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# The Notion of Reconquest According to the Catholic Kings of Spain and Éric Zemmour in France

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**Abstract:** The awareness of the unity of the territory and the desire to rediscover the Judeo-Christian culture of the Iberian Peninsula to ensure its protection and sustainability led the Catholic Monarchs in the 15th century to continue the work of “Reconquest” of the territories under Muslim domination since the invasion of 711. Later, in the 21st century, the notion of “Reconquest” also appears in the politician Éric Zemmour in France. From his political formation of the same name, he intends to bring together the French and those nostalgic for “old France” around traditional ideas to “save France from loss” and restore “its greatness”. This leads to studying “*the notion of “Reconquest” according to the Catholic Kings of Spain and Éric Zemmour in France*”. The objective of this analysis is to show that the concept of “Reconquest” used during these different periods was not used in the same ideological context. In short, this tends to show that Éric Zemmour is trying to make an outdated concept survive today because he thinks he finds a purely political interest in it. Through the analytical and comparative method, it will first be a question here of studying the notion of “Reconquest” in the 15th and 21st centuries and showing the similarities and differences of this word through these periods.

**Keywords:** Reconquest, Catholic Monarchs, Christianity, Éric Zemmour, Spain, France

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## 1. Introduction

Historians of settlements [9, 17, 15] and of the social organization of populations in the world reveal that the occupation of a territory is generally made by arrivals from all directions. They take the form of a migration, a more or less rapid colonization of this space. This occupation can also turn out to be brutal or progressive. Indeed, over the centuries, these populations living on the same territory end up acclimatizing and very often sharing the same values, the same techniques and religions, the same culture and the same feeling of belonging. This set of social phenomena experienced by these peoples associated with the social characteristics they acquire become their civilization, even their identity. But when these peoples are attacked and the territory is invaded by other foreign peoples who impose their culture, this can harm the common interests of the natives. To exist, it happens that the consciousness of unity and the will to live together of the attacked become a major concern. This situation naturally leads them to defend themselves in order to regain their space and their identity.

This desire for reunification and restoration of religious identity led the Catholic Monarchs in the 15th century to continue in the Iberian Peninsula, the work of “Reconquest” of the territories occupied by the Muslims that Pelagius<sup>1</sup> had begun from 722. In France in the 21st century, the vision of “Reconquest” of the politician Éric Zemmour is revealed from the formation of a political party of the same name.

In the context of this analysis on “*The notion of Reconquest according to the Catholic Kings of Spain and Éric Zemmour in France*”, the concept of “Reconquest” could be polysemic. Also, starting from the reign of the Catholic Kings (1474-1516)<sup>2</sup> who marked the history of

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<sup>1</sup> Pelagius was a Christian and was the first king of Asturias.

<sup>2</sup> Attention. We choose the period from 1474 to 1516 to mark the duration of the reign of the Catholic Monarchs for various reasons. When Henry IV died in 1474, Isabella proclaimed herself Queen of Castile. This fact started the War of Succession to the Castilian throne between her and her niece Joan the Beltraneja (this name because it was considered the bastard of Henry IV that his wife would have had with a certain Beltrán de la Cueva) between 1475 and 1479. The importance of the support of the small aristocracy to Isabella to the detriment of Joan conferred on her a royal power which already allowed her to administer

Spain by defending Catholicism in the Middle Ages to arrive at the very recent era of the 21st century by Éric Zemmour, the concept of Reconquest may have evolved.

But who are the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour? What does “Reconquest” mean to them? What ideology do they defend through the concept of “Reconquest”? What are the similarities and dissimilarities of this term among the protagonists of our analysis?

This questioning leads to the hypothesis that the concept of “Reconquest” starting from the Catholic Monarchs in the 15th century to arrive at Éric Zemmour in the 21st century has become anachronistic. The concept has a completely different meaning today. Two secondary hypotheses emerge from this main hypothesis: The first is that the “Reconquest” among the Spanish sovereigns of the 15th century is the homophone and the homograph of “Reconquest” by Éric Zemmour in the 21st century. The second is that although there is an analogy of the term among these protagonists from different eras, there are ideological contrasts associated with the means used to achieve the goal that are also completely different. Thus, the objective of this theme is to show that Éric Zemmour could use the influence and the positive connotation given to the word “Reconquest” by Spanish Catholicism in the 15th century, and of which the current conservative circles of this country are use it out of regret for the past, to echo those nostalgic for an identity France, in order to attract them to its political formation “Reconquest”. In short, Éric Zemmour seeks to make an outdated concept survive because he thinks he finds an interest in it.

To achieve this objective, this article opts for documentary research. According to I. Chong de la Cruz [14], documentary research is «el estudio de los documentos que derivan del proceso de la investigación científica y permite referir y citar investigaciones realizadas en otras partes del mundo que aporten informaciones a la investigación para la cual fueron consultados». <sup>3</sup> This leads to the use of the analytical method which will interpret the data of this research in order to facilitate the writing. Thus, Montaneres Vargas, Isabel, et al. [10] will say that the analytical method «aproxima al estudiante a un acontecimiento del pasado para desenvolverse de manera competente». <sup>4</sup> Also, the different periods of the conception of the word “Reconquest” lead to the use of the comparative method, taking into account the context in which it is used. The comparability criteria are similarity, equivalence and opposites.

In this analysis, it will first be a question of briefly presenting the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour. Then we will give the meaning of the word “Reconquest” according to the protagonists of this study and we will analyse its ideology in the 15th and 21st centuries. Finally, we will establish a

comparison according to the context in which it is used. Also, it should be noted that most of our research on the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour was done in Spanish and French newspapers and history books that we translated.

## 2. Brief Presentation of the Catholic Monarchs and Éric Zemmour

This chapter will briefly present the key figures of this analysis by explaining the context in which the concept of “Reconquest” appears among them.

### 2.1. Who Are the Catholic Kings of Spain

Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504) and Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452-1516) formed the royal couple of Catholic obedience who reigned over the most important kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, namely Castile and Aragon. Married in 1469, they officially acceded to the throne of Castile after their victory in the War of Succession of Castile (1475-1479) which opposed Isabella and Joan the *Beltraneja*, daughter and heiress of her late brother Henry IV. In 1478<sup>5</sup>, to have a greater control of the purity and the faith of the people, they set up the Inquisition as religious policy of Castile under the influence of Thomas de Torquemada, confessor of Isabella. In 1479, Ferdinand II inherited the throne of Aragon after the death of his father John II of Aragon. But, from 1475, the political maturity of Isabella I of Castile [7] had allowed her to obtain from her husband the signing of the Treaty of Segovia which allowed the sovereigns to administer jointly and independently the dual monarchy. In 1483, the Supreme and General Council of the Inquisition was created. Thomas de Torquemada was promoted to General Inquisitor of Castile and Aragon to manage this institution in a context of territorial expansion, conquest and defense of the faith. This commitment earned the monarchs Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon the title of Catholic Kings of Spain or Catholic Kings for short, granted by Pope Alexander VI and certified in 1496, by way of thanks and compensation for the appellation “Very Christians” granted to the kings of France.

The year 1492 is considered by Spanish historiography as a decisive year for the future of this country. Moreover, we could consider Spain as a political and geographical entity from this date. Indeed, the Catholic Kings invaded Granada which was the ultimate quintessential symbol of Muslim domination since 711. It was therefore a decisive victory for the Christian monarchs who interrupted several centuries of Arab domination in the Iberian Peninsula (we will come back to this). To establish Christian domination, it was necessary to reconquer territories under Muslim influence. Despite the relative acceptance of other religions, the various reconquered territories were federated around Catholicism. In addition, several events such as the decree of expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the discovery of America marked the

Castile. Moreover, when Isabella the Catholic died in 1504, Ferdinand II of Aragon was appointed regent until 1516, the date of his death.

<sup>3</sup> «the study of the documents that derive from the process of scientific research and allows referring and citing research carried out in other parts of the world that contribute information to the research for which they were consulted».

<sup>4</sup> «connects what is being studied to an event in the past to competently detail it».

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that if the Inquisition was set up in Castile from 1478, it was from 1480 that its courts were installed.

year 1492. Even though the goal was economic, it must be said that these actions were carried out in the spirit of the “Reconquest”.

## 2.2. Who Is Éric Zemmour

According to Emmanuel Berretta [25], Éric Justin Léon Zemmour better known as Éric Zemmour is a French journalist and politician, born on August 31, 1958 in Montreuil to Jewish parents from Algeria. After being educated in Jewish schools, Zemmour obtained a diploma in public service at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris [33]. Writer, essayist, editorial writer and columnist, he made a name for himself through the media<sup>6</sup> in which he achieved audience records for his polemical, violent, aggressive and defamatory speeches [33]. Moreover, he is very often sued for defamation or, as in 2011, for “provoking racial discrimination” because of his essays and statements, but also several times released.

From this popularity granted to him by these frequent media appearances will be born a confidence in him which will lead this speaker who stirs the media to embrace a political career. In 2019, the journalist Éric Decouty [29]<sup>7</sup> expressed his surprise at the intention of the divisive Éric Zemmour to run for the presidential election of 2022. With Patrick Buisson<sup>8</sup>, he prepared public opinion for this project by thinking about “a platform of ideas for the right”. So, to create an electoral base, the association “*Les Amis d'Éric Zemmour*”<sup>9</sup> and the collective “*Génération Z*”<sup>10</sup> are created in 2021. If the idea was to gather adherents to his cause (we will come back to this), this also made it possible to assess the political weight of their leader on the national scene. In September 2021, encouraged by the *Ipsos Sopra-Steria* poll which announced him in 3rd position with a strong progression [39], Éric Zemmour formalized his candidacy for this election on November 30, 2021 through his political movement “Reconquest”.

But what ideology do the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour defend through their conceptions of the word “Reconquest”?

## 3. The Meaning of “Reconquest” Among the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour and Its Ideology

This part explains the notion of “Reconquest” in the 15th and 21st centuries and analyses the system of ideas constituting the philosophical and political doctrines

<sup>6</sup> BFM TV, France2, CNews, RTL, I-Télé.

<sup>7</sup> For him, it is ridiculous and disturbing to see Zemmour the polemicist, racist, Islamophobic and sexist, condemned several times for incitement to hatred to present himself as a candidate in the presidential election.

<sup>8</sup> Essayist, political scientist, journalist, documentary filmmaker and political adviser to former French President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012). Known for his commitment to the far right, he campaigns for the union of the rights.

<sup>9</sup> Friends of Eric Zemmour

<sup>10</sup> Generation Z

defended by the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour.

### 3.1. The Concept of “Reconquest” in the Spanish Middle Ages and Its Ideology

«Plût à notre Seigneur de nous donner complète victoire sur le roi et les Mores de Grenade, ennemis de notre Sainte Foi Catholique. Car aujourd'hui, deuxième jour de janvier de la présente année nonante-deux, la cité de Grenade s'est rendue à nous avec l'Alhambra, et maintenant nous avons celui-ci tout entier en nos mains et puissance. Je fais savoir à votre Sainteté un si grand honneur, à savoir qu'après tant de peines, dépenses, sacrifices de vie et de sang de nos sujets et régnicoles ce royaume de Grenade, qui durant sept cent quatre-vingts ans a été occupé par les Infidèles, sous votre règne et avec votre aide a été gagné» [11].<sup>11</sup>

This fragment of text summarizes the mentality of Hispano-Christians around the notion of “Reconquest”. This is the speech of King Ferdinand the Catholic (1452-1516) delivered on January 2, 1492 in front of the Pope Innocent VIII. He announced to the high ecclesiastical authority the capture of Granada and its capital importance for the political and religious history of Spain. The historian J. H. Elliot [6] confirms the deep motivations of the Reconquest in these terms: «Si dos siglos antes Fernando III El Santo se hacía llamar “Rey de las tres religiones”, en la segunda mitad del siglo XV, Isabel y Fernando no podían concebir la unidad y seguridad de su reino más que en términos de una sociedad donde predominara un catolicismo firme y, en última instancia, monolítico»<sup>12</sup>.

We will not quote in detail the localities which marked the stages of the Spanish Reconquest. The main thing is to understand the motivation of this ardent desire for Reconquest which became a philosophy of life of the Hispanic Christians under the reign of the Catholic Monarchs. For this, it is necessary to make a brief foray into the history of the Iberian Peninsula marked by several invasions including the Visigoth and Muslim invasions.

Indeed, after Romanization<sup>13</sup>, one of the important cultural contributions of which was Christianity in the 3rd century, the Iberian Peninsula was invaded by the Germanic peoples called “barbarians” in 409. They tried in vain to impose a

<sup>11</sup> «May our Lord grant us complete victory over the King and the Moors of Granada, enemies of our Holy Catholic Faith. For today, the second day of January of the present year ninety-two, the city of Granada surrendered to us with the Alhambra, and now we have it entirely in our hands and power. I inform your Holiness of such a great honour, namely, that after so many pains, expenses, sacrifices of life and blood of our subjects and kingdoms, this kingdom of Granada, which for seven hundred and eighty years was occupied by the Infidels, under your rule and with your help was won».

<sup>12</sup> «If two centuries before Fernando III El Santo called himself “King of the three religions”, In the second half of the fifteenth century, Isabella and Ferdinand could not conceive of the unity and security of their kingdom except in terms of a society where a staunch and ultimately monolithic Catholicism».

<sup>13</sup> It is the spread of Roman culture, civilization and way of life to the Iberian Peninsula after the Roman invasion since 234 BC. This invasion occurred following the clashes between the Roman Republic and Carthage, and then between the Roman Republic and the various Celtiberian peoples between -218 and -19.

heterodox religion of Christianity which is Arianism.<sup>14</sup> The desire for religious unity pushed the Visigoth king Leovigildo between 569 and 586 to convert to Catholicism with the support of the Church. His son Recaredo I who replaced him between 586 and 601 also converted to Catholicism. But the Visigoth reign was conquered by the Muslims in 711. They invested the Iberian Peninsula with their linguistic and religious culture which is respectively Arabic and Islam. The ideology of this religion founded by Muhammad is faith in one God. The entire Iberian Peninsula submitted to Islamic domination except for certain northern localities such as Covadonga where resistance to this occupation began. Al-Adaluz was all of the peninsular territories and part of France (province of Narbonne) under Muslim rule between 711 and 1492.

The revolt of Pelagius against the Muslim occupation materialized in the Battle of Covadonga. It took place in 722 and opposed the caliphate founded by the Umayyad dynasty (661 to 750) to the kingdom of Asturias (718 to 925), the first Christian entity established on the Iberian Peninsula after the fall of the Visigoth kingdom and the Muslim conquest of Europe. The battle ended with the decisive victory of Asturias over the Moors. It marks great changes which are the halt of the Muslim advance and the beginning of the Reconquest. Also, the consequence of this resistance against the Muslim occupation was the geographical division of the Iberian Peninsula with the foundation of Christian kingdoms in the North and a predominantly Islamized South. In the South, lived the "Mozarabs" who are Christians who practiced their religion in Muslim territories. There were also the "Muladies" who were Christians converted to Islam.

The Muslim domination of the Iberian Peninsula did not prevent an apparent cohabitation between Muslims, Christians and Jews. But Islam had difficulty in spreading because it came up against a well-established Catholicism. The Catholic Kings Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon relied on this last and important aspect to undertake the project of territorial and religious reunification which resulted in the fall of Granada in 1492.

After the fall of Granada in 1492, the Catholic Monarchs implemented a territorial management policy. With the Catholic Church seen as the exclusive holder of the truth and grace of salvation, it is not surprising that the relationship between political power and the Church that the Muslims had suppressed was restored. Finished the "Reconquest" or restoration on the territorial level, the Catholic Monarchs galvanized by the capture of Granada decided to also complete the "Reconquest" of souls [4] won by "paganism". But it is important to emphasize that it is only from the 19th century that historiography uses the word "Reconquista" to replace the term "Restoration" used in the 15th century.

From 1492, the solution was to force the Jewish and Muslim communities to convert to Catholicism following the

decree of the Alhambra, under penalty of being expelled. Jews who continued to practice Judaism clandestinely were treated as Marranos (pork), when converted Muslims are called Moriscos by those who doubt the sincerity of their conversion, because it would have no other objective than to preserve their interests. Pork evokes a general feeling of disgust because of its eating habits and its appearance. So, it's not unusual. The comparison is made with an animal, in this case the pig, which the Jewish and Muslim communities themselves in worship proscribe for hygienic requirements. But here, the objective is to use their prohibition to create an electric shock, so that the individuals of these communities become aware of "their sin" which will certainly lead them to eternal damnation. The idea is to make them proselytes to win souls to Catholicism in order to be saved. In other words, the goal was to bring the person suspected of heresy back to "reason", to enable his conversion. The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition was then the state apparatus responsible for controlling the purity of the Christian faith and the sincerity of new converts.

We therefore understand that the "Reconquest" is a period of the Middle Ages in which a policy of annexation of territories was exercised over which religious domination was established to ensure continuity. The same feeling of religious belonging was a protection against any other religious current which could be considered as an aggression. This is why the reconquest of religious and territorial unity was seen as a crusade against the "infidels" Muslims and Jews. This religious conformism did not spare the nascent Protestantism and other currents "adhering" (such as Calvinism) to this reformed religion that Hispanic Christians considered heresy and a danger for religious unity around Catholicism [16].

J. A. Sesma Muñoz [19] thinks that the religious policy of the Catholic Monarchs tarnished their image because it was: «un organismo dispuesto a ejercer una violencia institucionalizada y represiva que garantizase un cierto hermetismo ideológico, la unidad religiosa y el sosiego en las relaciones».<sup>15</sup> D. Knowles [8] will say that: «le lecteur d'hier et d'aujourd'hui se révolte et s'indigne quand il étudie la procédure suivie par l'Inquisition. (Il sait) à quels excès mène...le pouvoir totalitaire».<sup>16</sup> However, according to Charles De La Roncière [18], these contemporary historians have a retrospective reading of this medieval judicial apparatus. They focus on the fact of heresy, the means used to obtain the confession and especially the firmness of the sentences which went as far as the condemnation to the stake, without taking into account the way of seeing people of the time. As a result, this contemporary reading may appear objective or biased.

In short, the "Reconquest" is first a conquering state of

14 Doctrine of the presbyter, theologian and former ascetic Arius (250-336). Exercising his ministry in Alexandria, he denies through Arianism the consubstantiality of the Father with the Son. He was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325.

15 «an organization willing to exercise institutionalized and repressive violence that would guarantee a certain ideological secrecy, religious unity and calm in relations».

16 «The reader of yesterday and today is revolted and indignant when he studies the procedure followed by the Inquisition. (He knows) what excesses lead to...totalitarian power».

mind and then a fact. It is the elimination of the Muslim states established after the Arab-Berber domination to restore the Christian kingdoms and their religious practice. From there appeared the feeling of belonging to a Spanish nation through a collective awareness around Catholicism.

Almost six centuries later, the concept of “Reconquest” that appears in the French Éric Zemmour may have taken into account the realities of the moment. This anachronistic appearance and the French political context of the 21st century may have influenced the expressive value of the concept.

### 3.2. Éric Zemmour’s Concept of “Reconquest” in France and Its Ideology

The “Reconquest” by Éric Zemmour is a political formation that defends the French national interest. This party insists on specific policies such as immigration, identity, Islam, insecurity, education, taxation, independence and industry which must be reformed to restore France to its greatness. Thus, according to the press release presenting the movement's program on its web page [40], refusing the decline, the objective is: «d’assurer la défense de notre identité, de nos familles et de nos terroirs, ainsi que la reconquête pleine et entière de notre sécurité, de nos libertés, de notre puissance et de notre souveraineté. Il est le rassemblement du peuple français qui combat pour sa survie, l’avenir de la France, son rayonnement à l’international et la défense de notre civilisation. Nous voulons transmettre à nos enfants un pays qui aura renoué avec ses racines et son génie propre: un pays flamboyant, vivant, créateur, innovant. Un pays qui aura retrouvé son unité et sa confiance en l’avenir».<sup>17</sup>

It was after a long political journey that Éric Zemmour finally positioned himself in his “Reconquest” movement to “save” France by restoring it to its original conception. In short, for him, the concept means “saving France” in decline. Inspired by the French left with which he distanced himself in 1989 [35], he approached sovereigntist nationalism [31]. From 2010, his preference for the preservation of national sovereignty over the supranational authorities of Europe and his strong positions against immigration [5] led him to defend the ideals of radical right such as sexism [28] national identity, anti-immigration and anti-Islam [22]. Emmanuel Berretta [25] reveals the words of Éric Zemmour who criticized freedom of termination of pregnancy in a column devoted to abortion on February 3, 2010 on the *RTL* channel: «200 000 avortements par an, chiffre constant depuis la loi Veil en 1975, il y a trente-cinq ans, cela fait 7 millions de personnes. Si on ajoute mécaniquement ces 7 millions, la population française serait passée de 65 à 72 millions d’habitants, c’est-à-dire plus très loin de l’Allemagne et de ses

80 millions d’habitants. (...) Je voudrais vous faire réfléchir sur l’influence de ce mini-baby-boom sur la croissance économique et le poids politique de la France»<sup>18</sup>.

On a subject such as immigration, he affirms his concern in his book *Mélancolie française (French Melancholy)* about the name of “the religion of human rights” the French elites (such as HDR, philosophers, politicians, singers, actors) assimilated to “preachers”: «enrôlent et bénissent des millions de “barbares” étrangers sous leur resplendissante bannière sans se préoccuper de savoir si ceux-ci croient réellement à la nouvelle foi, encore moins s’ils ont envie d’adopter les mœurs de leur nouveau pays; et se moquent éperdument de l’avis des populations autochtones qui subissent stoïquement ces vagues infinies» [13]<sup>19</sup>. The risk is to see the history of the Roman Empire repeat itself in France. It ended quickly because of de «la perte de contrôle gouvernemental de ces territoires qui hâtèrent la naissance progressive des royaumes, d’abord autonomes, puis réellement indépendants» [13]<sup>20</sup>. Thus, foreigners are assimilated to the “barbarians” who invaded France like Rome which was invaded by the Huns who did not belong to the Greco-Roman cultural sphere. Today, arriving like «a tornado tumbling down from the mountains» [23]<sup>21</sup> these foreigners represent a threat to France as the barbarians were to Rome. His debates on immigration echo the theory of the “great replacement” of the writer Renaud Camus who denounces an immigration of «“peuplement” remplaçant la population française d’origine avec la complicité d’un “pouvoir remplaciste”» [32]<sup>22</sup>. Thus, in his 2022 presidential candidacy speech, he continues to warn on the subject of immigration which for him is worrying. In reference to this “great replacement” conspiracy theory, he asserts that: «la France n’est plus la France [...] Nous ne nous laisserons pas dominer, vassaliser, conquérir, coloniser, remplacer» [30]<sup>23</sup>. For him, France is in great pain because of its procrastination. The discomfort is general «because of immigration, the excessive power of women, gays, Brussels and international finance and the betrayals of a corrupt, vain and stupid political elite» [34].

The subjects that Éric Zemmour addresses are therefore multiple. The evil is profound, especially since it is cultural.

17 «to ensure the defense of our identity, our families and our lands, as well as the full and complete reconquest of our security, our freedoms, our power and our sovereignty. It is the gathering of the French people who fight for its survival, the future of France, its international influence and the defense of our civilization. We want to pass on to our children a country that will have reconnected with its roots and its own genius: a flamboyant, lively, creative, innovative country. A country that will have regained its unity and its confidence in the future».

18 «200,000 abortions per year, a constant figure since the Veil law in 1975, thirty-five years ago, that makes 7 million people. If we add these 7 million mechanically, the French population would have gone from 65 to 72 million inhabitants, that is to say not very far from Germany and its 80 million inhabitants. (...) I would like you to reflect on the influence of this mini-baby-boom on economic growth and the political weight of France».

19 «to enlist and bless millions of foreign “barbarians” under their resplendent banner regardless of whether they truly believe in the new faith, even less if they want to adopt the mores of their new country; and do not care about the opinion of the indigenous populations who stoically undergo these endless waves».

20 «the loss of governmental control of these territories which precipitated the gradual birth of kingdoms, first autonomous, then truly independent».

21 Ammien Marcellin describing the arrival of the Huns perceived as “barefoot animals” in Europe in *Ut turbo montibus celsis*, Histoire, XXXI, 3, 8.

22 «“Peopling” replacing the original French population with the complicity of a “replacing power”».

23 «France is no longer France [...] We will not allow ourselves to be dominated, vassalized, conquered, colonized, replaced».

The polemicist rises in the debates against halal meat in canteens, public holidays requested, state medical aid, miscegenation, integration, polygamy etc... By demagogy, he means to substantially influence the conscience of the French people by using the politics of the fear of the extinction of the white man to “reconquer” voters. Some observers of French political life think that the columnist is a storyteller. For example, Lilian Alemagna [22], quotes Patrick Weil who says that: «le problème chez Éric Zemmour est qu’il y a toujours un petit peu de vrai et beaucoup de faux dans ce qu’il dit. C’est comme ça qu’il séduit»<sup>24</sup>. Journalist Jean-Loup Adenor [21] confirms the words of these colleagues by asserting that: «l’élection présidentielle approche l’éditorialiste vedette de *CNews* semble vouloir se donner une envergure nouvelle, quitte à tordre la réalité»<sup>25</sup>.

This analysis by Jean-Loup Adenor comes following the words of Éric Zemmour when he was sentenced for “incitement to hatred”. He asserted that: «j’ai été condamné pour délit d’opinion (...) Je ne suis pas un délinquant, je suis un dissident»<sup>26</sup>. These words seem to recall the political ideals of Jean Moulin, which are to have faith in France and to know how to die for her [12]. So, he draws inspiration from the brilliance of historical events and speeches to hope to attract those nostalgic for the moment. This is how the launch of his candidacy for the 2022 presidential election echoes the call of June 18<sup>27</sup> from General De Gaulle. Philippe Moreau-Chrevrolet, professor of political communication at Sciences Po explains that he “will imitate General De Gaulle to the point of caricature...”. The specialist notes that in Éric Zemmour's speech, «il n’y a aucune proposition concrète... On reste sur ses fondamentaux qui sont l’immigration, l’identité, la nostalgie de la France d’avant. On est très très loin du terrain, de l’économie, du Covid, au fond on peut se demander si ces sujets intéressent Éric Zemmour» [36].<sup>28</sup> His opponent in the presidential election Valérie Pécresse, during a heated debate between the two on *LCI*, adds: «tout est bidon chez vous» [26]<sup>29</sup>. On the *CNews* channel, she affirms that “everything is not screwed up” [38] in France, as Éric Zemmour would have us believe. If he presents himself as the candidate of the right, he asserts himself Gaullist, conservative, republican and sovereigntist as the former right-wing French political party “*Rassemblement pour la République*” (RPR) [27]<sup>30</sup>.

24 «The problem with Éric Zemmour is that there is always a little bit of truth and a lot of falsehood in what he says. That's how he seduces».

25 «The presidential election is approaching, the star columnist of *CNews* seems to want to give himself a new dimension, even if it means distorting reality».

26 «I was sentenced for an offense of opinion (...) I am not a delinquent; I am a dissident».

27 Speech given on June 18, 1940 by General De Gaulle on London radio *BBC* in which he invites the French to continue to fight against the German occupation of France (1940-1944).

28 «There is no concrete proposal... We are sticking to our fundamentals, which are immigration, identity, nostalgia for the France of yesteryear. We are very, very far from the field, from the economy, from the Covid, basically we can wonder if these subjects’ interest Éric Zemmour».

29 «everything is bogus with you».

<sup>30</sup> Rally for the Republic

Considering himself the representative of this school of thought, Zemmour was perceived by several movements from the deeply divided French right as the one who could bring together this plural right under this political heritage during the presidential election of 2022. Indeed, in its publication of December 12, 2021, the newspaper *Le Monde* [24] attests to this: «Une génération entière l’a fantasmé. Éric Zemmour l’a fait. Pour la première fois dans l’histoire de la V<sup>e</sup> République, un candidat à la présidence fait voler en éclats la digue qui séparait la droite républicaine de l’extrême droite, rassemblant dans la même équipe des représentants de ces deux familles, autrefois violemment antagonistes, et agrégeant plusieurs de leurs composantes. Vingt ans après le choc du 21 avril 2002, de jeunes militants encartés chez Les Républicains font campagne pour un candidat qui a déclaré la guerre à l’Islam au côté frontistes, d’identitaires, de royalistes et de néonazis»<sup>31</sup>.

The newspaper's investigators specified that its campaign team included personalities from *Les Républicains*<sup>32</sup>, the *Rassemblement National*<sup>33</sup>, the Catholic right and close to the *Manif pour tous*, etc... [24]. It was necessary to unite around an integral nationalism to regain the happiness of “old France” rid of foreigners and Islam. This is what seems to confirm the words of a supporter of the political ideas of Charles Maurras<sup>34</sup>: «si le bien commun passe par avoir un président comme Zemmour, alors très bien» [37].<sup>35</sup>

Analogies and differences emerge from this notion of “Reconquest” used in the 15th and 21st centuries.

#### 4. Contrastive Analysis of the Notion of “Reconquest” Among the Catholic Monarchs and Éric Zemmour

After the systematic study of the ideology and the conception of the word “Reconquest”, this part identifies the similarities and the structural differences of this word among the protagonists of our analysis.

##### 4.1. The Similarities in the Notion of “Reconquest” Among the Catholic Monarchs and Éric Zemmour

The term “Reconquest” occurs at the political level both with the Catholic Monarchs and with Éric Zemmour. The

31 «An entire generation fantasized about it. Eric Zemmour did it. For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, a presidential candidate shattered the dike that separated the Republican right from the far right, bringing together in the same team representatives of these two families, once violently antagonistic, and aggregating several of their components. Twenty years after the shock of April 21, 2002, young activists with Les Républicains are campaigning for a candidate who has declared war on Islam alongside frontists, identitarians, royalists and neo-Nazis».

32 Gaullist and liberal-conservative political party. He is ranked on the right and center right on the French political scene.

33 New denomination of the National Front. It is a far-right French political party.

34 Journalist, essayist, French politician whose thought and career inspire right-wing and far-right currents of thought in France.

35 «if the common good goes through having a president like Zemmour, then fine».

ideological similarities appear in the form of their speeches which call for unity and are always based on the refoundation of a system which no longer suits them. They campaign for a return to the ideals that have constituted the essence of their nation. Thus, we notice that the question of identity and patriotism are the central elements of their ideology. Moreover, royalists and supporters of an exacerbated nationalism, the Catholic Monarchs and Éric Zemmour shared an interest in the conquest of political power. If today the notion of “Reconquest” brings together all the French opposition against Zemmour, the policy of abuse against all deviance, that’s to say the repression and expulsion of all those who were not Catholics, included in the “Reconquest” program of the Catholic Monarchs has been severely criticized [1-3].

Both parties believe that their idea of “Reconquest” represents good for the French and the Spanish. But there are structural differences in their perception of the notion of “Reconquest”.

#### 4.2. The Differences in the Notion of “Reconquest” Among the Catholic Monarchs and Éric Zemmour

The first notable substantive contradictions are the ideology and the era in which the word “Reconquest” is used. Indeed, even if the Catholic Kings and Éric Zemmour start from the same postulate of the quest for identity with regard to the “Reconquest”, the word, which did not exist in the 15th century, has the meaning of reunification and restoration of territory, which is used in a context of religious proselytist which targets the Iberian Peninsula. On the other hand, Zemmour uses it in the 21st century to federate its sympathizers, militants and nostalgic for the France of the Gauls<sup>36</sup> supposed to be “authentic” France. In other words, Zemmour intends to gather (willingly or opportunely) around the traditional values of France which made its singularity. We therefore understand that his policy, whose target is the extreme right, which he strongly wishes to see reunited, is limited to French territory. Also, it should be remembered that he started from a left-wing ideology, he migrated to the far right. A practicing Judaism, his conquest of power took place at the ballot box by universal suffrage. But he has not yet acceded to the supreme magistracy in France.

As for the Catholic Kings, they come from illustrious royal families<sup>37</sup>, although Isabella was not a favourite to the throne of Castile. Unlike Zemmour, they came to power in Castile by force after a long civil war (1475-1479). They succeeded in jointly and autonomously administering the dual monarchy of Castile and Aragon [20]. They were practicing Catholics and made the defense and expansion of Catholicism the

leitmotif of their political struggle. This is why the title of distinction Catholic Kings is linked to faith. First, their policy of geographical union, prosperity of Christians and defense of the Church and faith took place in Spain and the Iberian Peninsula before extending to other continents such as America from 1492.

## 5. Conclusion

Known under the term “Restoration” in the 15th century, the concept of “Reconquest” was used only in the 19th century to define the policy of geographical and religious reunification of the Catholic Monarchs. Éric Zemmour used this same term to define his vision of an authentic France centered on exacerbated nationalism. We note that the notion of “Reconquest” in the Catholic Kings of Spain and in Éric Zemmour are homonyms, pronounced and written in the same way. However, they do not have the same meaning at all. In addition, the contrastive analysis has shown that there are more differences that oppose them than similarity in this notion of “Reconquest”. The Catholic Monarchs took their responsibility by imposing Catholicism as a religious culture. This happened in a context of territorial defence. This context does not lend itself to the 21st century. This is why Zemmour is suspected of using this concept so dear to conservative and identity movements to assert itself. Which might sound like populism.

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36 All the historical peoples living in Gaul. These are the Celtic peoples described by contemporary historians and chroniclers as an ethnocultural entity born of the Roman conception of the European continental space. They occupied the territories of France, Switzerland, present-day Belgium and part of Germany located on the territory of Belgian Gaul.

37 They come from the House of Trastámara, a dynasty of kings who occupied the thrones of Castile, Aragon, Navarre and Naples. From this union was laid the foundations of the Crown of Spain or the Catholic Monarchy of Spain.

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