Jewish Spain in the 21st Century: Strategies of Identification and Disidentification

The small size of the Jewish population in Spain today—“few in number, indistinguishable, and therefore invisible” (Baer, “Between” 109)—stands in disproportionate relationship to the growing number of cultural and educational venues that seek to introduce participants to Judaism and its traditions.¹ In recent years Spaniards and international visitors have had the opportunity to view exhibits on medieval and modern Jewry in local and national museums (for instance, the Museo de Historia de Barcelona, Museo Sefarí de Toledo, and the Biblioteca Nacional) and register for courses on Jewish history and religious belief systems as well as Hebrew language and literature. They can tour heritage sites affiliated with the Red de Juderías de España; attend Jewish-themed concerts, lectures, seminars, and book presentations, a calendar for which is published in the monthly e-newsletter Carta de Sefarad; and listen to programs on Radio Sefarad or view the weekly Sunday morning installment of the television program Shalom (TVE-2). Moreover, they can follow in print journalism and electronic media the pronouncements and participation in public acts of politicians and celebrities who consider themselves stakeholders in issues relating to Jewish life and/or Israel.²

Sephardic and Jewish themes not infrequently appear as the subject of contemporary Spanish narrative, most commonly in historical novels set in early modern Spain (by César Vidal, José Manuel Fajardo, Lucía Graves, Carme Riera) or ruminations on the Holocaust (by Maria Àngels Anglada, Antonio Muñoz Molina). By contrast, audiovisual culture—film and, to a lesser extent, television—lags behind in contemporary Spanish cultural production that explores lo judío. Unlike the proliferation of Jewish-themed cinema in Latin American, the Spanish film industry has only rarely financed productions that feature fictional Jewish protagonists or
explore Jewish questions through a historical or sociological lens; while Jewish film festivals are held throughout Spain their programming is invariably comprised of foreign films, principally from the U.S., Israel, and Latin America. Jewish-oriented programming on Spanish public and private television, while perhaps somewhat more familiar to viewers owing to news broadcasts and biopics, is similarly infrequent. The film *L'estigma?*, released in 2012 by veteran Catalan documentarian Martí Sans, and episodes from 2017 of the wildly popular TV series *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (Tell me how it happened) are notable exceptions to this pattern. The former focuses on the disidentification of Spaniards from their Jewish past stemming from longstanding antisemitic biases; the latter promotes new forms of identification with a Jewish present that flatter the image of Spain as a multicultural, multiconfessional democratic state. From opposite ends of the high culture-mass culture spectrum, both communicate extensive knowledge about the relatively little-known Jewish world in an uneven effort to engage viewers in a pedagogy of citizenship that oftentimes is rooted in the longing to return to the harmony of an imagined past.

**Mapping Disidentification, Then and Now: Martí Sans’s *L’estigma?***

*L’estigma?* belongs to a so-called Golden Age of documentary filmmaking that in the U.S. dates to the 1980s (Nichols, *Introduction* 1) and in Spain to the 1990s, continuing undiminished up until the present moment as the popularity of art-house and television documentaries alike increases among Spanish audiences and the technical means required for production and post-production become cheaper, especially in comparison to the usually much larger budgets of fiction films. The affinity Sans feels for documentary filmmaking is clearly on display in *L’estigma?*, which he co-scripted, directed, edited, and produced on a relative shoestring. Financing was provided principally by the Generalitat (Autonomous Government of Catalunya), TV3/Televisió de Catalunya, and the Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals (ICEC), along with modest contributions from the Comunidad Israelita de Barcelona (the synagogue that appears in the film), the Federación de Comunidades Judías en España (FCJE),
and the Institut Ramon Llull de Llengua i Cultura Catalanes. Indeed, owing to constrained resources Sans was unable to shoot a planned second part to his film in Jerusalem, where he had hoped to explore the foundational spaces of Christian culture and show the latter’s indebtedness and ingratitude toward Jewish culture. In being forced to scale back his project Sans sharpened his focus on the theme that he said most disturbed him: “la judeofobia i la seva pervivència” (Judeophobia and its persistence) (“Cinema III”).

The topicality of Sans’s film is surely its drawing card. Discussion of the rise in Spain of anti-Jewish rhetoric and acts, including property damage and defacement of cemeteries and worship sites, has been duly documented in opinion polls conducted by the Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Project, the Ministerio de Educación-España, and the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas-Barómetros; investigations by national and international Jewish organizations including the Observatorio de Antisemitismo (established by the Federación de Comunidades Judías Españolas in 2009) and the Anti-Defamation League; and scores of academic studies and press reports, all of which express deep concern over what the Council of Europe, when it appealed to Spain in June of 2015 to introduce laws to combat antisemitism, described as “prejudice and intolerance against Roma, as well as Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance against migrants [that] continue to be expressed, notably in print and audiovisual media and on the Internet, as well as in political life,” chiding the Spanish government for its often tepid response.4 Notwithstanding King Felipe VI’s exclamation “¡Cuánto os hemos echado de menos!” (How greatly we have missed you), uttered in response to the passage in 2015 of the law granting Spanish nationality to Sephardic Jews, the reality of daily life for Spain’s Jews in their interactions with the general populace is, at worst, one of overt vilification or, at best, basic ignorance.

Although an exhaustive catalogue of examples of negative sentiment towards Jews in the Spanish press and public life lies beyond the scope of this essay, a handful of instances will suffice to illustrate the current climate. Frequently singled out are the editorial cartoons
published by Romeu (Carlos Romeu Müller) in *El País*, Spain’s most widely read daily newspaper; Romeu caricatures Jews physically and equates Israel’s policies toward Palestinians with Nazi genocide.⁵ Op-ed columns by Antonio Gala that appear in *El Mundo*, the national daily with the second-largest circulation, make repeated references to an international Jewish conspiracy and have claimed justification for the expulsion of 1492 based on Israel’s current conduct in Middle Eastern and Palestinian affairs.⁶ In 2009 during the demonstration “Madrid por Palestina,” organized by the ruling Socialist party (PSOE) in response to Israel’s Operation Cast Lead, participants waved Israeli flags substituting the swastika for the Jewish Star and carried placards declaiming “Paremos el genocidio” (Stop the genocide), an accusation that Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos subsequently walked back. In 2013, then Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo announced plans to establish a Spanish consulate in Gaza, a scheme that was later withdrawn when he learned that the EU classifies Hamas as a terrorist organization and that no other European nation has such a consular presence. The following year, after Real Madrid lost to Maccabi Tel Aviv in the Euroleague basketball tournament finals, 18,000 Twitter users posted negative comments using the hashtag #PutosJudíos ( Fucking Jews) (see Minder). Another scandal erupted in 2015 when commentator Xavier Bosch published an editorial in *Mundo Deportivo*, the longest-running sports publication in Spain, in which he claimed that a Jewish lobby and the Mossad were exerting pressure on the FC Barcelona soccer club to end a multimillion-dollar shirt sponsorship with the Qatar Foundation.⁷ In the summer of that same year the appearance of American Jewish reggae musician and rapper Matisyahu (Matthew Paul Miller) at the Rototom Sunsplash reggae festival in Benicasim was cancelled when he refused to declare publicly his personal position on Palestinian statehood, as demanded by BDS País Valencia; after an outpouring of condemnation from the press and the Spanish government his invitation was restored, allowing him to perform as initially scheduled. In one final and especially egregious example from 2015, then newly-appointed Madrid cultural
councillor Guillermo Zapata was obliged to resign his position after antisemitic tweets and jokes he had made in 2011 surfaced publicly.⁸

Quoting ex-foreign minister Ana Palacio to the effect that “Spaniards believe there is no anti-Semitism in Spain,” the ADL report Polluting the Public Square laments this “mainstreaming of anti-Semitism in Spain, with more public expressions and greater public acceptance.” Such lack of self-awareness—the internalization and normalization of explicitly anti-Jewish sentiment—is viewed by many analysts as one of the defining characteristics of antisemitism in Spain today (see, for ex., Baer, “Between” 96; Álvarez Chillida). When he became cognizant of his own unconscious prejudices, Sans explains that this became the motivating factor in making L’estigma? (Yacubovich Japkin “Cinema III”). As the director declares in voice-over in the early minutes of the film: “Tenía tan asumida la idea que los judíos no son de fiar, que ni siquiera era consciente de ello. Había heredado prejuicio de mi educación familiar y de la sociedad en general. La desconfianza y el desprecio están más arraigados de lo que quisiéramos admitir. Así, empecé el proceso de deconstrucción de mi propio antisemitismo.” (I had so absorbed the idea that Jews are untrustworthy that I wasn’t even conscious of it. I had inherited prejudice from my family education and from society in general. Mistrust and contempt are more ingrained than we would like to admit. Thus I began the process of deconstructing my own antisemitism).

The heart of Sans’s documentary reflects his efforts to expose the continuing existence of mythic archetypes and distorted stereotypes about Jews based solely on “imaginaris desinformats” (uninformed imaginaries; “Cinema III”), given the near-complete absence of actual Jews in Spanish society, and to explain why this enmity directed toward a religious minority continues to haunt the nations of Europe, his own included, even as contemporary societies become increasingly secularized. Sans’s focus on stigmatization aligns closely with Erving Goffman’s classic 1963 treatise, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity. In his study Goffman defines stigma as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from
full social acceptance” (Preface, n.p.). While he uses the term to refer to “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (3), an “undesired differentness from what we had anticipated” (5), he stresses throughout that stigma, as a social phenomenon, can only properly be discussed using a language of relationships rather than of attributes (3). The cases he analyzes are examples of “mixed contacts” between the stigmatized and “the normal” that can lead to two possible outcomes (13). Either the discrepancy between an individual’s actual and virtual identity is discovered and social rejection ensues (19), or the individual’s differentness remains undisclosed and she engages in “passing” (42). Both forms of encounter are experienced and discussed by the social actors who appear in Sans’s film. In elaborating upon the potential sources of support for the stigmatized, Goffman distinguishes between those fellow ‘shamees’ who shared the discredited individual’s stigma and “normals” who stand outside the tainted circle of discredit “but whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it,” and who are granted acceptance and a kind of honorary membership in the clan (28). These latter supporters, who Goffman labels “the wise,” carry a “courtesy stigma” (31). Such individuals, Goffman notes, tend to have undergone some dramatic encounter that changes their viewpoint: “The normal person who is becoming wise may first have to pass through a heart-changing experience, of which there are many literary records” (28).

This categorization aptly describes the circumstances in which Sans came to make his documentary. The director is notably circumspect in the film itself, stating only that a few years previously he had come into contact with the small Barcelona Jewish community, which had in turn led him to “replantear muchas cosas” (reconsider many things). However, in press interviews given at the time of L’estigma?’s release he revealed this was the consequence of a “relació sentimental” with a Jewish woman from the community, which prompted him to put himself in her place by traveling to Israel and enrolling in a seminar on Judaism. The
importance of having made the film as a non-Jew, in his opinion, is that the majority of spectators will more easily identify with his viewpoint (Castells “Per la cara”).

It is important to remember that Goffman is cautious with his praise of “the wise”: “The person with a courtesy stigma can in fact make both the stigmatized and the normal uncomfortable; by always being ready to carry a burden that is not ‘really’ theirs, they can confront everyone else with too much morality…” (Goffman 31). This observation is linked in L’estigma?, as in any documentary that voices the concerns of a marginalized or subaltern social sector, to an ethical quandary: Who speaks? Do the subjects who appear on camera and who wear the mantle of expertise speak in the film or for the film? Or as documentary scholar Bill Nichols asks: “When documentaries tell a story whose story is it? The filmmaker’s or the subject’s?” (Nichols, Introduction 10). In fact, with only the exceptions of the Spanish conversa Malka González and the Argentine-born Israeli author Gustavo Perednik, the interviewees who dominate the screen time in L’estigma? are non-Jewish scholars who are invoked as authorities on the subject of antisemitism and Spanish Jewry. How might this mediate the film’s impact on viewers? That is, will Spanish or Catalan viewers who strongly disidentify with Jews and Jewish culture indeed be more inclined to adopt a position of closer identification after viewing Sans’s documentary? Of what significance is it that the omission of Spanish-Jewish voices results in a circumvention of Jewish agency? To a certain extent, this omission is circumstantial; by the director’s own admission, he encountered difficulty persuading Jewish subjects to appear on camera. Some—including the Jewish woman who was his initial contact and sparked his interest in the project—turned him down outright while others made concealment of their identity a condition of participation. Such is the case of the young man who is the very first of Sans’s subjects to give his testimony. Immediately following the opening credits Sans and this man appear on screen, filmed in three-quarters profile and cloaked in deep shadow, obscuring their faces. Their dialogue is pointed and poignant. When asked if being gay has been a stigma for him, the man says no, “es algo completamente normal,” and he affirms that he neither feels
discriminated against nor hides his sexuality.\textsuperscript{11} Yet when asked about his Jewish background – “no quieres ser identificado. ¿Por qué? ¿Tienes miedo?” (You don’t want to be identified. Why? Are you afraid?) – Sans’s interlocutor demurs: it’s not fear, “lo que pasa es que es un rollo, dar explicaciones es muy pesado y es algo muy personal y considero que no tengo que dar ese tipo de explicaciones” (what happens is that it’s a problem, it’s annoying and very personal to have to give explanations and I don’t feel that I have to give this type of justifications).\textsuperscript{12}

In reality, \textit{L’estigma?} tells two stories. One is the history of the emergence of antisemitism, or Judeophobia, in early Christianity and its perpetuation over the centuries in Europe, with attention to the historical idiosyncrasies of the Spanish context and the transformations this antisemitic impulse has undergone in Spain since the start of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The other is the story of the director’s own awakening (concientización) to the silences, misperceptions, and overt attacks in his country on Jews and the legacy of Sepharad. By underscoring his own passage from ignorance to knowledge, empathetic understanding, and, ultimately, advocacy, what Sans relates is effectively a conversion narrative. With the braiding together of these two stories the director puts into play the larger transnational discourse of antisemitism as critiqued by leading Catalan and Spanish intellectuals alongside his personal odyssey of conscience. On the first of these levels (objective, historically-centered) the film methodically lays out for spectators the root causes and motives of anti-Jewish sentiment in Spain and Europe, reiterates the pernicious effects of such discrimination, and analyzes the latter’s manifestations and consequences in Spain from the medieval period to the present. The second or personal level is characterized by the director’s physical presence in \textit{L’estigma?}. Most often he is filmed from the rear while conducting interviews or shown walking through the streets of Madrid and Barcelona, and he is heard throughout—occasionally in dialogue with others, more frequently during the use of narrative voice-over.

As a result, \textit{L’estigma?}’s structure offers a hybrid mix of the expository, participatory, and performative modes of documentary filmmaking. Although the film is heavily weighted
toward explanation and relies throughout on the presentation of historical, theological, and political information, Sans rejects the pseudo-objectivity of what in documentary filmmaking is referred to as the omniscient “voice-of-God” narration, as found in the newsreels (NO-DOs) of the Franco era (Moreno-Caballud 63). Instead, in the expository mode Sans directly addresses viewers in voice-over and uses evidentiary editing to reinforce the continuity of his argument and communicate his personal perspectives. These in turn are validated by the interventions of the many experts who discursively expand on Spain’s (and Europe’s) enduring Judeophobia.

In the participatory mode Sans interacts with his subjects through conversations or interviews; consequently, “involvement grows into a pattern of collaboration or confrontation” (Nichols, Introduction 179) thatforegrounds the ethics and politics of encounter. In one key scene Sans visits the Centro de Estudios Ibn Gabirol, Madrid’s only Jewish high school, to interview author-teacher Gustavo Perednik and some of his students. In doing so he experiences firsthand the extreme security measures that the school has put in place, unlike any of the neighboring colegios on the street: police presence, locked entry doors, intercom system, requirement for visitors to give their DNI (national ID number) before being admitted. As the camera observes Sans going through this screening process, he becomes another of the social actors. Viewers see what this experience is like for the director and how it affects him. The juxtaposition of the uncomfortable scrutiny Sans is obliged to undergo and ensuing comments by students who express the need to keep a low profile – one boy states he’s been advised to take off his kippah when he leaves the school – underscores how Jews in Spain, as a vulnerable minority under surveillance by a sometimes hostile society, may opt to cultivate their invisibility, echoing the film’s initial scene and enhancing the persuasive power of the film. At the same time, this juxtaposition reinforces the ironic play of seeing/being seen that is, of course, central to documentary filmmakers and the human subjects they focus on.

In the performative mode Sans jettisons any pretense that there exists an all-knowing source of authority; rather, we see a return to “the embodied and subjective positions that
classic authoritarian documentaries wanted to erase,” a move that is often accompanied by the use of metacinematic techniques that lay bare the process of the the film’s genesis (Moreno-Caballud 63). It has been argued that this use of subjective intentionality—where the director exercises the dual function of narrator and protagonist—has become increasingly common in Spanish documentaries since 2001, the year that marked the success of José Luis Guerín’s En construcción at the San Sebastián Film Festival. In the performative mode emphasis is placed upon the affective aspects that are necessarily implied by the director’s insertion of autobiographical experience as the film “seeks to move its audience into subjective alignment or affinity with its specific perspective on the world.” For this reason, as Nichols observes, “The emotional intensities and social subjectivity stressed in performative documentary is often that of the underrepresented or misrepresented,” including ethnic minorities (Introduction 204-205).

L’estigma?’s overall compositional logic is one that crosscuts between extended interludes in which 15 authorities—essentially, talking heads—expound at length on Spanish Judeophobia and briefer man-in-the-street interviews that solicit opinions on Jews and Israel. Topically, the film is divided into five distinct segments: (1) What is a Jew? The responses to this question argue it is a multivocal concept, hard to pin down to a single set of defining criteria, while citing the confusion between historical and ‘imaginary’ Jews. (2) What does ‘the Jew’ signify for Spaniards? Here the film’s speakers answer: not heterogeneity but rather invisibility and exaggerated archetypical constructions, both of which cause problems. (3) What is Judeophobia? This represents the lengthiest section of the film, when the experts offer differing explanations—psychoanalytical, theological, historical—based on their professional expertise and rehearse the historical experiences of Iberian and Catalan Jews, discussing social, religious, and economic tensions in medieval society; the expulsion and Inquisition and the ensuing rejection of minorities and closing off of intellectual avenues; the converso problem and the anusim or crypto-Jews; the Enlightenment/modernity dyad; and, finally, the pseudoscientific
racial theories subtending 19th-century antisemitism. (4) This segues into a segment focused on the Holocaust, victimismo, and the creation of the state of Israel. (5) The final segment asks: How is Spanish Judeophobia displayed in the 21st century? Here Sans lines up his experts to make the case that age-old antisemitic prejudices are as strong as ever, though they now emerge cloaked as anti-Zionist sentiment and harsh attacks on Israel’s conduct in the Palestinian conflict. These critiques are delivered from both sides of the Spanish political spectrum, by pro-Arab conservatives as well as anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist liberals (Baer, “Between” 102). Sans inserts a wordless montage of visual evidence – photos, newspaper headlines, editorial cartoons, and tweets – that attest to the contention of the experts that in Spain, and especially Catalunya, the condemnation of Israel has been reconfigured as an anticolonialist struggle in which the Catalan left is fully complicit.

These five expository segments are threaded together by a series of scenes filmed at a boy’s bar mitzvah ceremony in the Comunidad Israelita de Barcelona. The insertion of these scenes works structurally to signal the shifts in topics being discussed; they are also a visual image that reinforces the notion of Jewish religious and cultural continuity that survives even in the face of discrimination, a vision of the future embodied in the younger generation that remains faithful to its origins and its Sephardic heritage, symbolized here by the boy who is shown donning phylacteries and reading from the Torah.

As can be seen from this abbreviated summary, the thrust of L’estigma? is highly pedagogical, responding to the observation of the unidentified gay Jew at the film’s outset who laments that “En este país hay mucha, mucha ignorancia” (in this country there is much, so much ignorance) and to Sans’s own rhetorical question: “¿Por qué lo ignoraba [yo] todo sobre una tradición que es parte de nuestro legado cultural y genético?” (Why was I completely ignorant about a tradition that is part of our cultural and genetic legacy?). It is precisely his search to answer this, “para conocer una historia que nos han ocultado, el esplendor de nuestra cultura judía” (to learn about a history that’s been hidden from us, the splendor of our Jewish
culture) that leads him to the prominent personalities—among them several Catalan university professors, a Catholic theologian, a psychoanalyst, an outspoken journalist who is a former member of Parliament, and an Israeli author—whose commentary maps out the historical trajectory of the “new old” Spanish antisemitic mindset. The pedagogy of Sans’s film is yet another example of the documentary impulse that critics have labeled “epistophilia” or the desire to know (Nichols, Representing 178), “pleasurable learning” (Renov 35) or “la dimensión aseverativa del documental” (Marzal Felici 169).

For all the cinematic dexterity and empathy with which Sans approaches his quest for answers, L’estigma? warrants close attention to the blindspots and omissions in the filmic text, a few of which we will briefly allude to here. First, the particularities of both the historical and present-day situation of Catalan Jewry is only lightly touched upon. There is no mention of the historical association between antisemitism and anti-Catalanism, based on the oft-repeated comparison that linked Catalans with Jews owing to their financial prowess, just as there is no recognition of the strong currents of philosemitism that earlier had circulated in Catalunya, most strongly during the Civil War, in the 1950s-60s, and during the period of pujolisme. This is somewhat puzzling in that “Catalan philosemitism is an ideology fully inscribed within Catalan nationalism” (Illás 90). Scholars have observed how the Jewish past “could be ‘useful’ in the construction of a regional identity for Catalunya” that is different from the rest of Spain (Menny 14); in fact, Sans himself has said that “El jueu és a Europa el que el català és a Espanya” (The Jew is to Europe what the Catalan is to Spain). The analogy he draws on is threefold, based on a series of convergent, shared myths: Catalans, like Jews, see themselves as a persecuted community fighting to preserve their identity, a vision that emerged during the Civil War and hardened during the subsequent Francoist suppression of manifestations of catalanidad; they are portrayed (and view themselves) as an industrious people who value work and productivity, and who have a history as highly successful merchants, industrialists, and today, global capitalists; they stress the importance of their own language. It is worth noting that the 6 faculty
members of the Universitat de Barcelona who participate in the film all speak in terms of the Spanish state rather than Catalunya. So too does Vincenç Villatoro, another of the experts called upon by Sans, and who, ironically, has written extensively on the position of Jews in Catalunya (see *El jueus*). The effect of this is that the film’s argument tends to treat historical and especially contemporary Spanish Jewry as a monolithic collectivity, and similarly glosses over the confluences and divergences of thought toward Jews that obtain between the central Spanish state and the autonomous communities, as well as within these communities themselves at different moments and under changing political regimes.16

Second, by centering on the pain or historical injury that narrativizes the plight of marginalized subjectivities, documentaries like *L’estigma*? contradictorily depoliticize the demands for justice that are implicated in the film, beginning with its very title. Sans’s film explains; it lectures; it engages in consciousness raising. What exactly does it demand, if anything? The interviewees who speak in the film’s coda advocate for better and more sensitive education of Spaniards, for a more responsible and evenhanded press, for the introduction “con garantías de respeto, en la vida pública [d]el judaísmo, religioso o no, como un factor de normalidad,” for the need to find “reglas de convivencia” (rules of coexistence) that will permit society to “hacer un orden que incluya al otro, incluso cuando el otro representa al rival o al extraño” (create an order that includes the Other, even when the Other represents the rival or the foreigner). The politics of minoritarian identity loom large in *L’estigma*? yet the film itself, especially because it is framed as the search of a single individual—i.e., the director—to better understand the ‘Jewish question’ as it has evolved in Spain, is less a political instrument than a vehicle for promoting empathy with the Jewish other. If *L’estigma*? remains at this level, never reaching the point of direct political engagement, this may be attributable in part to Sans’s organization and direction of his film, but it is surely also attributable to the paradoxical nature of the documentary genre. This is documentary theorist Bill Nichols’s point: “What documentary may produce (like fiction) is less a disposition to engage directly with the world than to engage
with more documentary (or fiction) . . . We come to value and look forward to the pleasure of engaging the world at a distance, looking out through the windows of our theaters and living rooms onto a world that truly remains ‘out there,’ with all the assurance this provides about the importance of our engagement with a historical world that we have simultaneously postponed in order to attend to a representation of it” (Nichols, Representing 180).

Third and finally, to what degree does Sans’s film succeed in its appeal to create a more informed citizenship, given the very limited circulation it has achieved to date? If a tree falls in the forest but no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? Based on the information provided in the press kits made available by Altervideo on their production company’s website, L’estigma? has been shown on ten separate occasions between 2012 and 2014: once each in Uruguay, Colombia, Poland, Hong Kong and New York, and in Spain, twice in Barcelona and one time each in Alcaniz (Curso Interdisciplinar de Humanidades), Girona, and Madrid. Several of these screenings took place as part of local Jewish film festivals and were followed by audience discussions with one or two of the experts who are featured in the film, either in person in the theater or via Skype. L’estigma? received very modest press coverage in publications such as El Punt Avui and in the online magazine Núvol, which bills itself as “el digital de la cultura”; it was also shown on TV3/Televisió de Catalunya (2014) and reached 38,000 viewers. Both the screenings and distribution of the film on DVD have been very limited, perhaps not unexpectedly: L’estigma? is the first and only Spanish documentary to tackle head-on the challenges of unpacking the deeply troubling antisemitic biases that have warped the fabric of civil society and that coexist uncomfortably with a historical legacy of Sepharad that has itself been written out of existence or conveniently repackaged for international consumption (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa “Marketing”). Making this contradiction visible is what makes L’estigma? compelling—and required—viewing.
**Promoting Identification through Mass Culture: *Cuéntame cómo pasó***

*Cuéntame cómo pasó* holds the record as Spain’s longest running television series. Debuting in September, 2001 on the state-operated public television network TVE-1 and airing without interruption since then, *Cuéntame* recently concluded its 19th season and remains highly popular; it has already been renewed for a 20th season. Viewership ran to approximately 5 million people per episode in the early years of the program, with some individual episodes reaching as many as 10 million; currently, it is watched on average by 3 million Spaniards (along with countless additional viewers in Europe, the U.S., Canada, and Latin America) who tune in weekly to follow the saga of the Alcántara family and are devoted readers of the show’s fan blogs, wikis, and official web page. In comparison to *L'estigma?*, an intellectually-driven survey of the bias historically directed in Spain on theological, social, and political grounds against Jews, *Cuéntame* is first and foremost a vehicle for popular entertainment. As such, it exemplifies the material conditions and rhetorical functions that characterize mass televisual productions. The series centers on the vicissitudes of the fictional, middle-class Alcántara family: husband Antonio (Imanol Arias) and wife Mercedes (Ana Duato); their three children Inés (Irene Visedo), Carlos (Ricardo Gómez), and Toni (Pablo Rivero); and Mercedes’s mother Herminia (María Galiana), who lives with them in the San Genaro neighborhood on the outskirts of Madrid. As their stories unfold, so too does a detailed panorama of events taking place in Spain (and, often times, internationally) with which their lives are intertwined in a sort of docufiction. Beginning with the very first episode, set in 1968, the series tracks the social, economic, and political transformations that remade Spain from the final years of the dictatorship through the consolidation of democracy: the intensification of student and worker unrest; the death of Franco and the installation on the throne of his approved successor, Juan Carlos I; the passage of a new constitution; the expansion of an economic boom with roots in structural changes already set in motion in the 1960s (see López); the abandonment of political and cultural isolationism in favor of rapprochement with Europe. *Cuéntame* has been acclaimed, and rightly
so, as a chronicle of the Transition, an impression heightened by the meticulous attention paid by the team of scriptwriters to period detail. The show incorporates archival news footage, carefully curated set decorations, and accurate costuming; it also draws from an extensive catalog of popular music which forms the soundtrack of the lives of the Alcántaras.

In narrating the story of the Alcántara clan, *Cuéntame* follows a linear chronology that is simultaneously marked by a highly complex temporality. Voice-over by the 40ish Carlos, speaking from an indeterminate present, opens each episode, thereby framing the enclosed action within the domain of memory. This retrospective vision is filtered through the contemporary perspective that governs the series’ making and is also reflective of current events. Indeed, “[t]he success of the show must thus be sought, not in what it tells about the past, but in the way in which historical events are related to the present of the (Spanish) viewer” (Song 93). Commentators and cultural studies scholars are in agreement that *Cuéntame*’s project is *tout court* the construction of a shared national memory built on recuperated personal memories. This is accomplished by the framing device of Carlos’s voice-over narration and by the focus on a tri-generational family story (grandmother, parents, children) whose members have differing experiences of the past (though lived by them as their present) that the show reconstructs. Not only does *Cuéntame* participate in the ‘memory boom’ that has overtaken Spain during the past three decades; it also exemplifies how collective memory in Spain was/is mediated through radio and especially television. The everpresent television set in the Alcántara’s living room, which they acquired during the very first episode of the show, is no mere prop. The family gathers around it to watch history in the making unfold: for instance, Carrero Blanco’s assassination, Franco’s funeral, the failed military coup of 23 February 1981. Critics also agree that memory in the series is saturated by nostalgia (Santana 153; Corbalán 341) and predicated on the role of emotions in memory’s creation, what Song labels “memory-as-affect” (96) and Smith refers to as the show’s “emotional imperative,” that is, the way in which “the intellectual goal of understanding subjects and institutions” is inevitably mediated.
through “the private (passional) sphere” (“Emotional” 364-365). Scholars unanimously coincide in describing the prevailing tone of *Cuéntame* as “benevolent,” “conciliatory,” and “edulcorado” (saccharine).

All these characteristics of the series are on display in Episode 317, “Nunca digas nunca” (Never say never; aired February 23, 2017), which takes place in June, 1985. Imanol Arias, who plays paterfamilias Antonio, described this date to *El País* as symbolic of “el año del reencuentro” (the year of reencounter) (Marcos “Los Alcántara inician”). Above all, Arias is referring to the national reencounter of Spain with Europe; in 1985 Spain signed the treaty marking its admission into the EC. With democracy firmly entrenched and threats of another coup rapidly fading, Spain was no longer “different.” Entry into the European Community was a form of certification of Spanish (post)modernity and neoliberalism; in this episode Antonio wants to export the wines from his *bodega* to Europe and begins learning English. The reunion is also a family event. Carlos visits from Brussels, where he has been living, and his brother Toni, after working as a foreign correspondent in Beirut while based in London, returns to Madrid when he is offered a plum position as a newscaster on TVE-1’s nightly news show. Metaphorically, it is also the occasion of Spain’s reencounter with the legacy of Sepharad. Toni (previously divorced) comes home with his new girlfriend, Deborah Stern, a British Jew whose family traces their lineage back to early modern Spain. The question of their incorporation into the lives of the Alcántaras and, by extension, their (re)absorption into the Spanish nation, is first broached when Toni introduces Deborah to his siblings. Deborah is portrayed as beautiful and brilliant, a mathematician (algorithmic analyst) who works for a multinational corporation in the field of information technology and is a winner of the Turing Prize, the so-called Nobel Prize of Computing.

Inés: Yo creo que es más alta que mamá. Es guapísima. (I think she’s taller than mom. She’s very pretty)

Carlos: Oye, ¿y lo de Stern? (Listen, what about this Stern business?)
Toni: Stern... Es que es judía. (Stern... The fact is she’s Jewish)
Carlos: ¿Qué es qué? (She’s what?)
Toni: Es judía nacida en Londres. Su padre emigró de Budapest tras la guerra y su madre es sefardí. (She’s a Jew born in London. Her father emigrated from Budapest after the war and her mother is Sephardic)
Inés: Ah, por eso habla tan bien español. (Oh, that’s why she speaks Spanish so well)
Toni: Habla cuatro idiomas. Es muy lista. (She speaks four languages. She’s very smart)
Carlos: ¿Y la vas a llevar a casa? (And you’re going to take her home?)
Toni: Sí, sí, claro. (Yes, yes, of course)
Carlos: ¿Sin avisar? (Without warning?)
Toni: Bueno, había pensado que vosotros podíais ir avanzando el tema. (Well, I was thinking that you both could bring up the subject)
Carlos: Ajá. (Aha)
Toni: Para eso están los hermanos, ¿no? (That’s what siblings are for, right?)
Carlos: Pero es judía. (But she’s Jewish)
Toni: No creo que les importe a papá y a mamá. (I don’t think it will matter to Dad and Mom)
Carlos: Un poco sí que les va a chocar. (It’s going to shock them a little)
Toni: A su familia le chocó que fuera cristiano. (It shocked her family that I’m Christian)
Inés: ¿Son muy religiosos? (Are they very religious?)
Toni: Ella no. Su abuelo sobre todo, es el más ortodoxo. (She isn’t. Her grandfather especially, he’s the most Orthodox).
While Toni is detained at work, Deborah arrives at his parents’ home unaccompanied, bringing as a gift a record album of Sephardic songs and ballads that reminds her of when she was a young girl. When her hosts express surprise that she speaks Spanish, Deborah explains that “Los antepasados de mi madre vivieron en España hace muchos años” (my mother’s ancestors lived in Spain many years ago), leading to the following exchange:

Antonio: ¿En la guerra, con lo de los alemanes? (During the war, with that business of the Germans?)

Deborah: No, mucho antes, en el siglo XV. La familia de mi madre es sefardí. (No, long before that, in the 15th century. My mother’s family is Sephardic)

Mercedes: Anda. (Wow)

Inés: Eran los judíos, papá, que se fueron de España. (They were the Jews that left Spain, Dad)

Antonio: Ya lo sé, hija, ya lo sé. Los que echaron los Reyes Católicos. (I know, dear, I know. Those whom the Catholic Kings kicked out.

In the kitchen Antonio and Mercedes, disconcerted, exchange brief words: should they serve the platter of sliced ham they’ve prepared for their guest? This is the first of several comedic moments that arise during the course of the episode because of their uncertainty over the correct protocols to use with Deborah. Their nervousness only increases when they learn that Deborah’s parents and grandfather have made the trip from the UK to meet their daughter’s boyfriend’s family. Knowing they will have to invite the entire Stern clan for dinner provokes another crisis, similarly played for laughs, as Antonio meets with a rabbi in hopes of learning the do’s and don’t’s of entertaining Jewish guests: for instance, he knows they do not eat pork, but are they permitted to drink wine? He is totally flummoxed, to the point of mistakenly thinking that the rabbi’s reference to a kosher diet is “una dieta de adelgazamiento judía” (a Jewish weight-loss diet). A subsequent conversation between the spouses offers viewers a recap of the rules of kashrut—the ban on pork, shellfish and meat from animals judged unclean, the
requirement for meat to have been slaughtered in accordance with ritual and purchased at a
Jewish butcher shop, the process by which wine is made kosher, etc. Toni is equally nervous
over the planned meeting of the two families: “Mi padre no ha visto judíos . . . les va a freír a
preguntas” (My father has never seen Jews . . . He’s going to riddle them with questions”). If
Toni represents the new Spaniard for whom an interfaith relationship is of little consequence,
his father embodies a prior generation, uncertainly charting a path through a turbulent period in
which social and political norms are being upended. The vast majority of Spaniards watching
this episode share Antonio’s ignorance, hence they learn along with him. As his character is
constructed in Cuéntame, Antonio models for the audience a a new form of citizenship, based on
a growing interethnic sensitivity, that emerges in the 1980s but is equally valid in 2017 when
this episode was first broadcast.

In his willingness to learn, Antonio stands in diametrical contrast to Herminia, his 80-
something mother-in-law who has lived most of her life under the dictatorship and appears
refractory to Spain’s newly liberal politics and culture. Where her son-in-law consults with a
rabbi, Herminia consults with don Pablo, her parish priest; the two of them are scandalized by
Toni and Deborah’s relationship. Herminia was weaned on the traditional Catholic theology that
accused the Jews of deicide, a view that even Vatican II’s encyclical Nostra Aetate (1965) has
failed to shake loose from her. She confirms with don Pablo: “Porque fueron los judíos los que
mataron a Jesucristo, ¿eh? . . . Con razón cuando yo era pequeña, nos decían en la iglesia que
había que matar a los judíos” (Because the Jews were the ones who killed Christ, right? . . .
When I young, they were right to tell us in church that the Jews should be killed). Stoking
Herminia’s dread, the priest warns her of the problems that will ensue if Toni and Deborah have
children: “esa religión se transmite por vía materna. O sea que si su nieto tiene un hijo con esa
chica, Dios no lo quiera, le sale judío” (that religion is transmitted through the mother. In other
words, if your grandson has a child with that woman, God forbid, he’ll be born Jewish). While
Herminia clutches her head in horror at the thought of a Jewish grandchild, the priest unloads
the coup de grâce: “Y cuando menos se lo espere, izas! Se lo circuncidan” (And when you least expect it, bam! they circumcise him). Herminia has no idea what this means, and his explanation – “Le cortan el prepucio” (They cut off his foreskin) – fails to offer any clarification. In what comes perilously close to a reenactment of what occurred in 1492, the priest advises that Herminia’s family are apostolic Roman Catholics and must remain so; Deborah must convert.

The dinner table scene forms the episode’s climax. Deborah’s family arrives, excitedly speaking a mix of English, imperfect Spanish, and Ladino. Herminia and Menahem, Deborah’s grandfather, immediately get off on the wrong foot; Herminia’s exclamation “¡Ay, Jesús” when she sneezes leads to a debate regarding Jewish guilt for the death of Christ, followed by Menahem’s retort that while the former has not been proven, what has been verified is that “la Inquisición Española echó de nuestras casas a nosotros” (the Spanish Inquisition threw us out of our homes). Then, unexpectedly, the tensions start to ebb. Menahem and Herminia agree to disagree, both repeating “to each his own.” Menahem has brought lajmashin, turnovers filled with tomato, onion, and chopped meat favored by Sephardic Jews, and offers one to Herminia, who tastes it and exclaims approvingly: “Empanadillas de carne.” The final minutes of the program spin the evening’s events as a story of newfound commonalities, reinforced by the reintroduction of Carlos’s voice-over: “Si una familia cristiana española y una familia judía asentada en Londres se encuentran para cenar, ¿cuántas probabilidades hay de que sean tan parecidas como dos gotas de agua?” (If a Spanish Christian family and a Jewish family settled in London meet for dinner, how many probabilities are there that they resemble each other as much as two drops of water?). Herminia’s father, no doubt referring to the intermarriage that often was transacted between conversos and Spanish Christians before and after 1492, even suggests the possibility his family and the Alcántaras may have a shared genealogy: “A lo mejor ustedes no sepan que sus antepasados eran judíos” (Maybe you don’t know that your ancestors were Jewish”), which elicits the response “Perhaps.” The final lines of dialogue belong to Antonio and Mercedes, as the former contemplates the future of his winemaking business:
Antonio: ¿Sabes lo que he estado pensando, Merche? (Do you know what I’ve been thinking, Merche?)

Mercedes: ¿El qué? (What?)

Antonio: ¿Qué te parecería si hiciéramos vino kosher? (What would you think if we made kosher wine?)

Mercedes: ¿Kosher?

Antonio: Kosher.

The manner in which the scene concludes suggests how Cuéntame ultimately seeks to present the history of the nation and its collective memories as consensual. By underscoring how the Alcántaras weather the crises they confront, not only remaining together but also showing a willingness to embrace the Sterns, the show reinforces the nation-as-family analogy and projects “a view of the passage of time that is always positive, both personally and financially” (Song 103). The feel-good ending of the episode corroborates the role of emotion in promoting viewers’ identification with these Sephardic Jews who epitomize not vindictiveness but rather nostalgia, a point which is made when the script recycles the topos of the key to the home, now lost, that Menahem’s ancestors once occupied in Toledo and where the Sterns say they still have family. The ability to identify with unfamiliar Jewish traditions is also supported by the conventions of dramedy. Cuéntame’s mix of pathos, tension, and humor—the unease provoked by the intimacy between Toni and the Jewish Deborah, contrasted with the genuinely funny verbal repartee and situational misunderstandings that arise out of the characters’ ignorance of Jewish life and customs—seems ripe for drawing in an audience who, like the Alcántaras (an “average” Spanish family), may have had little or no previous exposure to Jews. Paul Julian Smith, quoting philosopher and legal scholar Martha Nussbaum, contends that through television “viewers can receive an education for compassionate citizenship” (qtd. in Smith, “Emotional” 374). This is what the creators of Cuéntame appear to be promoting; surely there is hope for a more tolerant society if even the recalcitrant, dogmatic Herminia is able to
break out of the straitjacket of Franco-era ideology and declare in her final words in the episode: “Oye, la familia de los judíos es igual que la nuestra. Lo único es que se han equivocado de religión” (Listen, the family of the Jews is the same as ours. The only thing is that they chose the wrong religion”).

In line with the multitemporality that characterizes the series, the push toward cultural consensus and respect for religious difference that can be detected in this particular episode surely reflects the events of 2017 as much as it does those of 1985. In the reconstruction of history that Cuéntame pursues, the encounter between the Alcántaras and the Sterns on Spanish soil can be viewed as a response to the Constitution of 1978, which definitively legislated the separation of Church and state. Since the Sterns have traveled from London to Madrid, their meeting with the Alcántaras may also be related to the agreement signed in 1985 between Spain and the UK that resulted in the reopening of the border between Gibraltar and Spain, a symbolic gateway to Europe. Yet given the presentist turn that distinguishes Cuéntame, the Toni-Deborah subplot undoubtedly echoes more recent events as well. Of these, the most prominent is the passage in June, 2015 of the “Ley de concesión de nacionalidad a sefardíes originarios de España,” whereby Jews who can substantiate their claims of Sephardic descent may apply for Spanish citizenship. Quoting this law, “La España de hoy, con la presente Ley, quiere dar un paso firme para lograr el reencuentro de la definitiva reconciliación con las comunidades sefardíes” (Today’s Spain, with this law, wants to take a firm step toward achieving the reencounter of the definitive reconciliation with the Sephardic communities), a sentiment echoed by King Felipe when he declared in Madrid’s royal palace before an audience of government ministers and representatives of the Jewish community: “regresa formalmente al tronco común de la nación española una de sus ramas que, en su día, fue tristemente separada” (one of the branches of the Spanish nation, sadly separated from it in its day, formally returns to the common trunk) (Remírez de Gana “El Rey recibe”). The parable of return to the motherland works to the central government’s advantage, as it does for many Sephardim; it
supports the vision of Spanish democratic identity by re-invoking the myth of convivencia.

“Sepharad,” in Michal Friedman’s wry observation, “is the utopia that keeps on giving.” In a Spain that has been obsessively engaged in digging up and reburying the bodies of Republican victims executed and dumped in mass graves during the Civil War, one is left to wonder if the heightened attention to Sephardic Jews in televisual fictions like Cuéntame may in the long run offer a way toward negotiating difference or turn out to be simply another form of exhumation.

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1 As Nirenberg has observed, “in the vast archives of material that survive from early-modern and modern Europe and its cultural colonies, it is easy enough to demonstrate that words like ‘Jew,’ ‘Hebrew,’ ‘Semitic,’ ‘Israelite,’ and ‘Israel’ appear with a frequency stunningly disproportionate to the actual number of Jews living in those societies” (B11). Reliable figures regarding the size of the Jewish population residing in Spain today are hard to come by; the highest total quoted is ~45,000 out of a total population of 47 million, or less than 0.005%.

2 On this growth, see Rozenberg (252-292) and Menny. Many of the aforementioned activities are directed at Spanish (but non-Jewish) or Jewish (but foreign) publics. As for Jews who live in Spain at the present, although there is evidence of a modest revival of Jewish communal life, the fact is that since the 19th century the Jewish past they commemorate is not necessarily a Sephardic history (Menny 16). Jewish communities in 21st-century Spain are in great measure comprised of immigrants who came from the Maghreb in the 1960s and from Latin America in the 1980s-1990s during the dirty wars of the Southern Cone and in the early 2000s owing to the economic crisis.

3 Among the scant film titles we can mention are Intacto (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2001; analyzed by Shaw for its antisemitic topoi), El último sefardí (Miguel Ángel Nieto, 2003), Lobos sucios (Simón Casal, 2015), Perseguits i salvats (Daniel and Jaume Serra, 2017), La llum d’Elna (Sílvia Quer, 2017), Red de libertad (Pablo Moreno, 2017).

4 In 2008, concurrent with the Gaza crisis, the Pew survey found that 46% of Spanish respondents held unfavorable opinions of Jews, an increase from the 21% recorded in 2005; only 2% expressed a positive opinion, down from 18% in 2005. The 2008 survey by the Ministerio de Educación found that of 23,000 high school students surveyed in 300 public and private schools across all regions except Catalonia, fully 50% said they would not want to sit next to a Jew in their classrooms. The 2010 report by the Observatorio de Antisemitismo recorded that 34.6% of the population held an unfavorable view of Jews. More recently, the ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism (2015) shows some improvement; it records that 29% of adult Spaniards continue to cling to stereotypical anti-Jewish prejudices. Of these respondents, 59% answered “probably true” to the statement that “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Spain or to the countries they live in”; 45% agreed that “Jews have too much power in the business world”; 49% affirmed that “Jews have too much power in international finance markets”; 46% agreed that
“Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust”; 35% believed that “Jews have too much control over the United States government”; 23% were of the opinion that “Jews think they are better than other people.” These percentages were consistently higher when the sampled respondents were Spanish Muslims. See http://global100.adl.org/public/ADL-Global-100-Executive-Summary2015.pdf. Uniquely, Spanish antisemitism occurs in the near-total absence of Jews, owing not to the destruction of the local population during the Holocaust but rather to the 1492 Edict of Expulsion.

While acknowledging that El País does feature articles by prominent liberal Israeli politicians and authors, Weisz notes that the newspaper generally skews to “pro-Palestinian interpretations of the Arab-Israeli conflict, often wrapped in antisemitic motifs and stereotypes” and has often described Israel as a terrorist state (Weisz 13; 18).

See, for instance, Gala’s 2014 piece “¿Los elegidos?” (The Chosen?), in which he writes: “No extraña que los expulsen tanto. Lo que extraña es que los vuelvan a llamar” (It’s not surprising that they’re so often expelled. What’s surprising is that they’re called again).

Sporting events in Spain have frequently spawned not just antisemitic aggressions but openly racist hostilities as well.

Zapata’s tweet was widely circulated after it came to light: “¿Cómo meterías a 5 millones de judíos en un 600? En un cenicero” (How would you fit 5 million Jews in a SEAT 600? In the ashtray). When #Zapatadimisión became a trending topic, he apologized, claiming he harbored no antisemitic feelings but had erred in indulging “el humor negro y cruel” (cruel black humor).

While today it is admittedly difficult to accept Goffman’s universalizing and ahistorical approach, his inability to recognize agency on the part of “the stigmatized,” and his lack of questioning of the concept of “normalcy,” it is also true that Stigma is still in many respects a foundational text of disability studies.

The social interactionism theory that Goffman pioneered laid the ground for the understanding of disability as a socially constructed category.

In response to Castells’s observation that (ironically) Sans’s documentary was made by a non-Jew, the director affirmed: “Crec que és important. La inmensa majoria som gentils i ens podem identificar amb el meu punt de vista.” (I believe it’s important. The immense majority of us are gentiles and can identify with my point of view.)

In sharp contrast to the surveillance and purges of homosexuals under the Franco dictatorship, democratic Spain has been one of the EU’s earliest defenders of gay rights. Gay marriage and adoption of children by gay couples were legalized in 2006, and Pride Week (la Semana del Orgullo) is a major celebration in Madrid, Barcelona, and numerous other cities, receiving financial support from the respective municipal governments.

Barber quotes an unidentified Spanish-Jewish journalist who echoes this reluctance to speak out: “los miembros de esta comunidad siguen mostrándose muy reservados y se resisten a confesar públicamente su identidad en los lugares de trabajo o en los ambientes académicos” (the members of this community continue to be very reserved and resist acknowledging publicly their identity at work or in academic milieus). The ECRI Report on Spain (Fifth monitoring cycle), produced by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (published 27 February 2018), has advised the Spanish government of the need to strengthen reporting, data gathering, and criminal law response to hate crimes and to develop better mechanisms for handling online hate speech. Vulnerable groups, “including Jewish communities and LGBT people, have informed ECRI that their members tend to hide their identity as they fear being exposed to security risks, including that of becoming victims of hate crime” (25).

Notwithstanding a director’s professions of sincerity, the use of metacinematic camera work that facilitates the shift from the observational to the autobiographical creates its own paradox: “the voyeuristic power over their subjects that all documentary filmmakers possess is rendered much more obvious . . . by the often inevitable reflexivity of the shooting situation” (Dowmunt 272).

See Moreno-Caballud, 62-63. Another contributing factor to the expanded presence of the autobiographical voice in documentary is linked to advances in videotechnology, including webcams, cellphones, camcorders, and desktop editing (Dowmunt 264).
Jordi Pujol, president of the Generalitat de Catalunya from 1980-2003, was a strong proponent of Catalan nationalism.

In conjunction with the recent expansion of cultural tourism initiatives, the strengthening of regional identities as facilitated by the 1978 Constitution led many Spanish cities and towns to begin promoting their own local history by focusing on the material remains of the old Jewish quarters, which were held up to visitors as symbols of the medieval coexistence in Iberia of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Aliberti remarks that in some cases “el legado judío local se convirtió . . . en un medio para subrayar su propia política, diferente de la del Gobierno central (como sucedió con el programa conmemorativo catalán en el marco de Sefarad ’92)” (the local Jewish legacy became . . . a means for highlighting their own policy, which differed from that of the central government (as occurred with the Catalan commemorative program within the framework of Sepharad ’92) (Aliberti 288). For Aliberti, the memory war that erupted in 1992 turned into a faceoff between two opposing versions of the history of Spain’s Jews: “la historia oficial, escrita por el Gobierno, y una historia, ‘otra’, reivindicada durante el evento conmemorativo catalán” (30; the official history written by the government, and an ‘Other’ history, vindicated during the Catalan commemorative event).

In addition to his work as a documentarian, Sans is known for his engagement with social justice projects, including his work with the Direcciones Generales de Justicia Juvenil y Presos del Departament de Justícia de la Generalitat de Catalunya. He has taught courses for prison educators and organized a video workshop for youths under court supervision. About his recent film Visions de l’Islam (2014), Sans has stated that he views his documentary as a tool for social transformation that can change opinions (or at least try to do so): “We try to use it [documentary film] as a transformative tool to make the audience think” (see https://vimeo.com/113108363).

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