

WEAPONIZING HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE: THE NOTION OF *RECONQUISTA* IN SPANISH NATIONALISM

ALEJANDRO GARCÍA-SANJUÁN
UNIVERSIDAD DE HUELVA
SPAIN

Date of receipt: 30th of April, 2019

Date of acceptance: 29th of October, 2019

ABSTRACT

The notion of *Reconquista* is the product of 19th-century Spanish Nationalist thinking. Although developed as an academic concept, it played, at the same time, a crucial political and ideological role, thus holding a very powerful and potentially toxic ideological burden, chiefly consisting of the idea that Spain is a nation shaped against Islam. Its dual academic and ideological nature makes it a highly problematic concept that greatly contributed to produce a largely biased and distorted vision of the Iberian medieval past, aimed at delegitimizing the Islamic presence (al-Andalus) and therefore at legitimizing the Christian conquest of the Muslim territory. Over the last years and in the framework of the Clash of Civilizations doctrine, conservative and far-right scholarly and political outlets reignited the most ideological version of the *Reconquista*, thus raising a major challenge for academic historians.

KEY WORDS

Reconquista, Spain, Al-Andalus, Spanish Nationalism, Nationalist scholarship, Far-right.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Recuperatio Hispanica, Hispania, Iberia Arabica, Nationalismus hispanicus, Academia nationalista, Factio extremæ dexteræ.

1. Introduction¹

On last December 2nd, 2018, former grand wizard of the KKK, David Duke, tweeted out the following:² “VOX triumphs in Andalusia! 12 seats and the end of the socialist regime #EspañaViva makes it history and shows that change is possible. The Reconquista begins in the Andalusian lands and will be extended in the rest of Spain”.

Exceeding all predictions, Vox took 12 seats in the aforementioned election, becoming the first far-right organization to triumph at the ballot box since Spain’s return to democracy after the death of Franco in 1975. As we shall see below, Vox has constantly invoked the idea of *Reconquista* over the last years. Given the recent results in the Andalusia elections, the strategy seems to have paid off well.

Both the political repurposing of the idea of *Reconquista* by Vox and Duke’s tweet point out to the same fact: the far right’s increasing fascination with the Middle Ages, an issue that has been widely discussed in the media over the last years. At the same time, this subject has been considerably enlivened in recent scholarly publications, such as books by Bruce Holsinger³ and Andrew Elliott.⁴

As Sarah Pearce pointed out in a thoughtful opinion piece published in *The Washington Post*, “These movements share more than political goals: They share an attachment to an imagined medieval past”.⁵ The recent reintroduction of the *Reconquista* rhetoric in the political conversation has become a global phenomenon, as Duke’s tweet clearly suggests. For this reason, Spain comes as an excellent case study to approach this subject. What makes the *Reconquista* different is not just its recent repurposing by various conservative political and scholarly outlets, but also its long-standing and solid scholarly track record.

1. This text represents the earliest outcome of my research stay at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton) over the Spring of 2019. I am very grateful to the Institute for its support to carry out my research. I am also indebted to Seth Kimmel (Columbia University), Mayte Green-Mercado (Rutgers University), and Fernando Bravo López (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) for their comments and suggestions. All possible mistakes are my own.

2. @DrDavidDuke. “VOX triumphs in Andalusia! 12 seats and the end of the socialist regime #EspañaViva makes it history and shows that change is possible. The Reconquista begins in the Andalusian lands and will be extended in the rest of Spain #AndalucíaPorEspaña”, 3 December 2018: <<https://twitter.com/DrDavidDuke/status/1069370522000130049>>. On Duke and his Islamophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric, see Bravo López, Fernando. *En casa ajena. Bases intelectuales del antisemitismo y la islamofobia*. Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2012: 190-195.

3. Holsinger, Bruce. *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2007.

4. Elliott, Andrew R. B. *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media. Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-first Century*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017.

5. Pearce, Sarah. “The Medieval Fantasy that Fuels Israel’s Far Right”. *The Washington Post*, 1 March 2019: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/03/01/medieval-fantasy-that-fuels-israels-far-right/?utm_term=.7cac5c67787a>. See also Schuessler, Jennifer. “Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists. And One Another”. *The New York Times*, 5 May 2019: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html>>.



2. The origins of the notion of *Reconquista*

In a path-breaking study published nearly twenty years ago, Patrick Geary highlighted the narrow relationship between scholarship and nationalism.⁶ However, and despite the rather obvious political and ideological features of the idea of *Reconquista* and its pervasive and abiding influence in Spanish scholarship, the relationship between ideology and academic history remains an ill-studied topic with regard to medieval Iberia, especially in Spain. The only monograph on this subject was published only four years ago and, significantly, it was carried out by a non-Spanish scholar. To my mind, the book by Patricia Hertel⁷ represents a good starting point in a subject that desperately calls for a much deeper and further development.⁸

A right understanding of the origins of the notion of *Reconquista* requires a careful look at the ideological context in which it was created. Among many other political, social and economic changes, liberalism brought the notion of national sovereignty. The new political subject, the nation, needed to be legitimized, and there is no better legitimator than the past. The nation thus was turned into the new historical subject and national histories swept through all European countries over the 19th century. The first Spanish Constitution of 1812 set forth the new right of national sovereignty: *La soberanía reside esencialmente en la Nación, y por lo mismo pertenece a ésta exclusivamente el derecho de establecer sus leyes fundamentales* (Title I, art. 3).⁹ At the same time, Catholicism was proclaimed as the only possible and perpetual religious faith of the Spanish nation (Title II, chapter 2, art. 12).¹⁰

Nationalism plagued with similar intensity the two main tendencies of 19th-century scholarship, liberals, and conservatives. As pointed out by Modesto Lafuente

6. Geary, Patrick J. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

7. Hertel, Patricia. *The Crescent Remembered. Islam and Nationalism on Medieval Iberia*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2015. The significant role played by the Islamic past in Spanish nationalist thinking seems largely ignored by Núñez Seixas, Xosé M. *Suspiros de España. El nacionalismo español 1808-2018*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2018.

8. García Sanjuán, Alejandro. "Al-Andalus en la historiografía del nacionalismo españolista. Entre la España musulmana y la Reconquista (siglos XIX-XXI)", *A 1300 años de la conquista de al-Andalus. Historia, cultura y legado del islam en la península ibérica*, Diego Melo Carrasco, Francisco Vidal Castro, eds. Coquimbo: Centro Mohammed VI para el diálogo de Civilizaciones, 2012: 65-104; García Sanjuán, Alejandro. "Al-Andalus en el nacionalcatolicismo español: la historiografía de época franquista (1939-1960)", *El franquismo y la apropiación del pasado*, Francisco José Moreno Martín, ed. Madrid: Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 2017: 189-208; García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. "Rejecting al-Andalus, exalting the Reconquista: the persistence of an exclusionary historical memory in today's Spain", *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 10/1 (2018): 127-145.

9. "In essence, sovereignty resides in the Nation, and therefore the right to stablish its fundamental laws belongs to the Nation". *Constitución política de la monarquía española*. Cádiz: Imprenta real, 1812: 3.

10. *La religión de la Nación española es y será perpetuamente la católica, apostólica, romana, única verdadera. La Nación la protege por leyes sabias y justas y prohíbe el ejercicio de cualquiera otra.* ("The religion of the Spanish Nation is and will be perpetually Catholic, Apostolic, Roman, the only true one. The Nation protects it by sacred and fair laws and prohibits the exercise of any other"). *Constitución política de la monarquía española...*: 6.



(1806-1866), the finest representative of mainstream liberal historical writing, the *Reconquista es cristiana y nacional*.¹¹ To a large extent, therefore, this notion stood for a common ground shared by both tendencies, and this cross-cutting character explains much of the scholarly success it reached. On the other hand, although both were equally Catholic in their leanings (as revealed by Lafuente), over time National Catholicism consolidated as the most conservative version of Spanish nationalism, peaking under Francoism which, not by accident, was likewise the heyday of the *Reconquista*, as we shall see below.

Late in the 19th century, the much-renowned scholar Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (1856-1912) wrote the following: *España, evangelizadora de la mitad del orbe; España martillo de herejes, luz de Trento, espada de Roma, cuna de San Ignacio (...); ésa es nuestra grandeza y nuestra unidad; no tenemos otra*.¹² As pointed out by J. Álvarez Junco, Catholicism and the nation were the same thing for Menéndez Pelayo.¹³ The notion according to which upholding and spreading the Catholic faith stands for the paramount historical achievement of the Spanish nation represents the basic underpinning of National Catholicism.¹⁴ Menéndez Pelayo was by far the most important scholarly figure of his time in the academic fields of history and Spanish language and literature. The consequences of the key-role played by Catholicism in 19th-century Spanish scholarship with regard to the reception of al-Andalus are not difficult to ascertain. If Spain as a nation represented the quintessence of Catholicism, what role was to be given to Islamic and Arab culture in the national narrative?

An accurate answer to that question may be found in the works of Francisco-Javier Simonet (1829-1897), holder of the chair of Arabic in the University of Granada since 1862. An unshakable Catholic faith shaped most of his scholarship, thus representing the major driving force of his approach. Actually, he was not simply a faithful Catholic believer, but a convinced militant of Carlism, the most conservative political tendency in 19th-century Spain, mostly made up of anti-liberals and supporters of absolutism and which provoked three wars between 1833 and 1876. Simonet regularly contributed to *El Siglo Futuro*, a newspaper released between 1875 and 1936 which since 1886 became the official publication of the

11. "The 'Reconquista' was Christian and national". Lafuente, Modesto. *Historia general de España*. Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Mellado, 1851: V, 444. On Lafuente and his concept of *Reconquista*, see Ríos Saloma, Martín. *La Reconquista: una construcción historiográfica, siglos XVI-XIX*. Madrid – Mexico City: Marcial Pons – Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011: 210-220. According to Álvarez Junco, José. *Mater dolorosa. La idea de España en el siglo XIX*. Madrid: Taurus, 2001: 204, Lafuente repeatedly claimed the existence of divinely-originated permanent national features.

12. "Spain, evangelizer of half the world. Spain, hammer of heretics, light of Trent, sword of Rome, cradle of Saint Ignatius (...). This is our greatness and our unity, we have no other". Menéndez Pelayo, Marcelino. *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, 3 vols. Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1978: III, 658.

13. Álvarez Junco, José. *Mater dolorosa...*: 463.

14. Botti, Alfonso. *Cielo y dinero. El nacionalcatolicismo en España (1881-1975)*. Madrid: Alianza, 1992.



so-called Integrist Party, founded by the most radical Carlist followers, those against any political engagement with the liberals.¹⁵

Simonet rose to prominence with the history of the so-called “mozarabs”, the Christians living under Muslim rule in Iberia. According to his approach, their steadfast and unflinching Catholic faith allowed them to endure the endless hardships of their subjection to Muslim rule.¹⁶ In this book, Simonet sketched the evolution of the medieval Iberian historical process as follows: *Trabajada por muchos vicios y males en los últimos tiempos de la dominación visigoda, la nación española sucumbió a principios del siglo VIII, cayendo bajo el yugo de los musulmanes en que debía gemir por cerca de ocho siglos*.¹⁷ It is thus hardly surprising that Simonet described time and again the Islamic conquest of Iberia in terms of “catastrophe”.¹⁸

The Arabist Eduardo Saavedra (1829-1912) espoused the same idea in *Estudio sobre la invasión de los árabes en España* (“Study about the invasion of the Arabs in Spain”), the first Spanish academic monograph on the origins of al-Andalus. In line with Simonet, he claimed that the arrival of Muslims to Iberia provoked *la inmensa catástrofe nacional*.¹⁹ This highly pessimistic approach to the expansion of Islam should not be regarded, however, as an exclusive feature of Spanish scholarship. In the context of his explanation on the end of Late Antiquity and the origins of the Middle Ages, the well-known Belgian historian Henri Pirenne (1862-1935) wrote: “The world-order which had survived the Germanic invasions was not able to survive the invasion of Islam. It is thrown across the path of history with the elemental force of a cosmic cataclysm”.²⁰

If the catastrophist approach to the rise and expansion of Islam may be rightly considered as a mainstream feature of late 19th and early-20th-century European scholarship, the Spanish case, however, would be unique with regard to the influence of nationalism, which is key to understand the abiding tendency of Spanish historical writing to name the origins of al-Andalus in terms of ‘invasion’. At the same time, this role is equally crucial in order to correctly grasp the heavy ideological burden of the idea of *Reconquista*.

15. On Simonet, see Monroe, James T. *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship (Sixteenth Century to the Present)*. Leiden: Brill, 1970: 85-100 and Manzanera de Cirre, Manuela. *Arabistas españoles del siglo XIX*. Madrid: Instituto Hispano Árabe de Cultura, 1979: 131-162.

16. López García, Bernabé. “Origen, gestión y divulgación de la *Historia de los Mozárabes* de Francisco Javier Simonet (con una bibliografía del Simonet publicista)”. *Awraq*, 22 (2001-2005): 183-212.

17. “Afflicted by many vices and hardships during the last years of Visigothic domination, the Spanish nation finally succumbed early in the 8th century, when it fell under the Muslims’ yoke and so it remained wailing for nearly eight centuries”. Simonet, Francisco Javier. *Historia de los mozárabes españoles*. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1897-1903: 1.

18. Simonet, Francisco Javier. *Historia de los mozárabes españoles...: 14, 35, 122*.

19. “A huge national catastrophe”. Saavedra, Eduardo. *Estudio sobre la invasión de los árabes en España*. Madrid: Imprenta de El Progreso Editorial, 1982: 1.

20. Pirenne, Henri. *Medieval Cities. Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014: 14.



The 1994 book by Pedro Chalmeta stands for the most recent instance of this pervasive tendency²¹ and represents, at the same time, a singular case. Far from being a traditional historian, Chalmeta is openly anti-nationalist in his leanings and has been very vocal about traditional Spanish scholarship.²² His use of the notion of “invasion”, therefore, seems a clear case of unconscious bias which, at the same time, reveals that traditional concepts have been uncritically assumed in large sectors of Spanish scholarship, regardless of their respective ideological leanings.

A correct appraisal of the peculiar role played by the notion of ‘invasion’ in Spanish scholarship can only be reached against the background of a wider approach. A quick glance at other academic traditions reveals clear differences in the use of historical vocabulary. This is the case of 19th-century authors like Jules Lacroix de Mârlès (d. 1850?)²³ and Henry Coppee (1821-1895)²⁴. The same holds true with regard to more recent scholars, like the British Roger Collins²⁵ and, similarly, Nicola Clarke²⁶ and Geraldine Hazbun.²⁷ All of them use the notion of “conquest”, instead of ‘invasion’.

Considering this stark contrast between Spanish and non-Spanish scholarly traditions as a sheer coincidence would be extremely naïve and misleading. “Invasion” and “conquest” might be well considered as synonymous terms describing the takeover of territories and peoples by a foreign power.²⁸ However, in the case of Spanish historical writing, there has been a careful selection of vocabulary in order to describe different historical events, and this selection is the result of ideological preconceptions and prejudices.

The Mexican scholar Martín Ríos Saloma published in 2011 the most earnest and comprehensive attempt thus far to explain the origins of the notion of *Reconquista*. This word remained nearly unknown across the Medieval period to describe the

21. Chalmeta, Pedro. *Invasión e islamización. La conquista de Hispania y la formación de al-Andalus*. Madrid: Mapfre, 1994.

22. Chalmeta, Pedro. “Historiografía hispana y arabismo: biografía de una distorsión”. *Hesperia culturas del Mediterráneo*, 5 (2006): 195-218.

23. Lacroix de Mârlès, Jules. *Histoire de la conquête de l’Espagne par les Arabes*. Tours: Ad Mame et Cie, Imprimeurs-Librairies, 1847.

24. Coppee, Henry. *History of the Conquest of Spain by the Arab-Moors*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1881.

25. Collins, Roger. *The Arab Conquest of Spain (710-797)*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

26. Clarke, Nicola. *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia. Medieval Arabic narratives*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.

27. Hazbun, Geraldine. *Narratives of the Islamic Conquest of Medieval Spain*. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2015.

28. It holds likewise true that both concepts convey very different meanings in everyday language. For example, we speak of “conquest” with a usually positive meaning when talking about “conquering someone’s heart”, expressing the positive idea of gaining affection or admiration by means of seduction or personal appeal. Likewise, we speak of conquest when a certain group or, in general, the whole society gets new rights (“social conquests” or “political conquests”). On the contrary, the idea of “invasion” has in everyday speech very negative connotations (‘invading someone’s privacy’), and the same holds true in the vocabulary of Biology (“invasive species”) and Medicine (“invasive disease” or “minimally invasive surgery”).



Christian conquest of al-Andalus:²⁹ with this specific meaning, it represents a modern neologism that only gained currency over the last quarter of the 19th century, remaining excluded from the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy until as late as 1936. Considered as the ‘official’ version of the Spanish language, the Dictionary does not create new words, but simply acknowledges those commonly used in everyday language. For the first time, the already existing entry “Reconquista”, which until then conveyed only a generic meaning, was reworded to include a new and more specific significance: *la recuperación del territorio español invadido por los musulmanes y cuyo epílogo fue la toma de Granada en 1492*.³⁰

According to this new definition, which may be described as a perfect formulation of the traditional Spanish nationalist approach, the medieval Iberian historical process could be boiled down to two basic concepts, ‘invasión’ and *Reconquista*. Understanding this difference in vocabulary is key to gaining a correct insight into the highly ideological nature of this approach. In sharp contrast with the case of the arrival of Islam to Iberia, the Christian takeover of al-Andalus has never been called “invasión” in scholarship: the concept of “Christian invasion of al-Andalus” is just simply non-existent in scholarly historical writing.³¹ In fact, even the concept of ‘conquest’ has been seldom used to name this historical process.³² A special word was created, and if there is a special name it is obviously because the named thing is considered unique.

As I mentioned before, this sharp difference of vocabulary must be explained as the result of a careful selection at the service of an ideological agenda: while “invasión” clearly points to the lack of legitimacy of the Islamic conquest, *Reconquista* bears exactly the opposite meaning. It is not just a simple conquest, but a re-conquest, that is to say, the recovery of something previously lost. And you can only lose what you have previously owned. This envisioning, therefore, leads rather inevitably to the downgrading of Andalusí Muslims as mere interlopers, regardless of the local origins of the vast majority of them and also regardless of how long they remained living in their territory.³³ The Islamic “invasión” and the *Reconquista* are, therefore,

29. De Ayala, Carlos. “La Reconquista: ¿ficción o realidad historiográfica?”, *La Edad Media peninsular: Aproximaciones y problemas*, Ángel Gordo, Diego Melo, eds. Gijón: Trea, 2017: 127-142, presents an example regarding King Alfonso II of Asturias (791-842), drawing on a 12th-century source.

30. “Recovery of the Spanish territory invaded by the Muslims, which ended with the taking of Granada in 1492”. All early versions of the Diccionario are available at *Nuevo Tesoro Lexicográfico de la Lengua Española*: <<http://buscon.rae.es/nltle/SrvltGUILoginNtIle>>.

31. The same holds true for “Spanish/Christian invasion of America”: Spanish tradition developed instead concepts as “discovery” (*descubrimiento*) and “evangelization” (*evangelización*) which tend to hide the violent aspects of the process.

32. Of late, the notion of “feudal conquest”, which in all likelihood must be attributed to Barceló, Miquel. *Arqueología medieval. En las afueras del “medievalismo”*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1988: 41, gained traction among significant scholarly sectors. Conversely, Manzano, Eduardo. “Al-Andalus: un balance crítico”, *Villa 4. Histoire et archéologie de l’occident musulman (VIIe-XVe siècle): Al-Andalus, Maghreb, Sicile*, Philippe Sénac, ed. Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2012: 24, brands this notion *desafortunada* (“misguided”).

33. *esta visión del musulmán intruso y a la postre vencido ha mantenido una vigencia extraordinaria, no sólo entre los historiadores nacionalistas españoles, sino también en otras historiografías peninsulares* (“This vision



inextricably intertwined, representing the two sides of the same coin, the Spanish National Catholic reading of medieval Iberian history.

To sum up, the *Reconquista* narrative may be sketched in two simple ideas. The Muslim takeover of Iberia was illegitimate (invasion) and therefore it provoked a legitimate reaction on the side of the Christian ‘Spaniards’. This reaction, the *Reconquista*, luckily led to the end of the Muslim presence. On the one hand, this approach stands for the most powerful myth of the origins of the Spanish nation,³⁴ which, accordingly, would have been shaped in the fight against Islam.³⁵ On the other hand, it represents a highly biased reading of the past aimed at delegitimizing the Islamic half of medieval Iberia and at legitimizing the other, Christian half. When weaponized for political goals, this approach is not only misleading but also extremely toxic and even dangerous, as we shall see below.

3. Spanish Civil War, Francoism and *Reconquista*

The liberal tradition always held a sincere pride of the artistic and scientific achievements of the Iberian Muslims as an integral part of the national heritage, and this approach crystallized in the notion of ‘Muslim Spain’, which allowed integrating the Islamic period into the national historical narrative. This reading of the historical process opposed the most conservative thinking, based on the idea of the exclusive Catholic identity of the nation achieved through the *Reconquista* process.³⁶ Liberals and conservatives shared across the 19th century the notion of the *Reconquista* as a national liberation struggle. However, since the 20th century

of the Muslims as ultimately defeated interlopers has proven highly effective, not only among Spanish nationalist historians but also in other Iberian scholarly traditions”). Manzano, Eduardo. “La construcción histórica del pasado nacional”, *La gestión de la memoria. La historia de España al servicio del poder*, Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón, ed. Barcelona: Crítica, 2000: 55.

34. Spanish and non-Spanish authors alike coincide in considering the mythical nature of the notion of *Reconquista*: “The Islamic presence in Spain has furnished generations of Christian Spaniards with a potent national myth”. Fletcher, Richard. *Moorish Spain*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992: 6; Ríos Saloma, Martín F. “De la Restauración a la Reconquista: la construcción de un mito nacional (Una revisión historiográfica. Siglos XVI-XIX)”. *En la España Medieval*, 28 (2005): 379-414; *uno de los principales mitos originarios alumbrados por el nacionalismo español* (“one of the main origin myths produced by Spanish nationalism”). García Fitz, Francisco. *La Reconquista*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2010: 17; “the most successful Spanish national myth”. Hertel, Patricia. *The Crescent...: 22; la Reconquista, el mito fundador por excelencia de la historia de España* (“the Reconquista, the origin myth par excellence of the history of Spain”). Furió, Antoni. “Las Españas medievales”, *Historia de las Españas. Una aproximación crítica*, Joan Romero, Antoni Furió, eds. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanc, 2016: 101.

35. Actually, the oldest origins of the nation would be lost in the mists of time, and the *Reconquista* stands as the period in which the national identity got definitely shaped: *la más larga y fecunda de las épocas doradas, aquella en la que había cuajado de manera definitiva la identidad nacional* (“the longest and most fruitful of the golden ages, the one in which the national identity was definitely set”). Álvarez Junco, José. *Mater dolorosa...: 218*.

36. Bravo López, Fernando. “Los nuevos sarracenos”, *Al-Andalus y la Historia*. 3 May 2019. 20 October 2019 <<http://www.alandalusylahistoria.com/?p=1226>>.



this concept would be increasingly identified with the more conservative sectors, reaching its peak during the Franco dictatorship.

1936 not only marks what we might call the definitive lexical consolidation of the word *Reconquista* as the mainstream Spanish name for the Christian conquest of al-Andalus. It also represents one of the crucial moments of 20th-century Spanish history. The Republican government set up five years before faced on this date a coup d'état by one of his highest military commanders. Having full political and economic backing from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, General Franco eventually won the ensuing Civil War in 1939, leading the country to a 40 year-long dictatorship.

Right from the beginning of the war, Franco gained full support from the highest hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which rushed to dub his coup d'état as a Crusade. Following medieval tradition, Franco was proclaimed after his victory *caudillo de España por la Gracia de Dios* ("chieftain of Spain by God's grace"). National Catholicism peaked with Francoism, becoming the undeclared official ideology of the dictatorship. In this new context, the notion of *Reconquista* played a decisive and unprecedented role as one of Francoism's most effective ideological weapons.³⁷

Manuel Machado (brother of the outstanding Spanish poet, Antonio Machado) once described Franco in a poem as *caudillo de la nueva Reconquista*.³⁸ According to National Catholicism, Franco's victory over the Republican government represented a new liberation of Spain: if the medieval *Reconquista* set Spain free from the infidel Moors, Franco did the same with regard to Marxists, atheists, and Freemasons. The media used to regularly and enthusiastically extol Franco's victory as a new *Reconquista*. In April 1947, on the occasion of the eighth anniversary of that event, the newspaper *ABC*'s front page read as follows: "Without General Franco, Spain, besieged by the grip of Marxism, perhaps would never have been the same free nation that began to emerge twelve centuries ago in the *Reconquista*. [The war] was, in effect, another *Reconquista*, based on the force of heroism against a foreign enemy".

The unfolding of the highly charged rhetoric of *Reconquista* over the early Francoist period was not limited to the personal figure of the dictator but also reached important State symbols. That's particularly the case of the eagle of Saint John in the new Francoist flag. The eagle had been part of the coat of arms of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Monarchs, who, according to the canonical account, achieved national unity by bringing together Castile and Aragon Crowns with their marriage and finished the *Reconquista* process in 1492 with the taking of Granada.

37. Ríos Saloma, Martín. "La reconquista en el primer franquismo: relecturas tras la nueva cruzada", *El franquismo y la apropiación del pasado. El uso de la historia, de la arqueología y de la historia del arte para la legitimación de la dictadura*, Francisco Javier Moreno Martín, ed. Madrid: Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 2017: 137-158.

38. "Chieftain of the new *Reconquista*". Machado, Manuel. *Las horas de oro*. Madrid: Ediciones Reconquista, 1938. See Sabaté, Flocel. "Frontera peninsular e identidad (siglos IX-XII)", *Las Cinco Villas aragonesas en la Europa de los siglos XII y XIII de la frontera natural a las fronteras políticas y socioeconómicas (foralidad y municipalidad)*, Esteban Sarasa Sánchez, ed. Saragossa: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2007: 57.



The Civil War represents, by far, the bloodiest carnage in Spanish history, followed by a violent crackdown over the vanquished. By using the idea of *Reconquista* to legitimize his coup d'état, the war against the Republic, and the subsequent consolidation of his own personal leadership, Franco was the first one to weaponize the concept, turning it into a very effective instrument of fascist terror. In this regard, he might well be considered an authentic trailblazer who set the path later followed by those with far-right wing tendencies.

A further remark seems in order before moving on. The idea that Francoism “appropriated” the notion of *Reconquista* represents, to my mind, a misleading misconception.³⁹ There was no such an “appropriation” and the fact that the heyday of National Catholicism matched the peak of the *Reconquista* rhetoric could be considered hardly surprising. Being an integral part of the National Catholic narrative since the 19th century, the *Reconquista* perfectly fit in Franco’s political project and Francoism knew perfectly well how to make the most of its potential, turning it into a highly effective ideological weapon.

An intense *Reconquista* rhetoric permeated Francoist Spain at all different levels and the education system acted as a particularly effective indoctrinating tool. The past represents a suitable instrument to instill nationalist beliefs and patriotic slogans and many generations of school children were intensely brainwashed between the 1940s and the 1970s.⁴⁰ The following examples, taken from *Enciclopedia Álvarez*, one of the most popular and well-known school textbooks in Spain across the 1950s and the 1960s, show how easily the *Reconquista* can be extolled without even mentioned by name.

The first case concerns El Cid Campeador, a well-known historical figure whose main achievement consisted in the taking of the city of Valencia from the Muslims in 1094. While he acted as a soldier of fortune at the service of Muslim and Christian rulers alike, he has been credited, however, as a national hero of the *Reconquista* in Spanish traditional narrative, and this is exactly the picture given in the following text. Besides the highly biased portrayal of El Cid, the way in which the text mentions the arrival of Islam to Iberia is also worth mentioning:

39. *Pero lo que determinó su rechazo en nuestros días fue, tal vez, su aplicación a hechos dolorosos del pasado [...]. En definitiva, estamos ante una discusión que —aunque viene de lejos— se ha visto marcada por la historia más reciente y por el abuso que se hizo del término aplicado a la guerra civil española de 1936-39* (“But what determined its rejection in our day was, perhaps its application to painful events of the past [...]. In short, we are facing a discussion that —although it comes from afar— has been shaped by the most recent history and the undue application of the name to the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39”). González Jiménez, Manuel. “¿Re-conquista? Un estado de la cuestión”, *Tópicos y realidades de la Edad Media*, Eloy Benito Ruano, coord. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2000: I, 156. Emphasis mine: it is worth highlighting the euphemistic language underlying the indirect style, apparently trying to dodge the explicit identification of Francoism as responsible for *el abuso que se hizo del término*.

40. The extent to which Romantic and Nationalist ideas about the *Reconquista* survive among current Spanish undergraduate students is addressed in López, César; Carretero, Mario; Rodríguez-Moneo, María. “Conquest or Reconquest? Students’ Conceptions of Nation Embedded in a Historical Narrative”, *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 24/2 (2015): 252-285.



*Hace mucho tiempo entraron en España unas gentes que no eran cristianas. Se llamaban árabes y se apoderaron de casi todo nuestro suelo. Los cristianos españoles lucharon ochocientos años contra ellos y por fin los echaron de nuestra Patria. Entre los guerreros cristianos sobresalió uno que se llamaba el Cid. Este famoso guerrero venció a los árabes en muchísimas batallas y les quitó la ciudad de Valencia. El Cid es considerado como modelo de caballeros porque era muy bueno y porque todo lo hacía bien.*⁴¹

The second case concerns King Ferdinand III of Castile and León (1217-1252), one of the most prominent Christian rulers in 13th-century Iberia. The text glowingly praises and extols Ferdinand as a great warrior and conqueror, considering him as a ‘model’ for school children:

*El mejor rey de todos los que lucharon contra los árabes y los moros fue Fernando III el Santo. Fernando III venció a los moros muchas veces y les conquistó las ciudades de Córdoba, Jaén, Murcia, Sevilla y Cádiz. Por ser muy bueno ahora está en el Cielo y se llama San Fernando. Su fiesta se celebra el 30 de mayo y ha sido elegido Patrono y modelo de los niños y jóvenes de España.*⁴²

The Francoist period largely coincides with the academic activity of Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (1893-1984) a key scholarly figure in modern Spanish medieval studies. While completely away from Francoism, both physically and ideologically, he must, however, be considered as the most vocal representative of the *Reconquista* paradigm. Having held high-profile political appointments during the Republican period, he pushed back against Franco’s dictatorship, thus becoming part of the Spanish exile community in Argentina, where he spent most of his life.

The real significance of Sánchez-Albornoz’s approach can be better reached against the background of his well-known polemic with Américo Castro (1885-1972). Between 1910 and 1936 both scholars shared the same scholarly framework, the *Centro de Estudios Históricos* created in 1910 as a branch of the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas*, founded in 1907 and headed by S. Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934) (Spanish Nobel Prize of Medicine in 1906).⁴³ At the same time, both were narrowly committed to the Republican government, especially Sánchez-Albornoz, and therefore they had to flee from Spain upon the outbreak of the Civil

41. “Long ago, non-Christian peoples entered Spain. They were known as Arabs and they seized nearly all of our soil. Spanish Christians fought them for eight hundred years and eventually expelled them from our homeland. The most outstanding among the Christian warriors was the one known as El Cid. This famous warrior defeated the Arabs in many battles and took from them the city of Valencia. El Cid is considered as a model of knights because he was so good and he did all things well”. Álvarez Pérez, Juan Antonio. *El parvulito*. Valladolid: Editorial Miñón, 1965: 38.

42. “Of all the kings who fought the Arabs and the Moors, Ferdinand III the Saint was the best one. He defeated the Moors many times and took from them the cities of Córdoba, Jaén, Murcia, Seville and Cádiz. Because he was so good, he is now in heaven and he is called Saint Ferdinand. His day is celebrated on May 30th and he has been chosen as patron and model for the Spanish kids”. Álvarez Pérez, Juan Antonio. *El parvulito*...: 40.

43. See the Board’s foundational decree, published in *La Gaceta de Madrid*, 15 January 1907: <<https://boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE//1907/015/A00165-00167.pdf>>.



War. Moreover, both also shared the same concern about the historical origins of Spanish identity and a similar passionate approach to the past of their country⁴⁴, although their ideas diverged radically in this regard. In a nutshell, while Castro tried to challenge the traditional narrative of Spanish history, Sánchez-Albornoz represents rather its culmination.⁴⁵

Considering his strong personal commitment to the Republican government, Sánchez-Albornoz might well be described as a clearly progressive personality in his time. His approach to the past, however, became increasingly closer to the National Catholic narrative, especially after his exile.⁴⁶ In 1956 he published *Spain, a historical enigma*, his overwhelming and hard-hitting response to Castro. Far from being the product of a cultural blending accomplished through the peaceful *convivencia* of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, as Castro claimed in *España en su historia: Cristianos, moros y judíos*, Spanish identity took definite shape in the drawn-out struggle against Muslims. On these premises, Sánchez-Albornoz raised the *Reconquista* to the highest possible level, turning it into the key concept of the history of Spain.⁴⁷ The controversy between both scholars sets the stage of the so-called “*convivencia wars*”⁴⁸ whose ensuing and more recent phase was even harsher and more acrimonious than the first one.

44. In a letter to Arcadio Díaz Quiñones from 1970, Castro confessed: *tengo más de afectivo que de científico* (“I am more emotional than scientific”). Princeton University Archive. Firestone Library. Arcadio Díaz Quiñones Papers, Box 3, Folder 14. Sánchez-Albornoz, in turn, was a fiery Catholic believer convinced that God appointed him to accomplish his mission as historian: *quiero agradecer al Altísimo la empresa por mi llevada a cabo. He dicho que Dios puso en mi cuna mi inclinación irrefrenable hacia el estudio y la investigación histórica* (“I want to thank the Almighty the endeavor I have undertaken. I have said that God put in my cradle the unstoppable inclination to historical study and research”). Sánchez-Albornoz, Claudio. *España, un enigma histórico*. Barcelona: Edhasa, 1977: I, iv (“Todavía”, prologue).

45. The scholarship dealing with the controversy between Castro and Sánchez-Albornoz requires an updating framed in the most recent developments on medieval Iberian studies: see, for example, Gómez Martínez, José Luis. “Américo Castro y Sánchez Albornoz, dos posiciones sobre el origen de los españoles”. *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 21/2 (1972): 301-319. According to Patrick Geary: “The entire debate about Spanish identity, largely carried on in the 1940s and 1950s, suggested less the vibrancy of national history debates in Europe than the backwardness of Spanish history in general”. Geary, Patrick. “Writing the Nation: Historians and National Identities from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Centuries”, *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-First Century Perspectives*, Bettina Bildhauer, Chris Jones, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2017: 84.

46. Eduardo Manzano describes Sánchez-Albornoz as *un ferviente republicano antifranquista cuya obra, paradójicamente había marcado la agenda del medievalismo español durante los años de la Dictadura* (“a fervent anti-Franco Republican whose work, paradoxically, had set the agenda of Spanish medievalism during Dictatorship”). Manzano, Eduardo. “Al-Andalus: un balance crítico”...: 19.

47. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “Al-Andalus en la historiografía nacionalcatólica española: Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz”, *eHumanista: Journal of Iberian Studies*, 37 (2017): 305-328.

48. Abate, Mark T. “Ever Since Castro: Thomas F. Glick, Medieval Spain, and ‘Convivencia’”, *Convivencia and Medieval Spain*, Mark T. Abate, ed. Cham: Palgrave-McMillan, 2019: 42. A recent and well-balanced approach to this old debate in Catlos, Brian. “Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations, Medieval “Spain”, and the Mediterranean: An Historiographical Op-Ed”, *In and Of the Mediterranean. Medieval and Early Modern Iberian Studies*, Michelle Hamilton, Núria Silleras-Fernández, eds. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015: 1-16.



4. The arrival of democracy and the reformulation of the *Reconquista*

The demise of Franco in 1975 and the arrival of democracy with the new 1978 Constitution gave rise to a fresh political context in which, thanks to the groundbreaking work of Abilio Barbero (1931-1990) and Marcelo Vigil (1930-1987), the notion of *Reconquista* came under scholarly criticism for the first time in Spain.⁴⁹ This critical approach, however, did not succeed and most academic historians across the post-Franco era endorsed the *Reconquista*, either as an “authentic” medieval concept,⁵⁰ or as a useful approach to medieval Iberia, championing a would-be ‘neutral’ or ideologically unloaded version.⁵¹

However, early in the democratic period, Sánchez-Albornoz made clear that such an “unloaded” version was merely wishful thinking. Although he remained very vocal about the *Reconquista* across his entire academic path, it was at the end of his life when he most staunchly and explicitly featured this notion in the framework of the National Catholic ideology:

*La Reconquista, nuestra magna empresa medieval, normal reacción contra la traídora invasión islámica de España; la maravilla de la Reconquista, ilustrada con increíble heroísmo, no solo forjó nuestro talante, nos hizo capaces de realizar nuestras hazañas americanas, conquistando el mundo nuevo para España, para la civilización occidental y para Cristo sobre todo. La Reconquista nos llevó a ser la espada de Dios sobre la tierra frente a turcos y herejes. La Reconquista es la clave de la historia de España. Lo he probado de modo exhaustivo.*⁵²

49. Barbero, Abilio; Vigil, Marcelo. *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1978.

50. Lomax, Dereck William. *The Reconquest of Spain*. London: Longman, 1978: 1, considered the *Reconquista* “a conceptual framework useful to historians, but no an artificial one like the Middle Ages”. However, he acknowledged that it was “an ideal invented by Spanish Christians soon after 711”. Lomax does not clarify how something can be, at the same time, “not artificial” and “invented”.

51. *el término reconquista no puede ser utilizado para definir el ser de España, en el supuesto de que ese ser pueda ser definido, pero en cambio sí puede ser utilizado, porque resulta muy significativo y preciso para ello, para definir una vieja idea o concepción política que sí es medieval, la que durante siglos legitimó la expansión de los reinos cristianos peninsulares y justificó una extraordinaria concentración de poder en manos de sus monarcas* (“the term *Reconquista* cannot be used to Spanish “being”, even on the assumption that this being can be defined. However, it can be used, because it is very significant and precise for it, to define an old political idea or conception which across the medieval period legitimized the expansion of the peninsular Christian kingdoms and justified an extraordinary concentration of power in the hands of their monarchs”). De Ayala, Carlos. “Realidad y percepción de *Hispania* en la Edad Media”. *eHumanista: Journal of Iberian Studies*, 37 (2017): 208.

52. “The *Reconquista*, our great medieval feat, normal reaction against the treacherous Islamic invasion of Spain; the marvel of the *Reconquista*, illustrated with incredible heroism, not only shaped our spirit, but made us capable of accomplishing our feats in America: we seized the new world for Spain, for Western civilization, and above all for Christ. The *Reconquista* turned us into the sword of God on earth against Turks and heretics. The *Reconquista* is the key to the history of Spain. I have proven it compellingly”. Sánchez-Albornoz, Claudio. *De la Andalucía islámica a la de hoy*. Madrid: Rialp, 1983: 32-33. The National Catholic idea of *Reconquista* has likewise reached some non-Spanish authors: Cook, David. *Understanding Jihad*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005: 51, claims that it had “something of the character of a liberation movement”.



De la Andalucía islámica a la de hoy ("From Islamic Andalusia to Today's") represents the outraged and bitterly acrimonious reaction of a 90 year-old historian to the post-Franco surge of a local Andalusian nationalist movement which considered al-Andalus the heyday of the "Andalusian nation".⁵³ The highly biased and ideologically heavy burden of his approach notwithstanding, Sánchez-Albornoz got a very warm reception in significant sectors of Spanish Medieval Studies, as we shall see next.⁵⁴

Sánchez-Albornoz firmly rejected Francoism and remained faithful to his political ideas, serving as president of the Spanish Republican Government in Exile between 1962 and 1970. His steadfast political commitment granted him a well-deserved reputation. In 1984, a few weeks before his passing, the newly democratic Spain publicly acknowledged him with the Prince of Asturias Prize, closely associated with the Spanish Crown and considered as the highest honorific distinction granted in the country.⁵⁵

Unlike Castro, largely ignored and even dismissed in Spanish scholarship, Sánchez-Albornoz has been highly regarded as historian.⁵⁶ On the occasion of the aforementioned Prize, Miguel Ángel Ladero (medievalist and member of the Spanish Academy of History) paid him a glowing tribute in the newspaper *El País*. He praised Sánchez-Albornoz, branding him the best Spanish historian of the 20th century and claiming that "the medievalists of these lands will always be vassals

53. Probably the best representative of Andalusian nationalist scholarship is Acosta Sánchez, José Antonio. *Historia y cultura del pueblo andaluz*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1979. This tendency, however, did not crystallize in a consolidated scholarly tradition, neither Andalusian nationalism has ever been a strong political movement.

54. *Despojada de las retóricas e inevitables adherencias de una historiografía de corte romántico-tradicionalista, [la Reconquista] ha sido reforzada por las investigaciones de los más reputados historiadores de este siglo. El primero de ellos, sin duda, don Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, maestro del moderno medievalismo* ("Once stripped away from the romantic rhetoric typical of the most traditional scholarship, [the Reconquista] has been reinforced by the investigations of the most renowned historians of this century. The first of them, without a doubt, was Don Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, master of the modern medievalism"). González Jiménez, Manuel. "¿Re-conquista?... ", 163. This text includes two striking claims. First, the idea of *Reconquista* as an "unloaded" concept. Secondly, the effort to dissociate Sánchez-Albornoz from the "romantic and traditionalist scholarship". In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite: Sánchez-Albornoz accounts for the most outstanding representative of that approach.

55. "El historiador Claudio Sánchez Albornoz obtiene el Premio Príncipe de Asturias de Comunicación y Humanidades". *El País*, 26 May 1984. See the official statement of the Príncipe de Asturias Foundation's Jury (*Acta del Jurado*): <<http://www.fpa.es/es/premios-princesa-de-asturias/premiados/1984-claudio-sanchez-albornoz.html?texto=acta&especifica=0>>.

56. Pérez-Prendes, José Manuel. "Semblanza y obra de don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz". *En la España Medieval*, 8 (1986): 19-52; Martín, José Luis. "Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz en la historiografía sobre la Edad Media hispana". *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos*, 42/107 (1995): 171-205; Maíz Chacón, Jordi. "Claudio Sánchez Albornoz y los mitos medievales de la historia de España". *Nonnullus. Revista de Historia*, Supplement II (2009): 34-40. Outside Spain, however, his nationalist approach came under sharp criticism: Russel, Peter Edward. "The Nessus-Shirt of Spanish History". *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 36/4 (1959): 219-225. See also a rather critical review by Hillgarth, Jocelyn Nigel. "Spain, a Historical Enigma by Claudio Sanchez-Albornoz, Colette Joly Dees, David Sven Reher". *The American Historical Review*, 83/2 (April 1978): 455-456, who, among other things, claims that "to see the Reconquest as 'the key to the history of Spain' inevitably leads to the depreciation of the peoples 'reconquered'". Foreign criticism on Sánchez-Albornoz has been rather ignored in Spain.



of his example and will be in debt of his work". Ladero likewise made a rather bombastic extolling of *Spain, a historical enigma* in terms of "the broadest and most comprehensive reflection ever written about our History from a medieval and Castilian point of view" and "a milestone and unavoidable point of reference for those who want to know more and better about Spain".⁵⁷ It is no wonder that Ladero embraced Sánchez-Albornoz's idea of the *Reconquista* as the keystone of Spanish Middle Ages.⁵⁸

On the other hand, Ladero played a crucial role in the field of medieval studies in Spain in recent years, linking together traditional and modern conservative Spanish scholarship. In addition to espousing and preserving Sánchez-Albornoz's legacy, he sponsored the most earnest attempt to refashion the *Reconquista* paradigm in the post-Franco era. In his prologue to *Al-Andalus contra España. La forja del mito*, Ladero highly praised the work done by Serafín Fanjul, explicitly endorsing his approach as largely compatible with his own ideas.⁵⁹ Before focusing on Fanjul's role as the most consistent scholarly reformer of the *Reconquista* paradigm, a quick look at the political and ideological context in which his work was developed seems in order.

4.1. The influence of the 'Clash of Civilizations' doctrine

In the mid-1990s, a new political and ideological context framed the reformulation of the *Reconquista*. At the local Spanish level, José María Aznar, leader of PP (mainstream Spanish conservative political party) won the elections in 1996, putting an end to 14 years of leftist government lead by Felipe González and the Labor Party.

57. Ladero Quesada, Miguel Ángel. "Don Claudio, la Edad Media y nosotros", *El País*, 3 June 1984. Besides, he devoted more extensive publications to Sánchez-Albornoz: Ladero Quesada, Miguel Ángel. "Presentación", *En la España Medieval*, 8 (1986): 13-18; Ladero Quesada, Miguel Ángel. "¿Es todavía España un enigma histórico? (releyendo a Sánchez-Albornoz)", *Lecturas sobre la España histórica*. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1998: 317-341.

58. Ladero Quesada, Miguel Ángel. "La 'Reconquête', clef de voûte du Moyen Âge espagnol", *L'expansion occidentale (XIe - XVe siècles) Formes et conséquences XXXIIIe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S.* Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2003: 23-45. And so does, apparently, Manuel González Jiménez: *En su obra 'España, un enigma histórico', defendió, con la contundencia que le caracterizaba, la tesis de que la reconquista fue, nada más y nada menos, que "la clave de la historia de España", negando de paso lo afirmado por Ortega y Gasset, Altamira, Américo Castro y otros* ("With this typical hard-hitting style, in his *España, un enigma histórico*, he claimed that the *Reconquista* was nothing short than 'the key to the history of Spain', thus calling into question what had previously been argued by Ortega y Gasset, Altamira, Américo Castro, and others"). González Jiménez, Manuel. "¿Re-conquista?...": 163-164.

59. *encuentro en el fondo argumental del libro y en su desarrollo muchísimos elementos concordantes con las reflexiones y puntos de vista que he ido elaborando desde hace un tercio de siglo en investigaciones sobre épocas y temas distintos de los que Serafín Fanjul trata en su obra, de modo que mi experiencia converge con la suya, o viceversa, pero apenas se han influido la una a la otra en sus procesos de maduración* ("Both in the core arguments of the book and in its development I find very many elements consistent with reflections and points of view that I have developed over the last 30 years when studying periods and issues different than those approached by Serafín Fanjul, in such a way that my experience converges on his, or vice versa, but without any mutual influence between us"). Ladero Quesada, Miguel Ángel. "Prólogo", *Al-Andalus contra España. La forja del mito*, Serafín Fanjul. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2000: xi.



About the same time, the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1927-2008) formulated the so-called doctrine of the “Clash of Civilizations”, providing a new ideological framework in which the *Reconquista* could thrive. In this approach, Islam is regarded as the last challenge to the hegemony of liberalism and Western Civilization worldwide.⁶⁰ The war against terrorism after the September 11th attacks confirmed the antagonistic role attributed to Islam in the new international order.

Years before taking office as head of Government, Aznar offered a remarkably significant hint about his vision of the medieval past of his country and the role played by the *Reconquista*. In the late 1980s, the newspaper *El País* asked different figures from Spanish politics and culture to dress up as their favorite historical characters. Aznar, by then President of the Autonomous Community of Castile-León, chose to get disguised as El Cid Campeador, one of the false heroes of the traditional *Reconquista* rhetoric, as I have shown above.⁶¹

Aznar must be considered a genuine trailblazer as he first paved the way for the highly-loaded *Reconquista* rhetoric recently adopted by far-right sectors, as we shall see below. On March 11, 2004, the worst terrorist attacks ever on Spanish soil took place. In this dramatic context, the historical relationship of Spain with Islam was back in the public conversation, revealing the abidingly problematic role of al-Andalus within Spanish historical memory.

In September of the same year, when the country was still reeling from the shock of the attacks, Aznar gave a public lecture at Georgetown University in which he formulated his peculiar explanation of what happened in Madrid a few months before. In his view, the terrorist attacks bore no connection whatsoever with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, in which his Government participated, thereby ignoring the overwhelming opposition of the Spanish public. To his mind, the real causes of the dreadful train bombings had to be found elsewhere, deep within history:

The problem Spain has with Al Qaeda and Islamic terrorism did not begin with the Iraq Crisis. In fact, it has nothing to do with government decisions. You must go back no less than 1.300 years, to the early eighth century, when a Spain recently invaded by the Moors refused to become just another piece in the Islamic world and began a long battle to recover its identity. This *Reconquista* process was very long, lasting some 800 years. However, it ended successfully.⁶²

60. Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

61. “La mejor foto de Aznar no es la de las Azores: recuperamos su sesión como Cid Campeador”, *El País*. Verne, 7 April 2017: <https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2017/04/07/articulo/1491558464_811336.html>.

62. The text of Aznar’s lecture (titled “Seven Thesis on Today’s Terrorism”) is not included in his personal Website: <https://jmaznar.es/es>. See the clip of the exact moment of his medievalism at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7no1WObcRs>>. An integral Spanish version of the original English lecture in *El Siglo*: <<http://www.elsiglodeeuropa.es/siglo/historico/politica/politica2004/618Aznar.htm>>. Aznar’s lecture made headlines in the main Spanish mass media: “Aznar asegura en Washington que el problema de España con Al Qaeda ‘empieza en el siglo VIII’”. *El Mundo*, 22 September 2004: <<https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2004/09/22/espana/1095805990.html>>. Aznar was heavily criticized for his “delusional approach” and his “one-sided and rudimentary talk” by Elorza, Antonio. “La espada de Tariq”, *El País*, 25 September 2004: <https://elpais.com/diario/2004/09/25/espana/1096063211_850215.html>.



Unlike the National Catholic tradition, Aznar's political repurposing of the *Reconquista* was not primarily aimed at exalting Spanish national identity: rather, he used this notion to explain the jihadist terrorist attacks. By so doing, he was bringing the *Reconquista* to its new ideological framework: as British historian Andrew Elliott points out, "the clash of civilisations theory is seen to be operating under the surface of much of the medievalist discourse surrounding the War on Terror".⁶³

Only two years later, Aznar confirmed that his words at Georgetown were neither a merely unwitting mistake nor the result of a reckless incursion in the field of history, but an intended medievalism that encapsulated his personal approach to the past of his country. In 2006, Pope Ratzinger came under sharp criticism from across the globe after drawing a contrast between Islam as the religion of jihad and Catholicism as the religion of *logos*.⁶⁴ When many voices (especially in the Islamic world) were asking him to apologize, Aznar leaped to his defense arguing that, rather than the Pope, Muslims should apologize "for having conquered Spain and remained there for eight centuries".⁶⁵ However baffling, far-fetched, and even outlandish and delusional this claim may look, Aznar is certainly not an exception: as we shall see below, similar demands of apologies have been raised recently by different actors with regard to other historical events. On the other hand, Aznar clearly aimed at the illegitimacy of the Muslim presence in Iberia, one of the core tenets of the traditional *Reconquista* paradigm, and it is thus hardly surprising that he shares the notion that *somos una nación constituida frente al islam*.⁶⁶

Beyond the criticism he drew in the media,⁶⁷ Aznar's statement provoked a rather snide reaction on the part of the Muslim community. Mansur Escudero (1947-2010), the then president of the Spanish Islamic Board (*Junta Islámica*), disparaged him by saying he was just talking rubbish (*memece*). Furthermore, as a psychiatrist, Escudero asserted that Aznar "must probably be affected by early senile dementia, as he seems to have lost the sense of reality".⁶⁸ However, over the last years, Muslims have furthered similar claims to Spanish authorities. In 2002, Moroccan hispanist Muḥammad ibn 'Azzūz Ḥakīm (1924-2014) sent a letter to King Juan Carlos I (r. 1975-2014) asking that the privileged access to Spanish citizenship

Conversely, he got the nod from Fanjul, Serafín. "El paraíso que nunca existió". *Libertad Digital*, 12 July 2005: <<https://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/serafin-fanjul/el-paraiso-que-nunca-existio-28555/>>, claiming that the idea that 'our' problems with Islam started back in 711 is irrefutable.

63. Elliott, Andrew R. B. *Medievalism...*: 93.

64. See the full text of the Pope's lecture at the Vatican's Website: <https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html>.

65. Monge, Yolanda. "Aznar pretende que los musulmanes le pidan perdón por haber 'conquistado España y ocuparla por ocho siglos'". *El País*, 23 September 2006: <https://elpais.com/diario/2006/09/23/espana/1158962427_850215.html>.

66. "we are a nation shaped against Islam". Aznar, José María. *Cartas a un joven español*. Barcelona: Planeta, 2007: 162.

67. See, for example, Goytisolo, Juan. "¡Felicitaciones, señor Aznar!". *El País*, 27 September 2006: <https://elpais.com/diario/2006/09/27/opinion/1159308005_850215.html>.

68. "La Junta Islámica descalifica las palabras de Aznar contra la conquista musulmana de España". *El País*, 24 September 2006: <https://elpais.com/diario/2006/09/24/espana/1159048815_850215.html>.



granted to the Sephardic Jews be equally provided to the descendants of Muslims from al-Andalus.⁶⁹ More recently, the Islamic community of Seville urged King Felipe VI (r. 2014-) to apologize for the “atrocities” committed after the taking of Granada in 1492.⁷⁰

Regardless of the accuracy or pertinence of these claims, it seems rather obvious that a double standard has been played out with regard to Sephardic Jews and the descendants of Moriscos. While neither a single official nor symbolic action has been taken in Spain with the descendants of the Muslims, the Sephardic Jews, however, received several gestures of reparation since 1990, when they were awarded with the Prince of Asturias prize of Concord as a “beloved part of the Hispanic family”.⁷¹ More recently (2015) the Spanish Government passed a law that fast-tracks their access to Spanish citizenship.⁷² In sharp contrast, the initiative for awarding the descendants of the Muslims the Prince of Asturias Prize on the occasion of the anniversary of the Moriscos’ expulsion (1609) was turned down in 2010.⁷³

4.2. Fanjul and the ‘Myth of al-Andalus’ approach

Aznar’s political repurposing of the *Reconquista* ran parallel to the scholarly work carried out by Fanjul in *Al-Andalus contra España* (2000), followed a few years later by *La quimera de al-Andalus* (2004). A correct understanding of Fanjul’s role requires a quick overview of the scholarly evolution in Spain after the arrival of democracy in 1978. According to traditional conservative approach, Spanish national identity definitely consolidated through an eight centuries-long liberation struggle against

69. Arias, Jesús. “Los descendientes de andalusíes dicen que la Ley de Extranjería los margina”. *El País*, 21 December 2002: <https://elpais.com/diario/2002/12/21/andalucia/1040426557_850215.html>.

70. Rodríguez, Chema. “La Comunidad Islámica de Sevilla reclama a Felipe VI que pida perdón por las ‘atrocidades’ de la conquista de Granada”. *El Mundo*, 29 March 2019: <<https://www.elmundo.es/andalucia/2019/03/29/5c9e5741fdddf69728b467e.html>>.

71. See the Website of Fundación Princesa de Asturias: <<http://www.fpa.es/es/premios-princesa-de-asturias/premiados/1990-comunidades-sefardies.html?especifica=0>>. The monarchist Spanish press praised this decision in glowing terms: Fernández, Vicente. “El Príncipe de Asturias reconcilia a España con los Sefardíes”. *ABC*, 19 October 1990.

72. “Spain passes law awarding citizenship to descendants of expelled Jews”. *The Guardian*, 11 June 2015: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/11/spain-law-citizenship-jews>>. According to Spanish authorities, 132,226 people of Sephardic descent applied for Spanish citizenship before the deadline (October 1, 2019); see Jones, Sam. “132,000 descendants of expelled Jews apply for Spanish citizenship”. *The Guardian*, 2 October 2019: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/02/132000-sephardic-jews-apply-for-spanish-citizenship>. In spite of the aforementioned gestures in favor of the Sephardic Jews, the president of the Conference of European Rabbis, Pinchas Goldschmidt, claimed that Spain should apologize for what happened in 1492: “Chief rabbi calls on Spain to apologize for expulsion of Jews”, *El País*, 17 February 2014: <https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/02/17/inenglish/1392634704_748454.html>.

73. Caravaca, Toñi. “Quieren el premio Príncipe de Asturias para los moriscos a los cinco siglos de su expulsión”, *El Mundo*, 8 April 2010: <<https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2010/04/08/andalucia/1270756235.html>>. On the Arab memory about the Moriscos, see Matar, Nabil. “The Expulsion of the Andalusí in Arab Memory, 1609/1614-2014”, *The Study of al-Andalus. The Scholarship and Legacy of James T. Monroe*, Michelle Hamilton, David Wacks, eds. Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2018: 229-244.



Muslims. This narrative was part of the National Catholic reading of the history of Spain which achieved full hegemony over the Francoist period. For obvious reasons, National Catholicism fell into deep disrepute after Franco's death in 1975. The new political and ideological context required a fresh reengineering of the old and musty approach, narrowly identified with Francoism. The *Reconquista* needed help desperately, but the 'rescue operation' was not an easy task. It had to be taken out of the dark cave of National Catholicism and put it in a safe place, that is to say, in a new framework in which it could survive. Likewise, it was crucial to preserve the ideological burden associated with the concept because otherwise, it would be as useless as an unloaded weapon. Uprooting the *Reconquista* from the dry and unproductive soil of National Catholicism and transplanting it to the much more fertile ground of the Clash of Civilizations was the delicate assignment carried out by Fanjul. Put differently, he successfully poured old wine into a new bottle, so to speak. If he were a film-maker, the title of his movie would be '*Reconquista* reloaded'.

In his first book, Fanjul solemnly (and falsely) claimed the end of conservative Spanish nationalist mythology.⁷⁴ Actually, the notion of *Reconquista* is hardly mentioned in his book and he focused on something apparently very different called the 'myth of al-Andalus'. In his view, Castro and his followers should be held accountable for engaging in the formulation of an extremely distorting approach to medieval Iberia. Far from being a paradise of religious tolerance or *convivencia*, al-Andalus represented a much darker and harsher historical reality: the living conditions of non-Muslims, based on the legal status of *dhimma*, were marked by the sign of submission and humiliation. So much so that their situation would be similar to *apartheid*.⁷⁵ In other words, Fanjul's emphasis was no longer the highly simplistic extolling of the *Reconquista* as an eight-centuries long struggle for the liberation of the nation but rather —and very much in line with the Clash of Civilizations doctrine— the excoriating of Islam as the antithesis of the supposedly Western values of freedom and democracy.

While Fanjul claims to play a myth-shattering role, he rather ignores the most influential and widespread myth, the *Reconquista*. Although seemingly aimed at debunking the myth of tolerance, there is a second, underlying, message in his approach: how lucky are 'we' (Spaniards) for having gotten rid of such an intolerant people, an idea that perfectly coincides with the old *Reconquista* paradigm. Actually,

74. Fanjul, Serafín. *Al-Andalus contra España...*: 98.

75. Fanjul, Serafín. "¿Eran españoles los moriscos? El mito de al-Andalus", *España, un hecho*. Madrid: FAES, 2003: 281; Fanjul, Serafín. *La quimera de al-Andalus*, José María Lasalle, coord. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2004: 28-29.



this idea is not merely a veiled insinuation: Fanjul seems to endorse the expulsion of *moriscos* in 1609⁷⁶ and constantly rails against multiculturalism in the media.⁷⁷

On the other hand, Fanjul ignores the stark difference between the theoretical *dhimma* legal rules and their real application, an important distinction when it comes to describing the situation of religious minorities in classical Islamic societies⁷⁸. But perhaps the most serious trouble raised by Fanjul is that, although he is trying to debunk the myth of tolerance and idealized *convivencia*, his alternative of al-Andalus as a ‘chilling’ period does not seem much more realistic,⁷⁹ and the same could be applied to the parallel he draws between the *dhimma* and the notion of *apartheid*, which is mistaken in addition to being anachronistic.

Although apparently disengaged from the traditional notion of *Reconquista* and focused on debunking the myth of tolerance, Fanjul remains, in fact, very close to old ideas about the role of al-Andalus in the national narrative. The title of his first book (*Al-Andalus against Spain*) clearly points to the idea of al-Andalus as the “anti-Spain”, one of the key elements of the *Reconquista* paradigm. Accordingly, and following the prevailing 19th-century Spanish scholarly tradition, Fanjul describes the origins of al-Andalus in terms of an appalling catastrophe, claiming that the Islamic conquest caused a *conmoción (...) brutal* (“brutal shock”) and provoked *un cataclismo político y social* (“a political and social cataclysm”).⁸⁰

Both the idea of al-Andalus as a paradise of religious tolerance and the *Reconquista* must be fairly considered myths, but there are clear differences worth mentioning. Far from being a consolidated and widespread scholarly approach, as Fanjul claims, the myth of al-Andalus has been for the most part promoted by non-specialized authors and among non-scholarly audiences.⁸¹ By contrast, the *Reconquista* not only

76. According to Fanjul, Serafín. “Inmigrantes y moriscos”. *ABC*, 4 January 2007, the moriscos hated Spaniards to death (*una nación a la que sus antepasados expulsados odiaban a muerte, antes y después de su exilio*), although, at the same time, he fully understands that attitude (*los moriscos tenían motivaciones objetivas y directas para odiar a España y los españoles*). In this regard, it seems worth recalling a legal Islamic text from late 15th century in which some exiled Andalusi Muslims are blamed for apparently like better returning to Iberia under Christian rule rather than remaining in North Africa under Islamic rule: see Maíllo Salgado, Felipe. “Del Islam residual mudéjar”, *España, Al-Andalus, Sefarad: síntesis y nuevas perspectivas*, Felipe Maíllo Salgado, ed. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1990: 135.

77. Palmero, Fernando. “Serafín Fanjul: ‘No existe el deseo de integración entre los musulmanes’”. *El Mundo*, 2 September 2017: <<https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2017/09/02/59a9a691e5fdea86788b45ab.html>>.

78. Lewis, Bernard. *The Political Language of Islam*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998: 66.

79. Vaquero, Natalia. “Fanjul: La época de al-Andalus fue terrorífica”, *La opinión de Málaga*, 27 July 2015: <<https://www.laopiniondemalaga.es/sociedad/2015/07/27/epoca-andalus-terrorifica/784091.html>>.

80. Fanjul, Serafín. *Al-Andalus contra España...: 24*. On this regard, see García Sanjuán, Alejandro. “El origen de al-Andalus en el discurso españolista: catastrofismo y negacionismo en torno a la conquista musulmana de la península ibérica”, *El islam: pasado de un futuro. XXVIII Semana de Estudios Medievales (Nájera, 24-28 Julio 2017)*. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2018: 37-65.

81. A well-known exception is the book by Menocal, María Rosa. *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002. On the other hand, in his 2009 remarks to the Muslim world in Cairo, President Obama likely pronounced the most recent and well-known political expression of the myth of tolerance: “Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition”.



stands for a highly consolidated academic concept, but actually represents one of the most solid pillars of Spanish scholarship. At the same time, the myth of the *Reconquista* holds a highly toxic and even dangerous ideological potential. Certainly, the myth of al-Andalus has been intensely promoted by jihadist organizations, but I am not aware of any scholar, let alone policy-makers, supporting the recovery of al-Andalus by Al Qaeda or ISIS. Conversely, the myth of the *Reconquista* remains currently widely accepted in Spain, spreading across academic, politic and media outlets. Both myths, therefore, are neatly different, not only in their scholarly reach, but also in their respective social and political consideration.

Right after Aznar's statements and the publication of Fanjul's books, Eduardo Manzano incisively warned of 'an unspeakable conservative reaction' pointing out to an "enraged return" of a highly ideological version of the *Reconquista* 'that seemed definitely cornered' promoted by "historians, publicists, and bitter politicians".⁸² It would have been hardly possible, however, to foresee the breadth and scale reached by the current political and ideological reengineering of the *Reconquista*.

5. *Reconquista* and current far-right tendencies

Although he received notably poor reviews from different Spanish specialists,⁸³ Fanjul quickly became a largely influential author, both in the most conservative academic outlets and in the media.⁸⁴ Elected in 2011 as a member of *Real Academia de la Historia*, the impregnable stronghold of traditional Spanish scholarship, his books from 2000 and 2004 have recently appeared together in French translation.⁸⁵ The book by D. Fernández-Morera, intended "to demystify Islamic Spain by questioning

See the full text in "Text: Obama's Speech in Cairo": <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html>.

82. Manzano, Eduardo. *Conquistadores, Emires y Califas. Los Omeya y la formación de al-Andalus*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2006: 21-22.

83. Manzano, Eduardo. "Fanjul, Serafín: Al-Andalus contr España. La forja de un mito, Madrid, 2000, 249 págs., ISBN: 84-323-1042-5". *Hispania*, 61/209 (2001): 1161-1164; Martínez Núñez, María Antonia. "El mito de al-Andalus". *Revista de Libros*, 81 (September 2003): <<https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulos/el-mito-de-al-andalus>>; Rodríguez Mediano, Fernando. "Fanjul, Serafín. 'La quimera de al-Andalus', Madrid (Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores), 2004, 271 págs". *Aljamía: Anuario de Información Bibliográfica*, 18 (2006): 295-300. Particularly intense was the controversy with Maribel Fierro, Maribel. "Idealización de al-Andalus". *Revista de Libros*, 94 (October, 2004): <https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulo_imprimible.php?art=3978&t=articulos>; Fanjul, Serafín. "El paraíso perdido". *Revista de Libros* 96 (December 2004): <<https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulos/el-paraiso-perdido>>; Fierro, Maribel. "¿De quién es el Paraíso?". *Revista de Libros*, 98 (February 2005): <https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulo_imprimible.php?art=4618&t=articulos>.

84. See, for instance, Palmero, Fernando. "El mito de al-Andalus", *El Mundo*, 24 August 2017: <<https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2017/08/24/599db272ca4741e7198b45ea.html>>.

85. Fanjul, Serafín. *Al Andalous, l'invention d'un mythe. La réalité historique de l'Espagne des trois cultures*. Paris: L'Artilleur, 2017. See the review by García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. "Serafín Fanjul. – 'Al Andalous, l'invention d'un mythe. La réalité historique de l'Espagne des trois cultures'. Paris, L'Artilleur, 2017, 732 pp.". *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 61/3 (2018): 299-301.



the widespread belief that it was a wonderful place of tolerance and *convivencia* of three cultures under the benevolent supervision of enlightened Muslim rulers”,⁸⁶ most likely represents the best instance of Fanjul’s influence outside Spain. In turn, Spanish⁸⁷ and French versions⁸⁸ of this book have recently been published.

R. Sánchez Saus, the author of *Al-Andalus y la cruz. La invasión musulmana de Hispania* (a book written with the single goal of downgrading al-Andalus as a mere prequel of ISIS), stands as the most talented Spanish imitator of Fanjul.⁸⁹ Having no previous expertise whatsoever in the field of al-Andalus, his book must be understood as a purely ideological byproduct. Actually, Sánchez Saus perfectly illustrates the narrow connection between the “myth of al-Andalus” approach and far-right ideology, as revealed by his very colorful political track record. Years ago, he served as senior member of Falange Española,⁹⁰ a well-known fascist Spanish political party, and in 2015 he ran as Vox’s candidate to the local Andalusian elections.⁹¹

Given his far-right ideological profile, it is no surprise that he praised Franco’s dictatorship in terms of *aquellas décadas que cambiaron la suerte de España a base de*

86. Fernández-Morera, Darío. *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews Under Muslim Rule*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 2016: 2. It has been very poorly reviewed by Fierro, Maribel. “Fernández-Morera, Darío. ‘The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain’, Wilmington (Delaware), Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, 2016, 363 págs.”. *Al-Qantara*, 39/1 (2018): 248-253, and Pearce, Sarah J. “Paradise Lost”. 17 March 2017 <<https://wp.nyu.edu/sjpearce/2017/03/17/paradise-lost/>>. A much more benign consideration by Dadson, Trevor. “The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain’ by Darío Fernández-Morera”. *Modern Language Review*, 113/2 (2018): 421-423.

87. Fernández-Morera, Darío. *El mito del paraíso andalusí: musulmanes, cristianos y judíos bajo el dominio islámico en la España medieval*. Córdoba: Almuzara, 2018.

88. Fernández-Morera, Darío. *Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans dans al-Andalus. Mythes et réalités de l’Espagne islamique*. Paris: JC Godefroy, 2018.

89. See the review by Fierro, Maribel. “Al-Andalus, convivencia e islam: mucho ruido y pocas nueces”. *Revista de Libros*, 17 October 2018: <<https://www.revistadelibros.com/discusion/al-andalus-convivencia-e-islam-mucho-ruido-y-pocas-nueces>>. Despite its rather appalling academic quality, the book has been published also in French: Sánchez Saus, Rafael. *Les chrétiens dans al-Andalus. De la soumission à l’anéantissement*. Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2019. Significantly, the French versions of the books by Fanjul, Sánchez Saus, and Fernández-Morera were published thanks to the efforts of A. Imatz, an obscure Basque-French admirer of José-Antonio Primo de Rivera (founder of Falange Española): to get a grasp of his rather depressing concept of historical knowledge, see Imatz, Arnaud. “Los falsificadores de la historia y el mito del Al-Ándalus”, *La Tribuna del País Vasco*, 4 June 2019: <<https://latribunadelpaisvasco.com/art/11087/los-falsificadores-de-la-historia-y-el-mito-del-al-andalus>>.

90. Rodríguez Jiménez, J. L. *La extrema derecha en España: del Tardofranquismo a la consolidación de la Democracia (1967-1982)*. PhD Complutense University of Madrid, 1992: 26. Available at: <<https://eprints.ucm.es/2360/>>.

91. Maestre, Rita. “Rafael Sánchez Saus y otros dos catedráticos, en las listas de Vox por Sevilla”. *ABC*, 12 February 2015: <<https://sevilla.abc.es/elecciones/andalucia/20150212/sevi-listas-sevilla-201502121217.html>>. See Sánchez Saus, Rafael. *Por qué Vox. El despertar de la derecha social en España*. Madrid: Homo Legens, 2019. Actually, Sánchez Saus is not the only Spanish scholar committed to the far-right: in the April 2019 general elections, the Arabist J. Ramírez del Río (University of Córdoba) got one of the 22 seats of Vox in the National Parliament.



*ofrecer pan y dignidad a los españoles.*⁹² Similarly, Sánchez Saus described Franco as the true architect of Spanish democracy: *Un jefe de Estado reconocido internacionalmente de forma unánime durante 35 años, de cuya acción de gobierno en esas décadas dimana la España nueva que hizo posible la Monarquía parlamentaria, el régimen democrático y la Constitución.*⁹³ Being staunchly Francoist in his leanings, it is hardly surprising to learn that, in his opinion, those who like the idea of *Reconquista* is because they love Spain, while those who call it into question *no suelen molestarse en disimular su desafecto hacia la España que fue su resultado.*⁹⁴

On the other hand, his active membership in one of the most influential Spanish Catholic lobbies, the so-called “Catholic Association of Propagandists”, provides him with a platform in which he routinely promotes his academic (?) publications.⁹⁵ Actually, one of his books advocates for a delusional return to providentialism as the driving force of human history.⁹⁶ To sum up, other than following Fanjul’s steps, Sánchez Saus embodies more faithfully than anyone else in current Spanish scholarship the National Catholic tradition.⁹⁷

Beyond his influence in the mass media and in conservative historical writing, Fanjul has become in recent years a pundit and an essential scholarly reference for far-right political organizations. This is evident, for instance, with regard to National Democracy, an openly xenophobic and Islamophobic group, albeit politically irrelevant in the current political Spanish context, which immediately posted on its website⁹⁸ Fanjul’s favourable consideration of Spain as a nation shaped against Islam.⁹⁹ As already mentioned, this idea represents the cornerstone of the traditional *Reconquista* paradigm and provides a common ground shared by all Spanish conservative ideological landscape.

Over the last years, Vox has emerged as the new and rising brand of Spain’s far-right. Of late Santiago Abascal, former PP member and founder of Vox, has routinely

92. “those decades that changed Spain's fate by bringing bread and dignity to Spaniards”. Sánchez Saus, Rafael. “Prisioneros del odio”, *Diario de Sevilla*, 6 September 2018: <https://www.diariodesevilla.es/opinion/articulos/Prisioneros-odio_0_1279672063.html>.

93. “A head of State internationally and unanimously recognized over 35 years whose rule gave rise to the new Spain that made possible the Parliamentary monarchy, the democratic system and the Constitution”. Sánchez Saus, Rafael. “El Valle y la derecha vil”, *Diario de Sevilla*, 3 October 2019: <https://www.diariodesevilla.es/opinion/articulos/Valle-derecha-vil_0_1397260337.html>.

94. “do not usually bother to hide their disaffection towards Spain”. Sánchez Saus, Rafael. “La Reconquista”, *Diario de Sevilla*, 24 October 2019: <https://www.diariodesevilla.es/opinion/articulos/Reconquista_0_1403559685.html>.

95. “El propagandista Rafael Sánchez Saus presenta su libro ‘Al-Ándalus y la Cruz’: http://www.acdp.es/_old26062016/?page_id=15656.”

96. Sánchez Saus, Rafael. *Dios, la historia y el hombre. El progreso divino en la historia*. Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2018. Very correctly, the publishing house’s website presents the book under the heading of “Christian Theology”; see: <<https://www.edicionesencuentro.com/libro/dios-la-historia-y-el-hombre/>>.

97. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “La persistencia del discurso nacionalcatólico sobre el medievo peninsular en la historiografía española actual”. *Historiografías, revista de historia y teoría*, 12 (2016): 132-153.

98. <<http://democracianacional.org/dn/espana-se-forja-contra-el-islam-serafin-fanjul/>>.

99. Personal interview, online newspaper *La Gaceta*, 27 February 2016: <<https://gaceta.es/noticias/espana-forja-nacionalmente-islam-27022016-0150>>.



lionized Fanjul in his social media platforms, tweeting Fanjul's opinion pieces as they appear in Spanish conservative media.¹⁰⁰ These pieces frequently deal with commonly held anti-Islamic stereotypes, such as the dangers of Muslims' immigration and their abiding reluctance to accept the Western values of freedom and democracy.¹⁰¹

The interest raised by Fanjul's ideas among far-right political organizations could hardly be considered as a sheer coincidence. Much to the contrary, if his approaches are appealing it is because they are mutually compatible and because Fanjul's "insights" have the potential to feed far-right ideas. Furthermore, the attraction between Fanjul and Vox seems to be mutual. In the early days of Spanish democracy, Fanjul was a member of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE)¹⁰² although, just as many other leftists, he seems to have gone through a dramatic ideological crisis at some point. His connection to Vox became narrower in recent years and he currently belongs to the advisory board of Denaes, a think-tank aimed at defending the Spanish nation that Abascal founded in 2006 and led up until 2014.¹⁰³

Over the last two years, Vox brought the notion of Reconquista into the Spanish political conversation with an unprecedented intensity since the early Francoist period. A fair observer must consider this a second phase in the weaponizing process of the Reconquista. Much in line with the traditional National Catholic concept, Vox currently upholds this notion as a rallying cry to raise and reinforce feelings of national identity. Besides and in line with Fanjul, this new political repurposing of the notion is similarly framed in the context of the Clash of Civilizations and the denigration of Muslim immigration.

Vox kicked off the 2015 campaign in Covadonga,¹⁰⁴ the place where allegedly Pelagius (the pseudo-mythical first King of Asturias) defeated the Muslims for

100. @Santi_ABASCAL. "¡Bravo Serafín Fanjul!", 29 June 2017: <https://twitter.com/Santi_ABASCAL/status/880333917647196160>; @Santi_ABASCAL. "El experto arabista Serafín Fanjul: 'No existe el deseo de integración entre los musulmanes'", 3 September 2017: <https://twitter.com/Santi_ABASCAL/status/904437728548462593>; @Santi_ABASCAL. "Un Islam moderado". Por Serafín Fanjul. "Que no nos culpen a nosotros de cuanto no están dispuestos a hacer: 'integrarse'", 28 August 2017: <https://twitter.com/Santi_ABASCAL/status/902137560461344768>. Similarly, Fanjul has been of late lionized by publicists close to Vox, among them, for example, Sánchez-Dragó, Fernando. "Clarividencia de un arabista". *El Mundo*, 29 June 2016: <<https://www.elmundo.es/blogs/elmundo/dragolandia/2016/06/29/clarividencia-de-un-arabista.html>>.

101. Fanjul, Serafín. "No quiero ser dhimmi". *ABC*, 3 February 2006.

102. Apparently, Fanjul drop out the Communist Party due to his disagreement with the leadership regarding North African (Maghreb) politics, as revealed in his public resignation letter: "Carta abierta a Manuel Azcárate, secretario de relaciones internacionales. La política norteafricana del Partido Comunista", *Diario 16*. Digital copy in: Archivo Linz de la Transición Española. Fundación Juan March: <<http://linz.march.es/Documento.asp?Reg=r-13618>>. In the early 1980s, Fanjul held ideas totally contrary to those he defends currently: he railed against *el prejuicio antiárabe, tan fácil de detectar entre intelectuales y universitarios españoles, arranca de aquella unificación por decreto de los Reyes Católicos, Cisneros, Felipe II, etcétera* ("the anti-Arab prejudice, so clearly visible among intellectuals and Spanish scholars, caused by the unification imposed by the Catholic Monarchs, Cisneros, Philip II, etc."). Fanjul, Serafín. "Latinidad y arabismo en el Norte de África". *El País*, 2 May 1980.

103. <<https://nacionespanola.org/fundacion-denaes/patronato-de-honor/serafin-fanjul/>>.

104. Abascal, Santiago. "¿Por qué arrancamos en Covadonga?", *Libertad Digital*, 29 November 2015: <<https://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/santiago-abascal/por-que-arrancamos-en-covadonga-77406/>>.



the first time after their arrival to Iberia in 711. Vox repeated the same strategy in the last campaign (2019), apparently trying to turn Covadonga into a sort of sacred national ground.¹⁰⁵ In line with far-right claims, current National Catholic scholarship remains faithful to the idea of Pelagius as *Reconquista* first hero and Covadonga as the cradle of the Spanish nation.¹⁰⁶

Any opportunity to present the *Reconquista* as the origins of the Spanish nation has been seized upon by Vox in the past few years,¹⁰⁷ especially on the occasion of the Taking of Granada, whose public and official commemoration takes place every January 2. In 2018 Abascal posted in his personal twitter feed: *El 2 de enero de 1492 concluyó la reconquista con la #TomaDeGranada derrotando así al último reducto islamista de nuestro suelo. Siglos después permanece el orgullo imborrable por una gesta de 7 siglos. Y permanece la determinación de no someternos al Islam #EspañaEsReconquista*.¹⁰⁸ In a similar vein, the official twitter feed of the organization posted the following in January 2, 2019: *No queremos, ni debemos olvidar, que hoy hace 527 años de la liberación*

He explains the reasons for such election: "Covadonga is the heart of our nation, our culture, our traditions, and values".

105. González, Miguel. "Abascal lanza desde Covadonga su cruzada contra separatistas y 'progres'". *El País*, 13 April 2019: <https://elpais.com/politica/2019/04/12/actualidad/1555085458_659820.html>.

106. *Fruto de todo ello fue la manifestación de esa ya por entonces vieja conciencia de continuidad con el pasado de la Hispania visigótica, expresada por Alfonso III en la asunción de títulos como Totius Hispaniae Imperator o Hispaniae Rex en tiempos que, por vez primera, quedaba expresada la voluntad de atisbar el desvanecimiento el poder islámico sobre España* ("As a consequence, King Alfonso III affirmed the old self-consciousness of continuity with the Visigothic past by adopting titles such as *Totius Hispaniae Imperator* or *Hispaniae Rex*, in times when, for the first time, the wish to glimpse the fading of the Islamic power over Spain was evident"). Sánchez Saus, Rafael. "Covadonga y su sentido, 718-2018". *ABC*, 14 September 2018. As shown by De Ayala, Carlos. "Realidad y percepción...": 212, the documents mentioning King Alfonso III (866-910) as *Totius Hispaniae Imperator* and *Hispaniae Rex* are false. Similarly, Manuel Alejandro Rodríguez de la Peña brands Covadonga a crucial event, the first link in the chain of events leading to the *Reconquista*, which in turn he considers *el germen de la historia de España* ("the origin of the history of Spain"). Barreira, David. "Ni Covadonga fue una gran batalla, ni El Cid el héroe cristiano: caen todos los mitos de la Reconquista". *El Español*, 21 October 2019: <https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/historia/20191021/covadonga-batalla-cid-heroe-cristiano-mitos-reconquista/437707481_0.html>. Rodríguez de la Peña holds an appointment as Medieval History lecturer at Universidad CEU San Pablo, a private Catholic university in which a course on *Historia de la España de la Reconquista* is taught, while undergraduates are not offered either specific courses on Islamic history nor al-Andalus. See: <<https://www.uspceu.com/Portals/0/docs/oferta-academica/grados/grado-en-historia/plan-2009/plan-estudios-2019-historia.pdf?ver=2019-09-18-115826-607>>.

107. The incendiary historical rhetoric unfolded by Vox over the course of the 2019 campaign was centered on, but not limited to the *Reconquista*, since it likewise included 'A comprehensive plan for studying, disseminating and protecting the national identity and the contribution of Spain to human civilization and universal history, with a special focus on the deeds and feats of our national heroes': see "100 medidas para la España Viva": <https://www.voxespana.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/100medidasngal_101319181010040327.pdf. Number 8>.

108. "On January 2, 1492 the *Reconquista* finished with the #TomaDeGranada, defeating the last Islamist stronghold on our soil. Many centuries later our pride for a seven century-long feat remains. And so does our determination not to be subjected to Islam". @Santi_ABASCAL. "El 2 de enero de 1492 concluyó la reconquista con la #TomaDeGranada derrotando así al último reducto islamista de nuestro suelo. Siglos después permanece el orgullo imborrable por una gesta de 7 siglos. Y permanece la determinación de no someternos al Islam #EspañaEsReconquista", 2 January 2018: <https://twitter.com/Santi_ABASCAL/status/948164179080466432>.



*de Granada por las tropas españolas de los Reyes Católicos, poniendo fin a ocho largos siglos de Reconquista contra el invasor musulmán.*¹⁰⁹

One of the most stunning moments of the 2018 Andalusian campaign was a video in which Abascal appears on horseback leading his followers across the landscape of Southern Spain with the musical background of the soundtrack of *Lord of the rings*.¹¹⁰ Vox's unremitting rhetoric of *Reconquista* paid off in the Andalusian elections. Therefore, it is no wonder that they followed the same path after the elections, claiming the Day of Andalusia to be changed to January 2 in commemoration of the end of the *Reconquista*.¹¹¹

Resorting to the medieval past as an instrument of political propaganda represents a consolidated strategy in American white nationalism, as evidenced by the case of S. Bannon, apparently influenced in this regard by Russian publicist Aleksandr Dugin.¹¹² Vox chief strategist, Rafael Bardají, not only publicly acknowledges Bannon's ideological advice on Spanish alt-right,¹¹³ but he enthusiastically embraces the idea of Spain as a nation shaped against Islam, with the taking of Granada as a milestone in that historical process.¹¹⁴ It would be certainly difficult to ascertain to what extent the intense unfolding of the *Reconquista* rhetoric by Vox could be interpreted as the result of Bannon's strategic advice, although Duke's tweet looks like another hint pointing in that direction.

Besides serving as an ideological instrument to foster the idea of a national unity shaped in the fight against Islam, the rhetoric of the *Reconquista* represents likewise an effective argument against immigration, as Abascal himself showed when claiming that Spain is immunized ("vaccinated", literally) against Muslim immigration thanks to the *Reconquista*.¹¹⁵

It is worth mentioning that in places where Vox gained political responsibilities, their actions confirm their ideology. In Cadrete (Saragossa) they withdraw a bust

109. "We do not want to, nor should we forget that today marks 527 years of Granada's liberation by the Spanish troops of the Catholic Monarchs, putting an end to eight long centuries of Reconquista against the Muslim invader". @vox_es. "No queremos, ni debemos olvidar, que hoy hace 527 años de la liberación de Granada por las tropas españolas de los Reyes Católicos, poniendo fin a ocho largos siglos de Reconquista contra el invasor musulmán", 2 January 2019: <https://twitter.com/vox_es/status/1080418155992940545>.

110. @voxnoticias_es. "La Reconquista comenzará en tierras andaluzas", 12 November 2018: <https://twitter.com/voxnoticias_es/status/1061917901031129088>.

111. "Vox pide que Día de Andalucía sea el 2 de enero por el fin de la Reconquista". *eldiario.es*, 8 January 2019: <https://www.eldiario.es/politica/Vox-Dia-Andalucia-enero-Reconquista_0_854965203.html>.

112. Hawk, Brandon W. "Why far-right nationalists like Steve Bannon have embraced a Russian ideologue". *The Washington Post*, 16 April 2019: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/04/16/why-far-right-nationalists-like-steve-bannon-have-embraced-russian-ideologue/>>.

113. See Bannon's interview in Verdú, Daniel. "Entrevista/Steve Bannon". *El País*, 25 March 2019: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/03/24/actualidad/1553454729_290547.html>.

114. "Rafael Bardají, ideólogo de Vox: 'Coincidimos con Trump, no con Le Pen'". *El Mundo*, 4 February 2019: <<https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2019/02/04/5c573d29fc6c8355328b4619.html>>.

115. "Abascal afirma que España 'fue vacunada contra la inmigración islámica' durante la Reconquista". *ABC*, 22 September 2019: https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-abascal-afirma-espana-vacunada-contra-inmigracion-islamica-durante-reconquista-201909221352_noticia.html.



of Abd al-Rahman III from the public spot where it was exhibited¹¹⁶ and in Badajoz they claimed to replace the so-called Almosassa (which celebrates the foundation of the city by the Muslims in 875) by the commemoration of its taking by King Alfonso IX of León in 1231.¹¹⁷

The examples mentioned so far reveal that Vox has gained political benefit from the myths that many Spaniards have held, and continue to hold, about themselves and about their collective past. Although Vox has been very vocal in the *Reconquista* rhetoric, they are not alone in this endeavor: it has in fact swept like a wildfire across all conservative political landscape in Spain. Again on the occasion of January 2, Esperanza Aguirre, former senior member of the Popular Party (PP), Minister of Education and Culture with Aznar (1996-1999) and ex-president of the Autonomous Community of Madrid (2003-2012), posted on social networks that the taking of Granada was *un día gloria para las españolas* (“a glorious day for Spanish women”) because, under Islam, they would not have had freedom.¹¹⁸ Aguirre’s tweet is a glaring example of how right-wing politicians are consistently using social networks to weaponize historical knowledge, advancing passionately-held but often loopy notions about the past. In this case, Aguirre presented Islam as an oppressive system for women and the Christian conquest as a moment of liberation, apparently turning the Catholic Monarchs into feminist activists.

Following the path set by Vox, PP’s current leader (Pablo Casado) likewise jumped on the bandwagon of the *Reconquista* rhetoric. In the context of a visit to Oviedo, the capital city of the old Kingdom of Asturias, Casado did not miss the opportunity provided by such a matchless historical setting and posted the following text in his social media, together with a picture of the cross of the Victory, one of the main symbols of the Asturian monarchy: *Hoy he podido ver la Cruz de la Victoria que está en la Catedral de Oviedo, una joya emblema de la Reconquista. Vamos a empezar la reconquista de España, la de un gobierno sensato que defienda la unidad nacional, la creación de empleo y la preservación del Estado del Bienestar.*¹¹⁹ As Sarah Pearce pointed

116. Civieta, Óscar F. “Un concejal de Vox retira un busto de Abderraman III de una plaza de la localidad zaragozana de Cadrete”. *eldiario.es*, 18 June 2019: <https://www.eldiario.es/aragon/politica/Retiran-Cadrete-Zaragoza-Abderraman-III_0_911309214.html>.

117. Romero, Rocío. “Vox quiere cambiar Almosassa por un homenaje a la conquista cristiana de Badajoz”. *Hoy. Diario de Extremadura*, 26 September 2019: <<https://www.hoy.es/badajoz/quiere-cambiar-almossassa-20190925212129-nt.html>>.

118. @EsperanzAguirre. “Hoy hace 525 años de la toma de Granada por los Reyes Católicos. Es un día gloria para las españolas. Con el Islam no tendríamos libertad”, 2 January 2017: <<https://twitter.com/esperanzaguirre/status/815942890857885696?lang=es>>. The belief in an unbroken continuity between medieval *Reconquista* and modern values of freedom and democracy is a common ground shared by Spanish conservative outlets of all stripes. According to philosopher Ignacio Gómez de Liaño, Europe got to Humanism and democracy thanks to the *Reconquista*; see: Landaluze, Emilia. “Los intelectuales y España/Ignacio Gómez de Liaño”. *El Mundo*, 22 July 2017: <<https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2017/07/22/59723b8d22601ddf068b45bd.html>>.

119. “Today at Oviedo’s Cathedral I have had the opportunity to watch the Cross of the Victory, a jewel and a symbol of the *Reconquista*. We are going to start the reconquest of Spain with a sensible government that upholds national unity, job creation, and welfare state”. @pablocasado. “Hoy he podido ver la Cruz de la Victoria que está en la Catedral de Oviedo, una joya emblema de la Reconquista. Vamos a empezar



out in her aforementioned article, “by creating a revised version of medieval history, modern politicians can lead their supporters to believe that there is greater historical precedent for their ideas —racist or otherwise— than there ever really was”.¹²⁰

Casado’s tweet suggests that the current nationalist surge in Spain has prompted a sort of ‘competitive outbidding’ between right-wing politicians trying to outdo one another as defenders of the *Reconquista*. Actually, Vox immediately reacted to Casados’ tweet by posting a rather laughable picture of Abascal leaning out a window with his gaze lost to the horizon and wearing a *conquistador* helmet, accompanied with the following text: *Pablo, no das el perfil para apuntarte a la vanguardia de la reconquista como nuestro presidente @Santi_ABASCAL, pero sigue intentándolo*.¹²¹

As we have seen thus far, the political repurposing of the *Reconquista* represents an ever growing tendency among right-wing representatives of all stripes in contemporary Spain. I will mention one last example, taken again from social media. On the occasion of the 2017 terrorist attacks in Barcelona and following the example set by Aznar in 2004, a well-known conservative journalist tweeted out a startling message connecting jihadist terrorism and medieval Iberian history. After cursing the terrorists, she wrote: *Ya os echamos de aquí una vez y volveremos a hacerlo*.¹²² Much like Aznar’s Georgetown lecture, this statement equates the Muslims of al-Andalus with 21st-century jihadist terrorists and, by doing so the author framed the *Reconquista* narrative in the context of the Clash of Civilizations rhetoric, turning it into an effective Islamophobic trope.

The unremitting political repurposing of the *Reconquista* prompted the reaction of different Spanish historians with critical opinion pieces¹²³ and statements in the media¹²⁴ against the manipulation and distortion of the past. However, not

la reconquista de España, la de un gobierno sensato que defienda la unidad nacional, la creación de empleo y la preservación del Estado del Bienestar”, 5 March 2019: <https://twitter.com/pablocasado_/status/1102990243299512320>.

120. Pearce, Sarah. “The Medieval Fantasy...”.

121. “Pablo, unlike our president@Santi_Abascal, you do not have the right profile to be at the forefront of the *Reconquista*, but keep trying”. @vox_es. “Pablo, no das el perfil para apuntarte a la vanguardia de la reconquista como nuestro presidente @Santi_ABASCAL, pero sigue intentándolo”, 6 March 2019: <https://twitter.com/vox_es/status/1103337441723904000>.

122. “We already kicked you out of here once and we will do it again”. @isanseba. “Malditos seáis, islamistas hijos de... Ya os echamos de aquí una vez y volveremos a hacerlo. España será occidental, libre y democrática”, 17 August 2017: <<https://twitter.com/isanseba/status/898252410396606464>>.

123. Álvarez Junco, José. “La Reconquista”. *El País*, 27 January 2019: <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/01/25/opinion/1548436799_019300.html>. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “Vox, la Reconquista y la salvación de España”. *eldiario.es*, 5 December 2018: <https://www.eldiario.es/andalucia/enabierto/elecciones_en_Andalucía_2018-reconquista-Vox_6_843125717.html>.

124. Moreno, Aristóteles. “¿Por qué Vox rescata ahora el viejo concepto de ‘Reconquista’?”. *Público*, 15 January 2019 (including opinions of José Álvarez Junco, Carlos de Ayala and Alejandro García-Sanjuán): <<https://www.publico.es/politica/ultradercha-vox-rescata-viejo-concepto-reconquista.html>>; García Rey, Marcos. “Vox y la Reconquista en las elecciones: ‘Don Pelayo era un tío con dos huevos’”. *El Confidencial*, 12 April 2019 (Eduardo Manzano, Carlos de Ayala and Alejandro García-Sanjuán): <https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2019-04-12/vox-reconquista-andalus-historia-despropósito_1938810/>; Rodríguez Blanco, Patricia. “La idea de la Reconquista es ‘falsa’ y ‘manipulada’, según los expertos”. *El País*, 12 April 2019 (José Álvarez Junco, José Luis Corral and Alejandro García-



all scholars held critical opinions.¹²⁵ At the same time, alt-right journalists also contributed with opinion pieces backing Vox and his *Reconquista* rhetoric¹²⁶ and, in one particular case, criticism of *Reconquista* was interpreted as an expression of the allegedly rising tendency to “soften” history by dodging its most fraught events and, as such, as a danger for young scholars.¹²⁷

My last two remarks are devoted to the most recent, shocking and dramatic events connected to the weaponizing of the *Reconquista*. In these cases, unfortunately, this idea is not just a simple literary trope, but rather a tragic reality with highly painful consequences. In July 2011, Norwegian fascist terrorist Anders Breivik killed 77 members of the Workers Youth League, Norway’s largest political youth organization, closely associated with the Labour Party. Breivik set out his xenophobic ideas in a series of texts entitled *2083: A Declaration of European Independence* which he released the same day of the attacks and in which he mentions 14 times the notion of *Reconquista* in the framework of his anti-Islamic historical rhetoric.¹²⁸ The most recent case concerns the pseudo-mythical first Asturian King Pelagius, whose name (spelled as *Pelayu*) was inscribed in the gun charger of the Australian terrorist who killed 50 people in two New Zealand mosques in March 2019.¹²⁹

Sanjuán): <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/04/11/hechos/1554980000_022524.html>. Vox responded to this last information in his twitter feed: *No nos molesta que el Grupo Prisa haga vídeos de campaña contra nosotros, es más nos divierte y nos beneficia. Pero no aceptamos que escupa sobre España negando la Reconquista. Es falso y ridículo y demuestra muy poco amor por nuestra nación* (“It does not bother us that the Prisa Group makes campaign videos against us, in fact, it amuses and benefits us. But we do not accept that they spit on Spain denying the Reconquista. It is false and ridiculous and shows very little love for our nation”). @vox_es. “No nos molesta que el Grupo Prisa haga vídeos de campaña contra nosotros, es más nos divierte y nos beneficia. Pero no aceptamos que escupa sobre España negando la Reconquista. Es falso y ridículo y demuestra muy poco amor por nuestra nación”, 15 April 2019: <https://twitter.com/vox_es/status/1117738180051124224>; Altares, Guillermo. “Why the Middle Ages have become incredibly relevant”. *El País* (English version), 1 August 2019 (Maribel Fierro and Eduardo Manzano): <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/08/01/inenglish/1564673082_675360.html>.

125. García de Castro, César. “Pelayo y los propagandistas”. *El Mundo*, 25 April 2019: <<https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2019/04/25/5cc0a1e6fdddf062e8b46f8.html>>.

126. Jiménez Losantos, Federico. “La Fiscalía contra la Reconquista”. *Libertad Digital*, 7 April 2019: <<https://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/federico-jimenez-losantos/la-fiscalia-contra-la-reconquista-87588/>>; Carrascal, José María. “La Reconquista”. *ABC*, 18 April 2019; Insúa, Pedro. “La ‘insidiosa’ Reconquista y la deslegitimación de España”. *El Español*, 1 August 2019: <https://www.elespanol.com/opinion/tribunas/20190801/insidiosa-reconquista-deslegitimacion-espana/418078190_12.html>.

127. Pérez Reverte, Arturo. “Fabricando nuestra propia ratonera”, *XL Semanal*, 5 April 2015: <<http://www.perezreverte.com/articulo/patentes-corso/992/fabricando-nuestra-propia-ratonera/>>. Pérez Reverte is a best-selling fiction author and a member of Real Academia Española. A collection of his opinion pieces about historical issues appeared recently: Pérez Reverte, Arturo. *Una Historia de España*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2019. On the occasion of the launching of this new book, Pérez Reverte claimed that Spaniards are “very dangerous human beings”: Alemany, Luis. “Arturo Pérez Reverte: ‘El español es un ser humano muy peligroso’”. *El Mundo*, 13 March 2019: <https://www.elmundo.es/cultura/literatura/2019/03/13/5c89012cfc6c83254d8b483a.html>.

128. Available at: <https://fas.org/programs/tap/_docs/2083_-_A_European_Declaration_of_Independence.pdf>. I am grateful to Fernando Bravo López (Autónoma University of Madrid) for this reference.

129. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “Pelayo en Nueva Zelanda”. *eldiario.es*, 16 March 2019: <https://www.eldiario.es/andalucia/enabierto/Don-Pelayo-Nueva-Zelanda_6_878472145.html>.



The terrorist attacks of Norway (2011) and New Zealand (2019) are so far the last stages in the weaponizing process of the *Reconquista* which, for the second time in history, has been turned into a fascist terrorist weapon. As we saw above, Francoists used it to legitimate the killing of “bad Spaniards”, basically all those who were not Francoists. At the beginnings of the 21st century and thanks to the Clash of Civilizations doctrine, the weapon has become global and its potential targets have been widened, including now all those who do not fit in self-proclaimed Western values, whether leftists (enemies of liberal capitalism) or Muslims (enemies of Judeo-Christian civilization).

6. Final remarks

The *Reconquista* first grew within the framework of Spanish 19th-century nationalism. Although working primarily as an ideological concept, it drew solid credentials thanks to its scholarly origins, a legitimacy-lending factor that has proven crucial for the unbroken continuity of the notion over the last 150 years. Realizing its substantial political potential, Franco weaponized the *Reconquista* for the first time against the background of National Catholicism. At the same time, Sánchez-Albornoz, considered by significant sectors of Spanish scholarship as the best Spanish historian of his time and who was politically contrary to Francoism, raised the *Reconquista* to the highest possible scholarly rank.

With the arrival of democracy in 1978, most of the Spanish academics decided that the *Reconquista* no longer stood for a National Catholic concept. On the other hand, these sectors likewise thought that, since it represented a consolidated and useful scholarly notion, a neutral, unloaded and non-ideological rendering of the *Reconquista* was, not only a desirable but also a clearly feasible option. However, in the best case, this option turned out merely wishful thinking and, in the worst, a clever strategy to secure the continuity of the concept. *Reconquista* is intrinsically ideological and, therefore, a neutral version seems rather difficult to achieve. On the other hand, the most conservative sectors are openly reluctant to admit such an unloaded (and therefore, useless) rendering of the *Reconquista*.

The narrative of the *Reconquista* is the product of 19th century Spanish nationalist scholarship and, as such, the current continuity of this approach to the medieval past of Iberia represents a glaring anachronism. However, the examples so far mentioned clearly reveal that, although an unsuited term, *Reconquista* continues to enjoy wide acceptance in the most conservative academic and political outlets. On the other hand, the *Reconquista* not only represents a highly biased and distorting academic approach, but also a powerful ideological concept heavily loaded with a potentially toxic and threatening burden. Therefore, the *Reconquista* paradigm remains currently an academic challenge that historians must address from a critical perspective with the aim of producing an unbiased historical narrative free of nationalist romantic stereotypes and more committed to academic knowledge.

