**Final title:** Constructing Franco’s touristic image. The Valley of the Fallen as a tourist site.

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**Abstract:**

The monument known as Valley of the Fallen was conceived immediately after the Spanish Civil War as a colossal commemoration of the nationalist victory. But when it could be finally completed, in 1959, it opened its doors to a very different political scenario, marked by the regime’s quest for international rehabilitation. Consequently, the construction underwent a process of symbolic resignification: the discourse about the military uprising as a holy war of liberation faded away, and the Valley was officially re-read as a monument to reconciliation (see Alted Vigil, 2015; Llorente Hernández, 1995).

This inclusive narrative was especially underlined in guidebooks and promotional materials about the monument (Stockey, 2013), which soon became a typical destination for one-day tourist excursions from Madrid. However, the monument’s transition to a touristic function required further adjustments. Together with its commemorative character and the war echoes it could arise, the use of political prisoners in its construction (Hepworth, 2014) was another problematic issue which had to be dealt with. Additionally, the monument’s funerary function, with the mortal remains of José Antonio, founder of the Falange party, symbolically presiding the basilica, could most inconveniently remind visitors of Franco’s fascist origins.

Basing on an analysis of tourist discourses and visual representations of the Valley of the Fallen during the 1950s and 60s, I argue that the conversion of this fascist landmark into a tourist site was made possible through a heritagization process, where its architectonic attributes as well as its physical and metaphorical connections to the palace-monastery of El Escorial were key factors. This heritagized perception made it possible to overlook the monument’s more controversial aspects, and, basing on the authoritative principle that heritage just *is* (Smith, 2006), secured its ‘objective’ appreciation, implicitly hindering any possible discussion about the site.

The Valley of the Fallen is a representative case of the role tourism played in the rehabilitation of the Franco regime after World War II. Beyond the simplistic view of modern tourism as an apolitical phenomenon, I suggest a more contextualized reading that considers tourism as an active agent in the ideological evolution of post-war Europe. Addressing those tourist discourses that contributed to a positive image of the regime will also allow us to reconsider the traditional narrative of tourism as a destabilizing force for the dictatorship.

**Short bio:**

Graduated in Art History from Complutense University Madrid, Alicia Fuentes Vega’s research interests include the instrumentalisation of modern art by the Franco regime and processes related to the staging of Spanish national identity, as well as the methodology of visual studies. In her doctoral thesis she dealt with the representation of Spain in visual culture of the tourist boom, 1950-1970 (*Premio Extraordinario de Doctorado* 2016). As an FPU fellow of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Alicia developed research stays at the Freie Universität Berlin, Birkbeck University London and the University of California Berkeley. She is currently developing a postdoctoral research project with a grant by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, at the Technische Universität Berlin (Center for Metropolitan Studies).