2000:15). The world and its understanding are expanded by its secrets, the hidden, the frustrating, the inexplicable and the unmanageable. Thus, with the imaginaries “the individuals go beyond factual reality and introduce new realms of reality in interaction with historical and cultural contexts, in such a way that the human being gives meaning to his praxis and makes it more understandable.” (De Vivanco Roca Rey, 2009: 220).

of a king or queen sitting on it. The throne in itself is not a symbol, but it cannot exist out of symbolic web, a web that is “elaborated in the historical-social of the imaginary” (Ibidem.). Regarding this, in the instituted imaginaries the relationship between certain symbols (signifiers) and signified (such as representations) is petrified, that is, presents the relationship between a symbol and its representation as natural and immovable. However, this relationship is not necessary in itself, but subjected to socio-historical imaginaries and therefore permeable to change.

The previous idea connects to the second point. The *instituting imaginary* and *instituting society* as products of the radical imagination resignifies through history the representation of such symbols, i.e. in Marie Antoinette’s period the throne may have signified corruption instead of power. Meaning that, throughout history, existing representations may become resignified (Antoinette’s throne), while simultaneously the representation of certain symbols may change according to the social imaginary web where they belong to (nowadays the conquer in romanticized relationships is not represented through a duel between two knights in armor whose victor wins the woman). It is in this capability of (re)signifying representations and (re)presenting symbols where I think exists the potentiality of the social imaginaries for this project. First, because it sets the bases to understand the political side of the artworks as *processes* rather than *polices*, following Rancière. In other words, by understanding the social imaginaries as productive as well as representative (image of) allows a reading of *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos* not as a representation of the XXI century but also as transcendental responses of the current times. Both authors, by the use of symbols, as it may be the title of the photographic exhibition in itself (*Sand Castles*) and the fictionality of the novel, go beyond of a pure critique to a contemporary reality in order to expand the limits of the instituted social imaginaries of those territories, to explore otherwise: what is possible to institute.

The relationship between the symbolic and the social imaginaries is also studied for another well-known thinker, the anthropologist Gilbert Durand. Durand proposes a “mythodological” and archetypal focus of the creative imagination (radical imagination for Castoriadis), “assigning to the imaginary a natural place in the symbolic production and in the structure of myth” (Aravena & Baeza, 2015: 152). For him, the imaginary is the faculty through which the individuals and society interpret the world and relate to the environment (Ibidem). Durand defines it as “the inevitable re-presentation, the faculty of

symbolization from which fears, all hopes and their cultural fruits continually emerge” (Durand, 1994:77). The imaginary, and in this case the social imaginaries (as intersubjective agreement), transform the representations through the imagination, and through this process the representation suffers a symbolic transformation. The symbolic transformation is, in the last instance, the transformation of the representation into *images- guides*, which are images that drive processes and do not only represent material realities (Hiernaux, 2007: 20). In that sense the symbolization, which is to euphemize the material reality, creates guides of analysis and action. How does the symbolization of a depopulated territory as emptied generate not only a different guide of analysis to read such territory but schemes of action? In other words, what are the actions taken in a territory presented as emptied? Which symbols are conquering such emptiness? In the following subsection, I will explore the relation of the social imaginaries with the notion of territory, to study in the analysis what are the implications of symbolizing a territory as emptied. Emptied not only as the consequence of past event but emptied as the condition for new futures to emerge.

2. Social imaginaries in relation to the notion of territory.

As it has been just pointed out before, the creative potentiality of the social imaginaries can reveal the innermost perceptions and daydreams of the given society. As human’s beings that have always inhabited space and time, it is essential to pay attention to the symbolic webs and its social imaginaries, that do not only create societies, as Castoriadis mentioned, but worlds. For instance, Bierzo (León, Spain) an abandoned village from the 60’s was recovered in the 80’s by the Rainbow Family. Rainbow Family is a movement for non-violence in the United States, which was extended around the world developing different initiatives for a non-violent world; among them, the restructuring of abandoned villages with the aim to transform the ecovillages. One of them is Matavenero, housed in the Bierzo valley, and currently made up of organic gardens and communal areas such as the craft school or the community kitchen (Piernas Medina, 2020). However, how could one examine the social imaginaries, dreams of abandoned places that have not been repaired but are rather in ruins?

As Silva explains “the territory was and continues to be a space (...) where the memory of the ancestor and the evocation of the future make it possible to refer to it as a

place (...) with certain geographical and symbolic limits (...). This is how even in times of globalization in the 21st century, a new notion of territory can be maintained if we understand it as affective terrain, from which I see the world as imaginary sustenance” (Silva, 2006: 54-55). Through the notion of the territory one can examine the social imaginaries that exceed the physical (the architectonic infrastructure -or lack of it-), an excess that is not possible without the symbolic consideration of such space. The territory does not only inhabit a present but incorporates a collective memory of the past of those that inhabited it, while including a projection to the future. But then, how could one explore the social imaginaries of an empty/emptied Spain? If those territories are depopulated as are the cases of *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos*, which society would respond and produce such imaginaries? As I will show, it is an urban society that intends to analyse the past and imagine a new future. In this regard, it is important to clarify that the project is not an investigation of the everyday life of that territory (Lefebvre, 1981) nor a study about the uses of concrete spaces as the bar or the church where such practices are culturally studied (Kuri & Aguilar, 2006). Contrary, I will investigate the territories presented in both artwork as territories imagined in a double sense.

On one side, as territories that are a consequence of imaginaries. That is, by showing in *Sand Castles* how the post-fascist daydreams of modernization modified the morphology of those territories. On the other side, how the territories of both objects of study, in this paper, are dwelled by representations of the imagined territory. While the first one corresponds traditionally to the field of urban studies and the research of the articulation between imaginaries and action, that is, how the imaginaries are transformed in concrete actions (Soja, 2001); the second one, while belonging to the same field of study, investigate the representation of the city and thus the social imagination of the territory (Escoda 2003, Silva, 2001). Therefore, I will displace these theoretical frameworks, commonly applied to the urban reality, to the rural territory: not to explore the rurality (as a social imaginary) of such territories but their emptiness (as a social imaginary). When doing so, the territories reveal to their inhabitants the clash of multiple social imaginaries, instituted already – as part of the collective memory– and with the aim to be instituted– as components of a possible future–. Thus, the emptiness of these territories manifests as in crisis but rather than by its deficiencies, it is by its excesses. In the following and last section of the theory, I will explore the notion of *crisis* under Roitman’s lenses (2014), and thus investigate not what were the causes that drove to the

emptiness and abandonment of those territories, but what are the consequences of such. What are the territories in crisis? If so, why are they labelled under the concept of emptiness? and last but not least: what are the effects of doing so?

D. Crisis as the condition of possibility

Before going into detail of the concept of crisis, it is essential to point out that regardless of the structure of this section all the categories will intersect when applying them. While the Rancièrian theoretical frame shows how the perspective chosen in *Sand Castles* project (Redondo 2010, 2018) and the images portrayed in *Los Asquerosos* (Lorenzo, 2020) redistribute the order of the sensible – that is, what is seen-, the social imaginaries reveals some representations of the possible futures-yet-to-come enclosed in both pieces after such redistribution. Following this, the category of crisis will be explored in the discussion, after analysis, to illustrate how both the imaginaries and their redistribution correlate a moment of crisis.

I will draw on Janet Roitman's book *Anti-crisis* (2014) to explore not what the concept of crisis means in itself, but what it does. Roitman wonders, what are consequences of framing an event or historical moment within a narrative of crisis. If the territories are in crisis due to its emptiness, is abandonment: What does the discursive framing of a large section of the country as empty do? With this in mind: How are the imaginaries of the Emptied Spain reconstructed within such discourse? Crisis (crise, crisis) is defined as a "vitally important or decisive state of things, point at which change must come, for better or worse" (OnlineEtymologyDictionary.com, s.f.) or as a "decisive point in the progress of a disease" (Ibid.). Etymologically it is rooted in the Greek *krisis* that is a "turning point in a disease, that change which indicates recovery or death" (Ibid.) and from *krinein* meaning "to separate, decide, judge." (Ibid.). Based on this definition the concept of crisis is applied in a highlight critical moment in which a change, a rupture or a decision must be taken. The question would be a change regarding to what and towards where? At first impression the meaning of crisis encapsulates a temporal dimension: a rupture from X and to Y. Following Roitman in *Anti-Crisis* (2014), I will investigate this just mentioned temporal aspect. To do so, I will not explore under which

circumstances a determinate phenomenon must be framed within a narrative of crisis, but what are the consequences of doing so, especially regarding its temporal impacts. Therefore, I will not pay much attention to the causes that generate moments of crisis, but to the consequences of such, that is, to the productive aspect of the concept of crisis and how this reshapes the temporal and spatial representation of the Emptied Spain.

In her book *Anti-crisis* (2014), Roitman criticized the concept of crisis and proposes the term anti-crisis as an alternative device or *locus* for historical transformation. However, the following lines will not verse about her contribution – the category of anti-crisis-, but her critique. I am interested in “the kind of work the term “crisis” is or is not doing in the construction of normative forms” (Ibid: 3). In this regard, her work takes distance from investigations that theorize the term crisis (Shaikh, 1978, Clarke 1994, Roberts, 2000, Majumder 2020) or elaborate a working definition of it (Aldinhas Ferreira, 2020, Gigliotti, 2020, Wincott, Davis & Wager, 2021). For Roitman, crisis constructs and designates moments of truth, in other words, is their condition of possibility throughout history (2014: 3).

Two examples of this were Martin Luther King and Barack Obama who, by referring to a moment of crisis, imagined new historical times (Ibid: 6). Both claimed the need of a new future in the name of X crisis, being the last one the condition of possibility to imagine those futures. So, because X is in crisis, Y may now take place. To diagnose the present under a crisis lens, it allows that “certain questions become possible while others are foreclosed” (Ibid: 41). Crisis is, in Roitman’s words, a *narrative device*¹⁴. A narrative device acts as a historical *a priori* that enables the visibilization and enunciation of certain subjects and objects while not others (Deleuze 1989: 13-14). Thus, crisis thus not only operate as a turning point in history (by acceding to a historical truth) but as a construction of such (by elaborating the human history per se). Therefore, crises proclaim how things are and how they should not be, but also how they are not (yet) but ought to. In that sense, “crisis-claims evoke a moral demand for a difference between the past and the future” (Ibid: 8) occasioning a critique of the present. In regard to this project, I will examine in the analysis how the reconsideration of a territory as emptied is a way of framing the territory as in crisis, and thus operates similarly as the term just explored by

¹⁴ The term device has been used largely by the post-structuralist tradition among them Foucault (1978, 1979) Deleuze (1989,1992) and Agamben (2007ab).

Roitman: a space for (re)presenting possible futures. Concluding, once in the analysis I have studied how the social imaginaries of emptiness represent the territories of *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos*, I will introduce in the discussion the category of crisis in order to disturb such representations. What I am interested in, is to show how by examining how the social imaginaries of emptiness do not only represent a past but is the condition of possibility for possible futures, thus how they maintain a symbolical correlation of being in crisis. So, if an emptied territory of crisis and crisis operates a narrative device: how does that territory operate in such an architecture of emptiness? Moreover, it is empty for whom? How is functioning such discourses of emptiness/crisis and for what? with which effects?

IV. ANALYSIS

Before discussing the relation between emptiness and crisis, the next section will analyse the social imaginaries of emptiness in *Sand Castles I* and *II* and *Los Asquerosos*. To do so, I will first contextualize historically the relation between depopulation, abandonment and rural territories with the concept of emptiness. Thus, I will examine the book *La España Vacía. Viaje por un País que Nunca fue* (del Molino, 2020) to do a historical tour of the cultural representation of emptiness in the rural Spain that have portrayed those territories as empty. To conclude, in this subsection, I will shift the term Empty for Emptied to point out the agency of the social imaginaries. Followed by it, I will explore the modern ruins portrayed in *Sand Castles I* and *II* through the categories of redistribution of the sensible and social imaginaries, to study how the different perspectives from which the pictures are taken reframe the imaginaries that inhabit the supposed emptiness. Once the emptiness has been unveiled as a contested space, I will explore which ideologies are occupying throughout *Los Asquerosos*.

A. Framing the object of study: a brief history of the Empty/ed Spain

Before going into the particularities of the depopulated areas of Spain in comparison with some European countries, it is important to give a definition of the depopulation's concept. Depopulation refers to a "territorial and demographic phenomenon which consists of the decrease in the number of inhabitants of a territory or nucleus in relation to a period" (Pinilla & Sàez: 2017: 2). For Johnson and Lichter (2019), however, it does not only relate to "chronic population losses" but also to how this event prevents "counties from returning to an earlier period of peak population size" (ibid:3). The second definition outlines the core of the phenomenon: the difficulty to recover its previous population density. But are the areas underpopulated the real problem of depopulation as such? With the purpose of delving into the question, I will refer to its European historical roots. Principally, in Europe, the processes of depopulation have been produced as a consequence of a high level of migration from rural areas to growing urban centres during the XX century (Pinilla & Sàez: 2017: 2). The main cause of this was the great industrialization process that occurred after the Second World War (del Molino, 2020: 45). The industrialization of mainly the urban areas and the mechanization of rural activities, along with it the increase in productivity and the liberation of the labour force, caused the loss of employment in the countryside, followed by a great demand in the city (Delgado, 2018: n.p.). Therefore, people from rural areas, mainly young adults and later families, migrated to the city in search of work and prosperity, leaving some rural areas "touched by death" in many places in Europe (Pinilla & Sàez: 2017: 5). One of the crudest cases was that of the United Kingdom, in which the new economic organization implemented in those years made the way of life of millions of farmers impossible (del Molino, 2020: 46).

The difference between Spain and the other European countries is that when this decline in the rural world arrived, the Spanish countryside "was already starting from a dire situation, with a great disadvantage with respect to the rural areas of France or Germany. The Spanish peasants lived in a situation of inconceivable misery in 20th century Europe." (Ibidem.). So, the problem of depopulation is not something exclusively from the XX century, but its physiognomy depends on the social and historical moments. For instance, in Spain, already in the XVIII century, some intellectuals lamented the loss of the population in rural areas, and with them, they tried to implement repopulation policies. But it was not until the XIX century and the beginning of industrialization that the rural was economically relegated to a subordinate role (Del Pino & Camarero,

2017:6). On the cultural and imaginary level, the rural was synonymous with the traditional, with what it needed to leave behind in favour of the acclaimed progress (Ibid:7).

As del Molino (2020) explains, this Modern conception of rural Spain has its roots in two empires that sublimate the city: the Romans and the Arabs. Nor the Romans nor the Arabs believed that the field had any other function than to supply the city, as a mere space to extract the city's subsistence. In the case of the Roman Empire, this idea was symbolically reinforced by the very concept of civilization. The word civilization comes from the Latin *civitas* (city). Nowadays, the roman differentiation between *civitas* and *urbs* has been lost, as both concepts are mainly used as synonyms. However, during the Roman Imperial periods, the *civitas* were the people that lived in the *urbs* which designates "the set of buildings, streets, fountains and sewers" (ibid:23). Thereby, the *civitas* were those that for living in the *urbs* were civilized. In that way, the field was not part of the civilization and much less were those who inhabited it. This conception of the rural areas as uncivilized places was recreated throughout history. For example, Spanish rulers have long had the habit of banishing their political enemies to isolated regions. In the XVI, for instance, the writer Quevedo was exiled in the Torre de San Juan Abad, what is nowadays Ciudad Real (ibid:24). During this period, while other empires used the colonies to banish political adversaries or unwanted prisoners, as was the case in present-day Australia, Spain used their own peninsular territory and not that often the islands (Ibid:25). These conceptions of both the rural world and the urban world are the fruit of a look from the city to the countryside, where both maintain a dialectical relationship in which the city culturally and morally superimposes itself on the countryside. The opposite of civilization, therefore, would be barbarism.

This posture coexists at the same time with the gaze from the countryside to the city (FUHEM 2019). Under this perspective, the hierarchical and dychtonomical relationship reverses its order. With biblical roots, the city is presented as the focus of sin, corruption, and denaturalization of the human being. This is opposed to the countryside, where a society of shepherds and farmers that never stray from God live (Ibidem). The perfect example of this is Babel's myth. In *Genesis*, it is narrated how the construction of cities produced the corruption of human beings. By doing this, the pride and ambition overcame the simple values of the field and ended up enthraling tyrants and losing

themselves in a thousand languages. Hence, in Babel's myth inhabits the roots for an understanding of the city as the false, the polluted, while the field is the virtuous, the true and pure (del Molino, 2020:31).

Based on del Molino (2020), after the II World War, this last image was replaced by the above mentioned: the rural world as a place of barbarism and uncivilization. An image that supposedly accompanies us until today. However, could it be said the same after the Covid-19 crisis? Or even ten years before this one? Are not both perspectives concurring still in 2021? Del Molino funded the argument in his book *La España Vacía. Viaje por un País que Nunca Fue*, launched in 2016 but last edited in 2020. In the next paragraphs, I will come back to the cultural and political reception of the book, followed by the popularization of the term *Empty Spain*. But for now, following its pages, I will shortly point to the geographical and demographic characteristics of rural Spain.

Currently, Spain is the fourth country after Estonia, Finland and Latvia with the most municipalities at risk of depopulation (Epdata, 2021). Almost half of the Spanish municipalities currently have a population density of fewer than 12.5 inhabitants per square kilometre, the threshold set by the EU to identify territories at risk of depopulation, that is with an average of 8 inhabitants/km² - of which half have less than 100 inhabitants in the entire municipality- (Pinilla & Sàez: 2017: 4). Accumulating 90% of the residents in 30% of the land (Delle, 2021). The remaining 10% live in 70% of the rest of the territory. As Pinilla and Sàez assert, most of these municipalities never had a high density; (2017: 4) the problem of depopulation does not lie so much in the lack of inhabitants but rather in the ageing and masculinization of the population, as well as the lack of facilities and public transportation. Even in the past century, the rural population has increased between 10% or 20%, however, it is almost insignificant compared to the 230% growth of the cities. In del Molino's words: "depopulation is a proven phenomenon, but the perception of emptying has more to do with a stagnant population" (2020:37). Simply put, the problem of the depopulation and the emptying of these areas is not eradicated in the lack of certain quantity inhabitants but in its balance. The history of depopulation is not that of a loss in itself, but that of an imbalance.

While some European countries have applied local approaches to the problem of depopulation, such as the *Regionen Aktiv* in Germany, the *Rural Lenes* in Finland and in

the Netherlands or the *Local Strategic Partnership* in United Kingdom (del Molino, 2020:47)., Spain did not develop its own project until 2017 under the name *Estrategia Nacional frente al Reto Demográfico* (Gobierno de España, 2017). The creation of local plans is not only important because it pays attention to the political and social particularities but it also does to its urban distribution. For instance, while the continental villages are hamlets and farms extended and depressed along the way, "the towns of Empty Spain seem like fortifications on the ground of conquest" (del Molino: 44). For del Molino, the *España vacía* (the empty Spain) is a country within Spain for its cultural, historical and political background. It is the interior side of Spain composed by the two Castillas, Extremadura, Aragón and La Rioja (ibid:37). That regardless of the tiny dimension that occupies the map, caused by the projection of the Mercator in the world maps, it is a great territory. So, the Spanish landscape is not only characteristic for its low demographic density but also for the geographical disposition of the villages. Its villages have a centripetal urban distribution, the streets twist, the church bell tower indicates the ceremonial and political centre and the houses are arranged around the tower. Contrary, in the continental landscape, the village is village and field, while in the *España vacía* the village is only a village, outside of it there is nothing (ibid:44). Between town and town rises a dry ocean of brownish-yellow colours; what geographers have called: *the demographic desert* (Pinilla & Sàez, 2017:4). A desert that, as del Molino explains, some artists, intellectuals and politicians have used as its emptiness was a theatrical stage. As if they shared a feeling of *horror vacui*, and none of their corners could be left unoccupied. Thus, it has been always occupied, but by outsiders, by those who do not speak from belonging but from otherness. Like del Molino writes "the Empty Spain lacks a narrative to recognize itself. The stories that tell it please those who do not live in it and flatter two kinds of prejudices: those of the dark Spain and those of the *beatus ille* (...) Hell or paradise." (2020:99). Definitely, the dual representation is previous to the exodus.

1. Introduction to the analysis: an introduction to the history of depopulation representations in films and literature

Even before industrialization, even before the first rural exodus, different imaginaries were already inhibiting its emptiness. We cannot talk about these demographic deserts before mentioning the most famous antihero in Spanish literature: *Don Quixote* (1605). Cervantes, to write the *Don Quixote*, did not walk through La

Mancha paying attention to its geographical particularities, to its dry landscapes, or its mills. Although the author did maintain a certain relationship with the landscape, it was a work written from prison. The choice of that territory to narrate the adventures of an anti-hero was not a neutral decision. If it had been Don Quixote of Zamora, instead of Don Quixote of La Mancha (which is the original title) it would not have had the same effect. Before the masterpiece was published, La Mancha was already framed with certain imaginaries: as being a poor place, without trees and ungrateful (del Molino, 2020:177). It is a space for the ridiculous, a place where Quixote's brains "melt" due to the lack of shadows and his deliriousness take place, a space where the mills are perceived as giants. Don Quixote and Sancho embark on an epic crusade, supposedly through dangerous paths with epic adventures, but what they encounter instead are dirty innkeepers, scammers, thieving, prostitutes. The book, in fact, is a crusade against the marginal classes, against their supposed ugliness and amorality. As del Molino says, "the topic of the homeland triumphs as a stepmother and not as a mother" (Ibid: 181), triumphs an image of the lumpen and peripheral homeland.

In the XVIII century, Cervantes's work was sacralised. Since then, Don Quixote has become part of the *Geist* of the nation. "Its sacred and official condition forces us to go through it every time someone thinks about Spain from any intellectual or artistic sphere." (Ibid:180). Without a doubt, it is an imaginary that persists even today; however, it is not the only one. In the XIX century, with the arrival of romanticism, the landscape and its emptiness took on a new form. Its plains were mystified, they were the source of supernatural events (ibid:157). The Sevillian poet Bécquer (1836-1870) was the perfect example of this. In his works he ignored the social and economic context of Empty Spain, while creating "the first modern gaze of the landscape that is mythological and essentialist" (Ibidem). In his works, Empty Spain is portrayed rather than as a foreign country, as an unknown dimension. He represented the well-known, the traditional, as something exotic and originary. The romantics (Bécquers, Zorilla and Hartzenbusch among others) believed to have found "pieces of a sublimated Middle Age or even from more distant times, a species of *Iberian essence*, in the bare mountains of Moncayo or in the mummies of a church in Teruel" (Ibid:159, italics marked by me). These narratives about the romanization of the land's traditions and the mystification of the past, with the passage of time, were reappropriated productively by the inhabitants. The representation of these villages as temporal capsules began to generate the arrival of tourism, suddenly,

from the late XX century, the Middle Ages became profitable (Ibidem). Based on del Molino (2020), there was a deeper interest than merely getting some economic benefits. Its inhabitants “protect the mythical construction of the landscape, the deification of the plains and the mountains, the conviction that something ever happened there.” (Ibid:163) That is, the conviction that is not a blank landscape that its past is worthy of having a space in our memory: they fear being forgotten.

The fear of being forgotten derives from a history of abandonment. A story that starts to be told at the beginning of the XX century. In 1905, Azorín published in the journal *El Imparcial*, a contemporary look at the quixotic adventure: *El viaje de Don Quijote* (Don Quixote’s trip) (Ibid:182). To do this, Azorín embarked on a journey through La Mancha but this time under a mythical nationalist gaze. It softened the language used by Cervantes and highlighted its landscapes and the kindness of its people (Ibid: 185). However, Azorín was not only observing the landscape and objectively describing it, but he also wanted to prove something: that what was really threatening was not found on the roads, nor in the towns and their people. What was really sinister, it was its absence, it was the abandonment of these places. He narrated, almost in a tone like that of the American beat generation, how the heat, the loneliness and the immensity of the flat “took him to an altered state of consciousness typical of a Californian Buddhist who has passed with the peyote” (Ibidem). Azorín softened all the rough edges of the quixotic landscape and endowed the landscape with its very own agency. In short, he created a landscape with bucolic nationalists capable of generating inhabitants like them. Involuntary to Azorín, this narration would be appropriated, a few years later, by the *Falange Española* (Spanish Phalanx). Sowing the foundations for a mythical and foundational discourse of the ideality of the Spanish nation based on this rural world (ibid: 184).

As Moreno-Caballud (2016) illustrates, the discourse of the rural world was one of the propagandistic instruments and indoctrination preferred by Franco's regime (1939-1975). The field was used to highlight the purity of the traditions, while at the same time, was circulating a modernization discourse that stigmatized its inhabitants. Thereby, the identity of the peasant and his land was configured in a duality, on the one hand, they represented the nationalistic values, while on the other hand, they were conceived as barbarians in need of being civilized (Moreno-Caballud, 2016). This discourse was

accompanied by the economic centralization in the bigger cities and its consequently industrialization: subordinating the rural world to the industrial sector. By this, initiating what later has been called: *la España Vacuada*¹⁵ (Rodrigo Rejas & Dièz Gutiérrez, 2021); what provoked an irreversible imbalance between the rural and urban world (Ibidem). One of the consequences was the displacement of thousands of peasants from their villages to the outskirts of big cities like Madrid, Barcelona or Bilbao (del Molino, 2020:56). Thus, in short, Franco wanted to restore the catholicism, traditional labour and values that the corrupted cosmopolitanism aniquilated, for instance, in Madrid. Contrarily, his project to recover the national dignity supposed the idealization of the rural culture while its total material (political and economical) abandonment (ibid:59). Around 1950, Madrid, Barcelona and Vizcaya registered the highest rates of population growth in history, while fourteen provinces “plunged into what geographers have called the secular decline” (ibid:61). The emptying of the field began, while the hyper-growth of the cities (of those mentioned previously but also of Valencia, Zaragoza, Seville or Malaga) took place.

Even under a lot of political pressure, the cultural world did not keep quiet. While the Franco regime insisted on representing the great difficulties of the new villagers under a humorous tone, Jose Antonio Nieves Conde approached with his films more to the Italian neorealism to claim justice for the rural world. During the regime, triumphed films such as in 1966 *La ciudad no es para mí* (The city is not for me) or in 1969 *Abuelo made in Spain* (Grandpa made in Spain) starring Paco Martínez Soria, the big humorist of the regime. In *La ciudad no es para mí*, the protagonist Agustín, who is originary from a small village in Campo Romanos, visits for the first time his son who lives in Madrid. Agustín is a man with very noble and honest values attached to a simple life, who upon arriving in Madrid meets an upper-class Madrid with whom he does not quite fit in. He is represented as a man of good intentions who do not fit into the social decor of the capital. A capital that corrupts people and forces them to class conventions. Agustín does not fit into this world not because of ignorance, but because of the purity of his soul. The same narrative is repeated in *Abuelo made in Spain*, a widow shepherd who lives in the Aragonese Pyrenees is left by his three daughters who go to Madrid to find a better life. When he goes to Madrid to help raise one of her daughters, he encounters a hostile and

¹⁵ The Emptied Spain

frenzied world that only makes his daughters unhappy. As it is illustrated, both films idealize the values of the rural world, contrasting with the depraved morality of the city. But at the same time, the city is portrayed as the place of prosperity for the new generations.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned before, Jose Antonio Nieves Conde offered another perspective far away from the fascist imaginaries. *Surcos* (Grooves), his movie launched in 1951 illustrates the *Gran Trauma* (The Big Trauma) “locating the peasant in the midst of helplessness, loaded with dignity, demanding a just look” (Ibid:56). The film represents a Madrid truly recognizable; that is: “a Madrid full of jobless peasants who drool in grocery store windows, amazed by everything they cannot buy” (idem). The film, through the story of the Perez’s family, criticizes the excess of non-specialized workers caused by the rural exodus, which resulted in unemployment, deception, and in short, poverty (ibid: 58). The Perez family sells everything they own in their hometown in order to prosper, however, when they arrive in Madrid, they find a harsh reality. They are condemned to social and economic fragility, which finally ends up having an impact on their family ties and personal esteem. Finally, Perez’s family, incapable of continuing in those circumstances, returns to the village.

After the literary boom of *La España Vacía: Viaje por un País que Nunca fue* (del Molino, 2020) and the popularization of the concept of Empty Spain, sectors of the left-wing and academics with a mainly Marxist background contrasted the concept with that of the *España Vaciada* (the Emptied Spain). The emphasis on the notion *emptied* instead of *empty* attempts to illustrate the historical logics that have led to the current depopulation of the rural areas. If something is empty, it is empty in itself or by its own nature. However, if something has been emptied, it means there has been a second or third actor who has produced its emptiness. In their view, the Emptied Spain is a product of economical and political decisions that started during the Fascist regime. In *Surcos*, it represented what Rodrigo Rejas and Dièz Gutiérrez (2021) calls a *geography of power*; that is, “a model that uproots, excludes and generates poverty, which becomes, above all, urban poverty. Poor people who fight against other poor people, all migrants, whether they are native or come from other countries, disputing a job, cheap housing, a shorter distance to work.” (Ibid:n.p.). This dynamic was reinforced by neoliberal politics of which we drag its consequences until today. Once the fascism was over and the Spanish

government, especially during the 80's and 90's, tried to recover the rural architecture of the villages, restore the economy of those who suffer from depopulation through rural tourism (for instance, as explained, by the mythification of the Middle Ages) and the sociocultural revival of the villages and its traditions. The cultural dimension adopted a nostalgic tone produced by a country, which under some people's perspective, was growing too fast. Some examples (del Molino, 2020: 75-76) of this are the novel *La lluvia amarilla* (1988) by Julio Llamazares or the film *Amanece, que no es poco* (1989) by Jose Luis Cuerda.

2. Diving into a war zone: the Emptied Spain as the XXI battle ground

Added to this, at the end of the XX century, a nostalgic speech was replaced by one of prosperity. The economic recovery of the country attracted the arrival of migrants, particularly from North Africa and Eastern Europe to rural areas (Pinilla & Sàez: 2017:7). In addition, economic inflation of the land was added to this which produced the massive construction of urban projects (Marín, 2017). Years later, this phenomenon would be recognized as the real estate bubble that, along with other factors, led to the 2008 crisis. Since then, “the reorganization of the capital continues to displace young and adult populations from towns and small cities to larger ones in search of scarce, increasingly precarious employment.” (Rodrigo Rejas & Dièz Gutiérrez ,2021: n.p) while reducing international migration. The displacement of a vast number of people is what they have called the emptying of the rural areas, but as Rodrigo Rejas and Dièz Gutiérrez explain under capitalist logics, the empty does not exist, as it reevaluates over and over again even what seems to be forgotten/abandoned.

In the following pages, I attempt to combine both views: la *España Vacía* (Empty) and *Vaciada* (Emptied). On the one hand, del Molino insists several times that the *España Vacía* is not a territory but rather an idea, a product of our memory, the awareness of the loss of land and its culture. In his words, “The Empty Spain is overall, an imaginary map, a literary territory, a state, not always altered, of consciousness.” (71). Its emptiness has been a historical place to recreate several imaginaries through literature, art and films. Del Molino is an author that, rather than dealing with the problem of depopulation, dives into the postmodernity problems addressing the themes of uprootedness and belonging,

into the loss of an identity and the (re)creation of collective memory. So, the Empty Spain is a place to (re)imagine, rather than to live. While *la España Vacuada* (Emptied) highlights the reorganization of political and economic choices that generate the concentration of capital in certain places (urban areas) while extracting the resources of its surroundings (the rural areas between those cities). From the first concept, the Empty Spain, I will adopt his understanding of the depopulation as a place to imagine, the emptiness as something that is continuously (re)appropriated by different interests, narratives, and imaginaries which some of them take place within cultural representations. However, throughout the analysis, with the intention emphasising the political power of those aesthetic imaginaries (Rancière, 2004, 2010) and thereby, their force to interfere in the reality (that is, in our cotidianity) I will refer to the phenomenon as the Emptied Spain. By doing so, I believe that I highlight the structural force of the imaginaries inhabiting a supposedly emptied space as both: contesting a current historical moment while at the same time , transcending it and creating a space for the otherwise.

B. Exploring imaginaries of the Emptied Spain from a Rancierian perspective

In the following section I will implement the aforementioned analytical categories into two different works concerning the recent years of depopulated territories and their remains, and consequently the Emptied Spain. The analysis will be divided in two main parts and their subsequent sections. In the first part of the analysis, I will examine the visual work of Mark Redondo's *Sand Castles* (2010) and *Sand Castles II* (2018), followed by Santiago Lorenzo and his novel *Los Asquerosos* (2020). In doing so, I will explore the different distributions of the sensible (Rancière, 2004) that are at stake in each piece and how these redistributions propose diverse imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1998, Durand, 2000) of the Emptied Spain. Thus, in *Sand Castle I* will show how the different angles from where the photos are taken redistribute the sensible. In other words, how the chosen perspectives show different spaces/times of the territories and make visible different but mutually dependent social imaginaries of emptiness through the disposition of the ruins. Redondo uses the ruins to represent those territories. The ruins relate to the idea of emptiness as far as they are not inhabited, abandoned in the present but, as I will shed light on, they are still occupied by a past and a future that challenge

their own premises of being empty. While in *Los Asquerosos*, I will examine, rather than the ruins in themselves, what people (the characters) do with them, and thus with the abandonment and the supposed emptiness. That is, what they imagine in these terrains, the imaginaries that inhabit it and how these last ones turn this emptied territory is a contested space.

In the second section of the analysis, I will articulate a critical discussion across the different ways that the above representations work through the categories of *crisis* as a narrative device through which they are legitimized (Roitman, 2014). Then, by analysing the character of the joker played in the surrealist movie *Amanece, que No es Poco* (1989), I will displace these representations and recover Rancière's notion of *politics as a process*.

1. A museum of ruins: Sand Castles by Markel Redondo

Markel Redondo is a Basque photographer specialized in photojournalism and documentary photography. At the beginning of his career, he focussed particularly on China. However, in 2008 he moved back to the Basque country, concentrating his work mainly in Spain. Within this scope, one of his most widely known projects is Sand Castles (Redondo 2010, 2018). It consists of a photographic and video-monitoring project divided into two periods. The first is a report of seventeen photographs taken between 2010-2012, and the second part takes place almost ten years later -in 2018-. While in the first part of the project the pictures are taken from the ground, in Sand Castles II Markel opted for an aerial perspective taken by a video monitoring drone. Following Rancière and his category of the distribution of the sensible, I will discuss two principal points. First, how by paying attention to the different perspectives (ground- based and areal) taken in parts I and II of *Sand Castles*, different social imaginaries emerge. Secondly, I will explore the implication of considering the abandoned constructions as ruins.

Through these two pieces, Redondo portrays different urban planning projects financed at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st that were paralyzed and abandoned after the outbreak of the 2008 crisis. During those years, more houses were constructed in Spain than in Italy, France and Germany together (El Periódico de Aragón, 2005). This speculative inversion managed in the year previous to the crisis

created a museum of *ruins* in the Spanish landscape, included within the borders of what del Molino (2020) named “the Empty Spain”. However, it is relevant to point out that Redondo’s work involves the whole territory including areas that are not under drastic depopulating processes. What these terrains share has been used for speculative projects in the name of tourism, re-urbanization or modernization. Redondo visits these skeletons with the intention of denouncing the more than 1.2 million houses that are abandoned throughout the country. The exhibition, however, not only includes the remains of the real estate bubble¹⁶ but also general urban investments that were intended to “promote” these areas. One example is Ciudad Real airport (see photo below) being the first private international airport that had to close in 2011 due to its low rentability (Asquith, 2019).



(Obtained through personal correspondence with artist [Markel Redondo])

Ciudad Real is one of the provinces of Castilla La Mancha in the southern centre of Spain. As mentioned earlier, Castilla La Mancha is the land of Don Quixote, the sand deserts

¹⁶ A housing bubble, or real estate bubble, is “a run-up in housing prices fueled by demand, speculation, and exuberant spending to the point of collapse. Housing bubbles usually start with an increase in demand, in the face of limited supply, which takes a relatively extended period to replenish and increase. Speculators pour money into the market, further driving up demand. At some point, demand decreases or stagnates at the same time supply increases, resulting in a sharp drop in prices—and the bubble bursts.” (Investopedia, 2020)

and high depopulation processes. Originally planned to take excess traffic away from the capital's airport (Madrid's Barajas airport), the airfield was located a staggering 150 km south of Madrid (Asquith, 2019). However, the airport ended up being open for just three years. Today, it is out of order and its whole structure remains.

Another example is the uncompleted Francisco Hernando housing complex (see photo below) in Seseña (Toledo, Spain). Hernando planned to build 13,508 houses, which would have been the biggest housing development in Spain (Redondo, 2008) Following the real estate bubble, Hernando abandoned the project and moved to Equatorial Guinea, leaving the project to its fate; a project whose cost was 18 million euros (20minutos, 2020). Since 2015 some of the apartments were re-inhabited, but today more than two hundred are still for sale or for rent.



(Obtained through personal correspondence with artist [Markel Redondo])

During the email correspondence I had with Redondo, I asked him why he picked the title *Sand Castles* and what it meant for him¹⁷. After a few days, I got the answer: “the

¹⁷ “Me gustaría saber cuál es el porqué del título y que significa o representa para ti.”

title comes from Jimi Hendrix's song named *Castles made of Sand* that talks about unrealized dreams and loves that collapsed with the passage of time. I felt it was a great metaphor for my work"¹⁸. But unrealized dreams for whom? *Sand Castles* (2010) is composed of a series of photos taken from the ground, from a human perspective, i.e. as if the photographer was walking around and decided to take a picture. The abandonments seem huge compared to the size of a person. It seems like a large dream that, with the passing of time, has become petrified. Besides the clear intention of the photographer of denouncing these "leftovers" of the 2008 financial crisis, the human angle serves as a mirror for those that observe the images. You can perfectly imagine yourself behind the camera pressing the button to shoot, as well as, buying, investing, or merely believing in all these initial plans. Nevertheless, following Rancière (2004), the political side of these pictures is not the message that is portrayed nor the feeling transmitted. It is rather, the way that the pictures inhabit that *space (how they reshape it)* and cut the *time (how they illustrate another temporality)* (ibid:37); the political is the staging of the scene. That is, the angle chosen for taking the photos (the human position) shows how these downfalls belong to us, to our past, to our history. Spatially, the chosen cut (that is, the perspective) personalizes the captured object: it makes it personal. They are constructions now perceived by the human gaze. It says something about those who look at it. They are objects that are not about themselves, nor about those who invested money and lost it or bought a house that never came into being. It is about those who observe them.

The political aspect of these pieces lies in their experimentation; as the viewer is questioned by the incursion of the actor (the pictures). It redistributes the sensible; that is, it makes visible something that many were unaware of, had forgotten or ignored. According to Rancière, this supposes a reworking of the geographies of power (Arcos Palma 2009), it shows a new view of the Spanish territory. In Rancière's words "the politics consist in the reconfiguration of the redistribution of the sensible that defines the common of a community and introduces new subjects and objects." (2004:38). Then, the pieces, by making visible these ruins, collectivize their history. Specifically, it makes them part of the "common". It does not tell the story of i.e. Fernando whose dream was a second residence in Seseña, but about the common big dreams of prosperity and

¹⁸ "El título de *Sand Castles* viene de una canción de Jimi Hendrix que se llama "Castles made of Sand" y que habla de los sueños incumplidos y amores que se derrumbaron con el paso del tiempo y me parecía una metáfora que iba muy bien con mi trabajo"

development shared in that period and their impossibility of their realization in most of these cases.

Drawing on Rancière, “the characteristic of art is to operate a cut-out of the material and symbolic space. It is there that art touches the political.” (2004: 37). I have illustrated how the material cut-out of the territory presents the unseen or unrepresented. But what is the symbolic representation that inhabits that space? What is the symbolic space of these *ruins*? After a few days, I emailed Markel Redondo again asking him what those *ruins* represent for him: “Is it just a lost past or does it have any other potentiality?”. I used the term ruin because Redondo himself labelled them as such, for instance, in an interview for Xatacafoto.com, in which he called them “modern ruins” (Xatacafoto, 2018). The following day, Redondo responded: “For me, the *ruins* that I photographed represent those big dreams that the Spain of 2000 had, and they were left behind because they were not well founded, or they were too big or unreachable. At the end of the day, many of these constructions were made near towns with a few hundred inhabitants and with the hope that thousands would come to live, isn't that an inordinate dream?”¹⁹. Thus, the current ruins were not constructed in an absolutely empty space, few were already living there. The objects captured in this relatively empty space are the remains of the expectation of a particular future. Simply put, they are ruins of the exorbitant aspirations of the first years of 2000s. The ruin adds a temporality to the objects abandoned; it bears something about the past. As Dorndel & Şerban, point out “modern ruins are considered a decay, scar[s] on the landscape”, a “wasteland”, spaces of danger, ugliness and disorder” (2020: 129).

These ruins are not the remains of a glorious past, rather a past that was never fully experienced. They represent the capitalist fantasies of a prosperous moment of the Spanish economy, in which it was invested in the cities but especially in areas with low demographic density. From the end of 1980 until 2007, Spain experienced a great

¹⁹ “Para mí las ruinas que he fotografiado representan esos grandes sueños que la España de los años 2000 tenía y que se quedaron en el camino porque no estaban bien cimentados o eran demasiado grandes o inalcanzables. Al fin y al cabo muchas de estas construcciones se hicieron cerca de poblaciones con unos cientos de habitantes y con esperanzas de que vinieran miles a vivir, a caso no es eso un sueño desmesurado?”

economic growth of its national GDP²⁰, which contributed to a greater job creation. Also, greater credit facilities were generated -the mortgaged amount goes from 50% to 70% (López Letón, 2015). With the new financial facilities of the last of the XX century, the developers could afford to acquire land without hardly using their own funds. Thus, “who before could buy land to construct 50 houses, now could do so for 250 houses” (Ibidem). This caused many people to invest in a second home on the fringes of urban life. One example is “the housing development Ciudad Jardín Soto Real. At this complex there are 312 empty houses and 1169 that have not even been built yet.” (Redondo, 2010).

In this connection, the modern ruins portrayed by Redondo could be read as historical documents. These ruins are “a sign of technological shift and the restructuration of capital” (Bhattacharya 2018). They are the scars of societal transformations (Dorndel & Şerban, 2020: 130). Thus, the ruins are *signs* of a restructuration of capital. They are remains that were abandoned in the name of crisis and consequently, the bursting of the real estate bubble. In this respect, these remains are signified by a historical moment, a past event. The ruins retain in themselves a piece of history, not just any history, but of human history. As Dorndel & Şerban explain, the ruins are “material things that can also trigger the imaginations. Ruins recall the past, they trigger the affection of the viewer and engage them in a play of imagination and reverie. Perhaps unexpectedly, infrastructure is also the locus of imagination, hopes and dreams (Cross 2015; Dalakoglou 2010) and the promise of a new life (Anand, Gupta, & Appel 2018).” (Ibidem.). The positive period of economic growth was not only represented by data and re-accumulation/redistribution of capital and financial gain, but also by dreams, hope and a desired future. In that sense, there is an inadequacy between the signifier (modern ruins) and the signified (the left infrastructures). They are not constituted merely as products of political and economic decisions but also are signified by something else than in this rigorous definition is missed: the social imaginaries. As explained by Durand (2000), the symbol always evokes “something absent impossible to perceive” (ibid: 13). Therefore, to consider these objects symbolically allows me to study the imaginaries that represent.

As explained in the theory section the symbolic order operates through euphemisms. Redondo euphemise the reality in the title: *Sand Castles*. While, in the photos there is no trace of castles, much less of sand buildings, the author chooses this

²⁰ Abbreviation of Gross Domestic Product.

metaphor to explore something beyond merely material space. The title, *Sand Castles* is a metaphor that activates the viewer's imagination. As Dorndel & Șerban argue it operates as *a locus of the imagination*. The title invites the spectator to acknowledge not only the existence of the ruins but to also wonder what they represent. One could also view the sand as representing fragility. When wet, the sand seems to be solid allowing us to build. With the passage of time, it dries. When it dries, it begins to collapse little by little. Sand is an element that by its very nature does not withstand the passage of time, and the concrete forms always end up being diluted with the whole. Like the sandcastle on the beach, which ends up being destroyed by a wave, a kick from a running child or simply the passage of days. The word castles refer me to a place of fantasy, e.g. princess castles: huge, grandiose places, but ultimately fictional. Supposing this, *Sand Castles* function as the imaginary locus of the modern ruins, it transcends its materiality and by doing so it institutes a new plane of signification. In the following lines I am about to explore this symbolic dimension, not through the title chosen by the author, but rather through the perspective chosen in part I (2008) and II (2018) of *Sand Castles*.

Recovering the point about the perspectives chosen, by paying attention to Redondo's pictures we can imagine ourselves walking around Francisco Hernando housing or Ciudad Real's airport. These are photographs that could be taken by anyone who will walk through these areas. It situates you as a walker between the infrastructures. That perspective gives you a sense of their wide size. They are large pieces, which have not been reused, nor destroyed, they simply remain. In that remaining lies its essence, that is, more than ruins, they are (symbolically) monuments. F. Chaoy (2007) defines the concept of the monument in relation to its etymological origin. *Monument* comes from the Latin *monumentum*, which in turn is derived from *monero* —to warn or remind. — that which challenges memory. These ruins conceived as monuments do not transmit neutral (objective information) but arouses, with emotion, a living memory (Lacruz Alvira & Ramírez Guedes, 2017). A living memory that belongs to our human history. A history which belongs to us. As mentioned at the beginning of the analysis, the subjective perspective makes those objects personal. They tell a story, not just about them, but about us.

In the majority of the photos of *Sand Castles I* the infrastructures remain in perfect conditions. It is essential to take into consideration that those pictures were taken in 2010, just two years after the 2008 crisis. The objects, while they were abandoned, still

held their shape. As a spectator, you do not wonder why such constructions are about to be deconstructed but why they are not in use. In that sense, they are still perceived as constructed objects, not yet in the process of deconstruction but just abandoned constructions. As both the residence and the airport are in disuse. They lost the primary reason why they came into existence. They do not exist any longer to welcome people, they do not exist for flights to land but to remember. They are images-remembrance, symbols that awaken a past. Therefore, these modern ruins, like the monuments, are composed of a horizontal temporality (Lacruz Alvira & Ramírez Guedes, 2017). This means that they are the result of layers of the past: constructions that make present a past which at that time was perceived as close. A past that is not only remained but commemorated. However, in this particular case, what these monuments represent is not an idealized past, but a past that was never fully realized. Their utopian aspect endures in their hope, desires and dreams. What it commemorates is not what was but what could have been. In that sense, what they represent with their existence is an unrealized past, and thus a future lost. Although these modern ruins seem to maintain a similarity with the category of monuments, something does not entirely fit. In their present time there is not only an immemorial past but rather a future yet-to-come. To further explore this, I will move to the second part of *Sand Castles*.

a) *Sand Castles II: An aerial perspective*

As previously described, *Sand Castles II* (Redondo, 2018) presents an aerial perspective through the 26 photos of the ruins taken 10 years later. In Redondo's words "ten years later still thousands of empty houses, that were built in a dizzying rush by developers to make the most of cheap loans and favourable government regulation, litter the landscape across the country" (Ibidem.). The perspective redistributes the sensible and thereby what is represented, what can be seen and what we can perceive. We can no longer imagine ourselves walking through the ruins. The new angles from where the pictures are taken is not naturally reached by any human. It goes beyond human capacity. In this case the photographer needs some kind of technology, e.g. a drone to achieve it. In light of this, this perspective transcends the subjective view. Redondo explicitly says that the ruins "litter" the landscape. One example is the abandoned houses at Ciudad Soto Real housing development in Buniel, Burgos, Spain (see below).



(Obtained through personal correspondence with artist [Markel Redondo])

Initially 1,400 houses were planned to be constructed, but today 312 remain abandoned. In regard to *Sand Castles II*, two changes can be appreciated: spatial and temporal. The spatiality portrayed is not directly experienced by humans. The pictures are taken from a perspective that transcend the human gaze. This does not position the spectator as the direct experimenter of these infrastructures, but the landscapes. It no longer represents human history but the history of the territory. Even though it is pretty artificial that strict separation of history, it helps me to illustrate one essential thing. That is, how the same event (in this case the prosperous 2000's and its consequent crisis of 2008) shapes on one hand, the people (their hopes and dreams) and on the other hand their spaces, and thus, territories. In the photos, the ruins seem to be converged with their surroundings. It represents how the hand of man intervenes in nature, how capital transforms it based on its financial interests. Therefore, it shows how the financial interests of the moment not only shaped the dreams of prosperity of the Spanish population but modified their environment and its value. The land in itself was recognized as a source of wealth. The ground became a symbol of prosperity, and if in any place there was land that was not inhabited or in use, it was in Emptied Spain. Hence, most of these constructions were

developed in places with really low demographic density. At that time Buniel had about 300 inhabitants (INE).

Another example is the Fortuna Hill Nature and Residential Golf resort (see photo below). The housing development was built in Fortuna (Murcia, Spain) and its construction “was abruptly stopped in 2010 the construction company went bankrupt.” (Redondo, 2018). Murcia does not belong to what del Molino (2020) named as the *Empty Spain* but as previously mentioned the housing boom did not happen exclusively within those borders. Murcia is a region well-known for beach tourism, its high temperatures and warm people. Hence, in summer the population tends to accumulate in the coastal zone. However, Fortuna is an inland town, surrounded by land and not sea. The idea of constructing an exclusive and massive housing development in not such a popular area for tourism means two things. First, as I explained, the revalorization of the “empty” ground in economic terms. Second, the representation of such emptiness as something luxury, exclusively, something that only few could afford.



(Obtained through personal correspondence with artist [Markel Redondo])

However, as it is known nowadays, these expectations were never fully realized. In the photo one can perceive the unfinished constructions. Despite the buildings maintain their structure - the foundations -, they remain empty at the same time. From an aerial

perspective, the buildings seem to dissolve with the environment. Sharing the same colour as the ground, they integrate in the environment as one more element. While in *Sant Castles I* the human presence was symbolically involved by the perspective chosen, in *Sant Castles II* that view is replaced by. In this last case, the aerial perspectives reorganize the space and the time, by doing so something new emerges. The landscape of the territories turns to be the main protagonists of these scenes, no longer the human being. These territories have been portrayed socially as places of luxury, prosperity or development. Imaginaries that have been fetichized by the mercantile logics of a capitalist system and its speculative rationality. Then, that “inordinate dream” mentioned by Redondo does not correspond to a political or social illusion but economical conquest: the conquest of a new territory. For Deleuze (1972), one of the primary functions of capitalism is the codification of flux desire that organizes the different aspects of social, economic and political life (Antonelli, 2001). So, if capitalism is conceived as a machine that produces desire (and thus dreams, hopes and aspirations), it is in the nature of that capitalist machine to generate or to appropriate desirable imaginaries for its own productive interests. Then, that capitalist machine is, therefore, interested in producing and/or appropriating images and making them desirable. Consequently, when observing the totality of those territories, the remains “litter the landscape across the country” (Redondo, 2018) due to the unreachable desires of a hyper-accelerated capitalist system.

As stated before, in the theoretical framework and in the analysis of *Sant Castles*, the redistribution of the sensible implies the modification of the spatiality and temporality of that sensible. In this case, the redistribution of the sensible is done by the different chosen angles from where the photos are taken and the gap’s time between both projects. In the previous lines, I have explored what are the spatial implications. Next, I will briefly investigate its temporality. What happened 10 years after, when all these constructions were no longer considered to be used again? Where their materials are no longer in a usable/functional condition? And would their demolition be even more expensive than the attempt to fix them? (Comando Actualidad, 2019). Without the intervention of humans, nature begins to regain its territory. As evident in some of the pictures, vegetation makes its way between the bricks. Nature not only seems to beat capital but humans too. The natural environment imposes itself again. It represents the fragility and temporality of those big dreams, while at the same time, the reformulation of these remains. By existing in the present, they do not only encapsulate a past event, but also a future. The

structure of the construction projects partially remains limiting the usual nature's growth, in this way imposing a past on the ground. But, at the same time, nature finds the lines of flight of these constructions and tries to incorporate human made structure into its being, thus drawing a new possible future. With their remains, their impossibility to be re-used and their continuous decomposition and incorporation into nature: they are no longer considered as containers of the past but as precursors of new events (Lacruz Alvira & Ramírez Guedes, 2017: 90). In this regard, what the pictures illustrate are not monuments, but anti-monuments (Lacruz Alvira & Ramírez Guedes, 2017)²¹.

The anti-monument refers “to abandoned structures, obsoleted, in disuse and decomposition in which its function has been stopped in time abruptly” (Ibidem.). It is at the same time both: a space for uncertainty and a space for opportunity because it opens the room for debating its future. The anxiety that these ruins produce in the present (what are we going to do with this construction that are no longer valuable or useful?), is what fosters the reflection about their possible futures. Along these lines, the anti-monument awakens the memory of the future to the spectator, rather than the memory of a romanticized past. In other words, it “produces the experience of the future in the present time” (Idem). Consequently, the becoming of the time represented by nature taking over the territory, is reconquered by imagining their possible futures. The current question is: what futures? Those, that were promised at the beginning of 2000's and never actually came to be? Or are there new possibilities? In the next section, I will explore this potentiality: what could be imagined as futures for the abandments? To do so, I will explore the imaginaries in Los Asquerosos.

2. About futures abandoned and to be conquered in *Los Asquerosos*: an investigation of the imaginaries through the *phantasia*

²¹ Lacruz Alvira and Ramírez Guedes (2017) adopt the concept anti-monumet not as an opposition to Smithson (1967) idea of the monument. As they put it “the anti-monument is not the negation or deconstruction of the term monument but its decomposition as a strategy to reconstruct the term from a different perspective” (ibid:88). The do not aim to neglect the category of monument through the category of anti-monument but explore its full potentiality. For Lacruz and Ramírez, the anti-monument and the monument are both faces of the same coin.

“It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force”

(Michel Foucault, 1977)

In the above section I have explored three main aspects of both parts of Sand Castles. First, the photos have been used as historical documents that illustrate an event of Spanish history. Second, I have investigated how the angles from where the photos are taken re-distribute differently the sensorium (which is spatial and temporal). That is, how it redistributes distinctly the time and the space showing in that way, first, what was imperceptible before and second, unlocking their symbolic reconsideration. Third, by moving from what they represent to what they symbolize - in this particular case temporarily: a future-yet-to-come - it unfolds the possibility to research the imaginaries inhabiting those ruins.

In order to explore what this future may look like, in the following I will show the social imaginaries which repopulate the abandonments of the rural areas. By investigating what is the imagined repopulation by Santiago Lorenzo in *Los Asquerosos* (2020), I aim to go one step beyond its mere representability (as image of). I will argue that Lorenzo, through a fictional novel, transforms the representations of the ruins and their repopulation. By transforming the representations through his imagination, “the representations suffer a symbolic transformation” (Hiernaux, 2007: 20) and that transformation is due to the imaginaries that signify them. I will, in short, study these imaginaries that do not only represent a material reality, but surpass it and thus, explore the dimension of the possible, and of the possible of that-future-yet-to-come.

a) *Introducing the author and the book*

In *Los Asquerosos* (2020), Lorenzo reflects about the urban ‘lifestyle’, the practices of austerity and the possibility of becoming a hermit in the XXI century in Emptied Spain. Santiago Lorenzo is a producer, director, screenwriter and designer of cinematographic set designs, who recently started writing too. Originally from Portugalet (Catalonia), Lorenzo has been living in a small village in Segovia (Castilla y León) for the past ten years. As I will show, Lorenzo and the protagonist of the novel, Manuel, have certain similarities. Both moved from the urban to an almost unpopulated rural area, both

are immersed in an ascetic exercise of living with as little as possible, and they share a common enemy: la Mochufa²².

The novel is a blend between autobiography and fiction. While the plot of the novel is fictional, and the rural area Zarzahuril (where most of the storyline takes place) is too, the novel also employs a range of realistic and faithful representations of reality. To such an extent, that the fictional plot of the novel expands reality. All in all, the novel is a hybrid between a faithful representation of the material realities and their fictional recreation. The author plays with the imagination to give reality a new meaning, to explore its possibilities. Possibilities that respond to a context of rural abandonment. As Aristoteles points out regarding the imagination (*phantasia*) in *On the Soul*: “And since sight is perception par excellence, the name for *phantasia* is taken from light [*phaos*], because without light it is not possible to see” (429a2–6). What are the phantasies that occupied an emptied territory? In this section, I will explore the close relationship that the fiction/phantasy has with the radical imagination, that is, the construction of social imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987).

If we follow this thought: What then, sheds light on the social imaginaries which inhabit the novel *Los Asquerosos*? To explore that question, I will divide the following analysis in two parts. The first subsection will be an examination of the introduction and the core of the novel’s plot/storyline. In the second subsection, I will investigate the denouement. Here, I will explore how the incorporation of characters as the storyline evolves, supposes the redistribution of the sensible and thereby the visibilization of certain imaginaries. I will show how in the first part the main character unveils a romanticized rural world based on the idea of an autonomous man independent of society. While in the second part, la Mochufa breaks with the idea of the rural world as the opposite of the urban world. The idea that it is possible to escape the urban *modus vivendi* by moving into rural territories. In this last subsection of the analysis, I will examine through la Mochufa how the repopulation of the territory (the supposed revival of rural world as such⁹ in fact entails the urbanization of those territories presented as “empty”.

²² La Mochufa is a word created by Santiago Loreno to define people who buy a second residence in rural areas “to take a break” from the urban lifestyle, while they actually continue with their urban lifestyle in a rural area.

b) *A solo vision: Manuel's romanization of Zarzahuriel, an abandoned village*

The novel starts with the presentation of Manuel. He is an intelligent twenty-five-year-old man, originally from Madrid. As a kid, he was known as “child of the keys”, as one of those keys that they wear around their necks (Lorenzo, 2020: 9). Without them, no one would open the door. His parents were never home, due to work or social activities. However, Manuel saw this situation as an advantage: he was “strongly grateful for parental incompetence” (Ibidem). Loneliness not only persecuted him in his relationship to his family, but also in friendships and romantic relations. His ‘friends’ immediately ran away when they noticed how much Manuel desired to be accepted, and his romantic relationships always ended without his will. Definitely, his social skills were not his strongest suit. He never quite fit into society, although deep down he wanted it badly.

Currently, at the age of twenty-five, he lives in a small apartment located in the basement of a building in Montera, a well-known street in the center of Madrid. After studying engineering, the only job he could find was as a telemarketer. An employment which did not allow him to pay more than that small cave in that area. An area which was marked by prostitution, but in the center of the city; a location that would get him into trouble. One morning, when he left the apartment to buy some churros for breakfast, the street was more noisy than usual. A protest was taking place in Montera. He had barely left his apartment when he got trapped in the crowd. Soon, someone pushed him back into the gate of his own building. It was a riot police. He grabbed Manuel against the wall with the eyes thirsty for violence. Manuel knew he was about to receive a free battering. At that instant, Manuel remembered the amulet that he always kept with him: a small screwdriver. Instinctively, he used it to stab the riot police in the neck. He ran to his uncle's house, who lived a few streets away. Manuel was invaded by thoughts of panic: “the event of the front porch would be assigned to the scope of the terrorist attack against an agent of the authority” (ibid: 24). Manuel's uncle (who is nameless in the novel) is the narrator of the novel, and the one to help Manuel in this incident. Manuel feared he had killed the policeman. For that reason, he had to remain anonymous for a time. At first, he hid in his uncle's apartment, while they organized a plan to escape and hide in an abandoned village.

Finally, one day Manuel left Madrid “induced by what he had heard about large pockets of depopulation and abandoned villages in the northern sub-plateau, in the head of the Duero and the Serranía Celtiberica.” (ibid: 35). He traveled for a few days, until he found a village to establish himself: Zarzahuriel. It was one of the hundreds and hundreds of towns which today remain abandoned in Spain: “Six streets and six alleys made up the village” (ibid: 36). As he continues explaining, “due to the state of the buildings, Zarzahuriel must have been definitely uninhabited for twenty or twenty-five years (...) Two out of three buildings stand miraculously” (Ibidem). After exploring the area, he found a house to settle in. It was the perfect house, “one could tell that it contained no valuables to protect. One could tell that no one would come to defend them. One could tell that nobody would come to anything.” (Ibid:37). Structurally, it did not represent what Manuel expected from a rural house. It could be appreciated that its inhabitants in the middle of the 20th century wanted to make their interiors resemble those of the cities. “The old-fashioned modernization must have given its last residents the fascinating feeling, it had to be, that they were witnessing the first change in the domestic visual environment in four or five centuries of rurality” (ibid:37-38). There was hardly any furniture, kitchen utensils and a bed. Not to mention the lack of electricity, heating and signal on the mobile.

Throughout the novel there is no mention when, nor why Zarzahuriel has been abandoned. By the description of Manuel’s new house, it can be deduced that the abandonment happened within the last 80 years. What is certain is that someone has lived there before -unlike the houses portrayed in Sant Castles (2010, 2018). Thus, even though both are in ruins, Zarzahuriel has a different temporality. While Sant Castles presents a time that is yet to come, Zarzahuriel embodies a time that has already passed. While Sant Castles exemplifies a memory of the future, Zarzahuriel exemplifies a memory of the past (Lacruz Alvira & Ramírez Guedes, 2017). The story of Zarzahuriel resonates in a past present by “the old-fashioned modernization” (Lorenzo, 2020:38) of the house's decoration. First, the decoration shows that the reason why the house came to existence, to be inhabited, is achieved. Second, the author refers to the term modernization in correlation to the esthetics of the cities. In that way, Lorenzo points out something essential. That process of industrialization occurred in the 50’s, that Del Molino (2018) referred to above as *El Gran Trauma* (The Big Trauma), did not only produced a change in the cities but also in the villages. The city and the imaginaries of prosperity and

modernization were intrinsically connected as exemplified through *Surcos*' movie. That is, the city was imagined as a place for wealth and success. Moreover, successively, the imaginaries of prosperity, modernization and wealth were represented by images of the cities, of their esthetics. Thus, these imaginaries of abundance and comfort were not only represented in the cities (from where they are supposedly original), but as well in the villages. They produced the displacement of thousands of people from rural areas to the big cities, as ie. Perez's family in *Surcos*. While at the same time, those that remained in that rural area re-adjusted partially (and if possible) their lifestyles and esthetics to those dictated by the capitals to symbolize the imaginaries just mentioned without abandoning the territory. Consequently, these imaginaries not only displaced people to the cities but also redefined the rural areas.

Despite the fictional rural area of Zarzahuriel being totally inhabited at first impression, Manuel had to go unnoticed in case things changed. To avoid attracting attention, he never lit the fireplace and did not use any artificial lighting: "to navigate the house without a power outlet, Manuel had no choice but to entrust himself to the sunlight and the light of understanding. From twilight he would walk around the dark house, developing sensors on his fingers and toes" (Lorenzo, 2020: 45). The two-story house did not make it particularly easy for him. Manuel was adapting as well as he could, but he was pretty aware of his own limitations. He felt that it was ridiculous "to pretend to be fed from the fruits of the fields. It sounded to him like an advertisement for a very homemade jam" (ibid:59). To help him out, his uncle placed a monthly grocery's order for him. He helped Manuel with almost all the practicalities: from food or money to balance on the mobile phone. However, there were too many expenses just for a single man with a regular job. For that reason, Manuel started to work as a Spanish conversation teacher through telephone lessons. At first, he liked it. It was a way to connect with the outside world while earning a little money. But with the passage of time, he stopped being interested in it. Manuel began being absent from classes, absorbed by his own routine in Zarzahuriel. The house started to be a place for experimentation. It offered him two things that he never had the chance to enjoy before: space and free time. "He had hardly ever tried before, but in Zarzahuriel he began to sew. In principle, to refurbish torn clothing. Later as a useful hobby." (Ibid: 61). For example, with the remnants of a torn sock, he made a pocket in his shirt to keep snacks for when he went out for his long walks around the surroundings. Manuel read books, wrote theatre plays and did a lot of sudokus. Even

“the days when I woke up with fear of emptiness ended up being the most crowded with errands” (Ibid:64).

Little by little he was overcoming his own limitations and began to discover the advantages of his new home such as the fresh water from the fountain, the large space in the house compared to his apartment in Madrid and above all: free time. The lack of human interaction and ‘obligations’ would have driven most people mad, but for Manuel it was a chance to develop his internal world. Manuel learned to sew, wrote more plays than in his entire life, and got lost for long hours around Zarzahuriel. As time went by, he needed less and less things. For example, he stopped asking for shampoo in the purchase of the month. He discovered that after days without washing his hair, the hair itself regulated the sebum. Without washing it, it was cleaner than ever. He gave up the dependence on hygiene products, as well as non-basic foods such as pate or cheese. Meanwhile, he kept himself alive with what he harvested and basic groceries and tools that his uncle sent him. He found his own paradise. A paradise that was not represented as the idealization of the rural world, but rather an exercise of austerity. A paradise where the contemporary world with its habits, routines and values do not fit in. Manuel did not consume anything that he did not badly need and became the king of circular economy (nothing was thrown away and broken things could be given a second life) and isolation. To some extent, this was even something *imaginarily* revolutionary:

“Manuel did not detect the existence of merchandise that he wanted to acquire. I was like someone who does not invest in cars because they do not want to learn to drive. Or as someone who does not spend on children because he already knows that his vocation as a father is null. He did not conceive of the idea of spending money. No technique or tactic came to his head to transfer them. The imagination did not provide him with a suggestion to exchange capital for goods(...) The talent did not give him so much of himself as to create capital dewatering protocols. In my opinion, and for purely and strictly economic purposes, he was in an inescapably unbeatable financial situation” (ibid:91).

After such a long time away from the current capitalist society, money lost its meaning for Manuel. The exchange of capital for good is meaningless when one can provide to oneself everything that one needs. When one does not aim to accumulate goods, what is money then needed for? Manuel could not even imagine what he needed,

besides what he could provide to himself - and this, he already owned. He chose to live in a village where, at first sight there was nothing, and therefore he was supposed to need a lot to be able to live there. However, this story is not a story of a human's domination against nature. Or rather, a human once again taking over the land, tagging it with a surplus value and benefiting from it. The story that Lorenzo tells is that of Manuel. A man who, instead of subduing the terrain, adapts to it.

Zarzahuriel as an abandoned and inhabited territory is presented as a place for anti-capitalist fantasies. Its emptiness provides the space for Lorenzo, the author, to imagine new ways of life. In this case: the chosen austerity. It shows how this emptiness is not only the condition of possibility to redefine the space itself, but also to redefine the imaginaries of those who inhabit it. Thereby, the narrative starts as an escape from justice (after stabbing police in the neck) but ends up being an escape from the urban world and its capitalist values and even the escape from its own self. In this first part of the book, Zarzahuriel, as an empty space, is presented to us as a condition of possibility not for a new society, but for an individual transformation. In Zarzahuriel, Manuel seems to find a place for self-realization. A place for the deconstruction of the social contemporary imaginaries and the creation of new ones. However, the peace that he was enjoying so much, will not last for so long.

c) *Zarzahuriel as a space of contestation: when phantasias do not match*

One day Manuel woke up and heard voices in the garden. Who were they? Zarzahuriel was an abandoned village. How was it possible there were some people besides him? Two people in suits got out of a car. Manuel hid. While they were talking about renting the house, Manuel figured who they were: real estate agents. Manuel's hiding place was beginning to be in danger, and his anonymity much more. The next weekend a family arrived at the house. By that time Manuel was already hiding in the car (the car that he used to go to the village). The family came every weekend. Manuel watched them from the car and paid close attention to their conversations. They constantly talked about how much they were *enjoying* the field. What a *joy* it was to be out of the city. However, every weekend they contaminate the rural world with urban habits:

“One Friday afternoon, some people in orange jackets installed a device to raise the blinds by pressing a button. Others brought extensors to exercise the arms, as if the arms were not exercised by raising blinds. One Saturday a van arrived from which some workers lowered a treadmill. The plain and the hills, infinite tracks, looked at them crying out to heaven. Another crew came shortly after to put mosquito nets on the windows so that the field would not enter the country house” (ibid:131).

The way that they inhabited the rural environment was by transforming it. Contrary to Manuel, the family enjoyed the territory by transforming it. By urbanizing it. Manuel started to name them as “La Mochufa”. La Mochufa represent people whose life depends on thousand of technological things. People who do not take advantage of their close environment and without technological tools are absolutely disable. La Mochufa are people who live in the logic of minimum effort and contradictions of contemporary Spain. “There were several fat men among the Mochufa (those in gym shirts). They were one of those who are unable to gather the desire to get up from the sofa, for eating whatever it is so as not to prepare it, for being an asshole, for being lazy, for being asleep. Of the unsaturated fats flowing through the veins without dissolving in the blood because they are trapped in terminal drowsiness” (ibid:135). Among them was “the *chorraboba* (stupid) sister-in-law who sought to be independent because she used to walk alone. She always came back with a photo of her in front of the uninhabited landscape, which he showed everyone. She titled it with variations of the slogans DISCONNECTING FROM THE WORLD and posted it on the internet. With which she was connecting with millions of mundians” (Ibid.).

La Mochufa exemplified some of the new trend of repopulation, which is the urbanization of the rural world. La Mochufa could have been the same people that inhabited the emptied buildings of Sand Castles (2010, 2018). Urbanites who move on vacations to rural areas with little or no population in order to “disconnect” from the big city. As explained in the theory, the imaginary creates acting images, that is: images-guide (Hiernaux, 2017). The romanticized interpretation of the rural world as a place for joy, disconnection and well-being belong to urbanites' imaginaries. These values supposedly intrinsic to these areas displace people from the gentrified areas to the highly unpopulated. As the narrator explains, “What seemed like a weekend residence was actually a sanatorium for the traumatized, victims of an unfortunate fate, bottoms of a blind society, it takes a plot turn” (ibid:142). To conceive, for instance, Zarzhauriel as a

rest retreat did not imply the rehabilitation of the land nor the resurgence of a rural world. Their ideas of emotion and joy were exactly the same in the city than there. Unlike Manuel, La Mochufa did not experiment a personal change, did not perceive the terrain space as potentiality to being-otherwise themselves, but the village. They formulated the terrain as a place to project the already existing images of joy, conformity and disconnection that they already had. While at the same time they wanted to be detached from their world, they seemed desperately to be found by the same.

As Columbus did, La Mochufa “discovered” a land and inhabited with their values of modernization. La Mochufa colonized the supposedly emptied rural territory with the ideas of modernization and conformity that are distated by the life in the cities. As for Columbus, “to discover” it was not enough, they needed to domain it (Galafassi & Riffo, 2018). How could they dominate a depopulated territory? Generating capital from there, more concretely from the image of that territory, from the same imaginaries that initially displace them there. La Mochufa did not have enough to own their house, they wanted to buy the house where Manuel used to hide. They wanted to acquire it in order to create a rural hotel with kayaking activities. The idea could not disturb Manuel more. The hotel would bring exactly what Manuel fled from: more people, and specifically more people like La Mochufa. At this point, Manuel had forgotten the reasons why he moved there, he just wanted back the little lonely paradise. In the last chapters of the novel is where the whole plot unfolds. For this reason, I am about to make a brief summary and then begin with its analysis.

Manuel at this stage had a very concrete aim: to expel La Mochufa from Zarzahuriel. Thus, to recover what the village was for him. By his account, they could not coexist in the same space “they were, based on him, of another order” (ibid:156). At first, Manuel tried to scare them away, e.g. by breaking things in the house, while they were not there. This did not work; he devised a plan to burn the house when there was no one inside. To do this, he sneaked into Mochufa's house and damaged the boiler. According to Manuel's plan, the boiler would not burst now, but in a couple of months. Manuel wanted fiercely to see this happening. Then, another setback occurred. Manuel was surprised by one of the members of the Mochufa, Joaqui, while he was cutting firewood. The scare was such that he ended up cutting his leg deeply. After the bloody accident Manuel went back to Madrid to recover. This was a huge change for him. Instead of feeling glad to be back, Manuel developed a kind of agoraphobia. He could not get out of

his uncle's apartment. He could not stand the quantity of people on the streets. In his eyes, everyone seemed to be *mochufos*. In addition, it should be remembered that the police could still be looking for him after the episode at the protest in Montera.

Manuel lived in the small bedroom of his uncle's house. He did not want under any circumstance to be bothered by the *mochufas*, much less to be found by the police. One day Manuel's uncle found out that the police officer who Manuel attacked in Montera, had been killed by another policeman, and there was no clue about the person who attacked him in that protest. The police office has closed the case. The reasons for staying in hiding were over. No one would ever find out that it was Manuel who stabbed that cop in the neck. He could stay safely in Madrid. But he did not want to. The days passed and Manuel was still in Madrid, recovering. One day he received a call from Joaqui. Their house had burned in flames. They no longer wanted to buy Manuel's house. She sounded really upset. Apparently, the real estate wanted to collect damages. "Wait... What? real estate?" (Ibid: 164). Manuel and his uncle always thought that they were the owners of the property. That was very bad news. It meant that after they left, more *Mochufas* came and took over the place once again. Manuel's uncle cleverly contacted the real estate and made them an offer that they could not refuse. He bought the house for Manuel, and he returned as soon as possible to settle back in his long-awaited life.

The days passed and Manuel contacted less and less of his uncles. When he did, he sounded highly demotivated. Both agreed that his uncles will visit Manuel to spend some time together. His uncle moved heaven and earth to reach Zarzahuriel. He finally succeeded. He walked the streets with great enthusiasm and finally he was seeing with his own eyes everything that Manuel had described to him for so long. However, there was no sign of Manuel. When he finally reached Manuel's house, what he found was a note saying: "I love you" (ibid:219). He understood it all at once: "I had lacked the talent to realize that he was determined to complete his encapsulation to the last consequences (...) I didn't see that Manuel was no longer for anyone. Not even for me." (Ibid:220). Manuel had chosen his path: "to be a hermit without witnesses to attest to his works" (Ibidem).

The story of Manuel is a story of detachment. Manuel is not a Robinson Crusoe of the Spain of the twenty-first century. He was not lost but hidden. He did not master other animals or other communities. Unlike Crusoe, Manuel did not dream of going back

to his old life. He was not torn between one type of society or another. Santiago Lorenzo, unlike Daniel Defoe, did not portray a primitive community that while being wild, still keeps the purity of values that the modern life has snatched. Lorenzo does not represent the story of a lost man that is torn between two social worlds. Lorenzo does not illustrate what could be the potential of the depopulated area on a social level. Does not picture an alternative society but a fictitious story in which one of the characters, Manuel, embodies a critique of the urban world. For Manuel, the problem is not the emptiness and the loneliness, but the hyperconnected and technological dependent society. Likewise, for Lorenzo, the problem is not the continued depopulation of the rural world but the overcrowding of cities and all that it entails. That is why Manuel is a misanthrope, because he realizes that even in the supposed nothingness of the rural world, he cannot leave the urban world. One can do so, not where there is nothing, but no one.

Zarzahuriel is a place that is introduced as abandoned, emptied, in ruins, possibly forgotten from the rest of the world. Nonetheless, as the story progresses, the opposite is revealed. It is a space that, even being empty, is full, like Deleuze's canvas. In its abandoned objects is found a desire to modernize rural life. The modernization represents the desire to remain, to keep up with the times without being left behind and thus, vanish. That is, to save them from the passage of time and deterioration. However, it was not enough for their permanence, since as we already know nowadays, Zarzahuriel is abandoned. It is this supposed emptiness that drives Manuel to invent an anti-capitalist hermit life in what is believed to be a free space for creation. However, as the blank canvas of Deleuze, in order to create it is necessary to empty what is occupied. As the white canvas, Zarzahuriel was populated not by people but other interests and therefore other imaginations. Still in ruins, the houses were for rent; which was intended to capitalize the land, its ruins, and take advantage of it. Added to this, *La Mochufa* appears, which, as it has been explained, represents the culmination of the urban lifestyle and the contemporary society.

Consequently, Zarzahuriel is a place of contestation where multiple phantasias collapse. However, there is a difference between the portrayal of Manuel and *La Mochufa*: While the last one represents certain stereotypes of the current society (which most of us can feel identified with and can correlate to it), Manuel presents an alternative to the previous representation. By making a difference between representing and presenting, I am alluding to Castoraida's distinction between the reproductive and creative

imagination (de Vivanco, 2009). La Mochufa reproduces the current imaginaries of the urban lifestyle, that is, what it means joy, conformity etc. In contrast, through Manuel, an alternative way to being in the world is created and thus, some values that allude to that. Manuel makes it possible to question La Mochufa, its habits, priorities and values; and in turn creates new imaginaries within the social-historical domain of 21st-century Emptied Spain. As Pavel argues “literary fiction contributes to the development of the imaginary, either by giving it a powerful confirmation or by helping in its gradual transformation.” (1995:122).

To conclude, I will point out something that I barely mentioned before: the relationship of what I named an autobiography and fiction. The author of the book was a famous character in the cultural life of Spain. Almost ten years ago, he moved to a small village in Segovia. In some interviews, he confessed to share the same perspective about la Mochufa as Manuel (Martín, 2019). He did not need to stab a policeman to move there, either set on fire their house. However, the veracity of *Los Asquerosos* does not rely on its possibility to be proved with facts but is a story that has a place in what exists, and more specifically in the depopulating Spain. However, *Los Asquerosos* is a much more visceral and radical story than Lorenzo's life really is. It is precisely there where the power of fiction lies as “a place to install that which in some way or another disturbs our life experience; it is the space to stage the hidden, the frustrating, the unmanageable, the inexplicable” (de Vivanco, 2009: 229). For that reason, the fictitious character of the novel redistributes the sensible, that is the reality as we perceive it. La Mochufa reproduces the already existing order, but Manuel presents a new possible. As a result, in this redistribution of the sensible, what shows the unseen, the unsaid, the undone; and thus, the fiction of *Los Asquerosos* strongly affects the world of those who contemplate them becoming an image of their imaginaries. The image of a possible anti-capitalist life.

V. Destabilizing prevailing imaginaries of emptiness – a discussion

“What are at stake are not only possible stories about the world, but also worlds.”

(Roitman, 2014)

In the section above I have looked at the social imaginaries of emptiness portrayed in *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos*. In *Sand Castles* I and II, the emptiness of the territory (as uninhabited) has been occupied by the exacerbated dreams of the rural world modernization in capitalist terms – that is, linked with the idea of progress, a progress that can only be reached through capital productiveness. Dreams that were translated in land revaluation as well as massive construction in areas with none or low population density. These constructions, like the imaginary that promoted them, did not reach their culmination. Without even becoming, they turned into ruins due to the 2008's crisis. In other words, the representation of uninhibitedness as emptiness produced a territory for capitalist phantasies. Phantasies that due to the economic crisis, were given up but not forgotten. Still nowadays, the left infrastructures invade the landscape reminding us of those unfulfilled aspirations. Accordingly, these ruins have been examined as representations of the unreachability of those phantasies (regarding their past), but also as the promise of a future-yet-to-come.

Additionally, the potentiality of the ruin as a place for imagining otherwise (other possibilities) has been additionally investigated in *Los Asquerosos*. However, in this novel, the emptiness is represented as a consequence of depopulation, and hence marked by the remains of those that inhabited the terrain in the past. Zarzahuriel is an example of that. In this case, the emptiness reveals itself as a contested space where multiple interests clash while trying to be grounded in Zarzahuriel. On one hand, La Mochufa seems to be an extension of those social imaginaries of urban prosperity as a solution to the primitive status (uninhabited) of the nature of the territory. On the other hand, Manuel is the reply to such imaginaries. Along the story, Manuel openly despises La Mochufa, how they live, they talk; in short, the world that they represent. Manuel, on the contrary, embodied the anti-capitalist phantasies of austerity. Both characters represent opposite worlds but mutually dependent: Manuel represents the break from hyperconnected and capitalist global world. A world, that due to the constant globalization processes does not remain framed in a certain terrain; La Mochufa is the perfect example of that.

Manuel's break is derived from two moments of crisis. The first one is the stabbing on the policeman's neck, an event that drove him to Zarzahuriel. This indicated the rupture with the urban world and the immersion in idyllic rural reality. The second event was the arrival of La Mochufa. His anonymous, austere world went into crisis with the arrival of La Mochufa, and hence his need to restart again, far away even from his uncle. The second rupture is no longer connected with a territory, but with a society. This society is molded by global social imaginaries, and hence most of us can easily recognize them in our surroundings. For Manuel, La Mochufa's world is a world in decadence, in crisis, where nothing else can be done but to get away from it and imagining an alternative future. It is precisely on this idea of "being in crisis" where the two art works coincide. Both social imaginaries, represented in the photos and the novel, are born from a state of crisis. In both cases, the emptiness is the precondition to imagining an alternative future. In the following lines, I will explore the relationship between the notions of crisis and emptiness through *Cascales*, one of the characters of the well-known movie *Amanece, que no es poco*.

Amanece, que no es poco (1989) is a Spanish surrealist comedy written and directed by José Luis Cuerda. The film presents the peculiar lives of the inhabitants of a fictional town in rural Spain. In the film, the social imaginaries of a backward but morally superior rural Spain are pushed to the limit, fostered by the Franco era. These stereotypes are taken so far that they become ridiculed. However, there is a character in the film who does not represent anything: Cascales. He is a blond young man who dresses up in pajamas and walks around the village asking the rest of the characters of the movie "eh tú, que te cambio mi personaje por el tuyo" (eh you, let's switch characters!). Cascales is looking for a character to embody since he is missing one. Since he is a character without character, he could *potentially* be anyone. That is why he keeps asking throughout the movie to everyone he encounters: "eh tú, que te cambio mi personaje por el tuyo" (eh you, let's switch characters!). This is what occurs with the relationship between unpopulated/depopulated territory and their representation as empty/emptied, or in other words, the relationship between the notion of territory and emptiness. The social imaginaries of emptiness invade those territories giving the potentiality of being occupied by "anyone", as there was a character without character desperately to be found.

In the light of this, the symbolism of emptiness operates as a synonym of crisis. As it has been mentioned in the theoretical framework, crisis is a narrative device that

“elaborates critiques in terms of ideological and political failure” (Roitman, 2014: 85). Thus, as it has been already stated, by naming a territory as Emptied, it reveals the processes of depopulation as a consequence of the political actions, such as the centralization of the economy or major economical investment in the cities during the fascist period. Simply put, the so-called emptiness is synonymous to represent a territory in crisis as a consequence of “ideological/political failure”. As del Molino (2018) has illustrated, the conception of those territories as empty is something that has been culturally represented throughout the history of Spain. Del Molino does not deny the terrible effects for the rural world during the fascist period, but mostly defends the need for their own rural narrative. He claims the need of reappropriation of the rural social imaginaries by those that still nowadays remain there, those that are let out for euphemizing the crisis of depopulation/repopulation – or more precisely, a demographic imbalance – as a matter of emptiness. The emptiness as the cause for being in crisis, frames in a concrete form, first, the critique of what is wrong in the present (the supposed emptiness as product of emptying processes), and second, based on the critique, the solution that must take place in the future (the occupation). Regarding this, as Roitman argues, the term crisis operates as a transcendental place holder, it signifies a diagnosis to the present which evokes a moral demand between the past and the future (2018: 4-8). In that way, it elaborates a critique not only about how the things are but actually how they should be. That is, about how those territories are depopulated/abandoned but thus may be repopulated/reconsidered.

It is the social imaginaries of emptiness (and therefore crisis) of those territories what “unveil” their potentiality as transcendental place holders, that is, as places to think otherwise (Roitman, 2018: 9). Such otherwise is envisioned as an ostensible solution to the problem, to what has been criticized. If the crisis is based on the emptiness of depopulated or forgotten spaces, the solution must be to repopulate it. Consequently, these social imaginaries of emptiness illustrate a territory in crisis based on its losses but ignore what it remains: the inhabitants, the ruins, even the fauna and flora. As I have shown, such emptiness has been the condition of possibility along history to conquer that space, to inhabit it, with diverse imaginaries. The supposed emptiness is the condition to imagine how to live otherwise. In that sense, the perpetuation of the symbolization of a terrain as empty/emptied, police a particular distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2010) which is such emptiness. This distribution of the sensible as a space of emptiness and thus

crisis, subjugates the present for a future yet-to-come. The social imaginaries of emptiness become a political matter in so far, they shape what “is seen and what can be said about it around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière 2010:13).

As I have illustrated in the analysis, such imaginaries have become the condition of possibility for the urban imaginaries to extend its roots and ground into transformative actions in the morphology of the terrain, i.e., Sand Castles. Furthermore, following Roitman (2014), those spaces, framed as in crisis, acquire a redemptive and utopian quality, which I have studied through the category of ruins, anti-monument and both main characters in *Los Asquerosos*. For example, La Mochufa wanted to disconnect from the urban world and purified themselves in their new rural house, but instead they brought the urban *habitus*²³ with themselves to Zarzahuriel. Consequently, the supposed void ended up being taken by exogenous voices that appropriate the space petrifying its temporality as a future yet-to-come, a future that is configured not as the salvation (redemption) of that terrain and its culture or collective memory, but as the salvation of an overpopulated urban world that reveals itself as less and less liveable. As a result, the development of those depopulated areas is manifested in our societies as a response to urban demands and its global productive interests (Entrena-Durán, 1999N n.p.). The social imaginaries of emptiness, therefore, corresponds to the urban world, while at the same time it is such emptiness what makes possible the installation of their own social imaginaries. This implies an essentialist construction of these terrains, as a space for redemption (because of its emptiness) and time for salvation (because its temporality is a future yet to come). This produces what Rancière named *politics as police*, that is, the petrification of a certain distribution of the sensible which produces a unanimous vision and allows one voice to be heard while not others.

²³ As Entrena-Durán has studied nowadays the clear distinction between rural and urban *habitus* is quite diffused. Based on him, in a more and more globalised world it is more precise to make the distinction between the local (urban/rural) and global. Likewise, while in the traditional societies there used to be a clear correspondence between the spatial field where the life of the population unfolded and the symbolic-cultural arc that determined their habitus of behaviour. Nowadays, despite the population keeping living in locatable scopes, the genesis of their habitus is conditioned by a global culture (1999: n.p.). Following this, as the cities have a better internationally connected since they have, for instance, big museums where international painter are exhibited or have a nearby airport which brings together people from all around the world; but also, because they are the centre of political and economic matters. Consequently, urban habitus are more globally affected than other areas that are more geographical and politically-economically isolated.

For future research, I think it would be essential to contest such an essentialist understanding of the depopulated areas as emptiness by exploring the voices and lives that remain. This does not mean the replacement of one narrative for the other one, but to consider the representation of depopulation as constant processes of contingent negotiations and renegotiations replacing the reified idea of emptiness (Brambilla and Pötzsch, 2019:82). This will be possible by making visible the multiple voices (endogenous and exogenous) that are already occupying these territories. By doing this, one will enter into the political consideration of such territories, not only from an urban social imaginary, but also from a rural and ultimately global perspective. The terrain reveals itself as the Deleuzian canvas, hence making possible what Rancière called *politics as process* (Rancière, 2014): a constant renegotiation of those social imaginaries and its representation of depopulation and abandonment. In such a case, authors such as María Sánchez (2019) in *Tierra de mujeres. Una mirada íntima y familiar al mundo rural* (Land of Woman) or the director Diana Toucedo (2017) in *Trinta Lumes* (2017) will enable a redistribution of the sensible from within the territories.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research originated from an interest in understanding the cultural demand for artistic works that represent the Spanish rural world, especially those related to depopulation and abandonment. Instead of doing a sociological investigation based on the consumers or the rationalities of the cultural/artistic market, I decided to dig into the phenomenon as if it was a social one, as it was responding to a determinate historical moment. To do so, I have explored the historical moment where those demands were highly increased, and the prevailing narratives of depopulation and abandonment started to be desirable under an image of emptiness. As I have shown, the demand succeeded in a moment of scepticism towards the old power structures and a crisis of global health where the city turned into an insecure and comfortless place. Within these global and urban crises, the mentioned rural territories gained attention. On another note, before the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions about the Spanish demographic imbalances were already taking place in the media and social sphere, as well as political discourse. They were framed within the narrative of

emptiness/emptying, as I explained, naming the areas in processes of depopulation or abandoned as the Empty or Emptied Spain. For the purpose of understanding the desirability of empty/emptied territories within a context of crisis, but also to whom such desires/narratives belong I have examined the distribution of the sensible and social imaginaries of emptiness in *Sand Castles I* and *II* and *Los Asquerosos*, and I have explored through the Cascales how the emptiness operates as the crisis narrative device mentioned by Roitman.

Thus, *how do representations of an Emptied Spain relate to concern over crisis and with what effect?* As I have studied, they are related in two ways. First, the emptiness represents the rural world as in crisis itself. Hence, it operates as an historical category which makes visible a history of abandonment and rural exodus to the cities. Second, the emptiness does not only represent a history, but also operates as a concept that does something to the territories that it defines. As a concept, hence, it not only constructs spaces but demarcates temporalities as investigated under the category of the anti-monument. The abandoned territories of *Sand Castles* and *Los Asquerosos* operate in both times: in the past – as collective memory – and as a promise of a future that is yet-to-come. The emptiness as crisis reveals a future temporality that is appropriate for those who appeal to the void, that is, those who have an urban gaze, a look that in turn is constrained by the global interests of a capitalist system. This gaze finds in the supposed emptiness a space of its own redemption, a redemption of the urban world which translates into the appropriation of such emptiness through social imaginaries that contradict, or at least criticize, the urban territories from which they originate. Such was the case of Manuel, who, coming from the big city, made out of Zarzahuriel a paradise of anti-capitalist phantasias. Consequently, while the concept of emptiness permits the occupation of those rural territories by urban (as a derivative of global trends) or anti-urban (as a search for redemption of those trends) imaginaries, it simultaneously silences a wide range of voices. Thus, what are the voices that already occupied the “emptiness”? What different category could one use to frame the phenomenon of depopulation and abandonment from within, that is, from its endogenous inhabitants? These and other questions could be a good start for future research. An investigation, as Deleuze warned, should not deal with a blank canvas, but with all the figurative forms that already exist in it.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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