

## Abstract

The role of historical memory in the formation of national identities is well-documented. Historical memory is a continuous process by which societies piece aspects of the past together to devise a narrative that shapes identities and political action in the present. It lends nations the appearance of naturalness and continuity, creates perceived commonalities among those who identify or are identified as members of nations, and erases potentially divisive or embarrassing parts of history. Global communications, international movements to redress past harms, and political actors' longstanding tendency to define nations in comparison and opposition to one another mean that historical memory, national identities, and nationalism are increasingly shaped by transnational phenomena.

This thesis focuses on the role of historical memory in contemporary constructions of Spain's national identity, specifically in relation to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship (1939-1975), Muslim rule over the Iberian Peninsula (711-1492), and Spain's place in European institutions. Spanish politicians, activists, and intellectuals generally express admiration for supranational concepts of "Europe" and European institutions. Some define "Europe" in civic terms by invoking political ideals such as democracy, human rights, and antifascism. Spain diverged from this understanding of "Europe" through the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. Others define "Europe" ethnically by imagining it as homogeneously white and Christian, but Spain is different from its European neighbors because of medieval Muslim rule.

I argue that various individuals and institutions in Spain have employed historical memory to portray their nation as "European" in spite of its past disjunctions from "Europe." My analysis is informed by a wide range of primary sources in English and Spanish, such as newspapers, polls, legislation, and oral histories; a rich literature on nationalism and the history and contemporary politics of Spain and Europe; and visits to historical sites, monuments, and memorials in Spain.

# **“Becoming European”: Spain’s Selective Historical Memory and National Identity**

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<b>Acronyms</b>	
ARMH	Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory)
CED	Committee on Enforced Disappearances
CoE	Council of Europe
EC	European Community
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PP	Partido Popular (People's Party)
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party)
UN	United Nations
UNAOC	United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Chapter 1

### “Spain is Different”: “Europe” Through Historical Memory

*“My God, what is Spain?”*

*-José Ortega y Gasset*

#### **Introduction**

Reflecting on the above question in 1914, Spanish philosopher and essayist José Ortega y Gasset continues, “In the breadth of the world, in the middle of innumerable races, lost between unlimited yesterday and endless tomorrow...what is this Spain, this spiritual promontory of Europe, this thing like the prow of the continent’s soul?” (2021, 129).

Ortega’s queries about what “yesterday” means for “tomorrow” in the context of connections to Africa and the Americas that place Spain on the geographical and imaginary periphery of “Europe” are recurrent in Spanish politics. For example, observers have argued that “Spain is different” from the rest of Europe in that until recently, it largely avoided confronting its violent and authoritarian past (Golob 2022, 47). Between 1939 and 1975, Spain was under the control of the fascist Francisco Franco, who came to power after defeating a democratically elected government in the Spanish Civil War and perpetrated enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and other grave human rights abuses (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 3; Golob 2022, 55; Humphrey 2014, 6). Franco’s blatant defiance of the civic ideals of peace, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law propagated by post-World War II European institutions that developed over the course of his rule meant that Spain was barred from joining these institutions until the 1980s (Judt 1996, 93, 95-96; Kaelble 2005, 20; Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 755, 763, 767; Rigney 2012, 611-614). Although the Spanish government is now deeply committed to cooperation with these institutions, the fact that it has never forced accountability for the

atrocities that took place during the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship sets it apart from other countries in Europe, which have emphasized their adherence to European institutions' civic principles through efforts to repudiate, educate on, and atone for fascism and authoritarianism (Judt 1996, 93, 95-96; Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores 2023; Rigney 2012, 611-614).

The notion that "Spain is different" in its approach to the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's regime mocks a tourism slogan that takes advantage of another way in which Spain's history distinguishes it from other European countries (Iberia 2016). Beginning in 711, wide swathes of the Iberian Peninsula were ruled by Muslims in what is known as al-Andalus (Taseer 2022). Over the course of several centuries, the Christian kingdoms that would come to form Spain wrested control of al-Andalus from Muslim leaders in a process known as the *Reconquista* ("Reconquest"), which was completed in 1492 (Taseer 2022). Although it has been over five centuries since Muslims ruled, this history and the ethnic or cultural difference from "Europe" imagined as white and Christian that it implies have contributed to the exoticization of Spain elsewhere in Europe (Calderwood 2014, 40; Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 167). While some in Spain have extolled their country's historical distinction from other parts of Europe, as demonstrated by the "Spain is different" tourism slogan, others have emphasized the *Reconquista* or ignored the legacy of al-Andalus altogether to fit ethnic and cultural understandings of "Europe" (Calderwood 2015; Iberia 2016; Vox España 2018, 02:09:33; Vox España 2021a, 11:10:57). Repeated remarks that "Spain is different" and efforts to rework the past such that Spain conforms to the idea of "Europe" demonstrate Spanish political actors' longstanding preoccupation with Spain's belonging to "Europe" because of or in spite of its history.

## **Research Question and Methodology**

This thesis analyzes how and to what effect political actors in contemporary Spain shape historical memory surrounding disjunctures from the idea of “Europe” in the form of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship as well as al-Andalus. I argue that as various individuals and institutions in Spain utilize the past to legitimize and achieve their objectives, they develop a selective historical memory of these disjunctures to portray Spain as a “European” nation.

My research is rooted in scholarship on nationalism by authors such as Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Renan, Bernard Yack, Rogers Brubaker, and Yael Tamir, who emphasize that those fomenting nationalist sentiment must normalize nationhood by creating a sense of continuity and common references for those whom they identify as members based on both political and cultural criteria. I use their work in conjunction with the writings of Pierre Nora, Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann, and Sebastian Conrad to explain how political actors use historical memory to construct nations through both official measures and everyday means such as education or memorials. As several of these scholars emphasize the influence of transnational developments on domestic approaches to historical memory, I also use the work of Brubaker, Klaus Eder, Willfried Spohn, Juan Díez Medrano, and Paula Gutiérrez to examine this influence and its relevance to national identities in a European context.

To build on these sources and demonstrate Spanish political actors’ use of historical memory to display their nation’s Europeanness, I conduct a qualitative analysis of primary texts and sites that invoke Spain’s historical disjunctures from “Europe” as well as sources that gauge or reflect public perceptions of these disjunctures. I use the original Spanish versions of sources where possible so as not to lose meanings, intentions, or cultural context that can be obscured

through either dilemmas of translation or the manipulation that can occur when presenting materials on sensitive periods of history to foreign audiences.

Some of my primary sources convey Spain's official narratives of history. I examine Spanish government websites as well as statements by prime ministers, members of Parliament, leaders of political parties, and local officials from the early 2000s. I also draw heavily on Spanish legislation, especially the 2007 and 2022 memory laws governing narratives of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. These texts are useful because as state narratives of national history, they reflect the discourses and identities that political leaders would prefer for Spaniards to internalize and represent abroad. Since those who produce these texts are responsible for public commemorations, history curricula, and other factors that affect historical memory beyond the political elite, it is important to scrutinize their attitudes towards the past. Doing so allows me to trace challenges and changes to official narratives over time.

Examining documents from international organizations to which Spain belongs facilitates the identification of transnational and especially European pressures on official historical memory. I use reports of the United Nations (UN) Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) as well as resolutions by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from the early 2000s to determine international perceptions of Spain's approach to the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. I also utilize current materials from the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) to analyze how Spain's Islamic past influences external assumptions about the country. By considering when these documents are released in relation to disputes over historical memory within Spain and finding explicit references to them in Spanish government sources, it is possible to put transnational or European and Spanish discourses regarding the past in dialogue with one another and discern the influence of the former on the latter.

In addition to incorporating official historical narratives and international responses to them, my analysis includes primary sources that comprise the everyday means by which particular understandings of the past are transmitted. I observed many such sources during my semester in Spain in 2024. They include multiple museums, signs and statues honoring historical events and figures, a monument constructed in the mid-twentieth century to honor Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War, formal and informal memorials to the victims of the conflict and subsequent dictatorship erected between the 1980s and the present, and historical sites such as the medieval Mosque of Córdoba. I examine these places to determine what understandings of the past are communicated through ordinary people's surroundings and education. I also analyze the ways in which these places are or are not advertised, which reflect the reach of their narratives and the intent of those who maintain them. Advertising or a lack thereof is instrumental in uncovering transnational factors in historical memory in Spain because it is often geared towards foreigners whose perception of Spain it can alter. In some cases, it also explicitly references sites or events in other countries. I examine public and privately-owned Spanish news media for similar reasons; it is one of the sources of information about the past that people are most frequently exposed to and often places events in Spain in a broader international context, reflecting transnational influences.

I investigate not only official and everyday conduits for narratives of the past but also sources that indicate the overall impact of historical narratives. For example, I consider oral histories from the University of California San Diego's *Archives of the Spanish Civil War and Francoist Dictatorship*. These are composed of interviews conducted between 2008 and 2010 with victims of and witnesses to political violence and repression during the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. The interviewees are disproportionately leftist, but they are not public

figures, meaning that their perspectives are in touch with ordinary Spaniards' perceptions and not necessarily part of a political agenda. To gain an understanding of the more general influence of historical narratives of Spain's disjunctures from "Europe," I use a variety of sources' polls from the last decade. While I cannot establish a definitive link between the historical narratives promoted by official and everyday sources on the one hand and Spanish public opinion on the other, it is helpful to see whether they align. Doing so can demonstrate consistency between historical discourses and Spaniards' perceptions, supporting my other primary sources' evidence that the former plays a role in the latter.

### **The Case of Spain: Historical Memory and (Trans)nationalism**

Spain is far from the only European country to instrumentalize historical memory for political ends, grapple with the impacts of war and dictatorship, or struggle to define its relationship with Islam. However, its efforts to do so have two characteristics that make it a fruitful case study of nationalisms, the role of historical memory in developing them, and the influence of transnational dynamics on historical memory and attachment to one's nation or "Europe."

The first of these is that its political actors are deliberate and explicit about their use of historical memory to define the nation for present purposes. Given the importance of historical memory in inculcating attachment to nations, all nations are influenced by competing discourses regarding the past; for example, in the United States, there are debates about the appropriateness of Confederate monuments in public spaces, and in France, there is controversy surrounding how colonialism is explained in schools (Russian 2022, 198-208; Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 157, 168-169). While historical memory is at stake, it is not referenced directly, whereas in Spain, it is expressly understood as a central political issue. Key political figures constantly cite it, whether

it be socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's statement on X that "[w]ithout memory, there is no democracy," conservative leaders' affirmation of their "commitment to historical memory" as a means of preserving social peace, or Spanish social media users' calls for people to "study the history of our country a bit" in response to the former president of the Community of Madrid's celebration of the anniversary of the completion of the *Reconquista* (Belver 2024; Hedgecoe 2017; RTVE 2024). Diverse civil society actors explicitly evoke historical memory to achieve their ends, and historical memory activists can be analyzed as distinct constituents in Spanish politics (Golob 2008, 54). For instance, La Comuna (The Commune), which claims a "right to historical memory" in its manifesto, and the Asociación por la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory; ARMH) have demanded not only that the Spanish government issue apologies and provide compensation for damages done by the Franco regime but also that it change the way that the past is addressed in schools, government institutions, and public spaces (ARMH 2024; La Comuna 2024a). Similarly, the Asociación de Memoria de los Andalusíes (Association of Memory of the Andalusis) advocates for the incorporation of the expulsion of the Moriscos, or descendants of medieval Iberian Muslims, into Spanish historical memory and for reparations for the expulsion (*El Mundo* 2015).

Further evidence of the highly deliberate nature of Spain's politics of historical memory includes the explicit legislation of how the Spanish Civil War and Francoism should be remembered as well as the use of narratives of the past to justify policies such as the conferral of Spanish citizenship upon descendants of Sephardic Jews who were cast out centuries ago (Ley 12/2015; Ley 20/2022; Ley 52/2007). Spain's government and civil society's unusually direct recognition of the role of historical memory in constructing the Spanish nation and its political debates makes it relatively easy to discern when and why political actors employ it and to what

effect. This presents an opportunity for insights that might be harder to glean from cases in which historical memory is important but not so clearly acknowledged.

Another feature that makes Spain a useful case study is its position at the nexus of various transnational networks that have shaped pivotal debates around historical memory and nationalism. With regard to memories of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship, this position permeates former anti-Francoist activists' criticism of Spain's approach to past atrocities vis-à-vis that of Germany, Chile, or other post-dictatorship societies as well as government websites and historical memory laws' references to memory practices abroad (Cuéllar 2022; Díaz-Cardiel 2009, Part 10, 6:00; Ley 20/2022). In the context of Spain's history with Islam, Spain's transnational influences are exemplified by the "Spain is different" tourism slogan, which appeals to foreign audiences by highlighting that Spain stands out among other European countries because of the cultural legacy of seven centuries of Muslim rule (Iberia 2016). The Spanish government and population's constant comparison of their nation or its memory practices to others proves that discourses surrounding historical memory and national identity are profoundly influenced by transnational dynamics in addition to national ones.

The transnational phenomenon that most impacts historical memory and national identity in Spain is association with "Europe." There is a long tradition of travelers, writers, and politicians' considering Spain to be "a place not quite European" because of "[t]he stereotype...of a people that alternated between bouts of great creativity and frenzies of religiously motivated emotion and irrationality," defying the ideal of reason emphasized elsewhere in Europe (Richards 2010, 124-125). In fact, many people have labeled Spain as an extension of Africa, including most famously the British poet W.H. Auden, who in 1937 described the country as "that fragment nipped off from hot Africa, soldered so crudely to

inventive Europe” (1986, 1-4). These views of Spain are not merely foreigners’ prejudice; they have permeated Spanish political thought for over a century. “Europe” has constantly been invoked as a solution to crises, a way out of “backwardness,” and a symbol of modernity, as in liberal politicians’ insistence on “becoming European” after the “disaster of 1898” in which Spain lost its overseas colonies and much of its international power and prestige in a war with the United States (Jáuregui 2005, 113).

The Spanish government and population’s apparent need to prove their Europeanness has resurfaced repeatedly throughout the last half century, especially since Spain was a latecomer to institutional Europe. After World War II, as the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC; precursor to the European Union), and other European institutions were developing, Spain was an autocratic, isolationist, and autarkic regime ostracized by the Allies (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 762; Moradiellos 2016, 67-70). As a result, the Franco regime adopted a defensive nationalist, anti-European discourse. In 1949, Franco referred to “the States of Europe” as “so awkward, so old, so divided and their policies so full of Marxism, passions and resentment” that they had driven Spaniards “to closeness and understanding with the peoples of our lineage” (Moradiellos 2016, 71). In 1956, he objected to the ECSC, calling it “a fantasy that will quickly be thwarted by reality” because “[t]he old nations of the West have, over centuries, built their own personalities, which cannot be erased” (Moradiellos 2016, 71).

Despite Franco’s initial anti-European attitude, domestic political and economic crises combined with other Western European states’ interest in his regime as a Cold War ally forced Spain out of its isolation (Moradiellos 2016, 70, 72). Increased interaction with other parts of Western Europe turned Europe’s multilateral institutions and their members into models of economic well-being for Spain (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 763). Spain pursued membership

in European institutions beginning with its application for membership in the European Community (EC; another precursor to the European Union) in 1962, but it was rebuffed because of its authoritarian regime, which blatantly opposed European institutions' democratic norms (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 763). However, its efforts to develop economic ties with the rest of Europe had political consequences, especially given that opposition to Franco's rule was growing domestically (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 763-764). Europeanism and "faith in the creation of Europe under a democratic system" became a point of agreement among various factions of Spain's opposition (Moradiellos 2016, 75). Europeanness was increasingly equated with anti-Francoism, which in turn implied democracy; this was acknowledged even by figures within Franco's regime, such as Foreign Minister José María de Areilza, who stated, "The liberal, democratic uniformity of Europe is the basis of integration and we are the exception in Europe" (Moradiellos 2016, 78). Spanish politicians and media increasingly treated inclusion in European institutions as a right to which Spain was entitled and proof of Spain's comparability to the prosperous European states whose validation it sought (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 766). Spain was ultimately only able to achieve this aim by democratizing and breaking away from autocracy, traditionalism, and isolationism; these changes enabled it to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1982 and the EC in 1986 (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 755, 767).

The link between Spain's rejection of isolationist dictatorship and ability to enjoy the prestige of incorporation into European institutions contributes to a view of Europeanness as having facilitated Spain's adoption of principles like openness and democracy. This view is reflected in the tendency of Spanish politicians across the ideological spectrum to equate "Europe" with progress, democracy, peace, and social justice when explaining their support for

European Union (EU) enlargement (Jáuregui 2005, 110-111). It is furthered in narratives that portray “Europe” as necessary for the development of a Spanish national identity, such as King Juan Carlos I’s 1992 declaration that “we are Europe....The fact of belonging to Europe enriches our national identity” (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 767-768). Such narratives have led Spaniards to identify with “Europe” at a higher rate than citizens of other European countries (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 755). A 2018 Elcano Royal Institute poll indicates that on a scale of one to ten, the average Spanish identification with “Europe” stands at 7.2, and sixty-two percent of Spaniards have a positive opinion of their country’s involvement in the EU (Real Instituto Elcano 2018). For comparison, these figures for France, a founding member of the EU, are 5.8 and forty percent, respectively (Real Instituto Elcano 2018).

Spain’s deliberate and explicit use of historical memory for political ends, exposure to transnational dynamics, and unusually salient identification with the idea of “Europe” and European institutions shape specific ways of remembering periods that depart from typical notions of Europeanness, which in turn affect Spain’s international behavior and domestic politics. This is especially visible with regards to the remembrance of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism as well as al-Andalus. These two periods are salient in the Spanish historical imagination because they each frame a founding myth of Spain. Politicians, educators, and other crucial agents of historical memory treat the country’s ostensible rejection of violence and dictatorship in the late twentieth century as the birth of democratic Spain and glorify the *Reconquista* as the genesis of Spain as a nation-state (Hirschkind 2021, 61; Spangler 2024, 167). Memories of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, which represent a disjuncture from a civic characterization of “Europe” as peaceful, democratic, and respectful of the rule of law, influence Spain’s preference for multilateralism and frequent posturing on human rights in its foreign

policy (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores 2023; Simón 2023). Struggles with the legacy of al-Andalus, which breaks with ethnic conceptions of “Europe’s” exclusively Christian heritage, influence aggressive stances on Islamic extremism and a perception that Muslim immigrants cannot fit into Spanish society (Pardo 2006). Such positions stemming from particular understandings of Spain’s Islamic past often clash with discourses of peace, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights rooted in memories of the Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship. This makes it crucial to analyze both cases of historical memory and their implications for policy. It also demonstrates the interplay between civic and ethnic ideas of “Europe” in terms of how the past is remembered, how national belonging is defined, and the extent to which this definition can be influenced by “Europe.”

In Spain, these tensions have culminated in the rise of the far-right party Vox. Observers initially considered Spain an exception to the recent trend of far-right successes across Europe because far-right ideologies were heavily stigmatized after forty years of dictatorship guided by them (López 2022, 134). However, Vox was established as an alternative to the mainstream conservative Partido Popular (People’s Party; PP) in 2014 as a result of discontent with the latter’s handling of the 2008 financial crisis and Basque and Catalan separatism (Zhou 2023). It became popular following a surge in immigration from predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Zhou 2023). Vox has gained traction by whipping up xenophobia and Islamophobia through existing discourses that reference memories of a foreign invasion, which were also invoked as justification for Franco’s coup d’état and policies as dictator (López 2022, 141; Richards 2010, 129). Vox entered provincial governments in 2018 and was so prominent by 2023 that it nearly became part of the country’s ruling coalition (López 2022, 134; Zhou 2023). Throughout its rise, it has taken controversial positions not only on religion and

immigration but also on women's and LGBT rights and basic questions of governance (Hedgecoe 2019). This has led to a widespread view of Vox as a threat to Spanish and "European" civic ideals, if not an unabashed revival of Francoism (*El País* 2023; Hedgecoe 2019). In 2023, the editorial board of *El País*, one of Spain's most prominent newspapers, warned that "Vox does not disown the dictatorship" and poses a threat to Spain as "a modern country, pro-European, tolerant" and its "culture of coexistence." Vox's use of ethnic understandings of belonging to Spain and "Europe" to erode civic ideals has made memories of war and dictatorship along with those of Muslim rule increasingly central to Spanish historical memory and political debates, so it is important to understand the ways in which these memories have changed and been used for political ends over time. It also indicates overlap between civic and ethnic criteria for belonging in spite of some political actors' efforts to favor one over the other, reinforcing the importance of examining how political actors establish these criteria through historical memory.

### **Contribution**

Many scholars have researched historical memory regarding the Spanish Civil War and Francoism or al-Andalus in isolation, but I analyze both because there are informative links between the historical memories of each period. For instance, the most renowned thinkers on Spain's relationship with Islam were influenced by Francoist repression, seeking either to blame Islam for Spain's political divergence from most of the rest of Western Europe or to excavate the Andalusí past for alternatives to Francoism (Filius 2008, 92; Hirschkind 2021, 10, 63). This connection points to overlap between concern with Spain's belonging to "Europe" in terms of civic values and interest in Spain's place in an ethnically-defined "Europe." That said, there are

cases in which the latter undercuts the former, including the rise of Vox as well as activities outside of the party, such as *La Toma* (“The Taking”), a yearly festival commemorating the completion of the *Reconquista* (Hedgecoe 2017). It is a site for the rehabilitation of Francoism through insignia, slogans, and claims that Franco saved “Christian Spain” and “Europe” just as medieval Christian monarchs did (Faber 2021, 45; Hedgecoe 2017). By reproducing Francoist ideology to defend an ethnic vision of Spain and “Europe,” some participants in *La Toma* normalize a fascist dictatorship and the human rights abuses it committed in the name of protecting Spain and “Europe” from foreign influences, create an inhospitable environment for Spain’s Muslim and immigrant populations, and jeopardize Spain’s adherence to civic principles associated with institutional Europe. These tensions demonstrate that as much as some political actors try to define Spain’s position within “Europe” largely in civic terms, ethnic understandings persist, prompting questions as to the consequences of inculcating a “European” identity along with a national one. These questions in turn have implications for what it means to be a modern European democracy.

In addition to exploring the linkages among representations of distinct periods through historical memory, my work examines not only elite political discourses but also public spaces, material culture, and other aspects of everyday life as conduits for narratives of the past. Treating these as sites of political contestation contributes to an understanding of the extent to which official or elite narratives hold sway among ordinary people. It also expands the range of agents in and strategies for deploying historical memory to achieve political objectives, yielding a more complete understanding of how and why historical narratives are contested and change over time. The quotidian mechanisms of historical memory are often overlooked in traditional international relations scholarship, but their role in this project suggests that researching them is

a productive avenue for analyzing the politics of historical memory, national identities, and nationalism.

Analyzing the role of historical memory and its transnational influences, such as the idea of “Europe,” in national identities and nationalism is important given recent political developments. Spanish political actors often frame the challenges they face in a historically contingent manner; for example, some portray the arrival of Muslim immigrants as revenge for the *Reconquista* (Flesler 2008, 117; Hirschkind 2021, 96-97). However, Spain’s latecomer status within institutional Europe, struggles with the legacy of political violence and repression, and trouble defining its historical and contemporary relationship with Islam are not unique. The ways in which its people and institutions ground their approaches to these issues in their interpretations of the past yields insights for other European states, such as those in Eastern Europe, where democratic backsliding and deviation from the principles of recently-joined European institutions have raised the specter of past dictatorships, or the Balkans, where Ottoman domination is still invoked in the context of ethnic violence against Muslims (Abend 2008, 141; Blackburn 2022, 468). These insights are especially important as European governments increasingly reify these challenges through laws explicitly dictating particular narratives of history (Belavusau and Gliszczyńska-Grabias 2022, 325-327).

In addition to shedding light on the politics of other states in Europe, analyzing the influence of the idea of “Europe” on historical memory and national identity in Spain allows for a timely analysis of European integration. As the United States has abandoned the transatlantic alliance despite ongoing challenges such as Russian aggression, European institutions and alliances have become more assertive and displayed remarkable unity, as demonstrated by several recent security summits attended even by countries such as the United Kingdom and

Turkey, whose commitment to the project of integration is dubious (Euronews 2025). Whether this cohesion among European states lasts beyond the immediate crisis of the United States' renegeing on its defense commitments to Europe will depend in large part on whether they are able to transcend national differences in the name of shared interests and visions for Europe's future. The ability to claim a common "European" identity in addition to national ones would facilitate this change, so the use of historical memory to inculcate both national and "European" identities in Spain has implications for the whole region and its geopolitics.

Although institutional Europe may be galvanized by the United States' recent foreign policy pivot, it also faces substantial challenges that debates over historical memory, national identity, and Europeanness in Spain can illuminate. One of these is tensions between different conceptions of Europe, which are reflected by Vox and other far-right parties across Europe (Dempsey 2024; Zhou 2023). These parties are wary of European institutions, but they still believe in some form of an overarching "European" identity, as exemplified by Vox's insistence on Spain's belonging to "Europe" and collaboration with its counterparts abroad to promote policies restricting the rights of immigrants and LGBT people (Bubola 2025; Vox España 2018, 02:09:33; Vox España 2021a, 11:10:57; Vox España 2021b, 04:58:28). They are also beginning to change European institutions from within through increasing participation in bodies such as the European Parliament (EP) following the 2024 elections and efforts by individual leaders such as Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni to work through European institutions to normalize far-right ideologies (Bubola 2025; Végh 2024). Since the case of Spain demonstrates that historical memory can be mobilized to reinforce both civic and ethnic definitions of nationhood and Europeanness, it contributes to an overall understanding of far-right parties' approaches to "Europe" within their respective countries and raises the possibility that they could propagate

ethnic and cultural understandings of “Europe” to supplant civic ones as they become more involved in European institutions. These implications demonstrate the relevance of historical memory and its transnational influences in Spain to Europe more broadly at a time when the region is embroiled in geopolitical and cultural conflicts.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

To argue that political actors in contemporary Spain manipulate historical memory of the country’s disjunctions from different ideas of “Europe” to represent Spain as a “European” nation, I organize the thesis into four subsequent chapters. The next chapter contains the theoretical and conceptual framework for my analysis as well as a literature review. It defines nations and nationalism and problematizes the binary between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism that observers frequently apply to Spanish politics. It borrows ideas from nationalism studies, political science, history, sociology, and cultural studies to explain the centrality of historical memory to nationhood, national identities, and nationalism. It then discusses transnational influences on historical memory. Finally, it examines the distinct meanings of “Europe” that intellectuals, politicians, and European institutions have advanced over time as well as the compatibility of national and “European” identities as potential transnational factors permeating historical memory.

Based on this theoretical and conceptual framework and literature review, Chapter 3 analyzes the evolution and contestation of historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. It describes the shift from a narrative of the Spanish Civil War as a “crusade” that was dominant in the decades after the conflict to a characterization of the war as “fratricidal” and a preference for obscuring its legacy during and after Spain’s transition to democracy. It then

focuses on the contestation of the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism in the twenty-first century, which has led to a more confrontational approach to the past. It emphasizes the role of Spanish civil society as well as international and European norms and institutions in bringing about this change, but it also recognizes that the appropriate way of addressing the Spanish Civil War and Francoism in the present is still fiercely debated. Despite disputes over and modifications to historical memory of these periods, Spanish political actors have consistently used it to frame Spain as part of “Europe” as they understand it.

Chapter 4 deals with the historical memory of al-Andalus. It contextualizes current debates by providing an overview of how Spanish intellectuals and politicians have constructed Spain’s Islamic past in the centuries since the *Reconquista* and by identifying recent transnational challenges such as immigration and security concerns that have ensured the continued relevance of their narratives. It then examines how scholars, politicians, community activists, religious leaders, and the tourism industry in contemporary Spain reproduce these narratives through the distinct memory practices of forgetting, villainization, and idealization, all of which highlight Spain’s cultural affinity with or utility to “Europe” and reveal the interplay between civic and ethnic conceptions of Spain and “Europe.”

Finally, the conclusion summarizes my findings and explains their relevance and applicability to Spain, other European countries, the process of European integration, and belonging to a nation or to “Europe.” It identifies additional avenues of research to expand on the insights of the thesis regarding the influence of transnational dynamics and “Europe” on historical memory, actors’ agency in the formation and evolution of historical memory, and the governance of historical memory.

## Chapter 2

### Nationalisms, Historical Memory, and the Idea of “Europe”

*“The act of forgetting, I would even say, historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality. Indeed, historical inquiry brings back to light the deeds of violence that took place at the origin of all political formations...”*

*-Ernest Renan*

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I create a foundation for analyzing Spanish national identity by clarifying the concepts of nation and nationalism. As political actors in Spain frame the country’s nationalisms as either civic or ethnic, I explain these categories but critique the binary. I then examine the roles that historical memory plays in constructing national identity; because of Spain’s geopolitical position and heterogeneous cultural influences, I pay particular attention to the impact of transnational developments on historical memory. Finally, because I am examining the use of historical memory to portray Spain as “European,” I qualify the multiple meanings of this somewhat problematic concept and consider its relationship to national identities.

#### Nations and Nationalisms

The definition of a nation has been the subject of over a century of scholarly and political debate. Observers agree that a nation is distinct from a state, which is “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” and is the central political unit in domestic and international affairs (Hobsbawm 1992, 177-178, 188; Weber 1919). That said, the concept of nationhood profoundly influences states. The international system revolves around nation-states, or political units intended to represent a specific nation (Hobsbawm 1992, 9-10). Challenges to this concept exist in most countries,

including Spain, where Basque, Catalan, and other nationalities represented by autonomous communities<sup>1</sup> coexist with the Spanish one but often resist the state's centralization of authority and emphasis on a common Spanish identity (Hobsbawm 1992, 179; Muro and Quiroga 2005, 17-24; Spangler 2024, 165-167).

Beyond the basic distinction between nation and state, there is no universally accepted understanding of nationhood. Eric Hobsbawm cautions against treating nations as timeless, immutable entities since they only emerged as movements around the eighteenth century and have been defined and redefined as a result of historical contingencies since then (1992, 3, 5). He notes that some scholars, political leaders, and self-described members of nations characterize nations according to “objective” criteria, such as language, geography, cultural practices, and history, but they ignore cases in which groups possess all of these criteria but are not understood as nations or are seen as nations despite their failure to fulfill these criteria (Hobsbawm 1992, 5-6). He contrasts the “objective” approach with a “subjective” one, which emphasizes the consciousness and agency of political leaders and others in forming a community, possibly with a basis in “objective” factors (Hobsbawm 1992, 7-8). He presents some critiques of the “subjective” understanding, including that it is useful only once a nation is fully consolidated; however, he ultimately leans towards it, stating that “[a]s an initial working assumption any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’” can be examined as such (Hobsbawm 1992, 8).

Benedict Anderson elaborates on this understanding of nationhood, defining a nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”

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<sup>1</sup> Spain is divided into seventeen administrative units called autonomous communities as well as two autonomous cities in North Africa. Although autonomous communities—especially the ones representing “historical nationalities” in the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia—have the right to self-governance, they sometimes have disputes with the central Spanish government as to how far this right extends. See European Committee of the Regions 2025; Grad and Martín Rojo 2003, 229; Muro and Quiroga 2005, 17-24; and Spangler 2024, 165-167.

(2006, 6). It is a “community” because it is framed as a profound solidarity that cuts across other social categories (Anderson 2006, 7). Given the lack of actual physical contact among all of its potential members, it relies on narratives that are constantly modified and reproduced to inculcate a sense of affinity, making it “imagined” (Anderson 2006, 6). Nations are distinguished from one another by the manner in which they are imagined; they all have boundaries that set them apart from other imagined communities (Anderson 2006, 6-7). In the same vein as Anderson, Walker Connor argues that nationhood is based on “a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it...from all nonmembers in a most vital way” and appeals to kinship (1994, 197). Ernest Renan concurs that a nation is “a spiritual principle” or a “moral consciousness” and proposes specific means by which political actors construct nations and inculcate devotion to them (2018, 261). He characterizes nationhood as an “everyday plebiscite” on common memories of the past and on the present “value of the heritage that one has received,” suggesting that the perception of shared triumphs, sacrifices, and experiences of suffering compels people to identify with one another, assume that they each have a stake in one another’s fate, and act as a coherent community (Renan 2018, 261-262).

This constant invocation of common experiences spurs nationalism, understood generally as “loyalty to one’s national group” (Connor 1994, 196). It is distinct from other forms of communal attachment in that it implies political obligations (Hobsbawm 1992, 9). These vary by context but can include participation in the political structures of a nation, struggles against colonialism, or the dissemination of racist and xenophobic thought (Anderson 2006, 3, 170, 182). Although nationalism’s primary purpose is to build a particular, bounded community as described by Anderson and Connor, Jie-Hyun Lim points out that “[t]he most frequent misunderstanding of nationalism is that nationalism is national. Nationalism is one of the most

peculiar transnational phenomena in that nationalist imagination can be fed only in transnational space” (2010, 138). While counterintuitive, this claim is consistent with Anderson and Connor’s arguments that each nation must be conceptualized as having features that separate it from others as well as Rogers Brubaker’s contention that all nations must be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive to serve as coherent but distinct communities to which those identifying and identified as members become attached (Anderson 2006, 6-7; Brubaker 2004, 142; Connor 1994, 197).

Nations are constructed in comparison and opposition to one another, so nationalist actors are both influenced by external discourses and developments and able to influence them. Spain’s experience reflects this tendency, as exemplified by the Basque Country and Catalonia’s borrowing from Western European countries’ Holocaust remembrance practices to commemorate victims of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, which has in turn inspired Spain’s approach; these efforts are meant to display similarities with the rest of Western Europe’s experience of “overcoming” fascist violence to protect democracy and human rights (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 608-610). Such tactics in the construction of nations demonstrate that while particular nationalisms seek support from the constituencies they claim to represent, they do not exist in isolation from others and can employ comparison, cooperation, and antagonism among groups to shape a seemingly unique and appealing identity. The transnational dynamics underpinning nationalisms suggest that nationalisms are continually contested and modified based on both demands made within nations and perceived opportunities or threats presented by others.

The constant evolution of nationalisms leads to questions as to what criteria determine national belonging. Theorists typically use two categories to distinguish nationalisms based on these criteria. The first category is civic nationalism, which is “supposed to capture the freely chosen and purely political identity of participants” (Yack 1999, 103). Michael Ignatieff argues

that civic nationalism emerges when states create nations, which facilitates the inclusion of more people in nations and bolsters democracy and “rational attachment” to nations (1993, 7). The second proposed category of nationalism is ethnic nationalism, which “celebrates inherited cultural identity” (Yack 1999, 103). According to Ignatieff, because ethnic nationalism constructs belonging to states based on nationality, it imposes nationalities on individuals and thus encourages authoritarianism (1993, 7-8).

The binary classification of nationalisms as either civic or ethnic is common in the study and practice of Spanish politics. Scholars frequently label Francisco Franco’s regime as ethnic nationalist because of its emphasis on Catholicism and Spanish language and culture; conversely, they vaunt contemporary Spain as civic nationalist because of its democratic government and adherence to political principles expounded by the EU, such as human rights and the rule of law (Muro and Quiroga 2005, 18-22). They are concerned with categorizing not only Spanish nationalism but also Basque, Catalan, and other nationalisms in Spain as either exclusively civic or exclusively ethnic (Grad and Rojo Martín 2003, 229-230). This way of thinking about nationalisms in Spain permeates politics. Intellectuals and politicians frame loyalty to Spain not as nationalism but as “constitutional patriotism,” which is similar to civic nationalism in that it bases political attachment on citizenship and political norms and values (Muro and Quiroga 2005, 22; Spangler 2024, 168). Insistence on constitutional patriotism as opposed to nationalisms that are explicitly based on cultural factors permits members of Parliament, journalists, and others who influence Spanish political discourse to portray any nationalism other than constitutional patriotism as an irrational and violent sentiment that threatens Spanish democracy (Grad and Rojo Martín 2003, 235-258; Spangler 2024, 175-176). The prevalence of the civic

nationalism/ethnic nationalism binary in Spain means that it influences how political actors construct the nation through historical memory.

Despite its normalcy in Spain, the binary is simplistic and problematic for the study of nationalisms. Conceptually, it is difficult because it reifies the assumption of scholars such as Ignatieff that nationalisms can only be defined by particulars and have few shared characteristics (1993, 14). This has contributed to a “detheorization” of nationalisms, preventing observers from analyzing them in a systematic manner that could contribute to solutions to the challenges they pose (Tamir 2019, 419-424, 427-433). Additionally, civic and ethnic nationalisms coexist and share certain features (Brubaker 2004, 133). Brubaker notes that markers of nationality such as history and language are not clearly civic or ethnic, so their role in determining national belonging depends on whether political actors frame them as part of a selected political identity or as part of a particularist, inherited cultural identity (2004, 137-138). The possibility of using these criteria to promote both civic and ethnic nationalisms indicates that the two are interdependent. The chosen political identities upon which civic nationalism is based are shaped by cultural inheritance, and particular histories motivate political preferences and decisions (Brubaker 2004, 143; Yack 1999, 105). Bernard Yack expands on this point by arguing that the reach of political institutions is limited by “prepolitical communities” that are assumed to share a past; for example, while all Eastern European countries undergoing democratization after the fall of communism had the same stated political principles as West Germany’s consolidated democracy, the latter united only with East Germany because of longstanding ties that were rooted more in culture and common experiences than in political values (1999, 107-110).

The use of the civic nationalism/ethnic nationalism binary has pernicious effects beyond conceptual confusion. It facilitates the condemnation of certain nationalisms while preventing

scrutiny of others despite their similarities, insinuating that some nations are superior to others. This dynamic is enabled by representations of civic nationalism as rational, inclusive, voluntary, and “progressive” and ethnic nationalism as emotive, exclusive, forced, and “regressive” (Blackburn 2022, 461; Yack 1999, 105). It is reinforced by some theorists’ choice to label nations as homogeneously civic or homogeneously ethnic, citing France, Canada, and the United States as examples of the former and Germany, Eastern European countries, and Japan as examples of the latter (Yack 1999, 103). These practices suggest that civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism are incompatible, erasing problems such as xenophobia and the oppression of national minorities in “civic” Western nations and allowing Western countries to claim not to be nationalist or to be nationalist in a benign way (Tamir 2019, 420-424; Yack 1999, 105).

This effect became especially apparent in the late twentieth century, as advances in European integration implied that “just as Europe took the lead in inventing (and propagating) nationhood and nationalism, so now it would take the lead in transcending them” (Brubaker 1996, 1). The supposed replacement of ethnic nationalism with civic nationalism and the eventual transcendence of nation-states supports the assumption that nationalism is a problem for developing countries where feelings of inferiority lead to outbreaks of violence, not developed ones that can interact on an equal basis (Tamir 2019, 421, 425). This notion is reflected in Western European countries and international organizations’ paternalistic expectation that after the Cold War, newly independent Eastern European states would import Western political norms, institutions, and practices (Blackburn 2022, 468). The Western and European superiority implicit in the civic nationalism/ethnic nationalism binary yields a potential explanation for its use in Spain: if political actors embrace civic nationalism and distance themselves from ethnic nationalism, they can prove Spain’s belonging to Western Europe despite its latecomer status

within institutional Europe and centuries of being dismissed as part of Africa<sup>2</sup> (Jáuregui 2005, 110-111; Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 767-768; Richards 2010, 124-125).

The civic nationalism/ethnic nationalism binary is conceptually and practically problematic, but this is precisely why it permits political actors in Spain to extol certain aspects of Spanish nationalism while ignoring others to fit into European institutions and avoid their scrutiny. As a result, this thesis discusses how interpretations of Spain's past promote particular civic and ethnic criteria for belonging as understood by Spanish political actors; however, it also illustrates cases in which exclusively civic or exclusively ethnic understandings of belonging to Spain obscure their interdependence and the complex challenges that it poses to the construction of nationhood through historical memory in the contexts of transnational activism, immigration, security concerns, and tourism.

### **Historical Memory and Nationalism**

As suggested by Yack's concept of "prepolitical communities" and Renan's emphasis on a shared past as a cohering agent for potential members of a nation, history and the ways in which it is remembered and reproduced are essential to the creation of nations and nationalisms. History is understood in several different ways even among historians. Some, such as Michael Richards, think that the term "suggests a methodologically codified practice that, though not epistemologically unproblematic, is aimed at a value-free enquiry into processes in the past" (2010, 141). Others are far less confident in history's objectivity and ability to make sense of the past. Pierre Nora describes the discipline as a way for "our hopelessly forgetful modern societies,

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is not central to this project, another reason why political actors in Spain employ the civic nationalism/ethnic nationalism binary is to delegitimize Basque, Catalan, and other nationalisms besides that of the Spanish state as "intolerant," "exclusive," or a threat to democracy. See Grad and Rojo Martín 2003, 235-258 and Spangler 2024, 175-176.

propelled by change, [to] organize the past” into incomplete and problematic yet seemingly authoritative constructions of what no longer exists (1989, 8).

Nora’s questioning of the objectivity and accuracy of history is justified considering the close relationship between history and historical memory. Historical memory is the continuous process by which societies piece aspects of the past together to form a narrative that influences identities and political action in the present (Nora 1989, 8). It is not separate from history, as socially accepted ideas of the past influence how historians, educators, and others dealing with the past investigate and explain it; in Nora’s words, “it is memory that dictates while history writes” (1989, 20).

Nora discusses three features of memory that are crucial to its role in nationhood and nationalisms. The first is that it is collective (Nora 1989, 8). The act of remembering is usually conceived of as an individual experience, but Maurice Halbwachs points out that it does not take place within a closed system of ideas; instead, it is triggered by external images, environments, and conversations (Eder 2005, 205; Halbwachs 1992, 53). Reproductions of the past are influenced by external situations in the present because this is what directly affects those remembering; the past itself no longer exists (Halbwachs 1992, 49-51). This makes memory a social process shaped not only by one’s own experiences but also by others’ expectations of them (Halbwachs 1992, 38, 176-177). Individuals and groups with which they identify influence one another’s recollections, making them more congruous and coherent over time (Halbwachs 1992, 40, 51). Klaus Eder argues that this is a societal necessity because categories such as nation are made real through social interaction, but this interaction is not always direct, so there must be an “illusion of a shared space of communication where no social interaction takes place” (2005, 204). The more dispersed members of these categories are, the greater their need for a collective

historical memory on which to base a sense of identity is (Eder 2005, 204). Historical memory has a special role in this “illusion” because it convinces people that they are connected to others with whom they have had no contact on the basis that they have jointly experienced a past that others are not a party to (Eder 2005, 207). Halbwachs and Eder’s arguments explain why historical memory emerges through social processes and not in isolation, supporting Nora’s understanding of the concept as collective.

The collective nature of historical memory implies that it is closely linked to social and political processes. This explains the second feature of historical memory that Nora refers to, which is that while it ostensibly deals with the past, it is always a function of present realities (1989, 8, 18). Elizabeth Jelin argues that “the meaning of the past is located in the present, which is a space where past experiences and the yet-to-be or not yet experienced future converge” (2010, 64). Halbwachs posits the logical conclusion of this claim: societies preserve memories that help them navigate the present while discarding others (1992, 47).

The uses of historical memory to form nations and inculcate nationalisms illustrate these points. One use of historical memory consists of constructing the past in a way that creates a sense of community or kinship among a particular set of people. In any complex society with limited direct contact among members, there must be references that allow members to imagine contact and commonalities with one another (Anderson 2006, 198; Eder 2005, 197). Anderson states that the study of history in the present consists of not random narratives but those which facilitate the appearance of a natural, continuous nation (2006, 198). Producing such narratives may require a reframing of events that distorts what people actually perceived or experienced; this is questionable in history but highly useful in politics (Anderson 2006, 198). It permits nationalist actors to refer to an “inversion of conventional genealogy” that links current

developments to distant pasts, making nationhood seem timeless, inevitable, and immutable to help the relatively recent construct endure in a changing world (Anderson 2006, 205; Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 2, 10). In Spain, this process is exemplified by intellectuals' tendency to attribute current political corruption to Francoism or even nineteenth-century conservatism as well as politicians' sometime association of recent terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists with struggles between medieval Christians and Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula (Faber 2021, 62-67; Pardo 2006). It gives those identifying or labeled as members of nations a common knowledge base with which to support claims to community, kinship, and solidarity (Anderson 2006, 195, 205).

Historical memory knits potential members of a nation together not only by creating common references but also by obscuring points of difference, contention, or embarrassment. Halbwachs argues that societies tend to discard any memories that threaten social cohesion (1992, 182-183). Renan explains how this unfolds in a national context, proposing that “[t]he act of forgetting,...[or] historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation” because it obscures “the deeds of violence that took place at the origin of all political formations” (2018, 251). Anderson elaborates on this idea, claiming that national consciousness requires amnesia and incomplete narratives, including the “reassurance of fratricide,” in which groups that were once considered separate and in conflict with one another—such as the Republicans and the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War, who each saw the other as alien and illegitimate—are discursively amalgamated into one national people—such as the Spanish—that should be united in the present because it experienced an unnatural split in the past (2006, 200-204). Such manipulation of remembering and forgetting indicates that historical memory is less about the past than about the uses to which it can be put to maintain nations in the present.

The aforementioned practices have concrete implications for the inclusion and exclusion of particular people and groups, which in turn affect policy. Jan Assmann describes memory's potential to legitimize people or groups' positions in the future by creating a narrative of the past that explains and justifies them (2010, 102). Similarly, Anya B. Russian contends that since historical memory and heritage practices reflect the ways in which groups differentiate and maintain their identities, they reveal societies' ability and willingness to address painful pasts and conflicting memories that permeate the present (2022, 198). For instance, in Spain, they determine whether the nation and the state are prepared to take actions ranging from providing reparations to victims of Francoist political repression to accommodating Muslim immigrants (Bernabé and Bravo López 2008; Cano Hinojosa 2018, 31-36). They can either reinforce power imbalances by legitimizing current political and social institutions or remedy them by holding institutions accountable for their actions (Judt 1996, 93; Russian 2022, 199). Given the extreme actions that people are willing to take based on the psychological kinship bond encouraged by nationalist narratives, this choice may make the difference between conflict and reconciliation (Connor 1994, 206-207; Eder 2005, 206).

The policy implications of approaches to historical memory reveal the importance of Nora's final main observation about it, which is that it is constantly evolving and undergoing dialectical processes of memory and forgetting (1989, 8). Nora suggests that memory must be created, organized, and maintained precisely because political, economic, and cultural developments such as global mass culture mean that it is always vulnerable and in flux (1989, 7-12). He adds that if the preservation of historical memory is "to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial," it must display a "capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of...meaning" to remain

relevant in a contemporary context. Eder agrees, referring to historical memory as a “moment in a permanent struggle of naming” that will change in scope to include more or fewer people in a group, modify its contents to unite these people, and take on new forms as those who experienced the past being narrated die and must be replaced by monuments (2005, 206-207).

These claims are consistent with the notion that historical memory is a function of current political needs; if these change over time, so does historical memory. For example, if the present is unsatisfactory, the future is uncertain, and the undesirable features of the past are no longer influential, people idealize and become nostalgic for the past even if there are parts of it that they do not want to relive (Halbwachs 1992, 48-51). This occurs in contexts ranging from the Polish government’s treatment of World War II as a unifying national struggle through obliviousness to Polish complicity with Nazism to Spanish museums’ presentation of the coexistence of Christians, Muslims, and Jews in medieval Iberia as a solution to today’s religious and cultural conflicts (Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 157; Torre Calahorra 2024a; Torre Calahorra 2024b).

Conversely, if people have not experienced closure for their past grievances, they may compete to make their interpretation of events the hegemonic, legitimate, official, or “normal” one (Jelin 2010, 62). This leads to competition within nations to assign the roles of perpetrator and victim and mete out justice accordingly, as in late twentieth-century post-dictatorship societies in Latin American countries and increasingly in contemporary Spain as it grapples more explicitly with the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 604; Jelin 2010, 62). It also fuels tensions among nations as they shift from triumphant narratives that imply superiority to victimhood narratives that garner sympathy and deflect scrutiny in “a distasteful competition over who suffered the most” (Lim 2010, 138-139, 154). This requires an alteration of historical narratives such that they center events that emphasize one nation’s

innocence or another's guilt through comparison. This manipulation occurs in Spain, whose central government has sought to designate itself as a victim of Franco's dictatorship despite having also been its instrument, sparking backlash from Catalonia and the Basque Country, whose governments use memorials and demands for state apologies to demonstrate that they especially suffered at the hands of the Spanish state under Franco (Resina 2000, 102-105).

Further evidence of the ever-changing nature of historical memory includes the fact that attempts to impose constructions of the past from the top down consistently engender resistance. According to Eder, historical memory is precarious not only because it must adapt to current political demands but also because even when it does so, there are people who do not identify with the dominant narrative and press to have their perspectives represented (2005, 206). One example is the civil society agitation that ensued in Spain in the early 2000s after decades with few investigations or public records and little education regarding the Franco regime to validate victims' narratives of gross human rights violations (ARMH 2015; La Comuna 2024a). Another is the populist and nationalist rejection of EU institutions' attempts to ingrain a "foundational myth of transnational reconciliation" and a cosmopolitan mindset among its citizens scattered across nations (UNREST 2020, 2). Such cases demonstrate that much like the nations and nationalisms that it legitimizes, historical memory is constantly disputed and evolving.

Some scholars, such as Jan Assmann, claim that the various facets of historical memory imply distinct categories of memory, but I propose that what Assmann and others label as types of memory are merely mechanisms for inculcating historical memory, as they refer to the means by which people learn some version of the past, not the pasts they learn (2010, 122). One of these mechanisms is top-down imposition, which Assmann calls "political memory" (2010, 122). This is the formalization of particular perspectives on the past through endorsement from a

political regime; the resulting constructions of the past usually last only as long as institutional support for them does (Assmann 2010, 122). Assmann considers this means of developing historical memory to be merely symbolic due to a potential lack of grassroots buy-in (Assmann 2010, 122). While it may be fragile given people's aforementioned tendency to resist the dictation of memory from above, George Soroka and Félix Krawatzek rightly point out that its implications are becoming more concrete through the proliferation of laws such as those passed over the last two decades in Spain, which prescribe specific historical narratives and punishments for those who deviate from them (Assmann 2010, 122; Ley 20/2022; Ley 52/2007; Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 157, 162). This indicates that the official, political mechanisms through which historical memory is established and adapted require further analysis.

In addition to being imposed in an explicit, top-down political process, historical memory can be developed through quotidian practices and experiences, which constitute what Jan Assmann dubs "communicative memory" and "cultural memory" (2010, 122). Communication and socialization, especially through education, are formative in people's understanding of the past (Lim 2010, 140). This is why complaints about how school curricula equate the Second Republic with the Nationalists who rebelled against it or teach that Muslims in medieval Iberia were foreign invaders proliferate in Spanish political debates about historical memory (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 10; Moreno 2000).

Also crucial are what Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger term "invented traditions," which are "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (2012, 1). The implication of continuity is

particularly useful in the context of nationalism because it reinforces the norms, legitimacy, and cohesion of nations despite their constructed nature (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 7, 9).

Invented traditions are reflected in *lieux de mémoire*, or everyday sites that are meant to evoke particular understandings of the past even if those who observe them are unaware (Nora 1989, 23). They are not necessarily rooted in historical fact, as they are their own referents (Nora 1989, 23). What matters is that they are deliberately used—if not designed—to promote certain narratives of the past (Nora 1989, 12). Examples of *lieux de mémoire* include sites that people traditionally associate with the preservation of history, such as museums and archives; objects that are imbued with historical meaning for political purposes, such as treaties or school textbooks; and events, such as festivals and anniversaries (Nora 1989, 20, 23). In Spain, they range from annual commemorations of Franco's death by the far right to the use of advertisements for the Mosque of Córdoba to distance Spain from its history with Islam (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024; Faber 2021, 43-45). The use of *lieux de mémoire* can simplify or sacralize certain understandings, making them simultaneously vulnerable to critique and difficult to dismantle (Lim 2010, 140). Since the means through which this process takes place are part of everyday life, they are unavoidable for individuals and societies. This reality makes quotidian practices and experiences powerful mechanisms of historical memory that warrant investigation.

### **Transnational Historical Memory?**

So far, I have only discussed historical memory as a component of nations and nationalisms; however, many recent debates in the literature on historical memory address the relationship between historical memory and transnational phenomena. Jan Assmann sees historical memory and transnational phenomena as opposing forces on the grounds that the

former anchors people to particularisms and differences while the latter tries to bridge them (2010, 123). He also argues that since there is no “global identity,” the notion of a “global memory” underpinning it would be paradoxical (Assmann 2010, 123). In contrast, Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad write that the acceleration of global communications implies that the nation-state is no longer “the seemingly natural container of memory debates” (2010, 6).

Both of these arguments have flaws; the former ignores that the cultural pride and competition encouraged by variations in historical memory assume a global audience, and the latter is too dismissive of the enduring psychological and political influence of nationhood (Assmann 2010, 123; Assmann and Conrad 2010, 6; Connor 197, 206-207). In reality, historical memory is developed at multiple levels that mutually influence one another. Lim’s idea of nationalism as a transnational phenomenon in which nations seek to compare or distinguish their pasts indicates that the historical memory that bolsters nations and nationalisms roots people in a particular place or identity but is also impacted by international dynamics (2010, 138, 144-145, 148). Transnational communication leads certain historical inflection points such as colonialism or the Holocaust to become well-known references even in places that did not experience them, establishing historical standards to which contemporary local or national developments are compared to align historical memory with a nation’s current experiences and values (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 5). Transnational communication and the resulting increase in national populations’ understanding of histories other than their own have led political actors to develop historical memory more self-consciously, comparing practices across nations and weighing potential international reactions before selecting an approach (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 4-5, 7). In Spain, this shift is reflected in the government’s use of monuments on problematic sites abroad as a model for the Valley of Cuelgamuros and portrayal of the country as a haven of

coexistence in response to the rise of “clash of civilizations” narratives (Aidi 2006, 68; Huntington 1993, 22; Ministerio de Política Territorial y Memoria Democrática 2023).

Such changes to nations’ memory practices eventually become part of the precedent that other nations use to determine their specific treatment of the past in a context of constant transnational interactions (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 5). Political actors are increasingly aware of these dynamics and take advantage of transnational networks to build global support for a particular historical memory through cooperation with “memory activists” or through competition within influence groups and on social media (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 4; Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 164). Both strategies are used in Spain, whether it be civil society organizations’ use of Argentinian courts to prosecute cases against affiliates of the Franco regime or online quarrels over the legacy of Muslim rule (La Comuna 2024a; Hedgecoe 2017).

### **The Idea of “Europe”**

Historical memory’s development at multiple levels makes it important to analyze the influence of the idea of “Europe” on nations and historical memory in order to explain Spain’s particular case. “Europe” is an especially influential concept for Spain given its history of nonconformity with it in institutional and cultural terms. It has multiple meanings, including the continent of Europe, the institutions such as the EU and the Schengen Area that shape political realities in large swathes of it, and identification with values and traditions that these institutions consider to be shared across ethnic and linguistic differences (Rigney 2012, 610). These definitions of “Europe” are malleable and frequently debated, with implications for which people and nations belong to “Europe” (Eder 2005, 199; Kaelble 2005, 18).

Hartmut Kaelble analyzes the drastic changes that the idea of “Europe” has undergone in the twentieth century alone, outlining three general phases in political thought on the matter (2005, 22). He writes that in the decades prior to World War I, the notion of Europe as superior for reasons ranging from technological innovations to race began to erode as American influence grew, leading to a questioning of the ideas of modernity and progress that had long characterized European states’ discourses and arguments for economic and colonial policies (Kaelble 2005, 19, 22-23). From World War I until the 1960s, this idea was altogether discarded as conflict, widespread atrocities, and the fragmentation of European states into vastly different regime types engendered a sense of moral, innovative, and economic inferiority and decline (Kaelble 2005, 23-24). This was the period during which European intellectuals from various disciplines and countries began to identify with “Europe” on vague bases such as “common values” or supposedly shared Greco-Roman heritage in an attempt to reject the nations in the name of which political leaders justified multiple wars (Judt 1996, 96-97; Kaelble 2005, 23-24). In the late twentieth century, economic and political integration through institutions such as the EU made “Europe” a distinct, recognized polity, reviving ideas of a continent marked by “progress” and “modernity” through common experiences of liberation, democratization, economic development, and peacebuilding (Kaelble 2005, 25). The existence of “Europe” as a political entity alongside nation-states has also contributed to the ideal of “unity in diversity,” which in turn has rekindled debates as to what belonging to Europe entails in a space that is becoming increasingly heterogeneous because of the enlargement of European institutions and immigration from outside of Europe (Eder 2005, 201; Kaelble 2005, 25, 27).

Despite emphasizing these overall trends, Kaelble concedes that many distinct understandings of “Europe” have historically coexisted (2005, 18). Two sets of ideas about what

comprises “Europe” have been particularly salient in recent years. One is analogous to civic nationalism in that it focuses on the role of political values in shaping “Europe.” It emphasizes “overcoming the legacy of the past”—understood to mean fascism, World War II, and the attendant atrocities—through processes of justice and reconciliation (Judt 1996, 93, 95-96; Rigney 2012, 611). It characterizes Europe as “modern,” “tolerant,” and respectful of principles such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Kaelble 2005, 20; *El País* 2023; Rigney 2012, 612-613). Given its attempt to break with the violent, repressive past, this conceptualization of “Europe” portrays it standing against far-right ideologies, nativism, and authoritarianism (Judt 1996, 97; Végh 2024). It is expressed in settings such as national governments and media outlets, but it is promoted especially heavily by European institutions (Jáuregui 2005, 118-120; *El País* 2023; Rigney 2012, 607).

The second set of ideas about what “Europe” is includes elements of what the civic conceptualization seeks to reject and corresponds to ethnic nationalism because it stresses the importance of inherited cultural characteristics. It defines Europeanness in terms of white race and Christian heritage (Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 167). It appeals to common Greek, Roman, Judaic, and/or Christian heritage with the intent of excluding Eastern Christianity and especially Islam, which it depicts as the persistent enemy in a centuries-long European crusade (Rigney 2012, 616; Spohn 2005, 5). Despite the image of Europe as free from far-right, racist, and nativist views, this notion of “Europe” is flourishing alongside its civic counterpart, as demonstrated recently by the success of far-right parties in the 2024 EP elections (Végh 2024). Its resurgence is arguably a reaction to the perceived imposition of civic ideas of Europeanness (Végh 2024). Like their civic counterparts, ethnically based ideas of belonging to Europe have

benefited from transnational dynamics such as far-right political leaders' support for and bargains with one another across borders (Végh 2024).

Longstanding, ongoing debates as to what “Europe” encompasses mean that just as nations and nationalisms evolve over time and contain many variations and contradictions, the idea of “Europe” is constructed on distinct ideological bases and is therefore dynamic and disputed. This leads it to permeate a wide range of discourses, influencing politics and international relations in ways that go unnoticed if they do not fit within a narrow conceptualization of “Europe.” In explaining Spanish claims to Europeanness, this thesis will show the political impact of the idea of “Europe” while avoiding oversimplifying labels by specifying the grounds on which assertions of belonging to Europe are made.

### **National Identities and “European” Identity**

Regardless of how one defines “Europe,” attempts to determine who belongs to it and what its role in the world is suggest a degree of cohesion, agency, and ability to inculcate attachment that is usually associated with nations. This raises questions as to the possible extent of identification with “Europe” and how it interacts with identification with nations. There are three main theories regarding the relationship between “European” and national identities that have been devised in the context of European integration (Spohn 2005, 2). The first is based on a conceptualization of integration as a purely intergovernmental process that has no effect on identities; it treats “European” identity as a flimsy supplement to national identities (Spohn 2005, 2). “Europe” is a nebulous construction that lacks access to many of the mechanisms that nations use to become part of people’s everyday lives, such as control over education, media, or militaries (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 753; Kaelble 2005, 18). This makes it difficult to inculcate attachment to

“Europe”; however, the fact that contemporary political actors debate what such attachment entails and how it should influence policy means that the concept cannot be entirely meaningless (Rigney 2012, 607; Soroka and Krawatzek 2019, 167; Végh 2024).

The second theory regarding the relationship between “European” and national identities assumes that the ultimate aim of European institutions is to establish a strong supranational authority and perhaps even federalize Europe (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 754). It suggests that for this to occur, identification with “Europe” will restructure and become detached from identification with specific nations within it (Spohn 2005, 2). Whereas the first theory is too dismissive of the influence of the idea of “Europe,” the second theory’s prediction that European identity will become completely separate from and perhaps even supersede national identities ignores the basic reality that “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time,” and nationalism continues to be one of the most powerful tools of political organization and revolution (Anderson 2006, 3). It also forgets that the nation-state is the vehicle for incorporation into institutional Europe, so it is infeasible for a “European” identity to be disconnected from national ones.

The third theory concerning “European” and national identities takes a more nuanced position than the first two by predicting an enduring, variable combination of “European” and national identities (Spohn 2005, 2). Medrano and Gutiérrez discuss the multiple functions that identification with a polity can perform, including creating a sense of power and control, conferring prestige by association, permitting a break with an unfavorable reputation, and facilitating distinctions among peoples (2001, 757-759). People and institutions prioritize some of these effects over others depending on recent history, current political circumstances, and external perceptions; this means that they identify most strongly with the polity that provides

them with what they need at a given time, but it does not preclude identification with others (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 757-759). The various purposes that identities can serve suggest that political actors have context-specific perceptions of the effects of “European” and national identities (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 760). If political circumstances lead to the construction of each as a threat to the other, they become mutually exclusive, leading one to lose meaning (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 760). If they favor the construction of “European” and national identities as mutually constitutive, complementary, or unrelated, then it becomes possible to have “nested” or “hyphenated” identities, which allow for attachment to multiple levels of political institutions (Medrano and Gutiérrez, 758, 760, 772). Given its politicians’ representation of “Europe” as a constitutive element of Spanish national identity, Spain provides evidence of this possibility. Medrano and Gutiérrez’s approach recognizes the growing influence of multiple understandings of “Europe” and considers the staying power of nationhood and nationalisms while recognizing that these constructs change over time, so their relationships with one another also evolve. Ultimately, the relationship between “European” and national identities depends on political actors’ needs and framing. This creates an opening for “European” identities to influence national identities, which implies that ideas about “Europe” can be a consideration in strategies for constructing national identities, including the use of historical memory.

## **Conclusion**

Political actors construct national identities based on political values and culture. In Spain, they typically emphasize one of these criteria for belonging over the other, but the boundaries between them are blurred. Ignoring one at the expense of the other perpetuates narratives of Western and European superiority and prevents rigorous analyses of nationalism. Historical

memory is one of the most useful means of constructing national identities based on civic and ethnic criteria, as it operates through both political institutions and everyday experiences to contribute to a collective consciousness, create common references, avoid points of disagreement or shame, and legitimize nationhood. These functions of historical memory reinforce requirements for national belonging and their similarity to or distinction from those of other nations. Despite historical memory's power to build national identities, it is vulnerable because of its constant contestation, which has only intensified as advances in communication facilitate comparisons among nations and their memory practices and generate demands for new memory practices. Because of Spain's particular history, the concept of "Europe" is a major transnational influence on its people and institutions' negotiation of historical memory; however, since this concept has multiple meanings, it has distinct and sometimes contradictory implications for national identity. In the next chapter, I turn to these by analyzing how a persistent desire to belong to "Europe" has altered the remembrance of the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco over time, reshaping what it means to be Spanish.

## Chapter 3

### Historical Memory of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's

#### Dictatorship

*“Only through knowledge of our own history and the recovery of the memory and dignity of all of those men and women who fought for democratic rights and freedoms that we now enjoy will we be able...to identify challenges to those principles and defend them against multiple threats, like the ones that authoritarian, xenophobic, and nationalist movements pose all over Europe.”*  
-Claudia Cano Hinojosa

#### Introduction

The Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship of Francisco Franco are an aspect of Spain's past that complicates its quest to identify with “Europe” understood in civic terms as peaceful, democratic, respectful of human rights, and cognizant of the legacy of fascism (Kaelble 2005, 20; Rigney 2012, 611-613). The Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 when Franco and his fascist Nationalist forces attempted a coup d'état against the democratically elected government of the Second Spanish Republic (Golob 2022, 55; Humphrey 2014, 26). This initial provocation drew in combatants from around the world and led to the development of alliances among Europe's fascist regimes in a “curtain raiser to the broader conflagration that was to engulf the continent” during World War II (Hite 2008, 113; Richards 2010, 124). The ensuing violence, in which both parties were accused of war crimes, killed 500,000 to 600,000 people and led to widespread political repression (Humphrey 2014, 26). The bloodshed culminated in a Nationalist victory, allowing Franco to consolidate an authoritarian regime that lasted until 1975 and was marked by human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 3; Humphrey 2014, 26). These conditions meant that Spain provided a sharp contrast with much of the rest of Western Europe's post-World War II politics, which were

characterized by peace, democratization, and recognition of the harm done by fascism (Rigney 2012, 611).

Considering that Franco's dictatorship lasted until 1975, Spain is not far removed from the experiences of political repression, human rights abuses, and crimes against humanity (Faber 2021, 28). This reality has fueled debates over transitional justice and provided a frequent reminder of the clash between relatively recent events in Spain and a civic conception of "Europe" that emphasizes values such as democracy and human rights. The longstanding ambition of both the Spanish government and its opposition to be viewed as part of "Europe" because of the associated economic prosperity and political clout intensified during the late 1970s and 1980s with the transition to democracy and accession to European institutions (Jáuregui 2005, 113; Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 767). These changes created an opportunity to build on existing manipulations of memories of war and dictatorship to construct a "European" civic national identity for Spain. Politicians and ordinary citizens have modified and contested historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship over time according to their needs, but they have consistently done so in a way that portrays Spain as a "European" nation. This chapter will analyze this dynamic by exploring the narrative of the Spanish Civil War as a "crusade" that proliferated in the decades after the conflict, the notion of "fratricide" and the preference for forgetting that came with Spain's transition to democracy, and contemporary debates over how the Spanish Civil War and Francoism should be remembered.

### **The "Crusade" Narrative, 1939-1960s**

Spanish claims of belonging to "Europe" have been a constant in historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime, but the narratives and memory practices

constituting these claims have evolved with changing understandings of the criteria for belonging to “Europe.” A particular idea of “Europe” was invoked even in the immediate aftermath of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s seizure of power. Despite the Franco regime’s initial isolationism and opposition to nascent post-World War II European institutions, it based its legitimacy during its early decades in large part on the notion that the Nationalists had fought the Spanish Civil War to defend the “true Europe,” understood in ethnic or cultural terms as Christian (Moradiellos 2016, 70; Jáuregui 2005, 114). To do so, it employed an existing discourse of a political struggle between “two Spains”: one that emphasized modernization as well as economic, political, and cultural integration with the rest of Europe and another that valued Catholicism and a strong national identity based on traditional values (Jáuregui 2005, 113). Franco’s regime embraced the latter version of Spain, promoting the narrative that it had initiated the Spanish Civil War to protect not only itself but the rest of Europe and “Christian civilization” against communism, atheism, and anticlerical sentiment in what it repeatedly referred to as a “crusade” (Richards 2010, 129). This narrative drew on existing tropes of the “savage Muslim other” to describe the Franco regime’s Republican adversaries and compared its triumph over them to the Crusades and the *Reconquista* (Hite 2008, 116). In doing so, it deliberately excluded the democratic Republicans from Spain and “Europe.” It also positioned Spain as a central actor in well-established ethnic understandings of a Europeanness consisting of Christian heritage and tradition and excluding those who do not conform to them (Rigney 2012, 616; Spohn 2005, 5). While historically dubious, this way of remembering the Spanish Civil War served the dual purposes of legitimizing “the deeds of violence that took place at the origin” of the new regime as part of a broader fight for a Christian “Europe” and allowing Spain to continue to claim ethnic Europeanness as part of its national identity even as its civic

trajectory sharply diverged from those of most of its neighbors after World War II (Renan 2018, 251).

The historical memory of the Spanish Civil War as a struggle to defend the “true Europe” was inculcated through both political instruments and everyday experiences such as education and *lieux de mémoire*. Official discourse underpinned by the Spanish state’s adoption of Catholic traditionalism as its guiding principle was crucial to promoting the narrative (Richards 2010, 129). In the decades following the Spanish Civil War, Francisco Franco himself repeatedly explained the conflict in providentialist terms, as in a 1959 speech before Spanish and foreign officials and Nationalist veterans in which he dubbed the conflict a “crusade...marked by providence and miracles” against the recurring existential threat of the modernizing, integrationist “anti-Spain” (Cuéllar 2022, 13:12; Faber 2021, 5; Sánchez-Cuenca 2022). His regime’s propaganda not only amplified this narrative but sought to make it relevant beyond Spain by depicting him as God’s chosen “spiritual guide of the world”<sup>3</sup> (Faber 2021, 18). Such statements reinforced the notion of Spain as the protector of European Christianity, which normalized Franco’s usurping regime domestically by giving it a leading role in an imagined European geography that Spanish intellectuals and politicians had long aspired to join.

The same ideas were inculcated through people’s everyday experiences. For example, Spanish schoolchildren were taught for decades after the Spanish Civil War that the Republicans were foreign invaders from whom Franco, a spiritual leader for Spain and the rest of the world, had rescued the country (Richards 2010, 130). This claim precludes an understanding of Republican democracy as integral to Spain and justifies its downfall as essential to Spain’s place as a protector of “Christian civilization” in Europe. Its prevalence in Spanish schools after the

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<sup>3</sup> For examples of Franco’s self-insertion into Catholic history and hagiography, see Barallobre 2022.

Spanish Civil War gave it an early and lasting influence on how ordinary Spaniards viewed the history of the conflict and their relationship to it (Lim 2010, 140; Richards 2010, 130).

Various *lieux de mémoire* established after the Spanish Civil War furthered this notion. The most infamous of these is what was then called the Valley of the Fallen, just outside of Madrid. The site is a massive basilica complex constructed with forced Republican labor between 1940 and 1959 to honor the “heroes and martyrs of the Crusade,” “those who fell in the name of God and the homeland” (Cuéllar 2022; Hite 2008, 117-118). Various Civil War dead, including Republicans whose bodies were taken without the consent of their families, were buried there (Hite 2008, 110-111). Franco himself was eventually interred there as well (Cuéllar 2022, 15:36).

Like all *lieux de mémoire*, the Valley of the Fallen is intended to enforce a particular way of remembering the past regardless of its historical accuracy (Nora 1989, 12, 23). It imposes memories of the Spanish Civil War as a triumphant crusade to save “Christian Spain” through a combination of martial and religious imagery that conflates war with divinity to legitimize the brutality of the Spanish Civil War. This imagery is exemplified by numerous statues of patron saints of war and archangels bearing weapons (see Figure 3.1) as well as the ceiling mosaic over the main altar that displays Nationalist troops alongside Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and saints (see Figure 3.2).



*Figure 3.1: An archangel statue in the basilica at the Valley of the Fallen (Cuéllar 2022, 10:00)*



*Figure 3.2: Detail of the ceiling mosaic in the basilica (Cuéllar 2022, 10:05)*

It is reinforced by the messages conveyed by prayer cards intended for visitors, which refer to the Valley of the Fallen as a site “enriched...with the presence of numerous holy martyrs” and demand continued physical and spiritual sacrifices in the name of the Spanish nation. The associations among Christianity, violence, and nationhood in the architecture and advertising of the Valley of the Fallen perpetuate the belief that the Spanish Civil War and Francoist violence were fundamental to securing a future for a Spain defined by Christian heritage.

This impression is reinforced and given a European dimension by elements of the space that reinforce contemporary narratives of the Spanish Civil War as repelling an invasion of Europe. These include tapestries and bas-reliefs recalling centuries-old events such as the Crusades and the *Reconquista* as well as twentieth-century developments such as colonial wars against Muslims in Africa (Hite 2008, 114, 116). The inclusion of these events in the imagery of the Valley of the Fallen links the Spanish Civil War to historical examples of mass violence carried out in the name of protecting or expanding a particular ethnic and civilizational vision of “Europe” as Christian. This makes the aforementioned conflation of war and divinity important to Spain’s “European” identity as well as its national one by supporting the idea of the Spanish Civil War as a holy war for the “true Europe” and portraying Spain as Franco’s vision of a “European” nation.

Like all *lieux de mémoire*, the Valley of the Fallen ensures that a particular memory of the history to which it is dedicated persists even as ideas about it change (Nora 1989, 23). It accomplishes this by sacralizing all that lies within it to make it impervious to criticism (Lim 2010, 140). The physical space of the Valley of the Fallen is imposing and creates a sense that visitors are not in a position to question it. Its constant silence, semidarkness, and signs prohibiting photography in the “sacred space” further complicate scrutiny of the site. These conditions are determined by the Benedictine monks who have administered and held services at the Valley of the Fallen since its establishment, ensuring that visitors treat it as holy and do not challenge the historical narratives it furnishes (Cuéllar 2022, 10:09). The monks’ use of the space combined with its sacred nature as a basilica ensures that the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War that shaped the construction of the Valley of the Fallen is perpetuated at the site regardless of dissent elsewhere.

Due to censorship and repression as well as other Western European countries’ preoccupation with World War II, reconstruction, and the early stages of the Cold War, there was little room to contest the “crusade” narrative of the Spanish Civil War (Moradiellos 2016, 67-70; Navarro 2010, Part 10, 36:00). Individuals in Spain often neglected to counter the narrative by offering stories of political persecution and repression, thinking that their silence would ensure their families’ safety (Navarro 2010, Part 1, 36:00). However, this did not mean that alternative memories and related political activity were entirely extinguished; it was also common for people to tell clandestine stories in limited detail or strictly in private settings, which preserved them for a time in which they could be openly expressed (Ferrándiz 2008, 183-185). This reality heavily influenced the next phase of the use of historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Francoism to conform to particular ideas of “Europe.”

### **The “Fratricide” Narrative and Forgetting, 1960s-2000s**

Despite the absence of public challenges to the “crusade” narrative of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s rise to power, the predominant historical memory of these events shifted because of the evolving political needs of Spanish people and institutions. One key transnational influence on this process was the new understanding of “Europe” that developed during the 1950s as Spain abandoned isolationism (Moradiellos 2016, 72-73). An economic crisis and Western capitalist powers’ treatment of the Franco regime as a critical ally during the early stages of the Cold War led Spain to establish new political and economic relationships (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 762; Moradiellos 2016, 72-73). This partial opening led to emigration from and tourism in Spain, exposing Spaniards to the economic, social, and political realities of their neighbors (Díaz-Cardiel 2009, Part 2, 20:00; Golob 2022, 45-46). This process inculcated a view within Spain of other Western European countries and the budding regional institutions to which they belonged as models of economic prosperity (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001, 763).

It also made the social and political differences between Spain and most other Western European countries painfully obvious by highlighting the latter’s postwar experiences of freedom, democracy, and peace. The 2009 testimony of Víctor Díaz-Cardiel, a Communist opponent of the Franco regime who worked in France and the United Kingdom in the 1960s, exemplifies this phenomenon. He recounts his admiration of the social freedoms and lack of censorship in the countries where he worked, which were “another world” in comparison to the “exceptional” situation of Spain (Díaz-Cardiel 2009, Part 2, 20:00). This difference led him to reflect that in terms of democratization and the decline of fascism, “[w]hat happened in Europe did not happen in Spain” (Díaz-Cardiel 2009, Part 10, 23:30). Díaz-Cardiel’s interpretation of the

past, facilitated by his exposure to other parts of Europe, suggests that Spain was not a part of Europe because it spent years as an anachronistic vestige of World War II-era fascism while nearby countries overcame fascism, democratized, and built peace. The disjuncture between Spanish politics and the civic ideals embraced by countries in Spain's vicinity was noted not only by Franco's opponents but by his regime itself, which feared the "political content" of European integration, especially after 1962, when the EP published a report specifying that only liberal democracies could join the EC (Moradiellos 2016, 73-74). Spaniards across the political spectrum began to see the disadvantages of their departure from the civic values that defined the countries around them.

As a result, both the Spanish government and its opposition increasingly characterized their country as an aberrant case in need of "reconciliation" and "European normality" as a solution to the legacy of nationalist violence that prevented other European states from considering it an equal (Faber 2021, 226; Richards 2010, 132; Tamir 2019, 421, 425). Since the prevailing historical memory of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's ascent ostracized those who did not support the Nationalists and Franco's regime, and the regime initially rejected institutional Europe, "reconciliation" and "European normality" entailed a new understanding of who belonged to Spain and how Spain's experiences with political violence and repression compared to those of other European countries. This modification of the concept of Spanish national identity demanded a corresponding modification of historical memory to legitimize it. As a result, in the 1960s, a narrative of the Spanish Civil War as a "fratricidal" struggle that ought not be repeated emerged (Richards 2010, 133). The narrative of "fratricide" spurred the Spanish government, scholars, and others to apply the term "civil war" to the conflict even though many had long viewed it as an international affair (Richards 2010, 133). The shift from

the idea of a struggle against foreign invaders to that of a “Spanish Civil War” underscored the idea that all Spaniards should constitute one nation regardless of their political struggles, implying a new commitment to reconciliation (Anderson 2006, 200-204). However, genuine reconciliation was impossible because it required recognition of the atrocities committed during the war and Franco’s dictatorship, which would have eroded the regime’s legitimacy (Richards 2010, 132). Thus, a nominal acknowledgement of “fratricide” combined with silence on what exactly constituted this “fratricide” became the government’s preferred strategy for balancing the need to conform to European norms of peace and reconciliation with its own survival.

The “fratricide” narrative and forgetting were enforced largely by official means since they were integral components of the transition to democracy that began in the 1960s and continued after Franco’s death in 1975 (UN CED 2013a). This transition was negotiated between Francoists and their repressed opponents, leading to a significant power imbalance that forced the latter to concede continued legitimacy, institutional power, and economic influence in exchange for freedom for prisoners, inclusion in a new electoral democracy, and guarantees against future repression (Cano Hinojosa 2018, 30; Cardús i Ros 2000, 25-26; Golob 2022, 50). As such, the opposition lacked the leverage and leeway to challenge the dominant historical memory of a “fratricide” that must be forgotten in order to achieve “European normality.” This situation ensured that Spain’s new democracy would be grounded in “fratricide” and forgetting.

The most important official conduit for these narratives is the Amnesty Law, passed in 1977 by a new, democratically elected Parliament (Faber 2021, 16; Ley 46/1977). The statute, which states that one of its purposes is to facilitate the reintegration of various political actors, prohibits the prosecution of any illicit political acts committed prior to 1976, nonviolent acts committed in the name of freedom before mid-1977, and several other crimes (Ley 46/1977, arts.

1-5). It had a chilling effect not just on legal action but on all measures to address the past, including truth commissions and reparations, which it does not technically forbid (Golob 2008, 127).

At face value, the law does not seem to pertain to memory, but its provisions underpin two key aspects of the historical memory that became dominant in the late twentieth century. The first of these is *equidistancia* (“equidistance”). By providing amnesty for all political crimes regardless of who committed them, the law casts equal blame on the parties to the Spanish Civil War for the conflict and attendant atrocities (Golob 2022, 50-51). Superficially, this reinforcement of the “fratricide” narrative appears to support the inclusion and reckoning required for the reconciliation that observers claim the rest of Europe underwent (Judt 1996, 93, 95-96). However, since Spanish Republicans and other opponents of Francoism had been criminalized while Francoists were not, it only solidified the status quo and shielded the Nationalists and the Franco regime from scrutiny (Golob 2022, 51). This dashed any possibility of investigating what specifically happened during and after the “fratricide.”

*Equidistancia* facilitated the second aspect of the historical memory supported by the Amnesty Law. This aspect is known colloquially as the *pacto del olvido* (“pact of forgetting”) (Duplaá 2000, 34). By permitting amnesty for political crimes from the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship even as it implicitly acknowledges a “fratricidal” past, the Amnesty Law aids in the abstraction of past abuses from the people and institutions that were responsible for them and remain influential in Spanish politics and society (Cardús i Ros 2000, 22). It suggests that the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship were “a collective failure best left in the past,” while the transition to democracy was “a collective success based on leaving that past behind” (Golob 2022, 51). This notion is consistent with the longstanding practice of

cohering nations by erasing aspects of the past that could trigger memories of their violence or otherwise prove compromising or divisive (Anderson 2006, 200-204; Halbwachs 1992, 182-183; Renan 2018, 251). It supports claims that efforts to unearth alternative narratives from the period are bids to renew conflict (Faber 2021, 30-31).

The Amnesty Law's demand that Spaniards unite by abandoning the past and focusing exclusively on the future strengthens the "fratricide" narrative by stigmatizing any reference to past conflicts, which in turn allows for forgetting. In doing so, it legitimizes Spain's transition to democracy despite its failure to break with the Franco regime. It also implicitly permits the Spanish government and population to claim a "European" identity involving civic values such as peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights by simply eliding the recent history throughout which they had compromised those values (Golob 2022, 56). These consequences of the "fratricide" narrative and forgetting embedded in the Amnesty Law were politically convenient because they altered the dominant understanding of Spanish national identity such that it reflected the ideals propagated elsewhere in Europe without leading to the political upheaval that would have been necessary to act on them. Therefore, memories of "fratricide" and forgetting were crucial strategies for both establishing Spain's new democracy and "becoming European" in civic terms.

The historical memory buttressed by the Amnesty Law manifested itself in quotidian mechanisms for inculcating historical memory as well as official political measures. This is exemplified by the Spanish media. Even privately owned sources ranging from prominent newspapers like *El País* to radio stations have generally obscured the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship by presenting them in abstract terms that distance them from contemporary Spanish society and politics (Cardús i Ros 2000, 21; Faber 2021, 188). This

tendency is reflected in their sometime refusal to cover issues such as the self-enrichment of the Franco family and the corporations it favored, corruption enabled by institutions from the Franco regime decades after its end, and debates on the history of and appropriateness of taxpayer funding for the Valley of the Fallen (Faber 2021, 186-187). The media's silence on these matters has limited the available alternatives to an official discourse that attempts to cohere Spain as a nation and a state by disregarding past divisions. This has compounded the difficulty of questioning Spain's transition to democracy and achievement of what Spaniards describe as "European normality" by ignoring the departure from that "normality" exemplified by its recent experiences with political violence, authoritarianism, and human rights violations.

Education in Spain has similarly obscured history over the last half century. Because of a combination of autonomous communities' policies and teachers' misgivings, it has been typical for Spanish school curricula to cover the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship in limited detail or not at all in the interest of appearing politically neutral and avoiding controversy (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 9-10; Junquera 2025). As a result, if Spanish students learned anything about these parts of their history, it was usually a story of a "struggle between two factions" or a "fratricidal war" (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 7-8). Very few learned about the systemic repression carried out by the Nationalists and the Franco regime or alternative ways of remembering the past (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 8). The early and lasting influence of education on people's identification with and understanding of their nation and state likely contributed to the findings of a 2010 poll showing that forty percent of Spaniards think that the parties to the Spanish Civil War carried equal blame for the conflict, and one-third of them believed that they had the same number of victims (Faber 2021, 39; Lim 2010, 140). This suggests that the purported neutrality of Spanish educational curricula has actually served the political purpose of continuing to

legitimize *equidistancia* and the *pacto del olvido* as bases for Spanish democracy by ignoring other histories and experiences. It has also reinforced the notion that Spain is no different from other European nations and states where civic values are concerned, as it has secured peace and established an unimpeachable democracy just as they claim to have done following World War II (Judt 1996, 93, 95-96).

From the 1960s onward, the Spanish government employed historical memory to unite Spaniards behind a monolithic national self-understanding that legitimized the transition to democracy and attributed to Spain the same civic values as other European nations by simply ignoring their absence prior to the transition to democracy. Given both the aforementioned flaws of these narratives and Spain's political liberalization, there were opportunities to contest the dominant historical memory through testimonies and literature. For example, films by Antonio Muñoz Molina and Basilio Martín Patino brought attention to victims' fear of discussing the past, and Tomasa Cuevas' *Cárcel de mujeres (1939-1945)* (*Women's Prison (1939-1945)*) exposed the abuses that female dissidents suffered under Franco (Duplaá 2000, 35-37; Resina 2000, 96-104). However, these cultural products were consumed largely by audiences that already agreed with their content, so they did little to change the prevailing narrative (Duplaá 2000, 38). It would take broad transnational and domestic political changes to bring about another shift in the established historical memory and erode the power of the Amnesty Law.

## **Contemporary Contestation of the Historical Memory of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's Dictatorship**

### ***Transnational Catalysts***

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there were several transnational and domestic catalysts that contributed to a widespread shift in the remembrance of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. One of these was the changing international norms regarding democratization and transitional justice. When Spain became a democracy, the international community extolled it as a model for peaceful political transitions (Humphrey 2014, 33). However, Spain's transition prioritized peace above all other objectives, including accountability (Humphrey 2014, 33). The flaws of this approach were exposed when post-dictatorship societies in places such as Argentina and Chile initiated truth commissions and prosecutions to address human rights abuses committed under dictatorships, suggesting that there were means of demonstrating commitment to democracy and human rights other than simply ignoring the past (Faber 2021, 31). These alternatives led to the proliferation of an international language of victimhood, democratic memory, human rights, and transitional justice that victims of repression around the world have used to argue that peace and accountability for past atrocities are not mutually exclusive (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 603). It also challenged Spain's "fratricide" narrative and erasure of the past.

Events in Latin America were the immediate cause of this shift, but these events in turn were heavily influenced by European political values and norms. Among these were the language and symbolism of Holocaust remembrance, an aspect of Europe's global influence that became increasingly important for Spain as it integrated with the rest of Europe (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 604). Given the power of the countries most heavily implicated in World War II

and the Holocaust within European institutions, there was an understanding in Spain that becoming a modern democracy like others in Western Europe should involve integration not only with their social, economic, and political structures but also with their memories of Nazism and fascism more broadly (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 605). Spain faced further pressure towards this mnemonic integration in 2001, when the CoE Committee of Ministers advised member states to design their education policy to prevent crimes against humanity and genocides like the Holocaust (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 4). As a result, throughout the early 2000s, the Spanish government took steps to display its commitment to remembering and learning from World War II-era fascism and the Holocaust, including holding annual commemorative ceremonies, joining international fora dedicated to Holocaust research and remembrance, and signing an agreement with other EU countries on commemoration, education, and mobilization (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 612-613). Because of the invented tradition of condemning and mourning the Holocaust as a global reference for mass atrocities, discussions of World War II and the Holocaust have become more typical than those of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism in Spain (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 5; Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 1). A 2022 survey of high school seniors representing all of Spain's autonomous communities indicated that participants generally knew more about Nazi atrocities than about Francoist ones and were more likely to have visited the faraway sites of Nazi concentration camps than the nearby sites of Francoist ones (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 6-7, 11).

Situations like this one created a tension between the Spanish government and educational curricula's condemnation of European fascism and refusal to address its specific manifestation in Francoism (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 605). This tension led victims of repression to demand a reckoning with Francoism and its legacy as an antithesis to democratic Spain similar

to other forms of European fascism (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 605). The unfavorable comparison between Holocaust remembrance and the lack of memorialization of the atrocities committed in Spain inspired grassroots and local imitations of the former. Ironically, a top-down European narrative of World War II and the Holocaust insistent on remembrance in the name of peace, democracy, and human rights enabled the emergence of a bottom-up, national alternative to the “fratricide” narrative and forgetting. The comparison between remembering fascism and related atrocities in most of Europe and the tendency to ignore them in Spain exposed a shortcoming in Spain’s adherence to “European” norms. It suggested that obscuring previous disjunctures with these norms would not be sufficient for Spain to win the prestige associated with them, which created an opening for confronting these disjunctures instead.

### *Domestic Catalysts*

In addition to transnational developments such as the emergence of new models of transitional justice and the influence of World War II and Holocaust commemoration, developments within Spain altered people and institutions’ political needs regarding the past. One of these dynamics was generational change. Young people who grew up in a Spain that was integrated with European institutions and free from the political repression that silenced their parents and grandparents saw other European countries’ treatment of the past firsthand (Fernández Alonso 2009, Part 3, 33:30; Navarro 2010, Part 1, 2:00). The differences between historical memory regarding war, dictatorship, and human rights abuses in Spain and in much of the rest of Europe drove a questioning of the historical memory underpinning Spain’s transition to democracy (Faber 2021, 196; Golob 2022, 134). This process in turn left younger people frustrated with older generations’ silence around the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship, as they were

too young to have consented to the *pacto del olvido* (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 603). There was a sense that existing memory practices no longer attended to all who constituted the Spanish nation, so Spanish youth increasingly engaged with their country's past through inquiries into their family histories and the promotion of films and other media investigating the past<sup>4</sup> (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 3; Ferrándiz 2008, 183-185). A new negotiation of historical memory ensued from the clash between young Spaniards whose social and political conditioning taught them that remembering was critical and an older generation for whom remembering was pointless or even dangerous (Ferrándiz 2008, 183-185).

Repeated public revelations of Spanish political dysfunction prompted further questions regarding the legacy of Franco's regime. These include controversies over attempts to regulate history education<sup>5</sup>, though examples that are not directly connected to memory but nevertheless triggered discussions of it abound (Resina 2000, 113-117). Instances of corruption such as the disbarment of a judge for investigating crimes against humanity in Spain and the PP's financing through corporate bribes engendered claims that Francoist legacies such as impunity and benefits for corporations that supported the government remained intact (Faber 2021, 9-11, 34). Similarly, the discovery of suspicious ties between the media on the one hand and major political and corporate figures on the other led to doubts about the media's silence on the past (Cardús i Ros 2000, 21; Faber 2021, 186). Tensions between the central Spanish state and the autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Catalonia, which used their suffering under the Franco regime as an argument against the state, also forced discussions of the past into the public sphere (Resina 2000, 92, 118). As Spain's government, education system, judiciary, and media

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<sup>4</sup> The best-known film that has helped younger Spaniards question what they have been taught about the past is *The Silence of Others*, which was produced by Pedro Almodóvar in 2018. See Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Recent controversies over history education in Spain have stemmed from the Royal Academy of History's attempts to influence history curricula in autonomous communities and insistence that schools should focus on teaching traditional chronologies rather than analytical methods. See Resina 2000, 114-116.

floundered in response to these problems, it became common to compare them unfavorably with the institutions of nearby democracies (Faber 2022). Renewed conversations about the past and international embarrassment caused by Spain's political dysfunction created opportunities for new, confrontational narratives of the past via an "inversion of conventional genealogy" linking the dysfunction to Francoism (Anderson 2006, 205). This "inversion of conventional genealogy" exacerbated insecurity concerning Spain's ability to abide by civic ideals such as democracy, human rights, and accountability promoted elsewhere in Europe (Anderson 2006, 205; Faber 2022; Judt 1996, 93, 95-96; Kaelble 2005, 20; Rigney 2012, 611-613).

One final domestic factor spurring a more confrontational approach to the past was the discontent of Spaniards who believed that their relatively recent experiences under Franco's dictatorship had not been addressed. Victims of repression and their families, traumatized by the past, rejected traditional grand historical narratives and pride in war, underscoring their negative impact and calling for reparations (Loureiro 2008, 231). This strategy of emphasizing the experiences of victims followed a wider European trend (Humphrey 2014, 25). It became increasingly popular in Spain in the late 1990s and early 2000s as Prime Minister José María Aznar obstinately refused to consider the perspectives of Spaniards aggrieved by the past out of fear of societal turmoil (Haven 2007; Loureiro 2008, 232). This compounded the sense that Spanish memory practices did not include all who claimed belonging in the Spanish nation. The disconnect between Spain's dominant historical memory, which ostensibly abided by civic principles associated with "Europe," and the reality that many Spaniards experienced and witnessed created an unprecedented opportunity for open contestation of the past.

### *Spanish Civil Society Actors' Strategies*

In the early 2000s, civil society actors seized the opportunity to take a more confrontational stance on the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. Several organizations challenging the dominant historical memory were founded, including the ARMH, La Comuna, and Foro por la Memoria (Forum for Memory) (ARMH 2015; Baer and Sznajder 2020, 609; La Comuna 2024b). These groups differ on issues such as the extent to which they seek to provide personal closure versus vindicate a particular political perspective on the past, but they share the goals of addressing the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, ensuring accountability for human rights abuses and crimes against humanity, securing reparations for victims, and changing how Spanish society engages with the past (ARMH 2015; La Comuna 2024b; Golob 2022, 54).

To this end, civil society organizations focused on historical memory have pursued activities that bring alternative ways of remembering the past to the attention of ordinary Spaniards. The first of these is mass grave exhumations. In 2000, the ARMH became the first to identify and excavate mass graves in a systematic manner based on requests from victims' families; other organizations such as Foro por la Memoria began to do the same soon after (ARMH 2015; Golob 2022, 54). Mass grave exhumations became widespread and grabbed media attention both within Spain and abroad as they revealed shocking details of torture and killings and led to the widespread dissemination of images of bereaved families desperate to find the remains of their loved ones (Faber 2021, 217-218; Ferrándiz 2008, 177; Labanyi 2008; Torres 2008). Exhumations have brought the contestation of historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Francoism directly to communities across Spain and revealed its significance for ordinary people across the country who suffered as a result of being silenced,

complicating attempts to ignore the issue. They have also forced domestic and foreign media to scrutinize the “fratricide” narrative and the erasure of history, which had long impeded efforts to unearth past atrocities. This scrutiny has been crucial to foregrounding historical memory in Spanish politics and tying it to a sense of civic deficiency as compared to democracies elsewhere, which has added to political incentives to alter memory practices.

Another impactful project that civil society organizations dedicated to historical memory have carried out is the collection and dissemination of testimonies from victims of and witnesses to human rights abuses and atrocities. These *lieux de mémoire* were inspired by the Holocaust remembrance discourse of preserving the past to recover from and avoid repeating it (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 608-609; Nora 1989, 23). They have become especially urgent to civil society actors as the number of people old enough to remember the Spanish Civil War and Francoism dwindles (Ferrándiz 2008, 182). Civil society organizations sometimes use testimonies to provide personal closure, as is the case with the testimonies from victims’ family members that the ARMH records during exhumations (Ferrándiz 2008, 182).

The testimonies often have a political purpose as well. The Basque Country’s Aranzadi testimony archive and Catalonia’s Memorial Democràtic arguably lend moral standing to the autonomous communities’ demands for a devolution of authority from the Spanish state (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 608-609). The ARMH has employed personal testimonies to persuade Spanish lawmakers to fulfill its demands; for instance, when a government commission working on the issue of historical memory was reluctant to translate its work into legislation, several representatives from the organization went before it with personal stories of disappeared relatives to pressure it to bring about concrete changes to official historical narratives (Labanyi 2008, 152). La Comuna has had municipalities collect testimonies for legal purposes (La Comuna

2024a). While Spanish courts have rejected cases based on these testimonies because of the Amnesty Law, the testimonies did facilitate an Argentinian official’s prosecution of Francoist crimes from abroad (La Comuna 2024a). Testimonies show that not all who identify with the Spanish nation have been included in its memory practices; they also supply incriminating evidence that deepens Spain’s international embarrassment regarding its past. In doing so, they incentivize confrontation with the past and modifications to the dominant historical memory.

Memorials erected across Spain by civil society have also reshaped historical narratives by serving as alternative *lieux de mémoire* to those made by Franco’s regime (Nora 1989, 23). For instance, La Comuna erected a memorial in Madrid’s Parque del Oeste in 1985 to honor the poet Miguel Hernández<sup>6</sup> (see Figure 3.3), who died in 1942 after being imprisoned for aligning with the Republicans. Others arranged a monument to “the men and women who fought for Freedom and Democracy” in Bilbao’s Iturrizar Parkea (Patrimonio Cultural y Paisaje Urbano 2024).



Figure 3.3: A memorial to Miguel Hernández in Madrid’s Parque del Oeste (Samiee 2024)

Beginning in the early 2000s, students at the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid covered the walls of the building with murals

<sup>6</sup> The commemoration of Miguel Hernández continues to be a point of controversy that serves as a microcosm of broader debates as to how the Spanish Civil War and Francoist repression should be remembered. For example, in Hernández’s hometown of Orihuela, the PP and Vox have refused to overturn his sentence and withheld funding for the foundation that awards an annual prize in his honor. For further details, see Burgos 2024 and Cuquerella 2024.

commemorating victims of Francoist repression, particularly those who were students at the university (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5).



*Figure 3.4: A mural commemorating “the forgotten ones of the Transition” at the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Samiee 2024)*



*Figure 3.5: A mural dedicating the main auditorium at the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid to a student who was killed at a protest during the transition to democracy (Samiee 2024)*

More informal memorials have been set up as well. In several high-traffic areas of Madrid, there is graffiti in the colors of the flag of the Second Republic (see Figure 3.6).



*Figure 3.6: Graffiti in the colors of the flag of the Second Republic in Madrid (Samiee 2024)*

All of these projects inform an alternative way of remembering the Spanish Civil War and Francoism by ingraining it in people’s everyday surroundings such that people internalize it, connect it to their own experiences, and are empowered to question and confront the past (Nora 1989, 12, 23). As a result, they have been important in civil society’s work to use transnational and domestic dynamics to influence historical memory.

Civil society actors draw explicit comparisons between Spain and other European countries in their efforts to promote new ways of remembering the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. For instance, Vicenç Navarro, a Catalan sociologist and political economist who was detained and later forced into exile under Franco, objects to the characterization of Spain as “European now,” blustering,

Where in Europe does a fascist party take a judge who tries to search for the murderers of those who defended democracy, and the Supreme Court takes the argument of the fascist party and makes it its own? Where in Europe? Don’t tell me that Spanish democracy is comparable to that in the rest of Europe (2010, Part 2, 5:00).

Echoing Navarro, the Communist Díaz-Cardiel states that in terms of the defeat of World War II-era fascism, “what happened in Europe did not happen in Spain,” insinuating that Spain remains separate from the rest of Europe because of its role as an anachronistic vestige of the ideology (2009, Part 10, 23:30). At the same time, he asks himself, “How does it happen in this country?” (Díaz-Cardiel 2009, Part 10, 23:15). This question suggests that though disillusioned, he wants Spain to fit into the ideal of a “European” civic nation that has transcended nationalist violence, political repression, and their legacies (Brubaker 1996, 1; Ignatieff 1993, 7; Tamir 2019, 421, 425). The historian Ricardo Robledo concurs, citing the precedent of Germany’s reckoning with Nazism to argue that Spain’s population and leaders must revisit Franco’s rule to be free from it (Faber 2021, 114).

In their efforts to alter the dominant historical memory, civil society actors across the political spectrum have taken advantage of countries’ growing tendency to refer to one another’s memory practices when selecting their own (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 4-5). They strategically employ unflattering comparisons between Spain and the rest of Europe through the discourses of antifascism, Holocaust remembrance, democracy, human rights, and transitional justice to advance their objectives. The antifascist discourse places Franco’s regime within the context of a

broader fascist alliance that threatened European democracies in the twentieth century (Golob 2022, 55). In his narration of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, Navarro emphasizes the importance of support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to Franco's rise to power (2010, Part 1, 5:40). He also portrays Republican exiles as a key component of antifascist resistance in Europe (2010, Part 1, 9:10). Díaz-Cardiel similarly affirms that Spain's experience with fascism before and during World War II was analogous to that of other European countries, but unlike other European countries, it continued on its fascist trajectory because of Allied nonintervention (2009, Part 2, 5:00). La Comuna states in its manifesto that it endeavors to "eradicate fascist culture" as expressed through the influence and impunity of those who benefited from the Franco regime (2024a). Similarly, Emilio Silva, the founder of the ARMH, argues that fascism remains a powerful force in Spanish politics because of Spain's failure to reckon with the past (Faber 2021, 221). By comparing Franco's little-scrutinized dictatorship to the reviled ones of infamous European fascists and inserting the Spanish Civil War and anti-Franco resistance into a European antifascist narrative, civil society actors have highlighted that a political culture that has been thoroughly examined and repudiated elsewhere in Europe has been allowed to persist in Spain. As such, antifascist discourse has highlighted Spain's civic shortcomings as compared to other European countries that stem from the "fratricide" narrative and forgetting.

Holocaust remembrance discourse complements antifascist discourse in performing this function. Activists and governments of autonomous communities that suffered particular hardship under Franco have borrowed from the discourse's emphasis on victimhood, preservation, testimonies, and grassroots memory practices (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 605, 608). The ARMH often uses the "Never Again" slogan common in the context of Holocaust remembrance (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 608). Civil society actors have compared Spain's mass

graves with the plight of disappeared Jews in the rest of Europe (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 608). The Aranzadi testimony archive and Memorial Democràtic are *lieux de mémoire* related to the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, but they are modeled off of Holocaust remembrance projects such as Survivors of the Shoah and Yale University's Fortunoff Archive<sup>7</sup> (Baer and Sznajder 2020, 608-609). Additionally, multiple figures involved in debates over historical memory have proposed replicating other European countries' approach to the memorialization of Nazi concentration camps when dealing with Spanish concentration camps and other sites linked to the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. Scholars and activists have specifically contemplated whether the Valley of the Fallen needs to be reframed as a tragic site rather than a triumphant one just as sites associated with the Holocaust have been (Faber 2021, 25; Fernández Alonso 2009, Part 3, 31:30). By drawing on Holocaust references, civil society actors have built on antifascist discourse to create an urgent moral imperative to confront the past and represent Spain as an outlier from the rest of Europe in terms of its approach to past atrocities. They have also demonstrated that there are alternatives to the "fratricide" narrative and forgetting that could address this predicament.

Another discourse based on transnationalism and European norms that Spanish political actors looking to change the dominant historical memory employ is that of democracy. For the past sixty years, European institutions have been adamant that only democracies belong in their ranks (Moradiellos 2016, 74). It has become common for Spanish civil society actors to seize on this idea and stress that Franco's government emerged from an extremist assault on a legitimate, democratic predecessor (Golob 2022, 54). For example, photographer Francesc Torres, who

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<sup>7</sup> Survivors of the Shoah is a project launched by the USC Shoah Foundation in 1994 to record, preserve, and disseminate 57,466 audiovisual testimonies by Holocaust survivors as part of the foundation's broader mission to commemorate and prevent genocides around the world. Yale University's Fortunoff Archive developed in the 1980s and contains 4,400 audiovisual testimonies by Holocaust survivors, which it shares with interested scholars and educational institutions around the world. See The Institute for Visual History and Education 2025 and Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies 2025.

documents mass grave exhumations, characterizes the reinterment of victims that he witnessed in the town of Villamayor de los Altos as “the proper burial of these men killed for being loyal to a legitimate democratic government and to an idea of Spain that had to wait another half century to begin to re-emerge” (2008, 162). Reclaiming the democracy that Franco overthrew uses a civic principle of a polity that Spanish intellectuals and politicians as well as government institutions have long sought to connect with as a way to illuminate obscured memories of the Second Republic and those who suffered and died for its ideals. This framing makes a reexamination of historical memory seem just rather than divisive for a society that must be seen as a democracy to claim a place in “Europe.”

The same is true of the human rights discourse espoused by advocates for a revised historical memory. Civic understandings of Europe emphasize human rights, and Spain touts its role in promoting human rights “in its national capacity and as a member of the European Union” (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores 2023; Rigney 2012, 612-613). Civil society organizations have challenged the assertion that Spain promotes human rights. The ARMH centers human rights in its efforts, decrying impunity for human rights abuses and noting in particular the lack of prosecutions of perpetrators and reparations for victims, which violate basic tenets of national and international human rights law (ARMH 2015; Baer and Sznajder 2020, 609-611). La Comuna emphasizes that its advocacy seeks to bring Spain into compliance with international human rights norms and argues that there is a “right to memory” (2024a; 2024b). By highlighting the disparity between the Spanish government’s claim to work with institutional Europe to advance human rights and its unwillingness to address previous human rights violations, civil society actors have capitalized on the government’s desire to be perceived as “European” to posit that it must confront the past.

A final key transnational and European discourse that Spanish civil society actors use to encourage a confrontation with the past is that of transitional justice. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academics propagated a “transitional justice culture” (Golob 2008, 127). Based on models such as the post-communist democratization of Eastern European states, “transitional justice culture” holds that some human rights abuses are so grave as to be off-limits for amnesties (Cano Hinojosa 2018, 32; Golob 2008, 127). It also insists that to overcome the distrust, social schisms, and violence produced by serious and prolonged human rights abuses, the state and society must ensure justice, memory, truth, reparations, reconciliation, and non-recurrence (Cano Hinojosa 2018, 32). These principles have been borrowed by actors ranging from La Comuna, which demands “truth, justice, and reparations,” to students at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, whose murals identify them as the “Reparation Generation” seeking “truth and justice” (La Comuna 2024b; see Figure 3.7).



*Figure 3.7: A mural at the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid demanding reparations, truth, and justice (Samiee 2024)*

These actors have not merely copied slogans; they see these demands as genuine models for action, as exemplified by Communist Álvaro Fernández Alonso, who argues that Spain must apply international law regarding crimes against humanity by rejecting impunity and pursuing truth, justice, and reconciliation (2009, Part 3, 30:00). By questioning why norms that have been

applied to democratic transitions and past human rights abuses elsewhere in Europe have been ignored in Spain, civil society actors underscore Spain's awkward position as an exception to the values that its government and people say it should embody as part of civic "Europe."

### ***Pressure From International and European Institutions***

Spanish civil society actors have not only utilized transnational and European discourses to support their positions on historical memory at the domestic level but also brought Spain into these discourses at the international level. In 2002, the ARMH appealed to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to demand that international law regarding enforced disappearances be applied to Spain (ARMH 2015). Complaints about past repression that La Comuna collected in Pamplona were sent to the UN Human Rights Council for evaluation (La Comuna 2024a). The organizations' choice to bring issues of past human rights violations and historical memory in Spain to international fora reflects an understanding that they are not merely domestic affairs but broader matters of civic values that have developed transnationally.

This understanding sparked criticisms of Spain within international institutions, heightening awareness of its divergence from much of the rest of Europe. Various agencies of the UN have criticized the Spanish government's refusal to examine the past. In 2002, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances noted that Spain was not fulfilling its responsibility to investigate disappearances and that the government needed to do more to support investigations; it continued to criticize Spain in a report released the next year (ARMH 2015; Humphrey 2014, 36). These criticisms were followed by scrutiny from global NGOs such as Amnesty International, which in 2005 denounced the Spanish government's inattention to exhumation and identification efforts, calling for it to "recuperate the memory, dignity and

remains of the forgotten victims of the Civil War and Franco's regime." The stance of international organizations against Spain's memory practices gave Spanish civil society actors an international platform, intensifying comparisons between Spain and other countries' responses to past atrocities and casting doubt on Spain's adherence to civic values such as human rights and reconciliation.

Perhaps most damaging for Spain's claims to promote the civic values extolled by international and European institutions was a 2006 PACE resolution dedicated exclusively to questioning Spain's approach to historical memory. The resolution, which was supported by leftist delegates from Spain and drafted with the assistance of prominent British historians of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, repudiated the Franco regime and its human rights abuses and established a day of condemnation (*El Mundo* 2006; PACE 2006). It employed the same international discourses of human rights and transitional justice as Spanish civil society organizations to argue that the CoE had to intervene because gross human rights violations are of universal concern, and ensuring that they are not committed again requires adequate historical education (PACE 2006). The resolution supported initiatives to remove Francoist symbols from public spaces and conduct a thorough study of Franco's dictatorship and its crimes (PACE 2006). It made several recommendations to the Spanish government, including the formation of a national committee to investigate human rights abuses and report to the CoE, the opening of civilian and military archives to researchers, the curation of a permanent exhibit at the Valley of the Fallen explaining the role of Republican prisoners in its construction, and the creation of memorials to honor victims (PACE 2006).

Criticism from the CoE, an organization meant to promote human rights across dozens of European states, was particularly effective in questioning Spain's ability as compared to other

European states to advance fundamental values. Its impact was reflected in and compounded by widespread coverage by prominent Spanish media outlets of “the first condemnation of the Francoist regime at the international level” (Cué 2006; *El Mundo* 2006). Combined with other international condemnations of Spain’s approach to the past and civil society organizations’ efforts, PACE’s resolution inspired a modification of memory practices in Spain.

### ***The 2007 Historical Memory Law***

The most prominent and controversial mechanisms that the Spanish government has used to change the prevailing historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship have been official in nature. The Spanish government has passed two memory laws in the past twenty years, both times under the leadership of the social democratic Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party; PSOE) (Haven 2007; Jones 2022a). The first was the 2007 Historical Memory Law. The law is an explicit response to domestic and international criticism. Its Exposition of Motives recognizes civil society’s “legitimate and just petitions that our democracy, appealing again to its foundational spirit of harmony, and in the framework of the Constitution, cannot ignore” (Ley 52/2007). It also refers to the CoE’s condemnation of the “serious violations of human rights committed in Spain between the years 1939 and 1975” (Ley 52/2007, Exposition of Motives). The Exposition of Motives shows the Spanish government’s efforts to identify the Spanish nation with democracy and human rights despite its shortcomings as compared to others in Europe and around the world.

In keeping with this effort, the Historical Memory Law’s provisions address specific criticisms and discourses that Spanish civil society and international and European institutions deployed to pressure the Spanish government. It attempts to meet demands to confront past

atrocities as a principle of transitional justice by presenting the first official condemnation of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship at the national level and declaring that all politically motivated sentences, punishments, and violence from these periods were unjust (Ley 52/2007, art. 2). It also responds to efforts to ensure the recognition of victims by referring to "people who...suffered the consequences of the civil war and the dictatorial regime," whom it seeks to support or commemorate through monetary reparations and assistance with mass grave exhumations (Ley 52/2007, Exposition of Motives, arts. 5, 12). This acknowledgement marks a shift towards the confrontational stance that civil society and international and European institutions demanded. It addresses the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship as tragedies shared by all Spaniards in an attempt to include those who have previously been alienated by official historical memory and bolster Spain's legitimacy as a nation and a state. It continues to treat the past as a blemish on Spain's credentials as a "European" civic nation, but in accordance with international and European norms surrounding remembrance, human rights, accountability, reconciliation, and guarantees of non-recurrence, it tries to do away with this blemish by repudiating it to define itself as having "overcome" the legacy of fascist violence like other European countries (Judt 1996, 93, 95-96; Kaelble 2005, 20; Rigney 2012, 611).

The law seeks to frame the shift towards a confrontational approach to the past within the discourses that generated it, reclaiming Spain's position as a nation defined by values such as democracy and human rights. It refers to these values repeatedly. For instance, its Exposition of Motives refers repeatedly to the defense of Spanish democracy, "democratic memory," and personal and family memory as part of "democratic citizenship." It also recognizes an individual right to personal and family memory and treats remembering past human rights violations as a means of avoiding future ones (Ley 52/2007, Exposition of Motives). By mimicking civil society

and international and European institutions' language surrounding democracy and human rights, the Historical Memory Law positions Spain as a nation that conforms to the civic principles touted by European institutions. In doing so, it adjusts the historical memory on which common references and belonging to Spain are based so that it accommodates these principles and retains legitimacy with a citizenry demanding alignment with civic conceptions of "Europe" (Anderson 2006, 198; Eder 2005, 197; Kaelble 2005, 20; Rigney 2012, 612-613).

The Historical Memory Law provides for a shift not only in discourses surrounding historical memory but also in how Spanish people and institutions represent themselves in relation to their past. It instructs the government to remove coats of arms, insignia, plaques, and other *lieux de mémoire* conveying narratives that extol the Nationalist uprising, the Spanish Civil War, and Francoist repression (Ley 52/2007, art. 15; Nora 1989, 23). It bans the decades-old invented tradition of political activities and praise for the Spanish Civil War, those involved in it, and Francoism at the Valley of the Fallen in an effort to reject the fascist ideology that it buttresses (Cuéllar 2022, 17:53; Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 1; Ley 52/2007, art. 15). It also tries to repurpose the basilica complex itself, pushing back against its glorification of the Spanish Civil War and Franco by specifying that only Spanish Civil War dead can be buried there as an homage to victims of past violence (Ley 52/2007, art. 5; Lim 2010, 140). Finally, it charges the government with the documentation of the past and seeks to encourage historical research through funding initiatives; this provision of the law unabashedly compares Spain to other places grappling with difficult pasts by mandating the compilation of information on similar documentation and research efforts in other countries (Ley 52/2007, art. 20).

Such measures change the objectives of and narrative preserved by Spanish *lieux de mémoire* and expand the range of available narratives while avoiding nostalgia for fascism and

dictatorship. In doing so, they allow new versions of historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Francoism to proliferate in everyday life and exchanges. The goal seems to be to facilitate a widespread redefinition of Spain as a nation that unequivocally protects and promotes values such as peace, democracy, and human rights. The fact that this redefinition is mediated largely through visible sites indicates that the change is not for the benefit of Spanish audiences alone. Each of the aforementioned provisions of the Historical Memory Law meet particular demands articulated in the 2006 PACE resolution. This, combined with comparisons between Spain and other countries present in the text of the law, show that the Historical Memory Law was part of a larger project to shore up Spain's image as a nation that advances the same civic ideals as others in Europe.

### *Continued Domestic and Transnational Controversy*

The response to transnational and domestic pressures to alter the prevailing historical memory of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism drew mixed reactions within Spain, but overall, circumstances favored further attempts to confront past abuses in accordance with political principles promoted internationally and across Europe. Spanish civil society and outside observers have criticized several elements of the law, including its dependence on private exhumation efforts, inability to vacate the politically motivated sentences that it declares illegitimate, and refusal to overturn the Amnesty Law to permit the prosecution of perpetrators of injustices (Faber 2021, 24; Golob 2022, 63-64). Díaz-Cardiel asserts that the Historical Memory Law “does nothing” and is “out of place” because of the Spanish government's unwillingness to translate discursive and symbolic shifts into concrete political action, a concern that is echoed by others who have pressed for different ways of remembering the past (Díaz-Cardiel 2009, Part 10,

12:00; Golob 2022, 63-65). Conversely, Spain's conservative political parties have argued that the law does too much to encourage grievances and vengeance, disrupting the semblance of social and political stability achieved by the "fratricide" narrative and the *pacto del olvido* (Haven 2007).

In a reflection of debates over changing the dominant historical memory in Spain, the application and effects of the law have varied. In some autonomous communities, officials have not enforced it, while in others, including Andalusia, Asturias, and Navarre, they have added to it by supporting mass grave exhumations and designing school curricula intended to defend democracy and human rights (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 4; Golob 2022, 65; Humphrey 2014, 40). The lack of consensus around how best to recognize victims of past abuses and present Spain as a nation that conforms to civic ideals associated with European states and institutions presented the possibility of further change once the Historical Memory Law made contending with the past a politically salient issue.

Events in Spain in the years after the passage of the Historical Memory Law helped generate more political pressure and debate concerning how the past is remembered. The fallout from the 2008 global financial crisis and Spanish debt crisis spawned the left-wing populist 15M protest movement (Faber 2021, 8). 15M faulted the "regime of 1978"—the year the Spanish Constitution was approved as part of the transition to democracy—for Spain's troubles on the grounds that it was insular, corrupt, undemocratic, and unrepresentative (Faber 2021, 8-9; Sánchez-Cuenca 2022). To express its grievances against a political system with continuities from Franco's regime, it began to reclaim symbols from before its establishment, such as the flag of the Second Republic (Faber 2021, 31). The resemblance between 15M and the history it sought to recover went beyond symbolism in 2020, when Podemos (We Can), a political party

stemming from 15M, helped form Spain's first progressive coalition government since the days of the Republic (Faber 2021, 9). This turn of events facilitated an "inversion of conventional genealogy" connecting Spain and its values to the Republic rather than Franco's dictatorship, creating an opportunity to continue shifting Spanish people and institutions' relationship with the past at a time when many were clearly still dissatisfied with and alienated from Spain and its failure to practice its purported civic principles (Anderson 2006, 205).

New possibilities for remembering the past were also highlighted in 2019, when Francisco Franco's corpse was removed from the Valley of the Fallen in accordance with the Historical Memory Law's provision that only Spanish Civil War dead could be buried at the site as part of its "redefinition" as tragic rather than glorious (Cuéllar 2022, 20:00; Ley 52/2007, art. 15). The significance of this alteration to the most prominent *lieu de mémoire* related to the Spanish Civil War and Francoism was hotly debated. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez hailed Franco's disinterment, proclaiming, "Today, Spain has fulfilled a promise to itself... With this, a moral shame—which is what extolling a dictator in a public space is—finally comes to an end" (Faber 2021, 6). In contrast, conservatives called it unfair, and Franco's descendants were outraged (Faber 2021, 6-7). While these figures saw the exhumation as dishonorable, many leftists thought it was too dignified considering Franco's crimes, as he still received a ceremony in which his family played a central role (Faber 2021, 6). The debate surrounding Franco's exhumation ensured that broader debates surrounding the way his uprising and dictatorship are remembered and its implications for contemporary Spanish politics would persist.

As events within Spain continued to compel its government and people to modify their memories, international and European institutions also maintained pressure on Spain. In 2018, the EP passed a motion against neofascist violence, including several incidents in Spain (Faber

2021, 33). The motion specifically condemned Spain's Francisco Franco National Foundation, which glorifies Franco's legacy through measures ranging from education to merchandising, as "an entity that glorifies a dictatorship and its crimes" (Faber 2021, 33; Jones 2024). The motion cast Spain's failure to fundamentally reshape remembrance of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship as part of a larger problem of the erosion of civic values across Europe. It simultaneously affirmed that Spain was part of a broader "Europe" based on civic ideals and shamed the country for failing to live up to those ideals. This suggested that it needed to do more to guarantee that historical memory was aligned with "European" principles.

Continued pressure from the UN added to Spain's embarrassment over its incomplete confrontation with the legacies of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. In 2009, the UN Human Rights Committee exhorted Spain to abolish the Amnesty Law (Humphrey 2014, 37). Four years later, a report from the UN CED echoed the UN Human Rights Committee's denunciation of the Amnesty Law (2013b). It also expressed concern about the privatization of memorialization efforts and pointed out that Spain's legal definitions surrounding enforced disappearances were out of step with international law, impeding adequate investigations of and reparations for past disappearances (UN CED 2013b). It recommended that the Spanish state take a more active role in investigations and remembrance through measures such as the creation of a DNA bank to support efforts to identify disappeared persons (UN CED 2013b). The CED's report contradicted the information that Spain had submitted to the body prior to its release, which portrayed the country as a consolidated democracy that upholds the rule of law (UN CED 2013a). This embarrassment was compounded in 2014, when the UN questioned the effectiveness of the Historical Memory Law since not all schools provided the same information on Francoist repression despite educational reforms (Díez-Gutiérrez 2022, 5). Each of these developments

highlighted Spain's disjuncture from international and European norms, generating pressure for more thorough reforms to memory practices. Their impact was heightened since they were noted in Spanish academia and media (Chinchón Álvarez 2018, 3-6; *Noticias ONU* 2021). The pressure that international institutions exerted culminated in a 2021 statement by the CED supporting a proposed new memory law in Spain (*Noticias ONU* 2021).

### ***The 2022 Democratic Memory Law***

In response to the aforementioned pressures, the Spanish Parliament replaced the Historical Memory Law with the Democratic Memory Law in 2022 (Ley 20/2022, Derogation Provision). The Democratic Memory Law further advances the confrontational approach of the Historical Memory Law by repudiating Franco's regime as a whole, nullifying politically motivated sentences handed down under it, facilitating reparations for victims of repression, and changing memory practices (Ley 20/2022, arts. 1, 5, 30-59). Its preamble establishes the aim of fitting Spain into a civic conception of "Europe." It refers to international impetuses for the law, including the 2006 PACE resolution and a 2009 EP resolution calling for the construction of a shared European identity that protects democratic values and opposes authoritarianism (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). It also recognizes "the growing internationalization of democratic memory policies in Spain," mentioning visits by the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Special Rapporteur for Truth, Justice and Reparation that resulted in recommendations that the Spanish state take more responsibility for the remembrance of past human rights abuses and atrocities (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). The acknowledgement of international and especially European institutions' pressure for a revision of historical memory frames the law as an attempt to conform to their civic values.

The preamble of the Democratic Memory Law justifies the statute using not only the Spanish government's recent motivation but also a broader European context. Like the Historical Memory Law, it draws on discourses that Spanish civil society and international and European institutions have employed. It utilizes antifascist and Holocaust remembrance discourses by comparing the crimes committed during the Spanish Civil War to those for which Nazis were condemned at the Nuremberg trials and describing the Holocaust as the reason for "democratic memory policies" as a "moral duty." (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). It also borrows the "Never Again" slogan to explain the importance of legislating historical memory (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). The Democratic Memory Law's comparison between the Spanish Civil War and other harms of European fascism as well as its ready acceptance of the concept of confronting the past to "overcome" it portray Spain as a participant in a struggle to preserve particular political ideals jointly with other European countries. This formalizes an image of Spain as defending the same civic values as the rest of Europe.

The Democratic Memory Law's preamble also presents the law as a Europeanizing project by borrowing from discourses related to democracy. It contains an "inversion of conventional genealogy" detailing a Spanish liberal democratic tradition dating back to the nineteenth century and including the Second Republic, which was "abruptly interrupted" by Franco's coup d'état (Anderson 2006, 205; Ley 20/2022, Preamble). The narrative picks back up with the transition to democracy, which the law describes as part of the "defense of democracy" and the "antifascist struggle" that led to "the period of the greatest splendor and prosperity" in Spain (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). It argues that certain ways of remembering this historical narrative are essential to protecting Spanish democracy (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). By asserting that Spain has a centuries-long tradition of democratic values associated with institutional

Europe and labeling Francoism as anomalous rather than characteristic of the country, the Democratic Memory Law elides Spain's divergence from civic understandings of "Europe." The law's treatment of historical memory as a component of democracy also helps it fit into post-World War II European discourses.

The Democratic Memory Law's references to international human rights and transitional justice discourses perform a similar function. Its preamble emphasizes Spain's accession to international human rights treaties during its transition to democracy, which it claims has made the country an "international reference for its level of development, recognition, and guarantees of public freedoms and for how advanced and committed its system of civil rights" is (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). It reaffirms a right to personal and family memory (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). While the law does not reverse the Amnesty Law, it claims to implement international humanitarian law, which does not permit amnesty for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, all labels that have been applied to the events of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). It also acknowledges that victims are entitled to truth, justice, recognition, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence (Ley 20/2022, Preamble). While these sections of the preamble are inaccurate and contradictory, their attempt to mirror the discourses that have been used to criticize Spain indicates that the law is part of a project to bolster Spain's claims to adhere to particular civic principles and to comply with international norms that protect human rights and promote transitional justice.

Sections of the Democratic Memory Law go beyond merely reframing Spanish history and mandate concrete measures to alter the dominant historical memory in accordance with the preferences of international and European institutions. The law responds to UN criticisms of Spain's approach to enforced disappearances under the dictatorship by providing support to

NGOs searching for the disappeared, creating maps of mass graves, authorizing exhumations, and establishing the DNA bank proposed by the CED (Ley 20/2022, arts. 14, 16-17, 23). It heeds the UN and the CoE's demands concerning history education and preservation by expanding access to archives, making "democratic memory" and "the struggle for democratic values and freedoms" part of school curricula, and following the CoE's recommendation to establish days of commemoration for victims of repression and exile (Ley 20/2022, arts. 7-8, 25-27, 44). These measures have the potential to change the education and everyday experiences that inculcate historical memory and to invent a tradition of mourning and repudiating Francoism in the name of values such as democracy and human rights (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 1; Lim 2010, 140).

The Democratic Memory Law is especially concerned with responding to international and European institutions' concerns about continued homage to Francoism in public spaces. It strengthens bans on symbols and statements that honor the 1936 coup d'état, the dictatorship, those who enabled them, and the Axis powers; it also prohibits discrediting and embarrassing victims and their families (Ley 20/2022, art. 35, 38). It lays out plans for public events and "places of democratic memory" on sites relevant to the Spanish Civil War and Francoism that will be documented and advertised to ensure engagement (Ley 20/2022, arts. 49-53). There is a particular emphasis on "redefining" the Valley of the Fallen. In addition to reiterating existing restrictions on the site, the Democratic Memory Law seeks to desacralize it by renaming it the Valley of Cuelgamuros, shutting down the Benedictine monastery administering it, and "redefining" the complex as a "place of democratic memory" by changing how it is presented to the public (Ley 20/2022, art. 54). It also offers exhumation services and reparations to families whose loved ones were buried there without consent (Ley 20/2022, art. 54). These provisions not only limit the normalization of Francoism and forgetting permitted by public spaces but also seek

to modify these spaces and establish new *lieux de mémoire*, allowing everyday experiences to encourage further confrontation with the past and consolidate a national self-understanding around which more Spaniards could coalesce (Nora 1989, 12, 23). In doing so, the provisions help address the CoE's criticisms of the glorification of Francoism and ignorance of the human rights abuses that allowed Cuelgamuros to be built as well as the EP's concerns about neofascism. This permits Spain's government and society to address their historical differences from much of the rest of Europe with regards to the political principles promoted by European institutions.

The Democratic Memory Law takes the aforementioned measures with a European audience in mind. It encourages research on connections between the legacies of war and dictatorship in Spain and elsewhere in the name of "highlighting the European and global component of democratic memory in Spain" (Ley 20/2022, arts. 15-45). It also proposes that "places of democratic memory" develop ties with and highlight their similarities to other sites, especially those in Europe (Ley 20/2022, art. 53). These aspects of the law highlight that its attempt to change the dominant historical memory of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism is meant to redefine Spain not only to create common references for the Spanish population but also to prove Spain's similarity to other European nations and states with regard to principles and institutions (Anderson 2006, 198; Eder 2005, 197).

### ***Challenges to Spain's Memory Laws***

Like the Historical Memory Law, the Democratic Memory Law has provoked a variety of reactions. Civil society actors in Spain continue to find official mechanisms for modifying memories of the past to be inadequate. They have demanded measures beyond the provisions of

the law, including more reparations, the publication of a census of all who benefited economically from Franco's dictatorship, and an investigation of the Catholic Church's support for Franco's regime (Jones 2022a). They have also expressed frustration that for all of its condemnations of the Franco's regime's repression and human rights abuses, the government still refuses to overturn the Amnesty Law preventing legal consequences (Jones 2022a).

Spain's conservative parties, on the other hand, have found the Democratic Memory Law too disruptive. The PP and Vox have labeled those seeking a confrontation with the past as "*guerracivilistas*," implying that they are in favor of civil war, and threatened to repeal the Democratic Memory Law should they come to power (Belver 2024; Jones 2022a). These parties have already resisted the law at the local level in Valencia, Aragon, and Castile and León by enacting "harmony laws" that decline to refer explicitly to Franco's dictatorship and limit the activities of organizations, websites, and other projects related to historical memory (RTVE 2024). However, even this pushback against the Democratic Memory Law suggests that the law's purpose is to portray Spain as a nation and state that adheres to civic ideals associate with "Europe," as the Spanish government has brought complaints about "harmony laws" to international and European fora including the UN, the CoE, and the EP (RTVE 2024). The internationalization and Europeanization of Spain's struggles over historical memory firmly position them as a matter of the country's "European" credentials. The government's statements equating historical memory and democracy following UN experts' condemnation of "harmony laws" confirm that its attempts to change the mechanisms inculcating historical memory in Spain are a matter of portraying Spain as aligned with civic ideals associated with "Europe" (RTVE 2024).

The Democratic Memory Law has prompted not only controversy but also questions as to its effectiveness in influencing historical memory. Francoist narratives of the past and attempts to erase the past altogether are still prominent. Open veneration of Franco, while in decline until the mid-2010s, is still accepted in Spanish society (Faber 2021, 44). A 2010 poll indicates that one-third of Spaniards believe that there was more “order and peace” under Franco than now (Faber 2021, 38). This sentiment inspires older Spaniards to continue to pay homage to Franco at the Valley of Cuelgamuros individually so as not to run afoul of Spanish law. It also motivates gatherings in honor of Franco on the anniversary of his death, at which claims to defend “Christian Europe” persist, albeit in response to relatively new developments such as high levels of immigration (Faber 2021, 44-45). In a reflection of the continued influence of Francoist memories, changes to public spaces have been slow or nonexistent. For example, a Francoist triumphal arch remains in Madrid’s Moncloa neighborhood (see Figure 3.8).



*Figure 3.8: The Francoist Arco de la Victoria (Victory Arch) in Moncloa (Mirador Madrid 2024)*

Additionally, the monks running the Valley of Cuelgamuros have resisted changes to everything from its name to its administration, keeping the site inaccessible, sacralized, and difficult to challenge. They have found support through an agreement between the Spanish government and the Vatican that stipulates that while the basilica can be contextualized and reframed, religious ceremonies must continue there, and the monks cannot be expelled (Cruz Martín 2024).

An additional opportunity and challenge for the implementation of the Democratic Memory Law is the rapid and widespread production, publication, and consumption of historical narratives through the internet and social media. This development has provided an outlet and an audience for narratives that have been suppressed in official sources, educational curricula, traditional media, and public space. For example, the same year that the Spanish Parliament passed the Democratic Memory Law, a group of historians from Spain, France, Canada, and the United States launched the Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War (Jones 2022b). The website, which constitutes the first museum dedicated to the history of the conflict, contains documentation and artifacts on topics ranging from experiences of war in individual autonomous communities to Republicans' exile, preserving and disseminating narratives that were previously obscured (Jones 2022b; Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War 2025). Innovations such as the Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War could build support for the historical memory and policies promoted by the Democratic Memory Law, limiting pushback and facilitating its implementation.

However, the freedom in information production and publication on the internet that yielded the Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War also has the potential to undermine the Democratic Memory Law by permitting the rehabilitation of Franco's memory. Although younger Spaniards proved pivotal in advancing more confrontational approaches to the past, they are also vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation on social media (Ferrándiz 2008, 183-185; Junquera 2025). TikTok poses a particular risk (Junquera 2025). One-fifth of people under the age of thirty-five get most of their information from the app, and Spanish users frequently encounter videos reviving Francoist anthems and insignia, attributing Spain's economic development to Franco, blaming the Second Spanish Republic for the Spanish Civil

War, and claiming that the PSOE wants to start another war through the Democratic Memory Law (Junquera 2025). The proliferation of such narratives online could increase opposition to the Democratic Memory Law and impede its implementation.

No aspect of Spanish politics demonstrates the persistence of Francoist narratives better than the far-right party Vox's success over the last decade. Vox broke off from the PP because of what its founders perceived as moderation on social issues such as gender and immigration as well as concerns about Basque and Catalan separatism (López Escribano 2022, 135). It has since advocated for a return to "tradition" on social issues, gaining traction as it propagates the notion that the Spanish nation as imagined by Franco has been threatened by immigration from predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Zhou 2023). Because of Vox's political positions, its critics tend to brand it as a revival of Francoism (Hedgecoe 2019). The party certainly does try to preserve Francoist conceptions of the past in relation to Spanish national identity. It vehemently opposed the exhumation of Franco, and a 2019 LaSexta poll indicates that 58.5 percent of its voters do not believe that Franco's regime was a dictatorship (Hedgecoe 2019; LaSexta 2019). Vox's reverence for Franco and his ideas risks eroding respect for civic values such as democracy. A 2020 El Plural poll shows that twenty-one percent of Vox's 3.7 million voters agree that "[i]n some circumstances, an authoritarian government is preferable to a democratic system." Although Vox has the potential to jeopardize Spain's adherence to civic ideals associated with "Europe," its appropriation of Francoist concepts of Spain and "Europe" as defined in ethnic and cultural terms remains a means of asserting Spain's Europeaness. Its popularity demonstrates that both civic and ethnic understandings of belonging to Spain and "Europe" are politically impactful, causing further controversy over the past's implications for national and "European" identities today.

Overall, Spaniards remain highly polarized on the issue of historical memory. A poll conducted by Redfield and Wilson Strategies in 2020, over a decade after the promulgation of the Historical Memory Law and just before the passage of the Democratic Memory Law, reports that thirty-five percent of Spaniards, including forty-five percent of PSOE voters and seventy-two percent of Podemos voters, find that the Spanish public is too generous in its historical assessment of Franco (Redfield and Wilson Strategies Research Team 2020). Twenty-five percent, including thirty-eight percent of PP voters and sixty-one percent of Vox voters, believe that the Spanish public is too critical of Franco (Redfield and Wilson Strategies Research Team 2020). These figures indicate that since memories of the past are always a matter of present political needs, they will remain contested and dynamic.<sup>8</sup> The dominant historical memory of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism will not take a final, definitive form, but it is important to understand debates about it because of their implications for how the Spanish government and its people define their nation and its place in international and European politics.

## **Conclusion**

Historical memory regarding the Spanish Civil War and Franco's regime has gone through various phases since the mid-twentieth century, including the "crusade" narrative of the mid-twentieth century, the "fratricide" narrative and forgetting associated with the transition to democracy, and the more confrontational approach of the last several decades. Each narrative has served the distinct needs of the actors promoting it and is shaped by specific political contexts and contingencies, yet they are all the result of transnational and especially European

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<sup>8</sup> Additional disputes that are likely to unfold in the near future involve the implementation of the Democratic Memory Law's provisions surrounding education and museums, efforts to shut down the Francisco Franco National Foundation, and the Spanish government's 2025 commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of Franco's death. For additional information, see Coego 2024, Jones 2024, ARMH 2025, and Heller 2025.

developments. Therefore, they frame Spain as a “European” nation as understood by those with political power during the relevant time period. Attempts to portray Spain as a “European” nation through memories of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism have largely focused on civic understandings of Spain and “Europe.” However, the Francoist notion of a “crusade” to defend Spain and the “Christian Europe” to which it belongs hints at another, ethnic conception of Europeanness that is just as important to Spanish national identity as the civic one. The next chapter will explore additional understandings of belonging to Spain and “Europe” by analyzing memory practices surrounding Spain’s disjuncture from it in the form of centuries of Muslim rule during the Middle Ages.

## Chapter 4

### Historical Memory of al-Andalus

*“How we weave together...fragments into coherent stories about the past depends as much on the historical archive as it does on the hopes, desires, and ideals that we project onto the past.... In the end, assertions about the tolerance of Islamic Córdoba tell us more about our current moment than they do about the medieval past.”*

*-Eric Calderwood*

#### Introduction

Transnational pressures on Spain to revise historical memory regarding past disjunctures from particular ideas of “Europe” are not confined to narratives of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship. In the nineteenth century, the French expression “Africa begins south of the Pyrenees” was a common means of explaining Spain’s distinction from the rest of “Europe,” which some observers interpreted as economic and cultural backwardness (Calderwood 2014, 40). Over the past several decades, travel companies have embraced the idea that “Spain is different” but suggested that rather than displaying backwardness, this difference enriches Spain and “Europe” (Iberia 2016).

While one claim is intended to belittle divergence, and the other celebrates it, both are rooted in the same history. In 711, Muslim Umayyad forces defeated the Visigoths to establish al-Andalus in much of the Iberian Peninsula (Taseer 2022). For the next seven centuries, Muslims ruled over populations that also included Christians and Jews, leading to complicated cultural and political intermingling that remains influential and is idealized by some scholars, religious leaders, and politicians as “tolerance” or *convivencia* (“coexistence”) (Lenker 2022). However, Christian rulers asserted control over al-Andalus during the *Reconquista* between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, culminating in the fall of the final remaining Muslim kingdom of Granada in 1492 (Taseer 2022). Monarchs of the nascent Spanish nation-state initially

promised to maintain the religious and cultural pluralism of al-Andalus but ultimately demanded that Muslims convert to Christianity and violently suppressed these converts and their descendants, the Moriscos, through the Inquisition (Taseer 2022). This oppression culminated in ethnic cleansing with the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain in 1609 (Taseer 2022).

The processes of homogenization that took place in the centuries following the *Reconquista* are now key elements of Spain's founding myth (Hirschkind 2021, 61). The notion that Spain was established through violence against Muslims and their descendants fits with an ethnic or cultural understanding of "Europe" as invariably white, Christian, and opposed to Islam (Rigney 2012, 616; Spohn 2005, 5). At the opening of the Grand Mosque of Granada in 2003, religious leaders depicted this narrative as a precursor to developments ranging from colonialism to genocide against Muslims in the Balkans (Abend 2008, 141). Al-Andalus and Spain's founding myth are also relevant to a civic understanding of Europeanness as entailing political values such as democracy, human rights, and "tolerance" (Kaelble 2005, 20; *El País* 2023; Rigney 2012, 612-613). Today, scholars and policymakers disagree as to whether the "tolerance" and *convivencia* associated with al-Andalus were exceptional, entirely fictional, or a useful model for multicultural democracies (Anidjar 2008, 195-196). Arguments over the historicity of particular civic ideals have implications for their implementation in the present as Islamophobic violence, opposition to Muslim practices such as worship in mosques, and Vox's ascent erode human rights, basic freedoms, and democratic practices in Spain (Figueras 2012; Hedgecoe 2019; Moreno 2000). Historical memory surrounding al-Andalus and its consequences for ethnic and civic nationalisms in Spain have become especially salient due to the increasing visibility of Islam in Spain through immigration from Muslim countries, anxieties surrounding terrorism, and the commodification of al-Andalus for tourism (Coleman 2008, 131; Euronews 2023).

Historical memory of Spain's Islamic past has not followed a discernible overall trajectory as in the case of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism; however, disputes about the significance of al-Andalus for contemporary Spain are like those surrounding twentieth-century political repression in that they raise the issue of Spain's belonging to various conceptions of "Europe" and tend to assert Spain's Europeanness in ethnic and civic terms. This chapter will examine perspectives on how al-Andalus should be remembered in relation to Spain and "Europe" before surveying recent issues that have reinvigorated centuries-old debates. It will then analyze the overlapping but sometimes contradictory contemporary memory practices surrounding al-Andalus that contribute to a civic and ethnic "European" national identity for Spain: forgetting, villainization, and idealization.

### **Historical Debates on the Legacy of al-Andalus in Spain**

The legacy of al-Andalus and its implications for Spanish national identity have been points of contention since the *Reconquista*. As they created criteria for inclusion and exclusion to define their new nation-state, Spain's rulers questioned whether Muslims and later Moriscos could be assimilated into a Christian Spain or would betray the country to its rival, the Ottoman Empire, on the basis of cultural affinity (Perry 2008, 76). Once they chose to construct Spanish nationhood in part on the exclusion and eventual absence of Muslims and Moriscos, various intellectuals grappled with the societal implications; the best-known example is Miguel de

Cervantes' decision to pen several chapters in *Don Quijote* addressing the "Morisco question"<sup>9</sup> (Cervantes 2020, Volume 2, Chapters LIV, LXIII; Hirschkind 2021, 26-67).

Attempts to determine the significance of al-Andalus for Spain have continued since. Scholars and politicians of various ideologies developed a particular interest in the matter during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to Romantic nostalgia for the past, Orientalist fascination with Islam, and Spain's colonization of North Africa (Calderwood 2014, 28-31, 40, 46-48). Their work addressed two recurring questions. The first of these concerned the nature of the relationship between Spain and Islam. One response was that the two were essentially opposed to one another. The most prominent twentieth-century proponent of this notion was Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, a historian and exiled Republican leader who struggled to identify the roots of Spain's political divergence from most of Western Europe (García-Sanjuán 2016, 5). He argued that relations between Christians and Muslims in al-Andalus could only have been "superficial and hostile," so the *Reconquista* was "Spain's great, divinely ordained mission" and the beginning of Spain's modern historical trajectory (García-Sanjuán 2016, 6; Hirschkind 2021, 70). "[I]t was bad for Spain that the Muslims entered it and for our good that they were defeated and expelled," he claimed. "We, the Spanish people, we should thank God for having freed us from Islam" (García-Sanjuán 2016, 6). Sánchez-Albornoz's rejection of the possibility of harmonious relations between Christians and Muslims suggests that Spain can only be home to one or the other; his depiction of the *Reconquista* as an isolated reference point for the start of Spanish history implies that al-Andalus should not have influenced modern Spain. These

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<sup>9</sup> Cervantes responds to the "Morisco question" through Sancho Panza's encounter with the Morisco Ricote, who has reentered Spain illicitly after the 1609 expulsion. Ricote mourns his exile from his beloved homeland while also portraying himself as an inadequate Christian and expressing support for the decree that mandated his expulsion. He seeks to recover his wealth and invites Sancho to assist him; Sancho refuses on the grounds that doing so would be a betrayal of his king, but he agrees not to reveal Ricote's presence. Ricote is ultimately permitted to remain in Spain because of the Christian piety of his daughter. For detailed analyses of the Ricote episode, see Fajardo 2001 and Selig 1974.

assertions define belonging to Spain in ethnic or cultural terms that include those who can claim Christian heritage and exclude those with ties to Islam.

Some of Sánchez-Albornoz's contemporaries took an alternative approach to Spain's relationship with Islam; instead of envisioning primordial enmity with Islam, they posited that the *convivencia* they believed characterized al-Andalus should be recovered to resolve modern Spain's troubles. The most famous articulation of this claim is that of Américo Castro, an exiled literary scholar who popularized the term *convivencia* in reference to al-Andalus while searching the past for a solution to Francoist repression in the 1940s (Hirschkind 2021, 10). He stated that Spanish national identity was based on the interdependence and collaboration among people from different cultures that existed in al-Andalus; thus, Spain needed to revive this aspect of its history in order for its political situation to change (Hirschkind 2021, 10). Whereas Sánchez-Albornoz shunned the legacy of al-Andalus and insisted on modern Spain's ethnic and cultural homogeneity, Castro treated al-Andalus as a common origin for all Spaniards and implied that pluralism and political principles that facilitate it should define Spain.

Several of Castro's predecessors and peers made related arguments. They often sought to use the religious and cultural pluralism of medieval Spain as a means of distinguishing the nation with which they identified. Blas Infante, a politician, writer, and pioneer of Andalusian nationalism, devised an "*internationalist* nationalism" that cast Andalusia as the successor to al-Andalus and therefore posited that Andalusians are "Euro-Africans, Euro-Orientals, universalist men, harmonious syntheses of men" (Calderwood 2014, 37). He also claimed that the expulsion of the Moriscos was a crime against Andalusians that needed to be redressed (Hirschkind 2021, 105). Rodolfo Gil Benumeya, an Arabist and political thinker grappling with Spain's loss of its overseas colonies in 1898 and the establishment of the Spanish protectorate in

Morocco in 1912, thought similarly (Hirschkind 2021, 39-41). He insisted that Spain had to recover Andalusí glory through cooperation with Arab societies, which he considered Spain's natural ally because of historical ties (Hirschkind 2021, 37, 42). Ignacio Olagüe, a fascist emerging from the Spanish Civil War and seeking to denaturalize past instances of difference and conflict in Spain, went beyond Infante and Gil Benumeya's claims of Spanish hybridity or affinity with Muslim societies to insist that al-Andalus and the adoption of Islam on the Iberian Peninsula were endogenous developments rather than the result of conquest (Abend 2008, 139-140; García-Sanjuán 2016, 6; Hirschkind 2021, 63). Despite their distinct motives and backgrounds, each of these thinkers embraced Spain's history with Islam as a shared experience that directly impacted Spanish politics and culture during their time.

Based on their reading of the past and resulting interpretations of the relationship between Spain and Islam, intellectuals and politicians such as Sánchez-Albornoz, Castro, and Gil Benumeya also contemplated the impact of al-Andalus on Spain's belonging to "Europe," which was defined in various ways and approached with skepticism by observers from outside of Spain (Calderwood 2014, 28). There is a well-established anti-European current among some who claim affinity with al-Andalus. For example, Infante advanced his Andalusian nationalism by denying any link between Andalusia and "Germanic" people in northern Europe and proclaiming, "We cannot be, we don't want to be, we will never become Europeans"<sup>10</sup> (Calderwood 2014, 39). Olagüe portrayed "Europeans" as conquerors rather than re-conquerors of the Iberian Peninsula, suggesting that Spain is separate from the rest of "Europe" (Calderwood 2014, 39). Infante and Olagüe's arguments raise questions about "decentering Europe" and the

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<sup>10</sup> Infante was responding in part to an effort by King Carlos III to repopulate Andalusia with Germans, Flemings, and Swiss people in the 1760s. For further details, see Archivo Canal Sur 1994.

interaction between sub-state and state nationalisms on the one hand and supranational concepts such as “Europe” on the other.

Infante and Olagüe form a dialogue with frequent claims to Europeanness based on Spain’s Islamic past. One perspective, voiced by Sánchez-Albornoz, expresses that Spain is deficient as compared to its neighbors but belongs to “Europe” as much as they do because it has defended them against Islam, the supposed antithesis of “Europe.” He argued that although “[s]low-witted, barbaric Africa...twisted and distorted the future fate of Iberia, and took it down a path which cost Spain dear,” Spain was “European” and not African (Aidi 2006, 71). What he saw as the country’s intolerant and impoverished society was the price it paid for shielding the rest of “Europe” from Islam (Aidi 2006, 71). This racist, essentialist notion assumes a fundamental cultural incompatibility between not only Spain but the entirety of “Europe” and Islam, indicating that by claiming the historical role of combating Islam, Spain can cement its place in “Europe.”

In contrast with Sánchez-Albornoz, others claim that the religious and cultural diversity of al-Andalus was a forerunner not only to Spain but also to modern “Europe.” While he emphasized Andalusia’s distinction from “Europe,” Infante also declared that “it is glorious Andalucía to whom Europe and the world owe the nourishment...of the roots of the Renaissance” (Calderwood 2014, 37). Castro argued that Spain made significant cultural contributions to “Europe” through literature and philosophy inspired by Muslim thinkers and therefore fit within it from a cultural perspective<sup>11</sup> (Aidi 2006, 70). Castro’s use of Andalusian pluralism as a counterpoint to the social exclusion caused by Franco’s dictatorship and its National Catholic ideology anchors Spanish history in political values such as “tolerance” that

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<sup>11</sup> An extended contemporary version of Castro’s argument is made in the British Film Institute documentary *When the Moors Ruled in Europe*. See Copestake 2005.

make Spain appear similar to other parts of Western Europe in civic terms and portray the country's repressive mid-twentieth-century politics as an aberration (Filios 2008, 92).

Some also held more ambiguous or contradictory views on the implications of al-Andalus for Spain's status as a "European" nation. For example, Gil Benumeya stated that Spain's historical connection to Islamic societies implied a special role for Spain in countering the global dominance of other European powers, yet he simultaneously proposed the concept of *Mediodía*, a particular political and cultural identity for Spain that did not fit into dichotomies between Islam and "Europe" (Hirschkind 2021, 37). To complicate matters further, most contemporary readers of Gil Benumeya criticize his grandiose notions as a paternalistic excuse for Spain's twentieth-century colonial adventures in North Africa, which constituted an effort to maintain geopolitical heft and prestige relative to other European powers (Hirschkind 2021, 38-40).

Given the subjective, contentious, and dynamic nature of historical memory and its role in shaping national identities, the questions that Gil Benumeya and others raised regarding the impact of al-Andalus on Spain's relationship to Islam and belonging to "Europe" have not been resolved. However, just as these figures were spurred by the political circumstances of their time to revisit al-Andalus, actors at different levels of Spanish politics and society continue to draw on Spain's history with Islam to achieve their ends and conform to particular understandings of "Europe." They often echo the arguments articulated over the past several centuries, responding to new catalysts for debate regarding the legacy of al-Andalus.

### **Catalysts for Contemporary Contestation of the Islamic Past**

Although the *Reconquista* was completed over 500 years ago, and many of the most prominent writers on the legacy of al-Andalus expounded their ideas roughly a century ago, the means by

which various contemporary actors remember and reproduce Spain's history with Islam remain relevant. Historical memory surrounding al-Andalus is constructed in part through the agendas of domestic actors, including the Roman Catholic Church's efforts to cement its privileged position in Spanish society, Spanish converts' opposition to their country's history of centralized nationalism and imperialism, and the Spanish government's attempts to expand Spain's foreign policy footprint (Abend 2008, 136, 150; Soriano and Rubiales 2007, 100-105). Additionally, Spain's majority-Muslim autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa are a constant reminder of unresolved questions regarding the place of Islam in Spain (Abdelhadi 2021).

However, transnational developments have also catalyzed debates regarding historical memory of al-Andalus over the past several decades. Particularly salient among these is societal discomfort with Spain's transformation from an emigrant-sending country to an immigrant-receiving one as a result of its transition to democracy, European integration, and economic development (Flesler 2008, 117). While the Spanish census does not record data on religion, it is estimated that Muslims—both immigrants and converts—comprise about five percent of Spain's population (Coleman 2008, 164; Sempere 2024). Moroccans, who are predominantly Muslim, are the largest immigrant group in Spain, with a population of about 880,000; an increasing number of Moroccan immigrants have acquired Spanish citizenship over the past few years (Euronews 2023). While Muslims in Spain are still a small minority overall, native Spaniards have felt their increased presence acutely. A 2024 poll by *El País* found that fifty-seven percent of Spaniards think that there is an “excessive” number of immigrants, with a quarter expressing support for special restrictions on immigration from the Maghreb (Junquera 2024). Spaniards' heightened attention to the presence of immigrants and particularly Moroccans indicates uneasiness with immigration and the changes it has brought to the “prepolitical

community” upon which Spanish civic nationalism is based, sparking backlash in the name of preserving a narrow understanding of who benefits from Spanish political values (Tamir 2019, 428-429; Yack 1999, 107-110). This uneasiness is exemplified by the role of opposition to Muslim immigrants’ visible displays of their religion and culture, such as worship in mosques or wearing the hijab, in sparking conflict over Islam’s history and current place in Spain (Figueras 2012).

International political and security challenges have compounded anxieties about the implications of al-Andalus’ legacy for Spain’s present. The Spanish government’s shift away from its pro-Arab foreign policy and recognition of Israel following the transition to democracy encouraged the idea that Spain is a nation developed in opposition to Islam (Aidi 2006, 69-70). Additionally, the September 11 attacks, Spain’s controversial participation in the Iraq War<sup>12</sup>, and deadly train bombings carried out by Islamic extremists in Madrid in 2004<sup>13</sup> have enabled scholars, politicians, journalists, and everyday Spaniards to make simplistic linkages among al-Andalus, the *Reconquista*, and contemporary Spain as proof of a primordial rivalry between Spain and Islam (Abend 2008, 141; Aidi 2006, 68, 82). The assumption of such an adversarial relationship, combined with Spain’s proximity to North Africa, mean that Spain has toughened border controls and immigration restrictions as a means of securitizing Europe (Hirschkind 2021, 96-97). These developments have sparked further disagreements regarding the significance of Spain’s Islamic past in the present.

The development of Spain’s international tourism industry has also engendered debate on the legacy of al-Andalus. Sites connected to al-Andalus are heavily marketed in Andalusia,

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<sup>12</sup> At the 2003 Azores Summit, Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar cooperated with President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to place diplomatic pressure on Iraq to relinquish its supposed weapons of mass destruction before eventually invading the country. See Hunter 2003.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, refer to BBC Sounds 2024.

where medieval Muslims' presence was the heaviest and lasted the longest (Calderwood 2014, 31). The region has been a tourist destination since the nineteenth century, but its popularity has exploded in recent decades (Calderwood 2014, 31; Calderwood 2015). The dependence of local economies such as those of Granada and Córdoba on tourism has spurred state investment in heritage sites and cultural education, leading to disputes as to what understandings of al-Andalus and Spain's history with Islam these projects should promote (Calderwood 2015; Hirschkind 2021, 53, 129).

Transnational phenomena such as migration, security concerns, and tourism have renewed interest in historical memory surrounding al-Andalus, leading people and institutions in contemporary Spain to reproduce arguments popularized in previous centuries and apply them to new contexts. For example, advertising for the Mosque of Córdoba perpetuates the longstanding contention that modern Spain is distinct from and unaffected by al-Andalus; far-right figures' claims that Muslims support terrorism and cannot integrate into Spanish society echo the paranoia surrounding Moriscos in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and the Spanish government's claim that it is uniquely positioned for dialogue with Muslim countries on behalf of Europe and the West reflect Gil Benumeña's thinking (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024; García-Sanjuán 2016, 4; Hirschkind 2021, 37-40; Lahori 2011; Perry 2008, 76; Soriano and Rubiales 2007, 100). The following section will explore these examples and others by explaining the memory practices of forgetting, villainization, and idealization surrounding al-Andalus and the ways in which they contribute to Spain's identification with "Europe."

## Forgetting

### *Islam as an “Alien Civilization”*

One of the main tendencies in historical memory surrounding al-Andalus is forgetting. Consistent with political actors’ tendency to avoid histories that could prove divisive or complicate a preferred narrative, this practice treats Muslim rule over the Iberian Peninsula as an interruption to an otherwise continuous Christian civilization, implying that Islam is entirely alien and irrelevant to Spanish history and culture (Anderson 2006, 200-204; Gil-Benumea Flores 2023, 54; Halbwachs 1992, 182-183). Spain’s history with Islam is frequently forgotten within academic and government discourses. In 2004, the same year as the Madrid train bombings, the historian Serafín Fanjul argued that religious freedoms in Spain are the result not of a tradition of *convivencia* but of what he understands as the timeless values of European or Western liberalism enshrined in the 1978 Spanish Constitution (Coleman 2008, 164). Former PP Prime Minister José María Aznar spearheaded an effort to include a reference to “Europe’s Christian roots” in the EU constitution that was proposed the same year, and in 2008, Spanish member of the EP Alejo Vidal-Quadras declared,

The Spanish Nation, as a historical and cultural reality, has its roots in the medieval Christian kingdoms, but relies primarily on their common Roman and Visigoth heritage in Hispania, as well as on the political unity established five hundred years ago with the integration of these kingdoms under the Spanish Monarchy through the union of the crowns of Castile and Aragon and the Kingdom of Navarra (García-Sanjuán 2016, 8).

Each of these claims creates an “inversion of conventional genealogy” between contemporary Spain and historical settings that are often seen as fundamental to “European” cultures, such as the Enlightenment or Ancient Rome (Spohn 2005, 5). They also highlight Christian heritage as a defining feature of the Spanish nation. By linking Spain to these aspects of the past while glossing over al-Andalus, they preclude the possibility that Islam has influenced Spanish culture or the resulting political values, conforming to ethnic or cultural conceptions of Europeanness as

Christianity or opposition to Islam (Rigney 2012, 616; Spohn 2005, 5). They create a reference intended to rally Spaniards around a particular understanding of how their past should influence their national identity in the present (Anderson 2006, 198; Eder 2005, 197). However, seeing as each of the aforementioned assertions was intended not only for Spanish consumption but for an audience in institutional Europe, this reference also hints at Spain's comparability to other parts of Europe in ethnic or cultural terms.

The strategy of avoiding memories of al-Andalus to strengthen Spain's ability to identify with "Europe" is not confined to elite discourse and political mechanisms for conveying narratives of the past; it is also embedded in everyday life. This is exemplified by public spaces in Spanish cities such as Madrid, which was a Muslim stronghold between the eighth and eleventh centuries and continued to have a large Muslim and later Morisco population until 1609 (Gil Benumeya Flores 2022, 109-110). Official narratives bury this history, credit Christian monarchs with the founding of Madrid, and link the city to Ancient Roman and pre-Roman settlements; the city government states that a Muslim emir established only the fortifications of Madrid, suggesting prior settlement that was interrupted by and resumed after Muslim rule (Gil-Benumeya Flores 2022, 140; Gil-Benumeya Flores 2023, 57). This narrative is advanced not only by city officials but also by the media and museums such as the Museum of Madrid, whose exhibits start with the sixteenth century, and the San Isidro Museum, which acknowledges medieval Muslims' presence in Madrid but minimizes its significance (Gil-Benumeya Flores 2023, 57). By skipping al-Andalus, the narrative perpetuates the notion that Islam is alien to Spain, solidifying a conception of Spain as religiously or culturally Christian and implicitly aligning it with ethnic understandings of "Europe."

There are now few traces of Madrid's roots in al-Andalus to refute this idea, and those that do exist are vague or distance the space from its history with Islam such that it is difficult to associate the two (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2023, 56). Of the more than 16,000 place-names in Madrid, only a few explicitly refer to the city's Andalusí origins (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 142). One example is the Plaza de la Puerta de Moros (Moors' Gate Plaza), which is named for Madrid's medieval inhabitants but does not actually connect the present-day city with them (Gil Benumeña Flores 2022, 114). It is labeled with plaques depicting ancient Islamic architecture and stereotypical "Moors" wearing turbans or veils (Gil Benumeña Flores 2022, 114; see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). The plaques' design was inspired not by al-Andalus but by scenes observed in Morocco and mediated by stereotypes of North African indolence, passivity, and backwardness (Gil Benumeña Flores 2022, 114).



Figure 4.1: A plaque marking the Plaza de la Puerta de Moros in Madrid (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 115)

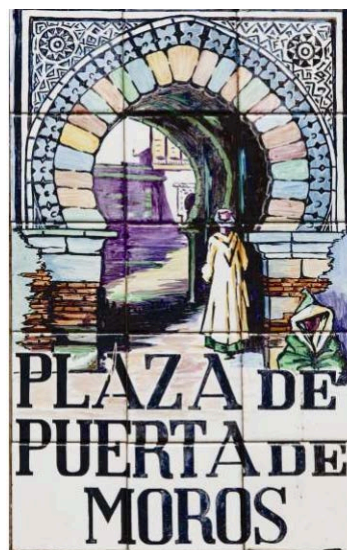


Figure 4.2: A plaque marking the Plaza de la Puerta de Moros in Madrid (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 116)

This pattern is replicated in the few other places in Madrid that reference al-Andalus (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 125). Additionally, none of these locations acknowledge the presence of Muslims and Moriscos in Madrid after the *Reconquista* (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 143). The lack of *lieux de mémoire* regarding al-Andalus in Madrid and the foreign imagery

associated with the few that exist separate the city from its Islamic past. This way of presenting Madrid to both its inhabitants and outsiders is not an innocuous omission; it reinforces the message that Spain is essentially Christian, and Islam is alien to the nation. This idea allows Spain to conform with ethnic imaginings of “Europe.”

A similar phenomenon occurs in the advertisement of tourist attractions related to al-Andalus. It is a potential quotidian mechanism for communicating memories of al-Andalus to both Spanish and foreign publics, but it acknowledges the influence of Islam for marketing purposes while distancing it from contemporary Spanish culture. For example, Iberia, Spain’s flag carrier, has a web page recommending sites associated with al-Andalus to tourists; however, it emphasizes that these are “an exotic fantasy come true” or “*1,001 Nights* come to life” through the endeavors of “invaders of an alien civilization” (2016). By expressly referring to Andalusian Muslims as “alien,” “invaders,” and “exotic” as well as by linking them to Arab and Persian folklore, Iberia suggests that Islam is inherently foreign and cannot belong in Spain other than as a historical curiosity unrelated to contemporary Spanish culture. By using this advertisement to bring in business, Iberia implicitly preserves Spain’s image as a country with a homogeneous Christian heritage, thereby facilitating the country’s conformity to ethnic conceptions of “Europe.”

### ***Controversies Over Potential Lieux de Mémoire in Granada and Córdoba***

The legacy of al-Andalus has been blotted out both in the presentation of potential *lieux de mémoire* to the outside world and within these sites themselves. Two infamous cases in cities that were capitals at different points in al-Andalus’ history illustrate this phenomenon (Calderwood 2015). The first is the controversy surrounding the construction of the Grand Mosque of Granada

in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Calderwood 2014, 45). While the mosque is not an Andalusí site, its status as the first mosque building erected in Granada since the *Reconquista* and planned location in the historically Muslim Albaicín neighborhood made it an unwelcome trigger for memories of al-Andalus (Coleman 2008, 157, 165). Plans for the mosque were originally drawn up in the 1980s, but the ensuing controversy prevented the site from opening until two decades later (Calderwood 2014, 45). In a reflection of the ways in which forgetting al-Andalus has made reminders of its relevance unpalatable for Spaniards, thirty-seven percent oppose the construction of mosques in their communities, and non-Muslims in Granada were no exception (Figueras 2012). Community activists were particularly concerned about the mosque's seeming intrusion into the space between Granada's main church and a convent across from the Alhambra, which is symbolically charged due to its association with both al-Andalus and the *Reconquista* (Aidi 2006, 80). They also fretted that the mosque might be taller than the church, which commemorates the *Reconquista* (Aidi 2006, 80). Thus, in 1993, the Neighborhood Association of Albaicín complained to the city of Granada that the construction of a mosque would represent a break with Albaicín's sociocultural and architectural "traditions," jeopardizing its bid for designation as a UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site (Calderwood 2014, 46). Ultimately, the city permitted the project to continue once it had been scaled down by half, and the Grand Mosque of Granada opened for worship and tourism in 2003 (Aidi 2006, 80; Calderwood 2014, 45).

The Neighborhood Association of Albaicín's efforts to ensure the prominence of symbols of the *Reconquista* while preventing the construction of a potential symbol of al-Andalus create an impression of continuity through an invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 1, 5). This invention of tradition to gain concessions from local authorities and persuade UNESCO

to grant Albaicín status as a World Heritage Site pointed to a continuous Christian or at least non-Muslim culture in the neighborhood, constructing a common heritage that Granadans could identify with while omitting the Andalusí history that could complicate it. It thus perpetuated the notion that Islam has no place in Granada or Spain and situated Spain within “Europe” understood in ethnic terms. However, in doing so, it limited the freedom of Spanish Muslims to worship and establish religious sites, suggesting that the principles that underpin civic notions of “Europe,” such as “tolerance,” pluralism, and human rights, are intended to benefit only certain groups within Spain (Coleman 2008, 161, 166-167; Kaelble 2005, 20; *El País* 2023; Rigney 2012, 612-613).

Controversy over another possible *lieu de mémoire*, the Mosque of Córdoba, has had similar effects. Built between the eighth and tenth centuries, the site was a global religious and intellectual center and a key source of medieval Córdoba’s prestige (Calderwood 2015). After Christians took control of the site in 1236 as part of the *Reconquista*, they constructed a cathedral in the middle of the complex (Calderwood 2015). Since then, the Mosque of Córdoba has been both a reminder of both the accomplished interfaith society of medieval Córdoba and the cultural suppression that destroyed it (Calderwood 2015). The site is important not only for Spanish history but for the presentation of Spain to the rest of the world; UNESCO dubbed it a World Heritage Site in 1984, and it is now a major tourist attraction, receiving 1.5 million visitors each year (Calderwood 2015).

The history, symbolism, and international reputation of the Mosque of Córdoba mean that the site provides an opportunity to examine and educate on the legacy of al-Andalus in contemporary Spain; however, practices of forgetting are more common. This is exemplified by the commodification of the site. The most extreme example is advertisements for unrelated

products and services that take advantage of the fame of the Mosque of Córdoba, such as the one for a nearby Starbucks that advises the viewer to enjoy their drink at the site but contains no substantive reference to it (see Figure 4.3).



*Figure 4.3: A Starbucks advertisement urging viewers to enjoy their drink in front of the Mosque of Córdoba (Samiee 2024)*

This use of the Mosque of Córdoba to attract unrelated business is disconnected from the actual history and legacy of the site, preventing reflection on the past. While it is highly unlikely that Starbucks and other businesses are intentionally influencing historical memory surrounding al-Andalus, their role in shaping the spaces people occupy on an everyday basis allows places like the Mosque of Córdoba to remain distant and abstract rather than relevant to contemporary society. This effect means that businesses unwittingly preserve existing narratives of Spain as Christian, confirming its belonging to an ethnically defined “Europe.”

The Catholic Church encourages forgetting much more deliberately. Its Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba (Córdoba Cathedral Chapter) has administered the Mosque of Córdoba since 1236 and therefore has an interest in maintaining its authority even as it is increasingly questioned (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024). The Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba’s portrayal of the site for both Spanish and international tourist audiences demonstrates its intentions. In the early 2000s, the organization began an effort to erase the “Mosque” label from promotional materials; it

replaced the term “Mosque-Cathedral” with “Cathedral” on its website, and some members of the public accused it of involvement in a 2014 incident in which Google Maps did the same (Calderwood 2015).

The brochures it has produced in the past two decades also indicate that it seeks to obscure the site’s connection to Spain’s history with Islam. In a departure from their 1981 representation of the Mosque of Córdoba as “the foremost monument of the Islamic West” and “the Hispano-Muslim style at its greatest splendor,” the Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba’s brochures for the “Córdoba Cathedral” from the 2010s begin their historical narrative with the site’s consecration by Christians in 1236 and emphasize the Christian worship that has taken place there continuously since, requesting that visitors “be respectful with the identity of this Christian temple” (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2014; Calderwood 2015). The brochures relegate Muslim contributions to a sidebar labeled as “The Muslim Intervention” in what has always been a Christian site, as demonstrated by the “historical fact that the Basilica of Saint Vincent was expropriated and destroyed in order to build on top of it the subsequent Mosque in the Islamic period” (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2014). Archaeological evidence for ancient Christian usage of the place is scarce, but the Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba’s narrative is reinforced by other Córdoba sites’ tourism advertisements as well as the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (Calderwood 2015; City 360 2024; *Mundo Medieval: al-Andalus*). The claims of the Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba in the mid-2000s entrenched the notion that Spain has an immutable Christian identity by ignoring histories that contradict it; however, its overt efforts to erase the Muslim roots of the Mosque of Córdoba proved controversial, forcing it to modify its promotional materials (Calderwood 2015).

The Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba's portrayal of the site through brochures in 2024 also minimizes the legacy of al-Andalus; there are many continuities between the advertisements of the 2010s and current ones. The brochures refer to the place as the "Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba" but still stress that Christian mass has taken place there every day since 1236 (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024). They maintain the previous brochures' insistence that the mosque was built over the ancient Basilica of Saint Vincent (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024). This idea is bolstered by an exhibition near the entrance to the building that displays an excavation site and tells the story of an ancient Christian culture obliterated by medieval Muslims. It is supported by a second exhibit containing supposed artifacts from the basilica. To further the narrative of continuous Christian use of the site, the current brochures claim that the design of the building is influenced by Roman and Byzantine architecture. Additionally, by providing numerous labels and illustrations, highlighting the cathedral transept as part of the site's "beautiful complexity," praising Christian modifications to the complex, and ensuring that nine of the eleven recommended stops are Christian creations, the brochures imbue the Mosque of Córdoba with a Christian character and imply Christian superiority (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024). The Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba is careful to impress upon visitors its role in their visit, stating in its brochures that "[t]he Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba, sensitive to the cultural heritage and aware of the importance of the legacy received, has since 1236 focused its efforts on preserving and raising awareness about the temple, which has allowed this monument to survive into modern times" (2024). It thus takes credit for the existence and preservation of the site, precluding the possibility of any other actor's involvement and solidifying its claim to the right to manage it. While the Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba's erasure of the Islamic past has become more subtle, it is still effective. Like its previous portrayals of history, its focus on

Christian contributions to the site and association between its own stewardship and the preservation of the site indicate that Islam had no significant impact on Spain's essential Christian character.

Depicting Spain as “European” in a religious, cultural, and ethnic sense buttresses the Catholic Church's authority. The Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba's portrayal of Spain as “European” through its strategies for explaining the Mosque of Córdoba to domestic and foreign audiences is no coincidence. In its current brochures, it not only treats the site as exclusively Christian but also uses a timeline to situate its history during the “Christian period” within the context of political, social, and artistic developments elsewhere in Europe, such as the construction of the façade of Saint Peter's Basilica (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024). It stresses the site's incorporation of artistic and architectural styles with roots elsewhere in Europe, such as the Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque (Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba 2024). It also maintains a display in the building that compares the cathedral inside the Mosque of Córdoba to others constructed in places like Geneva around the same time. By connecting the Mosque of Córdoba's history and aesthetics to those of Christian sites in other parts of Europe, the Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba conveys a common “European” heritage defined by Christianity to international audiences. This practice applies ethnic and cultural criteria to allow both Spaniards and foreigners to imagine Spain as a “European” nation.

The Cabildo Catedral de Córdoba's efforts to portray the Mosque of Córdoba and Spain as a whole as Christian and “European” are not purely discursive; they have tangible implications for who belongs and can exercise certain rights in the space. The ongoing controversy over Muslim prayer in the Mosque of Córdoba proves this point. Since the late

twentieth century, the Junta Islámica de España (Islamic Council of Spain)<sup>14</sup>, a Muslim civil society organization composed largely of Spanish converts, has claimed affinity with the site on the grounds that the Andalusí Muslims who once learned and worshipped there are its members' spiritual forebears (Abend 2008, 142). As a result, it has taken issue with the Catholic Church's tight control, which includes the use of security guards to prevent Muslim visitors from praying in a building originally designed for Muslim worship (Abend 2008, 149-150). In 2003, participants in a conference hosted by the Junta prayed at the Mosque of Córdoba and were expelled by security, prompting the Junta to launch a petition to make the site an ecumenical space rather than a strictly Catholic one (Arigita 2014, 33-34). Catholic officials responded scornfully. Michael Fitzgerald, the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, stated that Muslims in Spain had to "accept history," understood solely as the history following the *Reconquista* (Abend 2008, 150). He then deferred the matter to Juan José Asenjo, the bishop of Córdoba, who rejected the possibility of Muslim prayer, arguing that it would "only generate confusion among the faithful" after nearly eight centuries of Christian worship (Abend 2008, 150). In 2006, the Church created a petition of its own to register the Mosque of Córdoba as its private property under the name Santa Iglesia Catedral de Córdoba (Holy Church Cathedral of Córdoba) (Hirschkind 2021, 61). It used the *Reconquista* as a legal argument for ownership, implicitly tying its authority to that of Spain as a nation-state (Hirschkind 2021, 61). The standoff over Muslim prayer at the Mosque of Córdoba continued following a 2010 incident in

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<sup>14</sup> The Junta Islámica de España has its roots in the conversion of thousands of Andalusians who were disillusioned with their economic and political reality to Islam by the Scottish Sufi convert Abdalqadir as-Sufi (formerly Ian Dallas) in the 1970s. There are other prominent Muslim civil society organizations in Spain, including the Comisión Islámica de España (Islamic Commission of Spain), which formed in 1992 as the result of a merger between the Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas (Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities), an organization that challenged the privileges accorded to the Catholic Church, and the Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España (Union of Islamic Communities of Spain), an organization of foreign-born Muslims. The distinct origins and goals of these organizations mean that they are sometimes in conflict with one another. See Abend 2008, 134-136, 143-145.

which a Muslim youth group had a dispute with guards who did not let them pray, sparking international controversy (Arigita 2014, 35-36).

The saga further demonstrates the Catholic Church's refusal to engage substantively with Islam as a part of Spain's history and its tendency to take the historical basis of its own power for granted. The Church excises Islam from the history of the mosque, Córdoba, and Spain as a whole to make its own influence difficult to question. This approach reinforces the notion that Spain is Christian, and Muslims do not belong. It thus conforms to ethnic conceptions of "Europe" that limit the applicability of civic ones based on values such as human rights by denying those who do not conform to ethnic understandings of Spain and "Europe" the opportunity to express themselves and exercise freedom of religion (Rigney 2012, 612-613).

### ***The Influence of the Catholic Church***

The Catholic Church plays a role in obliterating memories of al-Andalus that goes beyond the specific context of the Mosque of Córdoba. Historians affiliated with it have disseminated narratives that ignore or minimize Islam's influence on Spain. Antonio Cañizares, the former Archbishop of Toledo and a member of the Royal Academy of History, writes that "Christianity, the Catholic faith, whether or not professed by the people, and like it or not, is the soul of Spain" (García-Sanjuán 2016, 9-10). Conversely, the Catholic historian Luis Suárez Fernández argues that Muslim rule was a "hiatus in the life of the Spanish nation" (García-Sanjuán 2016, 10). Santiago Cantera Montenegro, one of the monks at the Valley of Cuelgamuros, melds these two narratives by contending that after its ruler converted to Christianity in 589, the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo became the first instance of a politically unified Spanish nation (García-Sanjuán 2016, 9). Each of these Catholic historians' assertions encourages Spaniards to

seek common ground in their Christian heritage, supporting a view of national identity that is static, essential, and based on cultural factors such as religion. They rely on the omission or dismissal of al-Andalus to ensure that there are no alternative models for present-day Spanish national identity that could unseat the Catholic Church from its privileged position within Spanish society. Distancing contemporary Spain from its Islamic past in this way secures Spain's status as ethnically or culturally "European" by leaving Christianity as the only religious heritage that most in the country can claim.

The Catholic Church also consolidates Spain's image as an ethnically "European" nation with Christian heritage through its influence on religious education. Despite constitutional provisions that allow otherwise, only Christianity is included in educational curricula, which are devised largely by the governments of autonomous communities (Abend 2008, 133; Junquera 2025). PSOE Prime Minister Felipe González signed an agreement with the Junta and another Muslim civil society organization to facilitate Islamic education in 1992, but implementation of the agreement did not begin until 2005, and educators still lack the resources to teach about Islam or other non-Christian faiths (Abend 2008, 133, 154). These challenges mean that in general, the only common past that Spaniards imagine themselves to have is rooted in Christianity. They are presented with no other past to connect to and no ideas that could complicate a continuous history of Spain as Christian. Given the broad and enduring influence of education on historical memory, this situation both entrenches the Catholic Church's power and strengthens Spain's claims to Europeanness based on religion and culture (Lim 2010, 140). In doing so, it restricts the right of Muslims in Spain to be represented in education, reflecting the struggle of "European" civic principles to accommodate those who are not perceived as belonging based on ethnic criteria (Tamir 2019, 428-429).

### ***The Denial of Responsibility for Moriscos' Descendants***

The debate over whether to provide reparations or Spanish citizenship to the descendants of the Moriscos who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1609 is another instance of forgetting Spain's Islamic past that raises issues of its belonging to "Europe." Leading up to the four hundredth anniversary of the expulsion, the issue became more contentious. During a 2005 trip to Morocco intended to revive *convivencia* after the Madrid train bombings, King Juan Carlos I refused to apologize to the descendants of Moriscos (Aidi 2006, 77). The following year, the Junta called for Moriscos' descendants to be granted Spanish citizenship, and a leftist group in the Andalusian Parliament pressed for the inclusion of the terms "Morisco" and "Andalusi" in a law governing citizenship (Abend 2008, 151; García-Sanjuán 2016, 11-12). Neither of these measures was implemented in large part because of a political and media landscape that tended to distance contemporary Spain from responsibility for events that occurred centuries ago (García-Sanjuán 2016, 12). Similarly, in 2009, when a PSOE member of Parliament introduced a motion encouraging the Spanish government to strengthen economic, social, and cultural ties with the countries in which Moriscos' descendants lived, conservative politicians and newspapers reacted incredulously, deriding the motion as "ridiculous" and "absurd" given how long ago Moriscos had inhabited Spain (ABC 2009). Ultimately, it has only become harder for Moriscos' descendants to enter Spain—let alone secure Spanish citizenship—due to restrictive immigration laws (Aidi 2006, 76-77).

At first glance, it seems unremarkable that Spanish politicians and media do not perceive a need for accountability for centuries-old deeds. This changes when considering that granting Moriscos' descendants reparations or citizenship is not unprecedented, as Parliament passed a

law allowing the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula after the *Reconquista* to claim Spanish citizenship (Ley 12/2015). Moreover, it did so to broad acclaim, with the same figures that eschewed responsibility for Moriscos' descendants and ridiculed attempts to connect with them praising the government's efforts towards "reconciliation" (García-Sanjuán 2016, 12). This discrepancy raises questions as to why the Spanish government, other political actors, and the media are comfortable with the notion of redressing wrongs against Sephardic Jews but not Moriscos.

One proposed explanation revolves around Spain's attempts to conform to ethnic and cultural understandings of "Europe." As Spain integrated with the rest of Western Europe in the late twentieth century, it followed other European societies in their post-Holocaust tendency towards an understanding of Jews as belonging to "Europe" and the West (Aidi 2006, 79; Assmann and Conrad 2010, 5). This shift is reflected in descriptions of Jews as "returning natives" and Muslim Moroccans as "intruders and invaders" as well as the citizenship law's reference to the suffering of Sephardic Jews in Nazi-occupied areas during World War II as a reason why the Spanish state must commemorate the Holocaust and atone for its previous treatment of Jews (Aidi 2006, 79; Ley 12/2015, Preamble). However, European integration did not change that both domestic and transnational factors facilitate the forgetting of Spain's Islamic past and abuses against Muslims and Moriscos after the *Reconquista*. Pressures from institutional Europe regarding the treatment of Jews and the lack thereof regarding the treatment of Muslims, coupled with the correspondingly inconsistent stances of Spanish politicians and media on redressing past harms, indicate that they reject responsibility for any history that is not "European." This practice perpetuates the erasure of al-Andalus and isolates Spain from its Islamic past, supporting claims that the nation is "European" based on ethnic criteria. However,

it simultaneously violates civic criteria for Europeanness such as accountability and respect for human rights by denying redress to those harmed by Spain's past policies, raising questions as to who is allowed to benefit from these principles. The interplay between a strengthening of Spain's credentials as a "European" nation from an ethnic perspective and a weakening of them from a civic perspective emerges in all instances of forgetting Spain's Islamic past, including not only the dispute over the status of Moriscos but also official discourse and the suppression of potential *lieux de mémoire*. This interaction between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism is characteristic of another common approach to historical memory surrounding al-Andalus: the villainization of Islam and Muslims.

## **Villainization**

### ***The Reconquista as Spain's Founding Myth***

Ignoring Spain's historical ties to Islam as a means of inserting it into ethnic definitions of Europeanness facilitates villainization, a memory practice that bolsters Spain's image as ethnically "European" by portraying the country as the antithesis of Islam and a bulwark against incursions by Muslim societies into the rest of Europe. Historical memory surrounding Spain's founding myth, the *Reconquista*, often reflects this practice. Official discourse from all levels of government across Spain replicates that of Sánchez-Albornoz by suggesting that the repression of Andalusí Muslims was and remains essential to Spanish nationhood (García-Sanjuán 2016, 6). Josep Anglada Rius, the leader of the far-right Platform for Catalonia, argued in 2011 that "Spain is...as a nation, the result of this historic and endemic battle for liberation from the Islamic yoke imposed upon us in the eighth century" (García-Sanjuán 2016, 9). As the eight hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, a turning point in the *Reconquista*, approached

in 2012, members of Parliament from the PP made similar declarations (García-Sanjuán 2016, 13). Jaime Ignacio del Burgo called the battle “a great feat of Hispanic unity, in which the peninsular Christian kingdoms showed up to face the Muslim danger that threatened to take back Al Andalus” and secure “Spain’s destiny” (García-Sanjuán 2016, 13). The party’s then-General Vice Secretary Esteban González Pons highlighted what he saw as the continuity between “soldiers representing...a united Spain against a common danger” posed by Muslim “fanaticism” (García-Sanjuán 2016, 13). In 2017, the PP mayor of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre, marked the five hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Granada with a social media post celebrating the “day of glory for Spaniards” because “[w]ith Islam we would not be free” (Hedgecoe 2017).

These statements do not deny a connection between Spain and Islam as approaches intended to obscure the memory of al-Andalus do. Instead, by characterizing Muslim rule as a “yoke,” a “danger,” or “fanaticism” while portraying the *Reconquista* as a unified, preordained struggle for national liberation, the aforementioned narratives propose that the Spanish nation emerged in opposition to Islam and seek to rally Spaniards around a supposed historical mission to combat Islam. In doing so, they lend an apparent continuity and naturalness to Spanish nationhood and make it clear that Islam has no place in it. Given the proliferation of ethnic understandings of “Europe” characterized by the exclusion of Islam, villainizing discourse enables Spanish people and institutions to claim Europeanness both implicitly and explicitly (Rigney 2012, 616).

The villainization of Islam through the glorification of the *Reconquista* is not confined to elite discourse; it is a component of the everyday means through which Spaniards glean their history. Mainstream media and the academy mimic politicians’ framing of the *Reconquista* as

national liberation (García-Sanjuán 2016, 4-5). For example, conservative media commentator José-Javier Esparza frequently disseminates glorified liberation narratives of the *Reconquista* in various outlets, and journalist Juan Manuel de Prada followed members of Parliament in exalting “the blood shed from Christian veins” to “rid us of a shameful slavery” (García-Sanjuán 2016, 10; Prada 2012). Similarly, Spanish school curricula sacralize the *Reconquista* and make its glorification difficult to question by teaching students that the expulsion of “Moorish invaders” after an 800-year struggle is a national triumph that led to the “unity of Spain” and the victory of a superior culture over an inferior one (Lim 2010, 140; Moreno 2000). The ubiquity of the villainization of Islam in public discourse and education creates a shared past and resulting historical role to which Spaniards can refer as a point of commonality and pride. It facilitates identification with a Spanish nation defined in opposition to Islam and thus in line with ethnic conceptions of “Europe.”

This understanding of Spain as ethnically “European” is further supported by the ways in which the *Reconquista* is represented in public spaces. In Madrid, there is no shortage of *lieux de mémoire* to reinforce constantly the notion that the *Reconquista* was a foundational event and an early national triumph for Spain. Some streets are named after key *Reconquista* battles in which Christian rulers prevailed, such as the Battle of Covadonga and the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa; these streets are marked with plaques depicting Santiago Matamoros (Saint James the Moor-Slayer) crushing Muslim soldiers underfoot (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 137-138; see Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: An image of Santiago Matamoros defeating Muslim forces marking a Madrid street whose name commemorates the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (Wikimedia Commons 2025)

In addition, there are streets bearing the names of Christian leaders of the *Reconquista*, including Pelagius, who initiated it, and King Alfonso VI, who conquered Madrid (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 129, 137). Still other streets are named for saints and Marian apparitions thought to have overseen the *Reconquista*, such as Santiago, the Virgin of Almudena, and the Virgin of Atocha (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 135). The Virgin of Atocha also features in another street whose name commemorates a soldier who killed a Muslim trying to steal an image of the Virgin, a scene displayed on the plaque now marking the street (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 136; see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: A plaque in Madrid depicting the killing of a Muslim seeking to steal an image of the Virgin of Atocha (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 136)

Naming public places that people see on a regular basis for Christian victories in the *Reconquista* and rulers and religious figures considered responsible for them indicates that they are to be remembered and celebrated. The imagery labeling these places connects the veneration of the

*Reconquista* and its leaders with their violence towards Muslims, suggesting that Madrid and Spain more broadly can only be understood as products of a struggle against Muslims. The portrayal of the *Reconquista* on Madrid's streets connotes that revering violence against Muslims should be a unifying experience for Spaniards, and those who cannot participate in it, such as Muslims themselves, do not belong. This positions Spain within ethnic conceptions of "Europe."

Public holidays and commemorative events related to the *Reconquista* serve as invented traditions that employ recurring rituals and symbols that make it difficult to question or offer alternatives to the narrative of the *Reconquista* as the origin of Spanish nationhood (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 1, 3-5). They reinforce the period's importance in defining Spain in opposition to Islam and in comparison to "Europe" The most infamous example is *La Toma*, Granada's annual celebration of its 1492 capture by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II and Isabella I (Hedgecoe 2017). The event consists of parades of people dressed as medieval Muslims and Christians (Hedgecoe 2017). It has stirred controversy in recent years because far-right figures have linked the practice of honoring the *Reconquista* to more recent Spanish history by brandishing Francoist insignia alongside Islamophobic signs during the festivities (Hedgecoe 2017). Despite this, *La Toma* enjoys official support; representatives of Granada's city hall, the Spanish Army, and the Catholic Church take part, and in 2013, Granadan authorities requested that the Andalusian government declare the celebration a Heritage of Cultural Interest (García-Sanjuán 2016, 14). The mere existence of a public holiday commemorating the completion of the *Reconquista* creates a common past to cohere Spaniards and makes it clear that the defeat of medieval Muslims cannot be interpreted as anything but the genesis of the Spanish nation. Official endorsement of *La Toma* implies continuity between those who carried out the *Reconquista* and those who govern Spain today, making Spain seem like a natural, continuous,

and inevitable national community. The notion that Muslims are enemies who must be excluded from the version of Spain envisioned in *La Toma* is elucidated not only by the content of the festivities but also by far-right activists' use of them as a platform for xenophobia and Islamophobia. The implications of the narrative promoted in *La Toma* portray Spain as an ethnically "European" nation due to its supposed roots in the defeat of Muslims by Christians.

Attempts to connect Spain to the rest of "Europe" in ethnic and cultural terms through *Reconquista* commemorations are especially clear in proposals for the celebration of the 2012 anniversary of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. Francisco Gallarín, the mayor of La Carolina, one of the sites of the battle, pressed for patriotic and religious ceremonies that were to include a tribute to the army and mass on the former battlefield (García-Sanjuán 2016, 14). Like *La Toma*, such events would extol the *Reconquista* as the origin of Spain, draw parallels between what was done in the past and what should be done in the present, and villainize Muslims. However, it is particularly telling that Gallarín followed the international political trend of basing one's own memory practices on those elsewhere and explicitly drew inspiration from the extravagant celebrations that took place in Vienna in 1983 to mark the three hundredth anniversary of the Ottoman Empire's failed attempt to take the city<sup>15</sup> (Assmann and Conrad 2010, 7; García-Sanjuán 2016, 14). The parallels drawn between early modern Spain and the Holy Roman Empire on the one hand and medieval Muslim kingdoms and the Ottoman Empire on the other amalgamate distinct historical events into a single eternal struggle against Muslim societies. This demonstrates that the villainization of Islam through official and academic discourses, public spaces, and commemorative events is intended to depict Spain as a nation that fits within the

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<sup>15</sup> The 1683 Battle of Vienna was part of a centuries-long series of conflicts between the Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire. A combination of Habsburg and Polish troops halted Ottoman forces' advance by stopping them from taking Vienna. Austrians, Poles, and their diasporas tend to depict this event as an instance of unity among nations in defense of "Europe." See The Polish Museum of America 2023 for an example.

broader historical mission of an ethnically defined “Europe” to promote Christian heritage and culture while resisting Islamic influences.

### ***“Invasion” and Present-Day Reconquista Narratives***

The villainization of Islam and depiction of Spain as part of a general “European” fight against Muslim societies in which Spain is the first line of defense have intensified over the last several decades because of the transnational impact of Samuel P. Huntington’s notion of a “clash of civilizations,” which posits that the ideological conflict that defined the Cold War is being replaced by conflict among nations based on immutable cultural, religious, linguistic, and historical characteristics that become clearer through global interactions (Huntington 1993, 22-29). The “clash of civilizations” particularly emphasizes historical and contemporary enmity between “Western” and “Islamic” civilizations (Huntington 1993, 31-32). As a result, it has revived the notion of a Muslim “invasion” of Spain, which is a common characterization of the events of 711 that is now being reproduced in the context of international challenges such as immigration and terrorism (Hirschkind 2021, 96). Such challenges evoke a unique response within Spain. The country’s novel status as a host country for immigrants is a sign of its successful economic and political integration into institutional Europe, yet Muslim immigration and the threat of terrorism provoke a special anxiety in Spanish society because of the sense that Muslim immigrants and terrorists are coming to Spain to reclaim what belonged to their forebears (Flesler 2008, 117). This anxiety has prompted some political actors to manipulate the history of al-Andalus to perpetuate Sánchez-Albornoz’s understanding of Spain as “Europe’s” shield against Islam since the Middle Ages (Aidi 2006, 61; Hirschkind 2021, 96-97).

Official discourse from several different political perspectives interprets contemporary immigration and terrorism as a new “invasion.” In a 2004 lecture at Georgetown University, former Prime Minister Aznar described “a moment of war in which it is either us or them” and sought to explain the motives behind Islamist terrorism:

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 have to 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 (Aidi 2006, 83; García-Sanjuán 2016, 7). He concluded that where Islam and terrorism were concerned, he was “a supporter of Ferdinand and Isabella” (Pardo 2006). By treating support for the fifteenth-century Catholic Monarchs as a viable political position in the present and simplistically linking Al Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist organizations to the Muslims who ruled medieval Iberia through an “inversion of conventional genealogy,” Aznar not only glorifies the *Reconquista* but presents it as a process in which Spain continues to be engaged (Anderson 2006, 205). His position implies that Spain’s existence is both the catalyst for and the solution to an ongoing “invasion” of “Europe” by Muslims. It also indicates that since Spain’s history and current policies are a constant defense against Muslim influences, and Muslims are assumed to be a threat to “European” heritage and culture, Spain is a valuable member of “Europe” from an ethnic perspective. Aznar’s position is not an outlier. Anglada Rius, the head of the Platform for Catalonia, echoed his sentiments in 2011 when he argued that Islam has “remained a latent threat” due to the supposed preoccupation of Muslims with rebirthing al-Andalus, which “is not simply Andalusia, Murcia, and Badajoz, but all of Spain and even the South of France” (García-Sanjuán 2016, 9). In doing so, he, too, suggests that the *Reconquista* has not ended and extends beyond his country’s borders, casting Spain as a bulwark against contemporary terrorism for the rest of “Europe” and thus as a “European” nation.

The claim that Muslim societies seek to reestablish al-Andalus is not confined to staunch conservatives. José Chamizo de la Rubia, Andalusia's *Defensor del Pueblo* (an official charged with defending citizens' rights and civil liberties at the national level), who was generally regarded as an ally of immigrants, told *El País* in 2002 that Maghrebi immigrants face more discrimination than sub-Saharan ones in Spain

because the Black knows he is Black, he knows he gets attention and utilizes a strategy of not being seen; they have their lives, their groups, their places, and don't bother anybody. Not the Maghrebi. Because of the distance separating us, because of the eight centuries that they were here, because of Córdoba's mosque...Let's say that they think this is theirs (Alameda 2002).

While grappling with the social difficulties that come with immigration, Chamizo employs an "inversion of conventional genealogy" that associates contemporary Muslim immigrants in Spain with the Muslim rulers of al-Andalus (Anderson 2006, 205). His narrative expressly portrays immigrants as claiming entitlement to sites connected to al-Andalus and Spanish territory in general, implying that they are taking revenge for the *Reconquista* by migrating to Spain in the twenty-first century. This demonization of Muslim immigrants feeds into the idea that Spain is eternally threatened by Muslims and must mount a defense against them, making Spain appear "European" according to ethnic criteria that define "Europe" in opposition to Islam.

It is not only public servants but also the media that perpetuates "invasion" narratives to simplify the complex dynamics of contemporary immigration and terrorism. The prominent outlet *ABC* claimed in a 2006 editorial dealing with Muslim immigrant communities' construction of mosques in Córdoba and Seville that "[a]s much for extremists as for moderates, Andalusia has a historical evocation, and it is in this context where sources consulted place the interest in making Islam in the Andalusian community 'more visible.'" By lumping all Muslim immigrants together with terrorists and claiming that they have an interest in asserting themselves by erecting mosques in what was once al-Andalus, the editorial advances the notion

that Spain is under attack by a politically coordinated Muslim collective. Right-wing media provocateur César Vidal warns his readers and listeners not to assume that Western governments can control “a violent monster fed by resentment and a desire for vengeance” because of repeated humiliation through events like the *Reconquista* (Vidal 2023, 20:00). He explains the history of Spain as a single, continuous struggle to protect what he understands as Spanish culture against Muslim invaders, combining figures ranging from the Córdoba caliph Abd al-Rahman to Saddam Hussein into one villainous Muslim archetype (Aidi 2006, 82). Claims such as these in Spanish media, which articulate and exploit societal anxieties surrounding immigration, multiculturalism, and terrorism, make the *Reconquista* a point of reference for non-Muslim Spaniards to understand their identity in relation to current events. They fail to distinguish between different populations of Muslims across time, space, and ideologies such that they perpetuate the notion that Spain and Spaniards have a historical mission to deter the cultural threat supposedly presented by Muslims. This positions Spain as ethnically “European.”

Politicians, journalists, and others have reinforced their overarching narratives by employing anachronistic language to equate their interpretation of the past with current events and depict all Muslims as “invaders.” The most frequent example is the practice of referring to Moroccans in Spain as “Moors,” a historically loaded term that triggers fear in the Spanish historical imagination because of common representations not only of medieval Muslims but also of other former adversaries of Spanish state such as Ottoman Turks and Francisco Franco’s Moroccan troops as “the violent, lustful Moor, who invades Spain to kill and rape its inhabitants” (Flesler 2008, 117). Other instances of anachronistic language include PP Vice Secretary González Pons’ use of the term “radicals” in reference to the Almohads who once controlled the Iberian Peninsula, Vidal’s description of the prophet Muhammad as a “terrorist,” and the political

scientist and columnist Antonio Elorza's claim that Muhammad committed "crimes against humanity" (Elorza 2004; García-Sanjuán 2016, 10, 13). As they simplify today's challenges and stir latent Islamophobic sentiment for political ends, some Spaniards saddle contemporary Muslims with widely feared tropes or apply contemporary labels to early Muslims to demonize those who practice their faith in the present, which furthers an understanding of Spanish history as one prolonged struggle against attempted "invasions" by Muslims. This practice provides a shared reference for non-Muslim Spaniards to identify with, solidifying an ethnic identity for Spain that is based on an anti-Islam conception of "Europe."

### ***Ramifications of the Villainization of Islam in Spain***

"Invasion" discourses that manipulate historical memory surrounding Islam have tangible and often violent consequences. During the controversy over the construction of the Grand Mosque of Granada, Muslim communities were frequently threatened by *¡Moros fuera!* ("Out with Moors!") and *¡Muerte a los moros!* ("Death to the Moors!") graffiti (Coleman 2008, 169). These threats became a gory reality in 2000 with the outbreak of riots targeting Muslim migrant workers in El Ejido, spurred by the same slogans that were employed in Granada and the idea of *la caza del moro* ("Moor-hunting") as the execution of a perceived historical duty to eliminate Muslims<sup>16</sup> (Calderwood 2014, 34; Flesler 2008, 119). Perpetrators' ability to equate Muslims in their communities with the menacing historical character of "the Moor" catalyzed the xenophobic mob violence (Flesler 2008, 118-119). Those who understand Spain as intrinsically opposed to Islam might argue that actions against Muslim communities that draw on villainizing

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<sup>16</sup> The causes of the El Ejido riots are disputed. The immediate trigger was a series of murders that were all believed to have been carried out by Moroccans, but broader issues of demographic change, economic exploitation, and differing approaches to the integration of immigrants also played a role. For more information and examples of local and national responses to the riots, see Gooch 2000.

historical narratives are yet another episode in Spain's history of protecting "Europe" from a Muslim "invasion," strengthening Spanish claims to ethnic Europeanness. However, violence against Muslims also undercuts key tenets of civic conceptions of Europe, such as human rights and the rule of law, representing another instance in which civic representations of Spain as part of "Europe" have been circumscribed by ethnic ones (Kaelble 2005, 20; Rigney 2012, 612-613).

The idea of fulfilling a historical mission of shielding "Europe" from Muslim "invaders" influences Spanish foreign policy as well as domestic politics. With the onset of the United States' war on terror and the Iraq War in the early 2000s, conservative leaders in Europe sought to display their pro-American sentiment and Westernness by distancing themselves from Islam (Aidi 2006, 82). This trend was particularly pronounced in countries with complicated histories with Islam, such as Spain (Aidi 2006, 82). Aznar, who was Spain's prime minister at the time, attempted to raise Spain's international political and military profile by leveraging the notion that Spain had a historical obligation to defend against Muslims to skirt opposition and send Spanish troops to Iraq (Abend 2008, 141; Aidi 2006, 83). He confirmed his deliberate use of historical memory of Islam to justify his foreign policy by controversially awarding his troops the Cross of Santiago Matamoros for their service (Aidi 2006, 83). By attempting to reenact what Aznar saw as a glorious defense of Spain, "Europe," and the West against Muslims, the Spanish government reinforced an image of Spain as fundamentally opposed to Islam and therefore in line with ethnic understandings of "Europe."

The appropriation of the past to villainize Islam is not an extreme position used by just a few political, media, or community actors in Spain. The construction of Spain as essentially against Islam permeates Spanish public opinion. A 2016 Pew Research Center survey of people in ten European countries revealed that half of all Spaniards view Muslims somewhat or very

unfavorably (Wike et al. 2016). This group includes forty-four percent of respondents on the political left, forty-seven percent in the center, and sixty-three percent on the right, which represents one of the smallest differences across the political spectrum in the countries surveyed and points to deeply ingrained societal trepidation about Islam (Wike et al. 2016). A 2015 Bertelsmann Foundation poll found that sixty-five percent of Spanish respondents agree that “Islam is not compatible with the Western world,” reflecting one of the highest levels of Islamophobic sentiment in the West (Calderwood 2015). A 2004 Elcano Royal Institute survey shows that seventy-four percent of Spaniards believe that there is a “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West, and fifty-seven percent consider Muslims to be violent (Noya 2007). Perhaps as a result, the Pew Research Center finds that forty percent of Spaniards think that the presence of refugees will make terrorist attacks more likely, and a quarter suspect that many or most Muslims in Spain support ISIS (Wike et al. 2016). Additionally, forty-one percent of Spanish respondents to a 2017 Chatham House poll agreed with the statement “All further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped” (Goodwin et al. 2017). Narratives of Spain’s Islamic past that inculcate the idea of Muslims as enemies both contribute to and are strengthened by widespread xenophobic and Islamophobic sentiment.

Vox has exploited this dynamic in recent years to build up its popularity and normalize a far-right ideology that was stigmatized in the decades following Spain’s transition to democracy (Hedgecoe 2019). It employs ethnic criteria for belonging to Spain by using the concept of Spanish identity as rooted in Christian heritage and fundamentally opposed to Islam to spread fear that Muslim immigrants are impossible to integrate and will replace Spaniards and their culture (Cheddadi El Haddad 2024, 3-7). For example, prior to the 2015 Andalusian elections, it posted an imagined broadcast from 2018 on YouTube to play on paranoia that Muslim

immigrants and Islamic extremists were coming to Spain to reclaim al-Andalus (Calderwood 2015). The video showed a news anchor in a hijab announcing that the government of Andalusia has “expropriated” the Mosque of Córdoba, prompting congratulations from Muslim countries’ governments and the relocation to Córdoba of over two million Muslims who want to “reconnect with their past and culture” (Calderwood 2015). The video concludes, “Do you want a future like that? We can still change it. Vox” (Calderwood 2015).

While Vox was unsuccessful in the elections for which it created the video, its amplification of “invasion” narratives of both the past and the present boosted its popularity such that it had fifteen percent of Spaniards’ support in 2019 and almost became part of the governing coalition in 2023 (Calderwood 2015; Hedgecoe 2019; *El País* 2023). This has enabled it to promote policies such as its 2023 proposal to stop granting Spanish citizenship and residence permits to people from “Islamic culture” and “ban the entry into Spain of immigrants from countries with an Islamic culture if their correct and peaceful integration cannot be guaranteed” (Euronews 2023). On X, Vox’s leader, Santiago Abascal, vaunted the proposal as a means of countering “all the fiends who bring hatred, pain, and death” to Europe through terrorism (Euronews 2023). Vox’s messaging repeats established patterns of treating Muslims as incompatible with Spain and “Europe” by crudely connecting medieval history to the contemporary transnational challenges of immigration and terrorism. It refers to an imagined common past that is intended to overcome the public’s skepticism to justify and mainstream its far-right policies, which undermine political principles such as human rights that characterize “Europe” from a civic perspective (Rigney 2012, 612-613). Its strategy reinforces the idea that Spain is unquestionably part of “Europe” understood as Christian or anti-Islam.

Vox explicitly embraces what it portrays as Spain's role in preserving this version of "Europe." During a 2018 rally, its leaders stressed that "[w]e have more of a right than anyone else to be Europe, because we saved it from the Islamic advance during seven centuries of *Reconquista*" (Vox España 2018, 02:09:33). At a party event railing against "illegal and Islamic immigration," they expanded on this point by characterizing Spain as "a nation that was the creator of Europe, without which Europe would not exist." They argued, "We could go back to Lepanto [a battle between a coalition of Catholic states and the Ottoman Empire] or Las Navas de Tolosa or Charles V to understand why Europe would not exist. And it would probably be under the rule of Islam" (Vox España 2021a, 11:10:57). Vox derides institutional Europe, calls for the prioritization of individual nation-states over the project of European integration, and has proposed that Spain withdraw from the EU (Jaráiz Gulías 2025). However, by casting Spain as the savior of "Europe" from the supposed menace of medieval Islam, it uses ethnic and cultural conceptions of "Europe" and conflates past and current problems to suggest that Spain persists in its role of shielding "Europe" and is therefore an integral part of it.

### ***Civic Nationalism and the Villainization of Islam***

While most examples of the villainization of Islam through historical memory related to al-Andalus are rooted in ethnic nationalism, there are interpretations of civic nationalism that Spanish political actors use to ostracize Muslims. These rely on the treatment of Islam not as a religion but as a political ideology that some observers contrast with the democratic ideals promoted through European integration (Cheddadi El Haddad 2024, 8; López García and Bravo López 2008, 9). By placing Islam in political rather than cultural opposition to Spain, "democratic fundamentalism" makes Spanish communities' rejection of Muslims and demands

for assimilation more palatable since it is ostensibly not based on naked xenophobia (López García and Bravo López 2008, 9-10). Public opinion in Spain reflects justifications for Islamophobia that appeal to civic ideals. Polling from 2004 indicates that eighty percent view Muslims as “authoritarian” (Noya 2007). While “democratic fundamentalist” reasoning is not explicitly based on Spain’s Islamic past, it is a relevant complement to discourses that demonize Islam on ethnic or cultural grounds. Vox in particular utilizes it in addition to ethnic arguments, claiming that Islam poses a threat to the separation of powers, state secularism, gender equality, and LGBT rights and is therefore “[i]ncompatible with democracy” and “incompatible with freedom” (Cheddadi El Haddad 2024, 7; Vox España 2021b, 04:58:28). This strategy to draw in voters who might be deterred by Vox’s more overt xenophobia and distract them from Vox’s own extreme positions on matters such as women’s and LGBT rights identifies Spain with democracy, a key tenet of civic conceptions of Europe (Rigney 2012, 612-613; Zhou 2023). Vox’s claim that Islam is antithetical to democratic political values demonstrates that it is possible to use civic as well as ethnic understandings of Spain and “Europe” to villainize Muslims and highlight Spain’s belonging to “Europe.”

### **Idealization**

Although many contemporary political, media, and community actors erase the history of al-Andalus or villainize Muslims to depict Spain as inescapably, homogeneously Christian or anti-Islam and to secure its image as “European” from an ethnic perspective, their strategies are not the only option for fitting Spain into the construct of “Europe” (Rigney 2012, 616; Spohn 2005, 5). It is also common to idealize Andalusí cultural achievements and *convivencia*; while this practice highlights aspects of Spain’s history that are distinct within “Europe,” even it is used

to claim past cultural contributions to “Europe,” present lessons for “European” societies, or assign Spain an emissarial role in interactions with Muslim societies. This makes Spain appear useful to “Europe” from both cultural and political standpoints, firmly positioning Spain as a “European” nation.

### ***Islam as Spain’s Cultural Contribution to “Europe”***

The historical narrative that most explicitly idealizes Spain’s Islamic past as a means of proving Spain’s Europeanness is the idea that because of the influence of Muslim intellectuals and artists, Spain had an important and unique cultural impact on “Europe.” Emilio González Ferrín, an influential figure in Andalusian nationalism and creator of online content intended to educate Spanish audiences about Islam, argues that al-Andalus and its imagined successor, Andalusia, are part of “Europe” and the West because they connected intellectual currents from Persia, the Byzantine Empire, Ancient Greece, and Ancient Rome to transition “Europe” from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance (Abend 2008, 145; Hirschkind 2021, 81-82). In an echo of Américo Castro’s claim that al-Andalus enriched cultures elsewhere in Europe through the products of idealized intercultural synergies, González Ferrín portrays Spain not just as a part of “European” culture but as its wellspring (Aidi 2006, 70). This understanding of al-Andalus’ influence makes its successor, Spain, seem like an undeniable and even indispensable “European” nation.

The idealization of al-Andalus as the root of major “European” cultural achievements is conveyed through various *lieux de mémoire*. While public spaces in Madrid generally elide al-Andalus or celebrate its downfall, the few place-names that invoke it do so such that they hint at artistic and scientific achievements whose influence spread beyond the Iberian Peninsula. They refer to sites that are renowned across Europe, such as Granada’s Alhambra, or figures

whose ideas and texts were disseminated far beyond al-Andalus, such as Averroes (Gil-Benumeña Flores 2022, 141-142). Similarly, Córdoba is dotted with statues of figures such as Averroes in honor of Andalusí intellectual and cultural contributions to the rest of the world (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: A commemorative statue of Averroes in Córdoba (Samiee 2024)

This use of public space to extol al-Andalus as the site of cultural achievements that could only have resulted from *convivencia* and were relevant to the rest of “Europe” highlights Spain’s belonging to “Europe” as a result of its influence on European cultures.

Tourist-oriented institutions’ framing of *lieux de mémoire* with the potential to communicate an idealized version of Spain’s Islamic past reinforces the notion that Spain is a “European” nation not in spite of but because of al-Andalus. For instance, while the aforementioned Iberia advertisement for places associated with al-Andalus generally distances contemporary Spain from Islam, it also describes medieval Muslims as having fostered “a tolerance and enlightenment that made this Europe’s most progressive, educated, and multicultural civilisation of its day, while the rest of the continent was mired in the Dark Ages (in fact, the Moors facilitated the introduction of many advanced concepts and inventions into Europe)” (2016). Similarly, the National Archaeological Museum’s brochures and exhibition on

al-Andalus highlight the “splendor” of al-Andalus, exemplified by the trade ties that gave tenth- and eleventh-century Córdoba influence over the rest of “Europe” or the economic prosperity and sites such as Alhambra that made Granada renowned throughout the region (2024). Such representations of *convivencia* as having made Andalusí society uniquely educated, forward-looking, and therefore able to claim impressive cultural achievements reinforces the notion that al-Andalus guided other parts of “Europe” towards similar advances. They imply that from a cultural perspective, Spain is an inextricable part of “Europe.” The fact that this idealized narrative is present in materials meant for external audiences demonstrates a seeming need for Spain to be able to play a role in “Europe” via al-Andalus.

### ***Al-Andalus as a Political and Social Model for Contemporary “Europe”***

Versions of historical memory that idealize al-Andalus not only suggest that Andalusí cultures contributed to the rest of “Europe” during the Middle Ages but also use al-Andalus as a model of pluralism for contemporary “Europe” in light of international challenges that expose the limitations of European civic nationalisms, such as the integration of Muslim immigrants into predominantly non-Muslim societies and the threat of terrorism<sup>17</sup> (Tamir 2019, 428-433). These narratives treat al-Andalus as a timeless, simultaneously Spanish and universal blueprint for subverting the idea of Islam as “Europe’s” historical “other” in a rejection of the “clash of civilizations” (Arigita 2014, 22; Calderwood 2014, 38-39). They are often used to resist the erasure of contested potential *lieux de mémoire* associated with al-Andalus and rebrand them as spaces that can provide solutions to contemporary debates surrounding immigration and multiculturalism. In Granada, many non-Muslims demonstrated in favor of the construction of

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<sup>17</sup> This narrative extends beyond Europe, as exemplified by the Cordoba Initiative, founded in 2004 in the United States to advance interfaith and intellectual dialogue. See Arigita 2014, 22.

the Grand Mosque despite opposition from the Neighborhood Association of Albaicín and threats from others; this was a key factor in the eventual establishment of the mosque (Coleman 2008, 170-171). Demonstrators cited an idyllic understanding of *convivencia*, a fear of being ridiculed for not upholding Granada's reputation for it, and concerns about violating the ideal of religious freedom that they associated with democratic Spain as their motives (Coleman 2008, 171). The importance of external perceptions of Granada in its residents' efforts to reclaim an idealized historical memory implies that the city is the heir of a tradition of *convivencia* and should therefore orient the rest of Europe amid uncertainty about cultural diversity. Additionally, invocations of religious freedom and democracy as Spanish political principles that Granadans must adhere to affirm Spain's civic Europeanness (*El País* 2023; Rigney 2012, 612-613). Therefore, local actors' strategies for altering memory practices surrounding al-Andalus are shaped by transnational concerns that impel them to portray their country as "European."

Despite its initial ambivalence about the Grand Mosque, the Granadan government has also seized on the rhetoric of idealization in its portrayal of the site. It treats the site as a "persistent living symbol of medieval *convivencia* in Spain" that proves that the city is a "paradise open to all" (Coleman 2008, 172). Because of this symbolism, local authorities ensure that the mosque is incorporated into tourist itineraries of Andalusian monuments even though it was founded only decades ago (Coleman 2008, 172). Concerns such as revenue from tourism likely factor into their decision-making, but the use of the Grand Mosque to display continuity between the imagined "tolerance" of al-Andalus and present-day Granada to the outside world suggests a history of Granadan and Spanish embodiment of civic values associated with "Europe" that can guide the rest of "Europe" as transnational challenges complicate states'

commitment to those values. This idealization of al-Andalus positions Granada—and by extension Spain—firmly within “Europe.”

Another context in which al-Andalus has been idealized in Granada is opposition to *La Toma*. In 1995, an organization now known as La Plataforma Granada Abierta (The Open Granada Platform) began a campaign to replace the celebration with a festival honoring what its members view as Andalusia’s pluralist and liberal traditions dating back to al-Andalus (Hirschkind 2021, 152). In its manifesto, Granada Abierta argued,

The conquest of Granada brought about the ruin of the *convivencia* of the three religions, such that numerous neighbors of this city were persecuted because of their beliefs and customs...Because of this, it is our view that the events of the annual celebration of the conquest do not contribute to consolidating sentiments of reconciliation and tolerance, sentiments necessary for any city aspiring to progress (Hirschkind 2021, 152-153).

By reframing the fall of Granada as the loss of a tradition of coexistence rather than the triumph of the Christian culture of the inchoate Spanish nation-state, the organization locates Spaniards’ shared past not in the *Reconquista* but in al-Andalus, suggesting a duty to facilitate *convivencia* in the present. This understanding of the origins of Spanish nationhood and the resulting political obligations has gained traction; by 2013, the PSOE and other leftist political parties had opted not to participate in *La Toma* festivities, and Granada’s Director General of Historical Memory arranged a commemoration of an executed nineteenth-century liberal instead (García-Sanjuán 2016, 14). Increased questioning of *La Toma* and its replacement with tributes to “tolerant” and pluralist political values and those who have defended them reflect the idealization of al-Andalus and an insistence that Spain has a centuries-long tradition of civic ideals associated with “Europe” that makes it a model for other countries.

Granada’s tourism industry also idealizes Spain’s Islamic past such that it appears to be a simple model for contemporary Europe. This is exemplified by Legado Andalusi (Andalusi Legacy), a public foundation that offers tourist routes full of destinations that link both

al-Andalus and present-day Spain to other Mediterranean societies (Calderwood 2014, 41). Its advertising repeats Andalusí writer Abu Bakr al-Zubaydi's saying "All lands, in their diversity, are one, and all men are neighbours and brothers" (Calderwood 2014, 38). An introduction to Legado Andalusí's routes by historical novelist Antonio Gala reiterates the notion of al-Andalus as a transcendent, universal model that is simultaneously grounded in what is now Spain, albeit in unsavory terms: "Al-Andalus is the bed where the Germanic and the Arabic procreated with the greatest ease and the best result" (Calderwood 2014, 38). With such statements, Legado Andalusí not only sells its services but also indicates continuity between an idealized al-Andalus characterized by *convivencia* and contemporary Spain. In doing so, it suggests that Spain has a special role in disseminating values that are useful to fraught multicultural societies. This strategy for representing Granada to outsiders conveys that because of their past, the city and Spain as a whole are crucial guides to the rest of "Europe" and therefore undeniably part of "Europe."

Some community organizers and media outlets portray Córdoba in a similar manner, especially in response to attempts to obscure its Andalusí *lieux de mémoire*. The brief renaming of the Mosque of Córdoba to "Córdoba Cathedral" on Google Maps in 2014 prompted the Platform for the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba to release an online petition demanding that the term "Mosque" be restored to the name and that the site be administered by a public authority rather than the Catholic Church (Calderwood 2015). The group argued that the Islamic history of the site had to be preserved so that it could continue to serve as an "interreligious beacon" and "a universal paradigm of concord between cultures" as part of an effort to "recuperate the historical glory of what Córdoba represented in the ninth and tenth centuries" (Calderwood 2015). Spanish media disseminated similar ideas. Juan Luis Cebrián, the founder and director of *El País*, issued

a statement in honor of the victims of the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks in Paris that derided Bishop Asenjo for “assaulting” Spanish Muslims and encouraging “attitudes of hate and fundamentalism” by altering the history conveyed by the Mosque of Córdoba (Calderwood 2015). Guillermo Altares, another journalist at *El País*, bemoaned Córdoba’s lost “opportunity to become a pole of dialogue between religions at a moment when that is more necessary than ever” (2015). Such statements by Córdobaans and national media encourage a national identity that draws on idyllic medieval intercultural interactions, “tolerance,” and pluralism rather than the violence of the *Reconquista* as a societal model. This conceptualization of Spanish national identity suggests both compliance with civic norms associated with “Europe” and utility to the rest of “Europe” as it struggles to accommodate cultural diversity due to its assumed lack of experience as compared to Spain. This bolsters Spain’s credentials as a “European” nation.

Politicians and intellectuals seeking to capitalize on Córdoba’s attractions for symbolic and economic reasons typically present the city in the same idealized way. For example, when Córdoba competed unsuccessfully for the EU’s designation as its 2016 Capital of Culture, its mayor, José Antonio Nieto, made the case for his city’s importance to political and cultural issues around Europe, stating,

If they [the members of the EU jury] choose Cordoba, they are going to be talking about coexistence, dialogue, tolerance, tradition and modernity and at this time, this discourse is taking place not only between continents and countries, but also in European cities, many of which have integration problems due to religious, ethnic or racial differences (Arigita 2014, 31).

In his efforts to secure the EU’s recognition, Nieto utilizes multiple concepts linked to idealized images of al-Andalus, including “coexistence,” “dialogue,” and “tolerance.” He thus transposes the Andalusi past onto the present to suggest that Córdoba and Spain have continuously built on these values, which both buttresses Spanish claims to political traditions associated with civic understandings of “Europe” and makes Córdoba a blueprint for “Europe’s” response to

challenges related to immigration, multiculturalism, and integration. These consequences of the discourse surrounding Córdoba's participation in the 2016 Capital of Culture contest reaffirm that Spain is a "European" nation.

In another initiative to promote Córdoba as a site of intercultural dialogue and learning, the 2011 program for Ibn Rushd (Averroes) Encounters discussion forum explained to readers that

Today, the main question that Europe and Europeans must answer is how to overcome their fear of Islam and promote the Cordoba model instead of the logic of the Spanish Reconquista of six centuries ago. Of course, after this question comes another: what is the best way for Europe and Europeans to understand and accept their Islamic origins, while Muslims in Europe must revise their perception of Islam as a non-European religion (Arigita 2014, 30).

The explicit expansion of the implications of Córdoba and Spain's history with Islam for identity to a broader "European" context reflects Ibn Rushd Encounters' interest in making al-Andalus a model of diversity, "tolerance," and coexistence for the rest of "Europe" even if doing so requires a radical redefinition of the term's ethnic and cultural underpinnings. By using Córdoba as a vehicle for questioning what criteria can be used to determine belonging to "Europe," the forum's program both poses a dilemma and presents Córdoba and Spain as solutions. Through its role in problematizing historical narratives of "Europe" as intrinsically Christian or anti-Islam, Córdoba becomes uniquely able to educate others in "Europe" on navigating cultural diversity in the present. Paradoxically, using Córdoba to subvert longstanding ethnic understandings of "Europe" also firmly anchors Spain within them because of the purported usefulness of its history as a guide.

Tourist attractions in Córdoba also idealize al-Andalus to make it relevant to the present not only in Spain but throughout Europe. The Living Museum of al-Andalus is especially active in this endeavor. It is run by the Fundación Paradigma Córdoba para la Convivencia (Córdoba

Paradigm Foundation for Coexistence), which was founded in 2010 because of general societal pressures towards intercultural and interfaith dialogue (Arigita 2014, 22-23; Torre Calahorra 2024a). The foundation states that its purpose is

to remember...the cross-fertilization of the cultures of the East...and West between the eighth and thirteenth centuries...and the positive examples of *convivencia* among the three Abrahamic religions...fomenting the exceptional cultural dimension of the city of Córdoba under the principles and cornerstones of ecumenism and dialogue... (Fundación Paradigma Córdoba 2025).

Based on this mission, the Living Museum of al-Andalus strives to recreate the “encounters and understandings between human beings that we should strive for” through exhibits on Andalusian art, science, and diplomacy replete with exoticizing music and imagery (see Figure 4.7) but interspersed with contemporary art that is clearly intended to promote social harmony across religious and cultural differences (Torre Calahorra 2024b; see Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.7: A scene of Christian diplomats visiting Muslim rulers in Córdoba displayed in the Living Museum of al-Andalus; note the exoticizing imagery such as the treasure and the reclining, sexualized female figure (Samiee 2024)



Figure 4.8: A contemporary sculpture with a message of interfaith harmony in the Living Museum of al-Andalus (Samiee 2024)

Like any *lieu de mémoire* designed to promote a particular understanding of the past, its narrative avoids facts that do not fit into its idyllic narrative (Halbwachs 1992, 48-51, 182-183; Nora 1989, 12, 23; Renan 2018, 251). It describes the history of intercultural spaces in Córdoba and Spain in general while glossing over the power dynamics that limited the impact of these spaces; for

example, it highlights thirteenth-century laws guaranteeing religious freedom in territories ruled by Christians but ignores that while allowing Muslims to continue practicing their faith, these laws restricted their social relations to weaken their influence.<sup>18</sup> The displays at the Living Museum of al-Andalus categorize Muslims as “other,” but they also affirm a Córdoba tradition of respecting the “other” that has continued from al-Andalus to the present and can teach other European cities how to approach the political implications of cultural difference in the present. By reifying the notion of Muslims as foreign to Spain, the exhibits align Spain with ethnic conceptions of “Europe”; by emphasizing the relevance of medieval Córdoba to current challenges, they suggest that Spain is useful to the rest of “Europe.” Both of these strategies emphasize that Spain is a “European” nation.

Corporate efforts to capitalize on Córdoba’s history for marketing purposes advance comparable narratives idealizing al-Andalus in a way that highlights Spain’s Europeaness. Tariq Mahmood, the Pakistani-British director of Andalusian Routes, one of many tourist agencies that bring Muslim youth from Western countries to Spain’s Islamic heritage sites, argues that his company’s work shows that “there’s no contradiction” between being Muslim and being European (Calderwood 2015). Businesses producing halal food also take advantage of Córdoba’s history to promote their products; for instance, when the Halal Institute announced its “Córdoba Halal” project in 2014, it stated, “In the collective imaginary of Muslims, Córdoba is a historical point of reference of Islamic civilization in the West, and, therefore, what we seek when we visit this city is to find a place that carries values such as concord, mutual respect, religious freedom, diversity” (Calderwood 2015). These narratives use an idealized history of *convivencia* to reject the notion that ethnic or cultural difference should preclude belonging to Spain, “Europe,” or the West since these constructs can be based on civic principles such as freedom, peace, and

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<sup>18</sup> See *Las Siete Partidas*, Partida VII, Title XXV.

pluralism (*El País* 2023; Rigney 2012, 611). This portrayal of Córdoba as proof of the possibility of including Muslims reiterates the idea that the city, its Andalusí past, and its Spanish present are models for and therefore part of “Europe.”

A small but vocal constituency that builds on the concept of Spain’s Islamic past as a blueprint for addressing the political and social challenges of contemporary Europe is Spanish converts to Islam. Civil society organizations run by converts, including the Junta, seek to demonstrate that Islam—or at least their version of it—has a place in “Europe.” Some embrace Ignacio Olagüe’s assertion that medieval Iberian Muslims were not foreign invaders but “native, autochthonous Spanish Muslim” converts (Coleman 2008, 163). In another instance of the “inversion of conventional genealogy,” they identify as the inheritors of Umayyad Córdoba, distinguishing between themselves and Muslims from immigrant backgrounds in an attempt to avoid the stigma associated with the latter (Abend 2008, 143; Anderson 2006, 205). They additionally purport to practice a special, “open” Islam that stresses commonalities with other religions, protects women’s rights, promotes nonviolence, and rejects fundamentalism (Abend 2008, 134). This assertion allows the Junta and other convert organizations to argue that their Islam supports democracy by embracing values such as pluralism and freedom of religion, but it hints that other interpretations of Islam do not and therefore have no place in Spain (Abend 2008, 137-138). It is a means of protecting converts when events such as the September 11 attacks and the 2004 Madrid train bombings heighten anti-Muslim sentiment in Spain, but the treatment of al-Andalus as an idyllic shared past and the application of that past to present-day religious stances also suggest that Islam in al-Andalus its successor, Spain, should be a model for Muslims and their integration in the rest of “Europe” (Abend 2008, 134-135). Indeed, “there is an undeniable sense among New Muslims that the religion they practice is European, in the sense

that it both has its historical roots in Europe and that it affirms European Enlightenment values” (Abend 2008, 142-143). Certain convert communities’ insertion of themselves into broader narratives of “Europe” are confirmed by their tendency to criticize Muslims from undemocratic states and fret that Muslim immigrants are exerting too much influence over their “Spanish Islam” (Abend 2008, 137, 146). Convert organizations’ self-definition in opposition to non-European Islamic cultures that do not claim ties to al-Andalus demonstrates a concern with using Spain’s particular history to affirm their Europeanness based on cultural differences with other Muslims as well as civic values upheld by their idealized version of Andalusí Islam.

### *Spain as “Europe’s” Emissary to Muslim Societies*

In addition to portraying Spain as a model for the rest of “Europe,” the idealization of al-Andalus often follows Rodolfo Gil Benumeya in assigning Spain a role as “Europe’s” emissary to Muslim societies. Educational efforts drawing on the concept of *convivencia* exemplify this phenomenon. Spanish converts to Islam involved with the Junta created the website *WebIslam* to disseminate information and reflections on Islam as they practice it; these individuals have also been active in using international news outlets such as the BBC and CNN to insist that Islam is not inherently a threat to “Europe” or the West (Abend 2008, 143, 145). Various academic and civil society organizations from Spain and other Mediterranean countries convene courses and conferences related to the Arabic language, Middle Eastern art, and the contemporary politics of the Muslim world in Granada because of popular perceptions of the city as a site of *convivencia* (Hirschkind 2021, 129). These activities assume continuity between al-Andalus and modern Spain to suggest that because of the imagined harmony and pluralism that marked the former, the latter is uniquely positioned to facilitate dialogue between Muslim and other cultures or even entitled to

explain Islam to societies that are supposedly less tolerant of it. Consequently, they indicate that Spain is the ambassador of a monolithic Islam to the rest of “Europe” and therefore a vital member of “Europe.”

Some activities and advertising geared towards tourists promote the same ambassadorial role for Spain. In Granada, Jerónimo Páez, the founder of Legado Andalusi, insists that he and other Spaniards “are Europeans” and “felt good in Europe” but also have “affinities” with the Middle East and the Maghreb because of their shared past in al-Andalus, which has the potential to bridge divides between “Europe” and Muslim societies in the present (Calderwood 2014, 39). In a reflection of this attitude, Legado Andalusi spearheaded a *Cultural Itinerary of the Almoravids and Almohads* as part of the “Routes of the Andalusi Legacy” that was recognized as a Culture Route of the CoE in 1997 (Calderwood 2014, 42). This initiative brought tourists to sites in Spain and Morocco, the sponsoring countries, in a display of cultural cooperation (Calderwood 2014, 42). The guide to the route stated that political unity between what would become Spain and Morocco in al-Andalus led to “a symbiosis and a strong mixing of peoples and cultures, whose footprints we find everywhere we look,” making Andalusia “a meeting place and a link between Europe and Africa” (Calderwood 2014, 42-43). Similarly, as part of Córdoba’s entry for the European Capital of Culture competition, the city published guides that identified it as a “European ambassador over a number of routes that rediscover and highlight...evidence of intercultural dialogue” (Arigita 2014, 28). These advertisements of cities strongly associated with al-Andalus all claim that because of idealized medieval *convivencia*, Spaniards are comfortable with multiple cultures; however, their role in attempts to gain recognition from institutional Europe, insistence on a dichotomy between Europe and predominantly Muslim societies, and claim that Spain is an “ambassador” for Europe all assert

that Spain is a “European” nation from an ethnic or cultural standpoint and has the added value of a history that supposedly enables it to communicate with Muslim societies for “Europe.”

The discourse of Spain as an emissary of “Europe” or the West to Muslim societies because of its past is not a mere marketing gimmick to generate tourism revenue. The Spanish government has used it in foreign policy. The most famous example is PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero’s 2004 address to the UN General Assembly, in which he styled himself the leader of an “ancient and diverse country, with different languages, different traditions, different cultures” and declared, “In my capacity as a representative of a country created and enriched by diverse cultures, before this Assembly I want to propose an Alliance of Civilizations between the Western and Arab and Muslim worlds” (Abend 2008, 149; UNAOC 2024). Spain’s UNAOC project developed over the next several years as it received support from UN leadership and took on the government of Turkey—another country with a complicated history of identification with “Europe”—as a co-sponsor (UNAOC 2024). It now aims to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue as a foundation for achieving much more ambitious goals, including multilateral responses to terrorism and the resolution of conflicts over Palestine, Gibraltar, and Western Sahara (Soriano and Rubiales 2007, 102; UNAOC 2024). As the UNAOC’s agenda items reveal, the forum is partly a means for Spain to advance dialogue on international challenges that its government considers to be important. That said, it was founded on Zapatero’s assertion that his country’s past idyllic and “tolerant” society allows it to meet the world’s need for a bridge between what he framed as separate “Western” and “Arab and Muslim worlds.” Zapatero’s argument for Spain’s utility in an emissarial role on behalf of the West and “Europe” as distinct political and cultural entities from the “Arab and Muslim world” implies that Spain shares aspects of its cultural history with Muslim societies but has achieved the political stability

associated with “Europe,” placing it in a position to guide intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution on “Europe’s” behalf (Brubaker 1996, 1; Tamir 2019, 425). Thus, many actors in Spain use even the preservation of idealized memories of what historically has made Spain “different” from the rest of “Europe” to assert their place within “Europe.”

## **Conclusion**

On the surface, historical memory concerning Spain’s Islamic past may seem entirely unrelated to that of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship; however, both cases display Spain’s distinction from the rest of “Europe,” provoking debates as to whether and how to modify historical memory. In the remembrance of al-Andalus, Spanish intellectuals, politicians, and artists have spent centuries disputing the relationship between Spain and Islam and its consequences for Spain’s belonging to “Europe.” Transnational developments such as immigration from predominantly Muslim countries, concerns about terrorism, and economic dependence on tourism have reinvigorated these figures’ debates by prompting forgetting, villainization, and idealization of al-Andalus. While these memory practices are distinct in content, they all tend to frame Spain as a “European” nation. In doing so, they reiterate the importance of historical memory in nation-building as well as the relevance of transnational influences such as ideas surrounding “Europe” in shaping national identity. They also point to the interdependence of civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. The contradictory memory practices of villainization and idealization generally rely on a combination of civic and ethnic understandings of Spain and “Europe,” yet Islamophobic violence and the rise of Vox indicate that historical narratives promoting ethnic nationalism can at times restrict the implementation of

civic principles. In the concluding chapter, I will examine the implications of my findings and explain their relevance to Spain and Europe.

## Chapter 5

### Spain: Not So Different After All

*“Woe to the race that doesn’t stop at the crossroads before continuing on its way, that doesn’t make a problem of its own inner life; that doesn’t feel the heroic need to justify its destiny, to express clarity about its mission in history!”*

*-José Ortega y Gasset*

#### Findings

José Ortega y Gasset’s insistence that a people can only navigate the present if it excavates the past for its “mission in history” reflects a perennial preoccupation of political actors who seek to construct and mobilize around nations (2021, 129). This preoccupation is pronounced in Spain as a result of the country’s position at the nexus of various transnational networks, attachment to European institutions and cultural conceptions of “Europe,” and historical disjunctures from “Europe” through the Spanish Civil War, Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, and medieval Muslim rule. I analyzed primary sources to determine how and to what effect political actors in contemporary Spain represent past disjunctures from the idea of “Europe.” I found that in spite or perhaps because of frequent claims that “Spain is different,” various people and institutions have developed a selective historical memory that portrays Spain as a “European” nation based on both civic and ethnic criteria.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that while the prevalent historical memory surrounding the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s regime has shifted over time, it has consistently been subject to transnational and especially European pressures that induce political actors to frame history such that Spain conforms to their idea of a “European” nation. In the decades after the Spanish Civil War, it was typical to represent the conflict as a “crusade” in which Franco and the Nationalists protected “Christian Europe” from pernicious foreign influences. This narrative fell out of favor

around the 1960s as Spain's increased interactions with other Western European countries and nascent European institutions elevated the importance of civic principles such as peace, democracy, and human rights as defining features of "Europe." During and after Spain's transition to democracy, the history of the Spanish Civil War and Francoist repression was buried on the grounds that discussing it would disrupt the country's new "European normality" and spark another conflict. This treatment of the past was increasingly questioned beginning in the early 2000s. Domestic political challenges, transnational and European political discourses, and pressure from international and European institutions suggested that to adhere to "European" political values, Spain would have to reject past repression and human rights abuses explicitly rather than simply ignore them. As a result, a more confrontational approach enshrined in memory laws from 2007 and 2022 has emerged but remains controversial.

Chapter 4 explained that recent transnational developments such as immigration from North Africa, concerns about terrorism, and economic dependence on international tourism have revived centuries-old arguments regarding the implications of al-Andalus for Spain's relationship with Islam and place within "Europe." It identified three memory practices surrounding al-Andalus: forgetting, villainization, and idealization. Forgetting obscures Spain's Islamic past to facilitate a view of Islam as entirely alien to Spain. Villainization centers this past to assert that Spain was born out of opposition to Islam, so its existence depends on continuing a historical struggle against Muslim societies. Both of these practices support the notion that Spain belongs to "Europe" as defined by Christian heritage and opposition to Islam. They have also contributed to problems ranging from violence against Muslims to the rise of the far-right authoritarian party Vox, leading to violations of the civic principles touted by European institutions. They thus expose the difficulty of extending civic nationalism to ethnic "others," undermining the civic

nationalism/ethnic nationalism binary that is common in the study of Spanish nationalisms. In contrast with forgetting and villainization, the idealization of al-Andalus casts it as a wellspring of European culture as well as a site of *convivencia* that can guide other European countries through challenges such as the integration of Muslim immigrants and places Spain in a position to act as “Europe’s” emissary to Muslim societies. By underscoring Spain’s utility to Europe, it depicts Spain as a “European” nation.

### **Implications**

Political actors’ portrayal of Spain as a “European” nation like any other through the manipulation of history in contexts ranging from tourism to foreign policy has several wide-reaching implications. One of these is a reaffirmation of the importance of historical memory and its transnational influences to national identities. Transnational pressures on historical memory are especially crucial because they will only grow as online communications, international activism, and regional integration accelerate the processes of comparison and opposition inherent to the construction of national identities. They will also become more visible as states’ explicit efforts to govern how the past is remembered, as exemplified by Spain’s memory laws, either correspond with or counteract transnational pressures, making the political uses of historical memory increasingly clear and contested within and across countries.

Another implication is that national and “European” identities are compatible and even complementary if political actors represent them as linked rather than unrelated or opposed. For instance, the Spanish government has depicted the Historical Memory Law and the Democratic Memory Law’s provisions for accountability to domestic victims of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship as valuable not only in and of themselves but also as means of conforming

to European antifascist and Holocaust remembrance discourses and addressing the concerns of institutions such as the CoE and the EU. Similarly, Vox has justified its efforts to homogenize Spain through restrictions on immigration by couching them in a supposed historical mission to protect Europe from Islam. The coexistence and potential complementarity of national and “European” identities imagined from multiple perspectives could provide insights into the politics and foreign policies of European countries with historical disjunctures from “Europe” that are comparable to Spain’s, whether it be post-communist states in Eastern Europe that struggle with the legacy of political repression or Balkan countries where Ottoman rule is still sometimes invoked to explain political positions.

The relationship between national and “European” identities also points to possibilities for deepening European integration. The increasing assertiveness of the EU as a geopolitical actor is a pragmatic response to security challenges posed by Russia and the United States, but to be viable in the long term, EU member states must be able to identify shared interests, values, and visions that transcend or unite national ones. Spain’s experience shows that the invocation of the idea of “Europe” at the domestic level, narratives of history that emphasize commonalities among European countries, and consistent pressure from European institutions can inculcate identification with “Europe” in addition to specific countries. Identification with “Europe,” in turn, can contribute to a more coherent and autonomous EU despite differences among member states, equipping the institution to respond to threats.

However, Spain’s experience indicates not only opportunities but also challenges for European integration. These challenges emerge because the civic principles espoused by institutions such as the EU and the CoE are not the only basis for belonging to “Europe” or its constituent states. In fact, these political values sometimes struggle to accommodate those

labeled as alien to “Europe” on ethnic or cultural grounds. In Spain, this problem is apparent in attacks on Muslim communities, restrictions on Muslims’ freedom of worship, and Vox’s use of Islamophobia as a means of reviving Francoism. The interdependence of civic and ethnic nationalisms and understandings of “Europe” present situations in which European countries and institutions’ commitment to ideals such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are brought into question. These situations weaken European institutions’ credibility and capacity to address pressing challenges.

### **Avenues for Additional Research**

Moving beyond this study, I identify three broad areas for further research. The first of these deals with the idea of “Europe” and its influence on historical memory and nationalisms in other contexts. My research on Spain focused on war, dictatorship, and interactions with Muslim societies as historical experiences around which common notions of Europeanness are built. There are others that are relevant to national identities and highly contentious, such as colonialism. Investigating how these aspects of the past are represented and debated across European countries could yield a more detailed understanding of the multiple meanings of “Europe” and their political consequences.

Additionally, although Spain’s experiences are comparable to those of other European countries, each country has distinct domestic actors and attaches different levels of importance to international and “European” norms. As a result, additional studies on other European countries’ representations of historical disjunctures from the idea of “Europe” would complement this thesis and suggest the value and limitations of applying the lessons of Spain’s experiences to other cases. They would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how

“Europe” is constructed at the national level and yield possibilities for encouraging identification with “Europe.” It would be useful to compare cases of transnational pressures on historical memory and nationalisms from Europe with ones from outside of Europe. Other regions are not as integrated politically and tend to have weaker institutions but are still subject to other kinds of transnational influences, so expanding the scope of study beyond Europe would yield more widely applicable findings on transnational dynamics, historical memory, and nationalism.

A second area for further research involves the roles and interaction of specific actors in the political instrumentalization and contestation of historical memory. In both of the cases examined in this thesis, a combination of intellectuals, domestic politicians, civil society actors, private corporations, NGOs, and international organizations contributed either implicitly or explicitly to the construction of historical memory. An investigation of their relative contributions, awareness of their impact, and coordination or lack thereof could lead to a more detailed understanding of how dominant historical memories are sustained or countered and changed successfully.

This thesis also shows that Spain’s autonomous communities play a key role in shaping historical memory, whether it be the Basque Country and Catalonia’s initiative in condemning the Spanish Civil War and Francoism or Andalusia’s economic and political stake in the remembrance of al-Andalus. These dynamics raise questions regarding the role of sub-state nationalisms in the formation and evolution of historical memory as well as the relationships among sub-state nationalisms, state nationalisms, and supranational constructs. Research dedicated exclusively to these issues would contribute to a more complete understanding of the pressures that alter historical memory and nationalisms.

A final area worth examining in light of the findings and implications of my research is the ethics of policies governing historical memory. Incomplete or distorted representations of the past for political ends or informed by political circumstances may be inevitable due to the difficulty of recovering all relevant historical evidence and the utility of historical memory to those seeking to mobilize or suppress a population. However, these representations do cause and perpetuate harm, as in the cases of unrecognized victims of Francoist repression or Moriscos' descendants. In such cases, efforts such as the legislation of historical memory have the potential to provide much-needed repair, but imposing historical memory from the top down could also breed conflict or suppress dissent. Research on the political, social, and personal effects of different countries' efforts to manage historical memory would pave the way for governments to facilitate solidarity and justice without abusing their influence on historical memory. It is urgent amid the intensification of transnational pressures, attempts to control historical memory, and the resulting contestation that are exemplified in Spain but relevant across Europe and around the world.

The case of Spain and its place in "Europe" demonstrates that historical memory is so central to national identities and so ingrained in both high politics and everyday life that it wields a unique power in determining how countries approach fundamental questions of conflict, reconciliation, justice, pluralism, and belonging. Learning how transnational phenomena and the idea of "Europe" influence it, how different actors uphold or undermine it, and whether and how to shape it ethically are absolutely critical for addressing political challenges.

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