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# Fascism, Traditionalism, and the Reconquista in Franco-era Educational Materials

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Cameron Johnson  
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## Fascism, Traditionalism, and the Reconquista in Franco-era Educational Materials

### Introduction

The dictatorship of Francisco Franco was one of the longest lasting dictatorships of the twentieth century. From 1936 to his death in 1975, Franco was at the head of a totalitarian state that had, through a Civil War, overthrown a democratic republic in the 1930s. Franco's nationalist government was deeply authoritarian and conservative, though its policies reflected many different political currents that had been present in Spain. Two leading intellectual figures of the Spanish nationalist movement, Ernesto Giménez Caballero and José María Pemán y Pemartín, contributed to the ideological underpinnings and propaganda of this regime at the same time while being representatives of divergent political movements. While they were present in government offices and the literary world they both also wrote materials to be used in Spanish primary schools: *España Nuestra* and *La Historia de España contada con sencillez*, respectively.

Schools are important spaces for any state to promote its ideals, values, and national identity. This is not something that is unique to authoritarian states, though authoritarian states tend to have a tighter control over what ideas can be present within the educational system. Educational materials therefore can provide a record of how the state propagated its ideas to the bulk of its subjects. Through these materials one can see what information the state prioritized, the narratives that the subjects were expected to internalize, the rhetorical strategies used to present these narratives, and the

tensions between the state's view of history and other interpretations of events and historical processes. Comparing educational materials from different periods or different authors can also provide insight into political developments over time, and into conflicts within the state itself.

While Giménez Caballero and Pemán were writing textbooks for a government that held tight control over what was printed and over the educational system, the two articulated their different politics in their writing by how they presented the historical narrative of the Reconquista and its significance to global history. Giménez Caballero as a representative of the fascist wing of Spain's ruling party saw global history as important only insofar as it impacts the Spanish state; Pemán as a traditionalist Catholic believed in Spain being part of a divine order including the rest of the Catholic world and in a civilization-scale struggle against the East. These two narratives can be seen in conversation with the political debates that existed among Spanish nationalists from the beginning of the Civil War, as well as in conversation with cultural discussions starting in the nineteenth century about the nature of Spanish national identity and about what aspects of Spanish culture should be promoted.

The Reconquista is an important period of history to focus on due to the question of Spanish identity. The Moorish rule in Spain lasted for over seven centuries and therefore influenced Spanish culture and identity deeply. In the centuries leading into the Spanish Civil War foreign and Spanish commentators noted this influence. However, the Spanish nationalist movement generally presented Spain as being among the Roman Catholic western world in opposition to a growing communist threat emanating from a non-Catholic East. If Spain had been defined for so long as having a

character that was shaped by Moorish rule and presence, how would a Spanish nationalist in line with Francoist ideas of a unified, Catholic, western Spain understand and present this influence? What would its significance be? How would the nationalist Spanish state want students to learn about Muslim rule in Spain and the subsequent Reconquista?

### **Ruling ideology(ies)**

The Franco regime frequently emphasized the theme of unity under an authoritarian state and its ruler. The state and its representatives used this idea to quash dissent and made it into a cudgel against various ethnic groups who had sought various social rights and political representation. However, the ruling party of Spain, the *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (FET y de las JONS), was not completely unified ideologically. The FET y de las JONS was formed from pre-existing right-wing parties and organizations during the Spanish Civil War as a quasi-big tent party of those who supported the nationalist cause; its actual ideology would only be defined later in José Antonio Primo de Rivera's *Twenty-Six Points*. The party membership included fascist corporatists akin to Mussolini, conservatives who disliked the presence of leftist politics in the Republican government, monarchist traditionalists invested in restoring the monarchy and the role of the Catholic Church, and various others who were opposed both to Manuel Azaña's Popular Front and to the more radical left-wing groups growing in Spain in the 1930s. The eventual figurehead of the nationalist movement and dictator of Spain, Francisco Franco, is generally considered to have been a conservative monarchist without strong radical sympathies. However, he was a major figure in the Spanish military, which was another

important basis of support for the nationalist cause. Franco was able to become dictator by unifying these disparate groups into the FET y de las JONS, which he controlled.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, these intra-party tensions continued to exist and shape the development of Spain's policies until 1975.

The fascist elements of the Spanish nationalists were just as divided as the larger nationalist movement. At the time of the Spanish Civil War, fascism was a recent ideology, officially named and established by Benito Mussolini in 1919. Fascism is a notoriously difficult ideology to define due to its syncretic origins in ideologies including left-wing and socialist economic ideals, populism, expansionist nationalism, and authoritarianism.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish fascists that would later join the nationalist cause were influenced chiefly by Italian fascism, but different that influenced fascism played different roles in different Spanish fascist ideologies. Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, the founder of the fascist group that would in 1931 become the *Junta de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (JONS), was interested in imperial expansion and decisive revolutionary action against both the contemporary state and the radical left, and its economic policies were defined vaguely but were roughly modelled after Italian national syndicalism.<sup>3</sup> The rise of the Nazi party in Germany a few years later stimulated Spanish fascists like José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who founded the *Falange Española*, though his movement ultimately drew mostly from the ideas of his father, Miguel Primo de Rivera, and his authoritarian dictatorship. Primo de Rivera was more inclined towards authoritarianism and a nationalistic mysticism, though the *Falange*

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Thomás i Andreu. "La configuración del franquismo. El partido y las instituciones," *Ayer*, no. 33 (1999): 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Random House, 2004), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime: 1936-1975* (London: Phoenix Press, 1987) 53.

*Española* would later profess more anti-capitalist ideas.<sup>4</sup> Before the parties were unified with each other (and with the traditionalist Carlists) under Franco's leadership, Spanish fascists were just as regularly at odds with other fascists as they were with traditionalists, the left, and the Republic.

In contrast to the recent invention of fascism, monarchist politics have had a long history in Spain. The nation was more or less unified from various smaller kingdoms with the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in the late fifteenth century. The ruling house of Spain was that of the Bourbons since the eighteenth century. However, Spanish monarchists were themselves not unified. The Bourbon monarchs had been relatively liberal, and followed many of the principles of the Enlightenment, among them anti-clericalism and industrialism. Many Spaniards, especially the rural population and those closely affiliated with the Catholic Church, were opposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment and their enactment in state policies of the 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and espoused traditionalism. In the early nineteenth century, shortly after Napoleon's invasion and subsequent Spanish victory in its war for independence, these traditionalists grew more critical of the then king, Ferdinand VII, and preferred his brother and presumed heir, Don Carlos. The matter came to a boiling point in 1830, when the question arose of how female heirs should fit into the order of succession. In 1713, Spain adopted the French Salic Law, limiting succession to male heirs, but in 1789 King Carlos IV decreed but never ratified that Spain revert would to its initial practice of male-preference primogeniture. Ferdinand had two daughters and no sons; his pragmatic sanction would make his eldest daughter, Isabella II, the new heir

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<sup>4</sup> Payne, 55-58.

presumptive. Ferdinand's death in 1833 and Isabella's subsequent inheritance of the throne catalyzed the Carlist movement and sparked decades of war.<sup>5</sup> By the time of the Spanish Civil War, the last pre-Franco monarch of Spain, Alfonso XIII, had lost the throne, the Carlist claimant being Alfonso Carlos. Most monarchists and traditionalists among the Spanish nationalists were Carlists, though the nationalist regime would never place a monarch from the Carlist line on the throne. The Carlists were also more heavily inclined towards a government with theocratic elements than were the fascists; this affinity with the Catholic Church would prove to give the Carlists better results.

While even before Franco the Spanish state had a high degree of centralized control over the structure of education, the Catholic Church historically played a major role in Spain's education system, as it had played a major role in education in Europe for centuries. The modern model for education in Spain was developed in the nineteenth century with the Moyano Act. This act allowed the Catholic Church to maintain its influence over education while providing a framework for more state-controlled educational institutions. As the ideology of the FET y de las JONS emphasized Catholicism as an important part of Spanish national identity, it was clear that education under Francisco Franco would not be secular, and after the Civil War, the nationalist government quickly gave the Catholic Church even more control over education. Religious education became mandatory; after the Civil War the new state stepped back government oversight of the already established Catholic schools that had existed since the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> This relationship was mutually beneficial: Catholic

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Blinkhorn, *Carlism and Crisis in Spain 1931–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4–9.

<sup>6</sup> Celia Valente, "(Pre)School Is Not Childcare: Preschool and Primary School Education Policies in Spain since the 1930s" in *Children, Families, and States: Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool, and Primary*

institutions were happy to portray the nationalist government as having a divine mandate and the Republican government as dangerous and atheistic.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, traditionalists within the FET y de las JONS clashed with fascists over methods of teaching.<sup>8</sup> Clerical education typically involved more rote learning and memorization, while many fascists were embracing newer ideas of pedagogy. Despite these differences, there was not a significant amount of disagreement or diversity on educational material itself. Most parties agreed that educational material should be anti-liberal and anti-communist, and promote the authoritarian state and Franco's rule over the country. Spanish unity was to be presented as something timeless, and Catholicism was presented as an essential part of that unity.

### **Domestic and Foreign Narratives of Spain**

The emphasis on Spanish unity and religiosity becomes complicated, however, in the broader context of Spain's history. The earliest rulers of Spain after the fall of the Roman Empire followed a heterodox version of Christianity; through much of the Middle Ages most of Iberia was under Muslim political control. Standard Castilian Spanish took centuries to come into existence from various languages and dialects; Spain to this day contains multiple ethnic groups and languages.<sup>9</sup> These factors, among others, were instrumental in the development of Iberian culture(s), but they contradicted the narrative

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*Education in Europe*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Konrad Jarausch, and Cristina Allemann-Ghionda (Berghahn Books, 2014), 227.

<sup>7</sup> Valente, 228.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Domke, "Education, Fascism, and the Catholic Church in Franco's Spain." (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2011), 88-94.

<sup>9</sup> The Basque and Catalan languages and cultures are the most commonly known of the non-Castilian cultures in Spain, though Spain to this day contains multiple languages and cultures, including Extremaduran, Galician, and Asturian. Most of these languages and cultures were repressed under Francisco Franco; there are many present-day efforts to revitalize the languages. There are independence movements and nationalisms associated with these languages and cultures, including a post-Franco Andalusian independence movement.



about Spanish history that the FET y de las JONS wanted its subjects to internalize. Educational materials could not be blatantly contradictory to basic known facts and the world that students saw around them. While Castilian Spanish had been essentially standardized for centuries, there was still significant linguistic diversity in Spain, the Basque and Catalan languages being among the most well-known. Twentieth-century Spain's Muslim and Jewish populations (outside of Spanish colonies) were miniscule, but there existed obvious remnants of Moorish rule in the form of architecture and language that were picked up on by Spanish authors and artists.

In the decades just prior to the Civil War, *andalucismo*, or the artistic focus on southern Spain and its customs, was a popular theme in Spanish art and poetry. This was affiliated with the broader artistic idea of *costumbrismo*, which was the artistic depiction of everyday life and customs, with a particular focus on rural life and the lower classes. A significant number of *andalucismo* works directly reference Muslim Spain. For instance, painters such as Manuel Wssel de Guimbarda would use Islamic architecture as a setting for a contemporary *costumbrismo* scene to draw attention to those cultural influences.<sup>10</sup> These thematic choices were controversial, however. Before the Civil War there was a growing "Europeanizing" current among Spanish political and cultural writers. The writers in this current were invested in adapting to economic and political movements in western Europe. This was tied to regionalism: those invested in Europeanizing tended to identify strongly with Castilian Spain,<sup>11</sup> and viewed *andalucismo* as a rejection of modernity and of the West that threatened to hold Spain

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<sup>10</sup> José Luis Venegas, *The Sublime South: Andalusia, Orientalism, and the Making of Modern Spain* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 69-70.

<sup>11</sup> Conservative Catalan nationalists also tended towards Europeanizing. Venegas, 44.

back while other European nations continued to progress. The prominent liberal writer José Ortega y Gasset was one of the main critics of *andalucismo* on these grounds.<sup>12</sup> However, poets and artists of the twentieth century who embraced *andalucismo*, such as Federico García Lorca, argued through their work for a modernist interpretation of these themes. Unfortunately, the Spanish Civil War and subsequent Francisco Franco dictatorship would stifle this debate, though it would continue to influence arts and politics throughout the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

The phrase “Africa begins at the Pyrenees”, apocryphally attributed to various historical figures but with origins in the nineteenth century, demonstrates common European attitudes about Spain.<sup>14</sup> Foreign discourses and art about Spain invoked an orientalist idea of Spain with a focus on the south and on Spain’s history as an ethnically plural frontier. This historical narrative fueled the “Black Legend”, defined in 1917 by the term’s originator Julián Juderías as:

La afirmación, contenida en libros al parecer respetables y verídicos y muchas veces reproducida, comentada y ampliada en la Prensa extranjera, de que nuestra Patria constituye, desde el punto de vista de la tolerancia, de la cultura y del progreso político, una excepción lamentable dentro del grupo de las naciones europeas.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Venegas, 59-67.

<sup>13</sup> See: Bienvenido Mr. Marshall, Andalusian separatism?

<sup>14</sup> José Colmeiro, "Exorcising Exoticism: "Carmen" and the Construction of Oriental Spain," *Comparative Literature* 54, no. 2 (2002): 130.

<sup>15</sup> “The affirmation, found in seemingly respectable and truthful books, reproduced many times, discussed and expanded in foreign presses, that our country constitutes, from the point of view of tolerance, culture, and political progress, a lamentable exception among the European nations.” Julián Juderías, *La Leyenda Negra y La Verdad Histórica* (Madrid: 1917), 6.

The portrayal of Spain as uniquely vicious and backwards had its origins in writings about Spain in the Middle Ages and continued for centuries. *La Leyenda Negra* was deeply influential on Spanish historiography. There are multiple factors that contributed to the development and propagation of this historiographical narrative, but many historians have argued that Spain's frontier position led those writing about Spain to adopt a racialized lens and point to Muslim and Jewish influence as a reason for Spain's supposedly unique backwardness.<sup>16</sup> Paradoxically, the expulsions of Jews, Muslims, and converts was also frequently cited as evidence of Spain being uniquely intolerant and backwards. Other invocations were less overtly hostile and instead treated Spain with common orientalist tropes while following many of the same patterns as Spanish *costumbrismo*, such as the many travel journals that presented Spain as an "entrance of the orient" into the west.<sup>17</sup> The French Romantics were particularly fascinated with Spain as an oriental presence within Europe. Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* focuses on the French imagination of the Spanish "gypsy" more than anything else, but it still draws from previous writings and art on Andalusia, and it is one of the most well-known demonstrations of this fascination and interpretation of southern Spain.<sup>18</sup>

Spaniards of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were therefore conscious of their being understood as a people living on a frontier of sorts, and of these narratives and portrayals. They also would have been conscious of having a historical relationship to the Orient and to Africa. Educational materials could not blatantly contradict the

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<sup>16</sup> Nadia Altschul, "Medieval Belonging and Oriental Otherness in Figurations of Iberia" In *Politics of Temporalization: Medievalism and Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century South America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 29.

<sup>17</sup> Altschul, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Colmeiro, 133.

reality that students lived in, but they could frame their narratives in a way that promoted the new Spanish state. Fascists, monarchists, and Catholic traditionalists were all involved in the Franco-era educational system, and beholden to the ruling party and regime.

### Two Educational Texts

The Moyano Act was the first Spanish law to mandate education. However, it only mandated primary education – public secondary education was available, but optional, and public funding for education was often sparse prior to the Second Spanish Republic. The nationalist government's 1938 secondary education reform law standardized a secondary school curriculum and the new government continued the expansion of secondary education across the country,<sup>19</sup> but it still did not make secondary schooling compulsory.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, primary school materials represent what was most commonly available, and the baseline of what students were expected to know and how they were expected to understand Spanish history. To understand the relationship between specific politics and historiography, I will analyze two textbooks: one written by a representative of the Falangist/fascist wing of the FET y de las JONS, *España Nuestra* by Ernesto Giménez Caballero, and one written by a representative of the traditionalist/Carlist wing of the party, *La Historia de España contada con sencillez* by José Maria Pemán y Pemartín.

Ernesto Giménez Caballero was one of the major intellectual figures behind Spain's Falangist ideology and program. Giménez Caballero had been involved in

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<sup>19</sup> Domke, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Aubert J Clark, "The Reform of Secondary Education in Spain," *Comparative Education Review* 9, no. 1 (1965): 25-26.

fascist politics early in their development and was a major source of inspiration for José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Giménez Caballero had spent time in Italy in the late 1920s and had been in contact with many of the major figures of Italian fascism; this would become a major source of inspiration for Giménez Caballero's ideas.<sup>21</sup> Giménez Caballero came to Italy and Italian fascism after his involvement and subsequent disillusionment with Spain's literary and artistic avant-garde, or *Vanguardismo*. He entered this scene in 1923 after a period of military service in Morocco, which inspired his first published work. But upon his return to Spain from Italy in 1928, Giménez Caballero would, in his *Gaceta Literaria*, announce his full-throated support for a form of "Hispanic fascism." This would alienate him from his fellow vanguardists who were largely interested in "Europeanizing" Spain politically;<sup>22</sup> it would endear him to Spanish reactionaries who would go on to support the Nationalist movement in the 1930s.

Giménez Caballero was solidly a fascist, though his idiosyncracies would not remain popular with the nationalists. Though he aspired to be something of a "Spanish Goebbels,"<sup>23</sup> it would be difficult for him to attain that role. He insisted on a connection to Italian fascism at a time when Spanish fascists were mostly invested in fighting against the Spanish Republic and for prominence amongst other reactionary factions. He argued that the state should supersede the Catholic Church, and he wanted to prevent Spain from being led by "Anglo-Saxon"<sup>24</sup> fascist movements like that of Nazi Germany. These viewpoints clashed with various other viewpoints held by Spanish

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<sup>21</sup> Douglas Foard, "The Forgotten Falangist: Ernesto Gimenez Caballero," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no. 1 (January 1975): 10.

<sup>22</sup> Foard, "Forgotten Falangist," 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Foard, "Forgotten Falangist," 4.

<sup>24</sup> Foard, 12-13.

nationalists. Nonetheless, Giménez Caballero made it to a cabinet position in the Franco government<sup>25</sup>, and played a large role in guiding education under this regime – including textbook writing. Giménez Caballero did toy with ideas of the fascist state superseding the church, but he ultimately fell in line and emphasized the importance of Catholicism in his official writings, including *España Nuestra*.

*España Nuestra* was a history and geography textbook intended for primary school children. The text is divided into six major themes: “The Image of Spain,” its destiny, its land, its language, its founders, and its works.<sup>26</sup> The book was published in 1943, four years after the end of the Civil War and two years before the end of World War II. Spain was officially neutral in the latter, but Franco’s government was not unfriendly with the governments of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (receiving military support in the Civil War from the former), and had a clear anti-Soviet stance. Additionally, this textbook was published before Morocco declared its independence from Spain. Most importantly, *España Nuestra* was specifically published by the Ministry for Education; it directly reflects what the Franco regime wanted schoolchildren to learn.

*España Nuestra*’s maintains an idea of Catholic supremacy throughout; while it acknowledges contributions to Spanish culture from Moorish rule, any positive depiction of Islam or North Africa is couched in patronizing language. It repeatedly draws direct comparisons between centuries-old events and its own time, with a clearly presented narrative. Overall, *España Nuestra* is unambiguous about how students learning from this text should interpret historical events.

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<sup>25</sup> Ernesto Giménez Caballero, *España Nuestra* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Vicesecretaria de Educación Popular, 1943), 263.

<sup>26</sup> Giménez Caballero, 5.

*España Nuestra* is clear in its stance regarding Spain's Muslim history and any Moorish elements existing in Spanish culture. The Moorish governments of Spain are referred to as "el elemento invasor e infiel del sur",<sup>27</sup> and as "un enemigo que combatía con el terror y con una cultura atrayente, con un lenguaje seductor,"<sup>28</sup> among other things. The latter phrasing also plays into how Giménez Caballero explains parts of Spanish heritage with Moorish origins. He describes the Cordoban caliphs as "refined and enchanting,"<sup>29</sup> enough so that political and romantic relationships could exist between Spanish and Moorish royals. Still, the text makes sure that Spanish culture and Catholicism are understood as the "superior spirituality."<sup>30</sup> It also uses the language of "liberation": "un puñado de hispano-godos hablando romance alcanzaron una zona liberada por las montañas del Norte"<sup>31</sup>. There is a binary presented between an existence that is essentially Spanish and an existence that is essentially "oriental"; a person must neatly fit into one or the other.

Thus, when Giménez Caballero compares contemporary and medieval Spain, he has to find a way to account for the Catholic Iberians that remained and lived under Muslim rule, the Mozarabs. He does this by drawing a very direct comparison between these Mozarabs and the Spanish nationalists of the twentieth century, calling them "facciosos de la quinta columna".<sup>32</sup> This term "fifth column" arose in the Spanish Civil War to refer to supporters of the nationalist cause within Republican-controlled Madrid,

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<sup>27</sup> "the invading and infidel element of the south" Giménez Caballero, 42

<sup>28</sup> "an enemy that fought with terror and with an attractive culture, a seductive language" Giménez Caballero, 130.

<sup>29</sup> Giménez Caballero, 131.

<sup>30</sup> Giménez Caballero, 54.

<sup>31</sup> "a handful of Hispano-Goths speaking a Romance language reached a liberated zone in the mountains of the north" Giménez Caballero, 130.

<sup>32</sup> "fascists of the fifth column" Giménez Caballero, 130.

who surreptitiously assisted the nationalists until Madrid fell in 1939.<sup>33</sup> According to Giménez Caballero, the Mozarabs filled this exact role throughout the Reconquista, the gradual conquering of southern Iberia by Catholic monarchs. If the Mozarabs, loyal to the Catholic monarchs but living under Muslim rule, represent the nationalist fifth column, then it is clear that the Moorish rulers or “invaders,” and foreign influence in general, are meant to be equated with the Republican government. Giménez Caballero is very explicit about this equivalence throughout the text. When describing the movement of Christian forces southward during the Reconquista, he remarks that the conquest of the River Ebro was “como luego nuestro Generalísimo”;<sup>34</sup> he compares Francisco Franco to the medieval hero el Cid and writes “tiene Franco destino de Reconquista.”<sup>35</sup> Again, portraying Francisco Franco as the heir to the Reconquista means that the Republican government is not just something to be opposed, but something that is foreign and invasive, and antithetical to the original state of Spain.

The phrasing itself is also significant. “Reconquista” is the established term for the gradual conquering of Iberia by Hispanic Catholic monarchs. Nonetheless the prefix “re” implies a restoration to a previous state, even though political control of Spain before the Umayyad conquest was largely Gothic. Giménez Caballero elaborates on this implication, using the metaphor of a “resurrection.”<sup>36</sup> If Franco and the nationalist movement are to be understood as “heirs” of the Reconquista, then they similarly restored Spain to an original state. Ultimately, the details of the Moorish rule and

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<sup>33</sup> Javier Cervera Gil, “La Quinta Columna en la retaguardia republicana en Madrid,” *Historia, Antropología y Fuentes Orales* 17, (1997): 94.

<sup>34</sup> “as later, our dear Generalissimo” Giménez Caballero, 38.

<sup>35</sup> “Franco has the destiny of the Reconquista” Giménez Caballero, 172.

<sup>36</sup> Giménez Caballero, 53.



presence in Spain are not what the students reading this textbook would be expected to learn. The readers are meant to understand Spain as an entity that has always existed with roughly the same characteristics, but besieged by various external forces. The book implies a linear continuity in Spanish history, briefly interrupted by these presences,. All of these external forces are conflated with each other; the 8<sup>th</sup> century Umayyad conquest of Iberia that involved military forces marching northward through Spain and taking land is equated to people in Spain deciding to establish a Republic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of the aforementioned are presented as no more than negative foreign influence that needed to be purged from Spain; this, and not any actual history of Spain, is the main takeaway that Giménez Caballero as representative of the FET y de las JONS wants students to have.

José María Pemán y Pemartín can be seen as a representative of the Carlist wing of the FET y de las JONS. Today, he is known more for his poetry and theatrical works than for his political writings; nonetheless he was very vocal about his support for the Spanish monarchy and for the Catholic church having a presence in the Spanish state. From the very establishment of the Second Spanish Republic, he was deeply involved in the reactionary organization “*Acción Española*” that advocated for an authoritarian monarchist state in Spain. While this group was not fascist itself, it did have close ties to various fascist organizations in Europe. Pemán at this time was also a member of the *Real Academia de la Lengua*, and after the end of the Civil War he would rise to the role of director. In his theatrical and poetic works, he also made his reactionary ideas clear; he published poetry celebrating an attempted coup<sup>37</sup> against the

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<sup>37</sup> Marta Garía Peña, “Cisneros de José María Pemán, una apología del autoritarismo,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* no. 32 (2020): 162.

republic and plays like *Cisneros* (1934) which celebrated traditionalism and authoritarian rule. Despite Pemán being less involved in direct politics, even through *Acción Española*, his influence on the development of authoritarian and monarchist ideas leading into the Civil War was significant.

*La Historia de España contada con sencillez* was published in 1939. This year is significant: it was the year that the Civil War ended, and it was also the year that Pemán became director of the *Real Academia*.<sup>38</sup> However, this position of influence for Pemán did not mean the realization of his political goals. Spain was now under an authoritarian government, but FET y de las JONS did not restore the monarchy as the Carlist faction had wished.<sup>39</sup> This moment for the FET y de las JONS was also a moment where the fascist influence over the party was a lot stronger.

*La Historia de España contada con sencillez* spends a good portion of its length covering Muslim rule in Spain and the subsequent Reconquista. Multiple chapters are devoted to describing the northwards military conquests from North Africa and the Moorish rule. Pemán uses surprisingly glowing terms to describe this period and this rule, using terms like “brilliance” and “something”. Additionally, he invokes a similarity between Moorish and Spanish cultures: “Estos moros... ..eran... ..del mismo tronco y la misma familia que los primitivos «íberos» base de la población española.”<sup>40</sup> There was an “«aire de familia» que facilitó las relaciones entre unos y otros”;<sup>41</sup> for Pemán this is what can account for the periods of intermarriage and friendly relations between

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Gennara, “Standards and attitudes in the drama of José María Pemán from 1926-1950.” (MA diss., Montana State University, 1956), 5

<sup>39</sup> At least, not for another 36 years.

<sup>40</sup> “These Moors were from the same trunk and the same family as the primitive “Iberians” who were the base of the Spanish population” José María Pemán, *La Historia de España contada con sencillez* (Madrid: Ediciones San Román, 2014), 96.

<sup>41</sup> “‘Family resemblance’ that facilitated relationships between each other” Pemán, 97.

Iberian Christians and Arab and North African Muslims prior to 1492. Still, Pemán makes his belief in Catholic and Hispanic supremacy clear throughout the text, with a large amount of manifest orientalism. He insists that elements of North African or Arab origin present in Spanish society should be attributed to the Spanish and claims that “los árabes no produjeron una civilización absolutamente propia en ninguna parte de las muchas tierras que llegaron a poseer”<sup>42</sup> and engages in some spurious linguistics.<sup>43</sup> The crux of his argument for Spanish cultural supremacy is that Arab civilization is concerned solely with the superficial, and that this superficiality meant that even with several centuries of presence in Iberia it could not significantly change anything about the culture or region. If the culture and civilization brought to Spain was entirely built out of exterior adornments and ornamentation, then it follows that its removal would be a simple process that would simply restore Spain to an earlier state without bringing any fundamental changes to society.

This fits into Pemán’s idea of the Reconquista. Pemán takes care to emphasize that the regions under Moorish control were still largely Spanish; that the Reconquista likely involved a process of cultural mixing and religious conversion. For Pemán, the Reconquista was a religious crusade of Christians defending their faith, and to describe it as an organized conquest would be incorrect. While it is not inaccurate to portray the Reconquista as a period over centuries involving various battles that were not centrally coordinated, Pemán only gives his readers religious and quasi-moral motives for the Christians leading battles against Moorish regions. Political motives are simply not

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<sup>42</sup> “The Arabs did not produce a civilization of their own in any part of the many lands that they came to possess.” Pemán, 98

<sup>43</sup> Pemán, 104.

entertained as even a possibility. The Reconquista needs, for Pemán, to be seen simultaneously as the series of disconnected battles over centuries that it was, but also part of “una lucha de dos civilizaciones que interesa al mundo todo: la lucha de la Europa romana y Cristiana, contra el Oriente mahometano.”<sup>44</sup> Though Moorish rule of Spain for Pemán consisted largely of the addition of superficial features and ornamentation that was incapable of making any real change to Iberia, it was also something that had to be fought by a representation of the whole of the Western, Christian world.

There are few explicit comparisons between the period of Muslim rule and the Reconquista and Pemán’s era, but Pemán uses repetitive language to create associations between periods and draw implicit comparisons. Pemán’s Reconquista is a crusade to liberate Christians under Muslim rule; on top of specific phrasing Pemán makes sure to cite accounts of Christians martyred by Moorish rulers. Near the end of the text, when discussing the Second Spanish Republic and the Civil War, Pemán returns to very similar ideas: that while the Republic was in power, “las fuerzas de reacción de la patria no se durmieron,”<sup>45</sup> and traditionalist groups were organizing to defend Spain and the Catholic faith. He invokes imagery of another Crusade and of Christian martyrs<sup>46</sup> and describes cities taken by nationalist forces as having been “liberated”. The text gives the impression that there is an essentially Catholic and monarchical Spain, and any elements that diverge from that are existentially dangerous to Spain. At the same time, these non-Catholic, non-autocratic factors are not to be

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<sup>44</sup> “A fight between two civilizations that concerns the entire world: the fight of the Roman, Christian Europe against the Mahometan Orient” Pemán, 118.

<sup>45</sup> “The forces of reaction of the country did not sleep” Pemán, 436.

<sup>46</sup> Pemán, 440-441.

seen as something capable of creating any fundamental change. Anything that falls outside of what has been deemed to be inherently Spanish is simply adornment that can be removed without any structural damage.

Pemán and Giménez Caballero present very similar arguments about the nature of Spain and of what it is to be Spanish in their texts. Obviously, neither text could contradict the Catholic Church or the FET y de las JONS. Giménez Caballero would have no freedom to present his vision of a state superseding the Catholic Church; Pemán was obliged to praise the less traditionalist elements of the nationalist movement to a similar extent that he did the monarchy. They make deeply similar arguments about Spain under Moorish rule: that this period of time represents a brief divergence from Spain's natural and eternal status as a unified Catholic nation; that the Reconquista and the Civil War can be seen as analogous to each other in that they purged Spain of some negative foreign element.

Nonetheless, the two authors present these similar arguments in the service of different larger narratives. Pemán's argument that the Reconquista needs to be understood as part of a grander struggle between the Roman Catholic West and the Muslim East is not significantly present in Giménez Caballero's text. Pemán is much more interested in presenting historical events as being in the service of something far greater. He insists that his readers understand the Reconquista as a process formed out of centuries of smaller-scale battles and incremental movement before the unification of Spain. The nation and national identity are important to Pemán, but it is important that the nation exists within a divine plan. Pemán's placement of the Reconquista within a much broader historical narrative is his articulation of a worldview

and of a politics that emphasized the divine right of the Spanish monarchy and the importance of the Catholic Church. In this sense, Pemán follows prior Spanish writers like Ortega y Gasset who were concerned with Spain maintaining a place within western civilization. While these two major twentieth century Spanish intellectuals had significant political differences (unlike Pemán, Ortega y Gasset was a liberal and critical of the monarchy), there was a similar investment in the idea of a western civilization that Spain belonged to and owed something to. There also exists a very similar disdain for that which was deemed “Moorish” and for *andalucismo*; Ortega y Gasset argued that the nineteenth century interest in this region held Spain back from progress that can be made only through an “intellectual effort” foreign to the South and the East,<sup>47</sup> while Pemán presents that which comes from the South as meaningless adornment added to a stable and eternal Spanishness, which is necessary to achieve a place in a western Catholic world order and therefore, within the divine plan.

Giménez Caballero differs from Pemán in that he presents Spanishness as an end in itself. He more or less inverts Pemán’s narrative: instead of the Catholic Spanish state’s importance coming from its position in a divine plan and order of the world, Giménez Caballero sees a divine plan that serves the Spanish state. Pemán’s Reconquista is part of “the fight of the Roman, Christian Europe against the Mahometan Orient,” and the Civil War part of a struggle against “el comunismo [que] querrá «imponer al Occidente su espíritu oriental y asiático»”<sup>48</sup> whereas Giménez Caballero sees enemies that are concerned more with Spain than they are with the west or Catholicism more broadly.

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<sup>47</sup> Venegas, 59.

<sup>48</sup> “Communism [that] wants to impose on the West its oriental and Asiatic spirit” Pemán, 408.

Both authors present certain groups as enemies of the nation, but Pemán is more inclined to tie that animosity into a broader animosity to faith and the west. The two are equally antisemitic; they differ in that Pemán again presents a broader narrative in giving his antisemitism a background through the antisemitic trope of Jews as being a cosmopolitan people with no sense of homeland and lacking national loyalty due to their status as a diaspora people, which led to a disloyalty to Spain and the Spanish monarchs that could be universalized.<sup>49</sup>

Giménez Caballero invokes many similar antisemitic ideas, although he does not seek to rationalize them in the same way that Pemán does. Giménez Caballero does connect his statements about Jews to a broader global narrative, but neglects to give an explanation to the anti-Spanish motive that he presents. It must be noted that typical antisemitic ideas can be present without being stated explicitly: ideas of Jews being inherently conspiratorial, disloyal, and bearing particular animosity towards Christianity have existed for centuries. These ideas are all implicit in Giménez Caballero's text. At the same time, Giménez Caballero projects his own view of unified Spain as the end goal of history onto the groups he perceives as enemies of Spain. For example, he gives no clear reason why "judíos y elementos franceses"<sup>50</sup> would be interested promoting Catalan separatism apart from textual discussions of French invasions of Spain. While he existed in the same environment as Pemán and likely would have believed the same antisemitic myths as Pemán, Giménez Caballero never goes into the same detail as in *La Historia de España contada con sencillez*. Giménez Caballero ultimately does not see a need to justify his antisemitism. The significance of his

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<sup>49</sup> Pemán, 75-76.

<sup>50</sup> "Jews and French elements" Giménez Caballero, 138.

imagined conspiracies against Spain is that they threaten the nation and there is no need to understand these events, real or otherwise, outside of the context of Spain's continued existence and character.

Spain's place in the western Catholic world is also different for Giménez Caballero. Many narratives that define the "western world" through an affiliation with the Roman Empire; Giménez Caballero presents this affiliation but the importance of Rome is mostly in what it gave to the development of the Spanish language and identity. With regards to religion, the state does not need to serve a divine plan so much as it forms an identity through an affiliation with the Catholic Church and a parallel with the narrative of Christ:

La figura de España tiene la forma de una Cruz. Y recuerda al Cristo que pintó Velázquez: al Redentor del Mundo y de los hombres. Por eso el destino de España es cristiano y universo.

Pero para cumplir este sublime Destino debió España siempre, a imitación del divino Salvador, sufrir martirios, sacrificios, sangre derramada, infinitas amarguras. Y duras luchas.

Por eso – niños míos – es preciso imaginéis a España como un perpetuo combate y miréis su vida con *mirada militar*. Y sólo así comprenderéis su vida de alerta implacable *contra la Naturaleza y contra los Hombres*, esos dos tremendos enemigos.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "The figure of Spain has the form of a Cross. And recall the Christ that Velázquez painted: the redeemer of the world and of humanity. For this reason, the destiny of Spain is Christian and universal. But to fulfill this sublime Destiny Spain must always, like the divine Savior, suffer martyrdoms, sacrifices, bloodshed, infinite sorrows. And harsh fights. For this – my children – you must imagine Spain in perpetual combat and you will see your life with a militant gaze. And only then will you understand your life with relentless alertness against Nature and against Men, these two tremendous enemies." Giménez Caballero, 30.



Giménez Caballero, both due to his own convictions and due to the narrative he was expected to promote, would not explicitly write Catholicism as something secondary to the nation. Instead, faith becomes a part of how one serves the nation: it serves as an example for subjects who will be expected to make Christ-like sacrifices for the state.

Within two books that presented the same series of events, both written in service of a totalitarian state with a high degree of control over publishing, Giménez Caballero and Pemán wrote accounts that reflected diverging ideologies within the FET y de las JONS. Their accounts are the same in that they present Spain as something eternal with specific intrinsic qualities, the most prominent one being Catholic faith, and that they present any influence from Muslim rule as something that was not part of true Spanish culture. The main difference comes in the grander narratives that the Reconquista becomes a part of. As Pemán's main political interest was in traditionalism and Catholicism, and his investment in state politics was less strong, Spain's history is part of something grander. Giménez Caballero was, conversely, focused on the state and interested in separating and distinguishing Spain from the rest of Europe; in his text the ideas of western civilization and Christendom are part of a narrative whose telos is the Spanish nation.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the totalitarian and restrictive governing policies of the Francisco Franco regime, one can find traces of political debates and differences in different educational texts. The tensions between those who wanted the state to embrace newer fascist politics and those who wanted a state that operated on traditionalist principles could not be directly expressed in textbooks when both the government and the Catholic Church

had direct oversight over educational materials. To find evidence of this tension one can look at different interpretations of the Reconquista – a historical period that involved questions of Spanish national identity and confrontation with a group considered to be an Other. Due to church and state control, the similarities between narratives presented by a Mussolini-influenced fascist and a traditionalist reactionary are striking, but a closer reading shows the divisions that pulled the nationalist state in different directions, and what motivations may have guided different political factions. Implied narratives can be as influential on the reader as what is directly stated; searching for them can build deeper connections between an author's understanding of history and the author's political ideas and actions.

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### **Abstract**

The authoritarian nationalist government of Francisco Franco aggressively pushed the idea that Spain was a unified nation and culture. However, Spanish culture has always been varied, and possesses a great deal of influence from peoples considered to be deeply and fundamentally different – in particular, North African, Arab, and Muslim cultures. This influence has a long history, though Spanish nationalists in particular were inclined to present it as a brief foreign incursion that was ended by the Reconquista, which restored Spain back to its natural state.

Similarly, the nationalist government itself possessed a significant variety of political thought, with a large degree of tension between fascists and Carlist traditionalists. Through two educational texts written by representatives of these major groups (Ernesto Giménez Caballero representing the fascist current, José María Pemán y Pemartín the Carlist,) one can see differences in the historical narrative of the Reconquista that reflect these different viewpoints. Giménez Caballero centers Spain in his narrative, with little consideration for the nation as having a place in a broader historical context, while Pemán ties his historical narrative into a larger idea of the Christian West in constant conflict with the East.