Friend, Foe, or Franco? Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik Propaganda in World War II Spain

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Contemporary perspectives often conflate antisemitism and Nazism; however, the Nazis are certainly not the only regime in history to persecute Jewish people. The Spanish Inquisition (1470s-1853) and the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula (711-1492) were perhaps the second- and third-most famous persecutions of the Jews. These events resulted in the forced conversion, exile, or execution of Jews across the Iberian Peninsula. By the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, historical anti-Jewish policies ensured that few Jews remained in Spain.[1] It is curious, then, that in 1936, anti-Jewish sentiment was once again on the rise in Spanish society. Franco's *golpe de estado* saw a far-right, antisemitic regime come to power, one that would offer little help to the Jewish community during the Holocaust.

The foremost vehicle of this prejudice was the Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik Conspiracy—the idea that an international Jewish community was attempting to destroy Spain from within under the guise of Freemasonry and Communism.[2] Under this conflation, Freemasonry threatened the control of the Catholic Church through its secrecy and radical secular ideals, and therefore the very foundation of Spanish society. Francoist Spain's political philosophy of National Catholicism exacerbated a return to anti-Jewish and anti-Masonic tendencies, further resulting in a favorable view of the Nazi regime. As World War II grew into a full-scale conflict, *La bestia judeomasonica* was an important symbol used by both German and Spanish governments to tie their enemies into a single international threat.[3] There was indeed a "beast" threatening Spanish liberty but it was German, not Jewish, in origin. The use of Judeo-Masonic propaganda was a purposeful decision to create and expand Spanish sympathy with the Nazis and to unite factions within the Spanish political system against a common enemy that could be easily eradicated. As Spain walked the line between neutrality and belligerence, Franco's far-right *Falange* prepared society to be receptive to Nazi political and racial ideologies, turning the anger and frustration of the Spanish Civil War into a vehicle of hate.

At the beginning of WWII, there were approximately six thousand Jews and a similar number of Freemasons living in Spain.[4] Compared to an overall population of twenty-five million total Spaniards, Jews and Freemasons combined made up less than one percent of the population. Gustavo Perednik, an Argentinian scholar who specializes in Spanish history, suggests that "The modern Judeo-phobic myth of Jewish World domination should be meaningless in a country devoid of Jews for almost half a millennium," but the opposite was true.[5] The lack of personal knowledge of Jewish communities

[1] Stephen Mayeaux, "Limpieza de Sangre: Legal Applications of the Spanish Doctrine of 'Blood Purity,'" in *Custodia Legis: Law Librarians of Congress* (blog), (Library of Congress, 2021); *leyes de limpieza de sangre*, or blood purity laws, were created to separate Jews and Muslims from Catholics despite the forced conversion of the former. The Old Christians were those that had been Catholic long before Isabella I and Ferdinand II reconquered the Iberian Peninsula, and they remained at the top of the social order. New converts, or *conversos*, were those that had agreed to convert rather than be banished or killed. They were still viewed with suspicion and believed to be secretly practicing Judaism. Their status as New Catholics made them second-class citizens as compared to the Old Catholic faithful.

[2] Paul Preston, *Architects of Terror: Paranoia, Conspiracy, and Anti-Semitism in Franco's Spain* (London: William Collins, 2023), Preface; according to Paul Preston, a more accurate translation of this term would be "the filthy Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik concubinage."

[3] Álvaro Ceballos, "El Marxismo de Régimen," (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2008), 1.

[4] Javier Domínguez Arribas, "The Judeo-Masonic Enemy in Francoist Propaganda (1936-1945)," in *Global Anti-Semitism: A Crisis of Modernity*, (Brill, 2013), 257-258.

[5] Gustavo D. Perednik, "Naive Spanish Judeophobia," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 15, no. 314 (2003): 103.

and customs escalated anti-Jewish sentiment. The Franco regime then used pre-existing prejudices against these already ostracized populations to create fear and anger towards these groups and to control the perception of the "Spanish Jew." The *Falange* maintained that Jewish *conversos* had been biding their time since the Reconquista to rise up against Catholics. Under the *Falange*, the Spanish Civil War was reframed as a crusade against heretics that once again threatened the *Patria* (Fatherland), a modern-day *Reconquista* for the good of Spain.[6]

Franco did not start out his regime with antisemitic policies. Rather, they were incorporated into his political philosophy as he began to see the hand of the Masons, who he believed were a sect of the international Jewish community, in every aspect of the Republican Left. These ideas were further justified by the failure of the Second Republic of Spain to fulfill its promises to the people. This conspiracy created a state of paranoia that followed Franco throughout his regime. His actions as the dictatorial head of state mirrored this anxious, fearful state of mind. Within his regime, those close to him adopted and spread the news of a conspiracy working to destroy Spanish society, an idea which closely mirrored Germany's "stab-in-the-back theory," or the idea that Jewish people had brought down the country from within. The fact that the Second Republic strayed away from Catholic influence and emphasized freedom of religion seemingly confirmed Franco's suspicions that the Republican Left had become a slave of Judaism.[7] He demonized anyone who allied themselves with the left, claiming it was "paradoxical that they should be called Spaniards," in a speech directed at the Foreign Press.[8] These ideas were further exasperated by those within his circle that were sympathetic to the Nazi Regime as it grew in power and influence.

The Nationalist victors had the liberty to define the Spanish Civil War with impunity. When Franco rose to power, the war was reframed as a conflict not over the type of government but the type of Spain the country wanted. Indoctrination of this view was present at all levels of society, especially among the youth. Even "[t]he National school curriculum of 1939 stipulated that primary school children be taught that the military rebellion of July 1936 was inevitable after the Second Republic handed over Spain to a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy and International Socialism and Comintern."[9] The *Falange* worked to train the next generation to believe that Jews and Communists were responsible for the horrible conflict the country had undergone, and would continue to destroy Spanish society if given the chance. This propaganda had a drastic impact on how Spain treated its Jewish community far into the future. Ramón Serrano Suñer, as the head of Franco's propaganda apparatus, could control the narrative internally and did so with a clear purpose: to force the subjugation of any element that threatened Nationalist rule or spoke out against fascism. As a strong proponent of Nazi policy, he contributed significantly to the mission of the Nazis to spread antisemitic propaganda throughout Spain, believing that the two regimes shared ideological threads that could not be ignored.

Although Spain did not enter World War II officially, it remained neutral in name only. Despite the country's status as non-belligerent, Franco sent supplies, aid, and resources over the German border while deflecting Allied demands and attacking British and American propaganda. A cocktail of legislation, government-controlled media, and the unimpeded circulation of Nazi propaganda exacerbated existing racial prejudice that worked in favor of both Spanish Nationalist and Nazi goals. Non-governmental speeches and popular literature similarly echoed these sentiments. The Judeo-Masonic Conspiracy became such a significant part of Spanish popular discourse that "[t]he war against Bolshevism satisfied many Spaniards who now saw Germany engaged in a conflict analogous to their own civil war."[10] Spanish

[6] Samuel O'Donaghue, "Carlos Barral + the Struggle for Holocaust Consciousness in Franco's Spain," *History and Memory* 30, no. 2 (2017): 117-119.

[7] Julius Ruiz, *Franco's Justice: Repression in Madrid after the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 200.

[8] "Declarations of Franco to the Foreign Press" (transcript), *Documentos Inéditos Para la Historia de Generalissimo Franco*, ed. [Fundacion Nacional Francisco Franco], vol. 1 (Madrid: Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco:1992), 184. Translated by Rachael Jenness.

[9] Julius Ruiz, "Fighting the International Conspiracy: The Francoist Persecution of Freemasonry 1936-1945," *Politics, Religion, Ideology* 12, no. 2 (2011): 181.

[10] Raymond L. Proctor, *Agony of a Neutral: La Division Azul* (Moscow, ID: Idaho Research Foundation, 1974), 115.

society became so saturated with the conspiracy that the Jews appeared to be behind every historical downfall that Spain had suffered, regardless of the fact that a strong Jewish community had not existed in the country for almost half a century.

The most significant Nazi sympathies in Spanish society lay within the extreme-right ruling party of the Falangists, who were the main disseminators of German propaganda in Spain. Álvaro Ceballos, who studied Spanish Marxism during the Franco regime, argues this propaganda fulfilled the purpose of repressing the organized labor movement and creating a balance of power between conflicting elements in different far-right factions of the regime.[11] The parties on the right then coalesced into a single force that was indicative of the ideal Spaniard. The regime's aid in the dissemination of Nazi propaganda operated as a way to repay the *deuda de sangre* from the Spanish Civil War to Germany. Paul Preston, the foremost scholar on Francoist Spain, posits that "anti-Semitism became a major element of Falangist discourse by way of emulating and currying favor with the Nazis."[12] Ramón Serrano Suñer was one of these advocates of German attitudes and one of the more radical elements of the *Falange*. He often worked with Josef Goebbels, the head of Nazi propaganda, to shape the dissemination of misinformation across both countries.[13] With consent and support from Serrano Suñer, the Nazi party had weaseled its way into mainstream Spanish media.

The American Ambassador to Spain, CJH Hayes, states that "[i]n the Spanish press and over the Spanish radio and through the Spanish postal system, favoritism was shown to Axis, as against Allied, news and propaganda."[14] The Germans even had their own radio station in Salamanca created during the Spanish Civil War, while the *Aberwher*, the German military intelligence apparatus, was given free rein to operate in Spain. Collaborating with Goebbels, Serrano Suñer ensured that the common Spaniard had a Germanophilic rather than an Anglophilic perspective. He publicly boasted that "during his three-year period of control, he had kept the Spanish press continuously subservient to German interests."[15] His oversight ensured that only favorable views of Germany could be published in the press, contributing to the wide proliferation of Nazi ideology. Articles from *Das Reich* were circulated throughout Spanish newspapers unofficially controlled by the Franco regime. The *Falange* also ran cartoons from *Der Sturmer* furthering antisemitic and anti-Communist propaganda.[16] In contrast, British and American propaganda, or any other rhetoric that emphasized the Allied cause, was counteracted fiercely by both the Nazis in Spain and the Spanish government.[17] There was no doubt that the *Falange* sympathized with the Nazi cause.

Propaganda about Spain worked in favor of the Nazis in Germany as well. Goebbels used the Spanish Civil War to incite fear of social revolution in Germany and claim that a civil war would be imminent if the "Jewish Problem" was not solved. Goebbels' diaries emphasized the importance of Spain for German military support abroad, specifically because of its influence over Latin America. His obsession with Spanish news and events exposed how essential Spanish cooperation was to the Nazis.[18] Unfortunately for Hitler and Mussolini, Franco was a fair-weather friend, interested primarily in what the Axis could do for Spain rather than what his country could do for their cause.

The constant bombardment of Germanophilic propaganda greatly impacted the Spanish population. Despite the fact that Spain had just finished its own war, its soldiers became motivated once again to join in an ideological crusade. The amount of people who volunteered to fight with Germany on the Russian front shows just how effective Judeo-Masonic propaganda was. As part of the *Division Azul*, forty-thousand Spanish citizens were sent to fight on the Russian Front as a supplement to Germany's forces. This group was made up of volunteers who believed

[11] Ceballos, "El Marxismo del Régimen," 2.

[12] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 5.

[13] Robert H. Whealey, "The Spanish Holocaust and the Coverup that Lasted a Generation," (History News Network: Feb. 26), 6.

[14] Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Wartime Mission in Spain* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945), 70.

[15] Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1947), 90.

[16] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 19.

[17] Hayes, *Wartime Mission in Spain,* 72.

[18] Robert H. Whealey, "Nazi Propagandist Joseph Goebbels Looks at the Spanish Civil War," *The Historian* 61, no. 2, (Taylor & Francis: 1999): 348.

an Axis victory would further enhance Spain's legacy. As described by Raymond Proctor, "...the call went out to organize the Spanish "Blue Division", at which time Serrano Suñer publicly acknowledged Spain's *deuda de sangre* and promised prophetically to "replay blood for blood, friendship for friendship.'"[19] This demonstration of Spanish solidarity with the Nazis, despite Franco's cautious foreign policy, revealed Spain's true ideological alliances during the Second World War. Franco believed that committing officially to the war would likely put Spain in a compromising position because of its post-civil-war vulnerability, but did not hesitate to send his citizens to fight and die in a foreign war that he believed was ideologically similar to the one that had ensured his rise to power.

In conjunction, several radical writers informed Spanish opinion on Freemasons and Jews, the most influential of which were the priest Juan de Tusquets and the poet Jose Maria Peman. The former wrote ten volumes of a diatribe against Jews, claiming that "Freemasonry was a Jewish creation, a weapon of English imperialism, and responsible for the bloodshed" in Russia.[20] He based his fear of the Jewish community on the fictional work, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which portrayed Freemasonry as a sect of international Jewry. His writings were so widely published that he was invited to an anti-Freemason convention in 1933 and hired by the Francoist government to hunt down Freemasons and confiscate their property. Tusquets saw Germany as a model for the future of Spain and expressed this vehemently after visiting Dachau in 1934.[21] He was later elected by Serrano Suñer to publish what appeared to be the church's views on the current Spanish ideological conflict. Another work he influenced was a newspaper called *Pelayos*, which aimed to indoctrinate the younger generation against the Spanish Left. Along with indoctrination in schools, his writings were extremely important in spreading Judeo-Masonic propaganda through the use of popular and widely accessible media.

Jose Maria Peman penned another of the most influential works that propagated the Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy. His most important contribution was *La poema de la bestia y la angel,* which portrayed the Spanish Civil War as "the battle between Satan and God, who had chosen Spain to be the last defender of Western Civilization against the threat of 'the red and Semitic East.'"[22] Drawing on Tusquets' work, he similarly stressed how deep Jewish influence ran in Spanish society, and that Freemasonry and Communism were the brainchildren of international Jewry. Peman and Tusquets were convinced it was their duty to warn Catholics about the dangers of their Jewish neighbors.[23]

The works of these two writers during the Spanish Civil War belied the revival of a dangerous political trend in Spanish society: the tendency to conflate the international Jewish community with all of Spain's enemies. They asserted that, even though the Republican forces had been defeated, the ideological battle was not over and the only way to save Spain was with the "destruction of Jews, Freemasons, and socialists…in other words, of the entire left of the political spectrum."[24] Judeo-Masonic propaganda helped the Francoist government control the narrative and change the attitudes of society towards the Republican left and any who aligned ideologically with their ideas.

The clergy were also virulently antisemitic. The Spanish clergy demonized Jews as Christ-Killers and viewed them with extreme suspicion, although the Inquisition had removed the majority of Jews from the country. Franco's strong Catholic connections informed his suspicion towards Jews, to such an extent that even the Church grew wary of his rhetoric. His ruling philosophy of National Catholicism was simply another form of justification for the subjugation of political and racial minorities, as he believed "Spain was to be free of International Jewry…to return to its destiny at the right hand of God."[25] This language was indicative of Spain's goals and mirrored German rhetoric which elevated national destiny as a concept beyond the physical nation to the divine. While Spain did not directly have imperial goals during World War II, they

[19] Proctor, *Agony of a Neutral,* 25.

[20] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 35.

[21] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 85.

[22] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 125.

[23] Preston, *Architects of Terror,* 71.

[24] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 7.

[25] Preston, *Architects of Terror,* 71.

considered the purification of the regime to be an empire of the spirit.[26]

In 1940, the Franco regime passed *La Ley para la Represión de Francmasonería y Comunismo*, which targeted prominent Freemasons and hauled them before a Special Tribunal to be tried for treason. An unclear definition of Freemasonry and Communism created the space to indiscriminately prosecute anyone who was not part of Franco's *patria*. The *patria*, on the contrary, had an extremely narrow definition:

> those who embraced Spanish tradition and Catholic values. All the rest—Jews, arch-heretics, Protestants, Communists, Moors, Encyclopaedists, Francophiles, Freemasons, Krausists, liberals, Marxists—were and are a dissenting minority beyond nationality. Outside and against the Fatherland is the Anti-Fatherland.[27]

While the law only specified Freemasonry and Communism as prosecutable minorities, the actual application of the law saw many others condemned because of their political leanings. Because the regime believed that both Freemasonry and Communism were the manifestation of Jewish influence, Jews did not need to be specified in these laws to be persecuted. Additionally, because the law provided Franco with the legitimate authority to fire, imprison, or execute enemies of the regime, he and his government were able to apply it to whomever they wished.

This was not the only measure that the Spanish government took against Jewish communities. In 1941, Franco ordered the country's governors to "prepare a file of every foreign and domestic Jew residing in his province."[28] This list provided information on political and personal affiliations, their commercial activities, and if they posed a security threat. He later handed the list over to Heinrich Himmler, and German *Schutzstaffel* officers were allowed into Spain to keep tabs on Spanish Jews. Similarly, the property of Sephardic Jews in Spain was confiscated and given to non-Jewish Spaniards.[29] While antisemitism in World War II-era Spain never reached Holocaust proportions or amounted to mass executions, this action implies that the political climate in Spain would not have prevented the eventual murder of its remaining Jews. Official government communiques echoed these sentiments while simultaneously attempting to downplay Spain's antisemitic attitudes to the international community and emphasize Spanish "neutrality." Chillingly, Preston speculates based on these documents that "only a shortage of Jews prevented a more antisemitic policy."[30]

So why was there no Spanish Holocaust? The climate in Spain was ripe for a similar event, and Spanish sentiment and policy were eyeing that same path. The answer became clear around 1943 when it appeared that Germany was losing the war—the hourglass was running out of sand, and it was time to jump ship. Near the end of World War II, Spanish government policy began to distance itself from both *Falange* and Nazi influence. In doing so, Franco performed a complete about-face in his political opinions to appear more favorable to the United Nations, which Spain wanted to join. The shift in political philosophy is most apparent starting in 1943, when Spain pulled the *Division Azul* from Germany and disbanded it. Allied pressure caused Franco to limit supplies and other aid to Hitler. Eventually, he stopped authorizing the refueling and repair of German submarines in Spanish ports. The Judeo-Masonic Conspiracy and underhanded measures of the Franco government, however, did not disappear even after the war. Freemasonry and any activity connected to it remained a prosecutable criminal offense in Spain until 1964. To appear more favorable to the United Nations, however, the focus of the conspiracy shifted away from a Jewish problem to a left-wing enemy in the early 60s.

Francisco Franco would later claim that Spain had been the savior of the Jewish people during the horrors visited upon them by the Nazis and that his country had maintained total neutrality throughout the conflict. His "post-war doublethink" successfully convinced his own citizens and the international

[26] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 113.

[27] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 102.

[28] Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany and World War II*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 215.

[29] Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 222.

[30] Preston, *Architects of Terror*, 18.

community of Spain's wartime neutrality.[31] Franco rewrote his collaboration in World War II and presented himself as a benign ruler who had done all in his power to save European Jews. He scrubbed Spanish-German collaboration from the record and attempted to bury communications between himself and Hitler. Allied Intelligence saved some of this collaboration from the pyre, but were unable to prevent Franco from fooling the rest of the world into believing Spanish neutrality.

While Spain did accept Jewish refugees into the country during WWII, the attitude towards Jewish refugees was complacent at best and downright insidious at worst. Throughout the war, only ten thousand Jews were issued Spanish passports. The actual number of refugees allowed into the country is estimated by the Spanish government to have been close to forty thousand, although historians agree that this is likely an exaggerated assessment to make the country appear more charitable.[32] While the number of refugees is contentious, it is generally agreed upon that Spain did provide sanctuary for several Jews. However, the atmosphere in Spanish society suggests that Spain was no more friendly to the Jews than its German neighbor. Many Spaniards today believe that Spain owes no moral debt to the Jews because it accepted refugees during the war, an astonishing statement considering the history of Jewish persecution in Spain.[33] The moral debt of Spain to its Jews extends far beyond the acceptance of a few refugees in a time of need. Holocaust consciousness in Spain remains practically non-existent because of Francoist censorship and similarly prevents many Spaniards today from recognizing their country's role.[34]

Further, many Spaniards are not aware that twenty-three thousand of their own citizens were sent to concentration camps.[35] Franco was distinctly aware of these Spaniards and their suffering, but his abhorrence of the left prevented him from intervening. There is speculation that these camps were a convenient means for Franco to dispose of any remaining political enemies without appearing to be complicit in their execution.[36] Few survivors of these camps returned to Spain after the war, and there was little, if any, literature produced that implied Franco's hand in their destruction—strict censorship quelled any mention of the suffering of Spanish Republicans in comparison to Germany's Jews.

Ultimately, "[i]n its attitude towards the Jews and the Jewish question, the Franco Regime displayed a kind of split personality, but there can be no doubt about the anti-Jewish philosophy of Franco, the *Falange* and the church."[37] With this supposition, Gustavo Perednik accurately describes the policy of Francoist Spain towards Jews fleeing the Third Reich's influence. Francoist Spain can best be described as opportunistic and non-committal in official policy, but no amount of historical brainwashing can rinse the dictatorship's hands of Spanish blood or erase their moral alliance with Nazi Germany. Spanish fascism was the unfinished business of World War II—one that many people are blissfully ignorant of. Regardless, when the dust cleared at the fall of the Third Reich, Francisco Franco was neither friend nor foe to the Nazis—he was simply Franco.

[31] O'Donaghue, "Carlos Barral + the Struggle for Holocaust Consciousness in Franco's Spain," 132.

[32] Ruiz, *Franco's Justice*, 197-202.

[33] Perednik, "Naive Spanish Judeophobia," 17.

[34] O'Donaghue, "Carlos Barral + the Struggle for Holocaust Consciousness in Franco's Spain," 133.

[35] Whealey, "The Spanish Holocaust and the Cover-up that Lasted a Generation,"1.

[36] O'Donaghue, "Carlos Barral + the Struggle for Holocaust Consciousness in Franco's Spain," 143.

[37] Perednik, "Naive Spanish Judeophobia," 11.

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