



**Maite Ojeda Mata.-*Identidades ambivalentes: Sefardíes en la España contemporánea* (Madrid: Sefarad Editores, 2018), 399p.**

Maite Ojeda Mata's monograph confronts the complex history of the alleged reintegration of the Sephardic community into Spanish life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She details how the Franco regime, usually described as benevolent towards the Jews because of its highly-publicized openness to receive Jewish refugees fleeing war-torn Europe, was actually dealing a parallel discourse. The confusion created by World War II was used by the regime to implement both a policy of dejudaisation and what Ojeda Mata describes as a camouflaged expulsion. Her monograph details the gradual political buildup of philo-sephardism in the nineteenth century which was confronted with a crisis point of action during the war. Ojeda Mata takes apart the stark historical reality of active wartime Spanish diplomatic aid to European Jewish refugees while simultaneously abandoning the very Sephardim that they had advocated as their own during their nineteenth century campaign of Spanish cultural expansionism.

Ojeda Mata's introduction begins with the tragic example of Salonika's Sephardim near total annihilation in 1943 when they were deported. Only around 500 Sephardim from Salonika and Athens were saved because they could demonstrate that they were Spanish subjects. Contrastingly, a year later, the Spanish government protected several thousand Jews from Budapest by issuing them ordinary and temporary passports and protection cards, thus saving them from a certain death. The harsh difference between the fate of these two communities, as well as the manner in which Franco's regime publicized or hid the realities concerning their policies towards Jews presents a stark picture of the political reality that was driving their decisions. Ojeda Mata presents the proof of this throughout her work with detailed referencing to a multitude of primary and secondary sources.

This monograph grapples with the historical realities of the Spanish government's use of policies of inclusion and exclusion in the last century regarding Sephardim, as well as the discussion between Spanish intellectuals and politicians that has spanned over a century. The first historian to include the myth around Franco's help to Jews in an academic work was Richard Pattee in *This is Spain* (1951). The first to question it was Haim Avni in *España, Franco y los judíos* (1982/1979). Since then, various writers have weighed in on the discussion. Ojeda Mata highlights the following major studies (in chronological order) from Spain: Marquina y Ospina (1987), José Antonio Lisbona (1993), Gonzalo Álvarez Chillida (2002) Isidro González (2004), Miguel Ángel López Morell (2005), Javier Domínguez Arribas (2006) and Daniel Rozenberg (2010), who preponderantly confirm the inherent anti-semitism in Spanish policies during and after the war. Only González (2004) seems to weigh

the conclusions differently by supporting Franco's policies in light of the political climate. Two other studies which the author states as crucial to this discussion are Bernd Rother (2005) who concludes that even though the Spanish were not seeking to exterminate the Jews, they were actively discouraging them from settling in Spain (19), and Isabelle Rohr's (2006) who frames Spanish foreign policy on two fundamental myths in contemporary Spain: the "Reconquista" myth and the theory of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy (21).

Two key moments in recent history which mark Jews and their relationship to Spain were the commemoration of the 500 years since the expulsion (1992), as well as the more recent law (2015) granting Sephardim the possibility of claiming Spanish nationality. The first two editions of Ojeda Mata's volume (2012, 2013) were before this more recent political development, it would have been interesting to have had an epilogue in the last edition (2018) exploring the impact of the relationship of Spain's century and a half's long policies towards its Sephardi history and in the light of the groundbreaking development towards granting full citizenship to descendants of expelled Jewish ancestors. One of the more original aspects of Ojeda Mata's work is the ethnographic history of the communities of Melilla and Barcelona, bringing forth the importance of these small communities which were already vibrant during the early twentieth century. Through this qualitative and quantitative analysis of two communities, she shows often unknown aspects of Jewish settlement in pre-war Spain.

Ojeda Mata structures her book in seven main chapters, the introduction and conclusion wrap up her main arguments, dealing the reader with nine sections in which she treats the various elements that give forth to Sephardim's ambivalent identity in twentieth century Spain. She details the particularity of the development of nineteenth century philo-sephardism, which defended Spanish political and economic connection to Sephardi communities throughout the Muslim Mediterranean world. However, as a philosophy espoused by the right, philo-sephardism was often accompanied by anti-semitism. Sephardi Jews were considered to be more "Spanish" whereas Ashkenazi Jews were denigrated with the negative characteristics of "Jews"(26). It is this very ambivalence to Sephardim as Jews that ultimately sealed the fate of those that were ultimately not protected by the Spanish regime during the Nazi period. Her carefully documented explanation of this shows how the larger policy was implemented throughout occupied Europe in different ways according to the diplomats in charge and the orders that they were given from the headquarters in Spain.

In the first chapter Ojeda Mata presents Spanish studies that were instrumental in the reconstruction of European relationships with Jewish communities in colonial times. The Jewish elites with which colonialism engaged were mostly Sephardi from the Muslim Mediterranean. It was this renewed connection that facilitated a wave of immigration to Ceuta & Melilla, as well as to peninsular Spain. Her second chapter focuses on Melilla and Barcelona, where she compares North African and Ottoman Sephardi immigrants, the nature of the communities they formed and their cultural, political and economic contributions. Ojeda Mata details the political and legal implications that this new relationship between Spain and its Sephardi

diaspora created during her third chapter. The new reality of different religious and social needs for life-cycle rulings brought about a need for a revision of previous administrative rules.

In chapter four she writes about the reality faced by Jewish residents during Franco's regime's obsession with "cleansing" the country from its "enemies" and "foreign influences." This is where she states that there were camouflaged versions of a contemporary expulsion during the influx and outpouring of refugees and out of the peninsula during WWII. It is only in the fifth chapter where Ojeda Mata deals directly with the often-studied issue of Franco's relationship to Jewish refugees during WWII. Her contribution to this discussion centers around a revision of the sources that deal with the policies of inclusion and exclusion that both favored or impeded the protection of Sephardim during the War. Here she states the difference between the nineteenth century decision to protect Sephardim outside of Spain and the twentieth century reality of facing whether to admit religious plurality on Spanish soil. Ojeda Mata's findings put a spotlight on the contradictory implementation of a policy that placed the few hundred Sephardi Spanish citizens that were repatriated during the war together with the thousands of "apatrid" refugees from Europe to be evacuated to camps in North Africa and Palestine by international humanitarian organizations.

Chapter six is called "The Spanish in the Jewish" and unpacks some of the ambivalences regarding both the Sephardi diaspora and their simultaneous Jewish and Spanish elements, as well as the relationship to the descendants of the Jews who converted to Catholicism in order to stay in Spain in 1492. Ojeda Mata proposes that Sephardi Jews were perceived as having virtually assimilated ethnically by virtue of their long history in Spain, they were perceived as "almost" having become like the Spanish. In the last chapter, the author continues to explore this idea of ethnic mixture as well as its rejection in the example of Christians and Conversos in the Peninsula which began before, during and after the expulsion. Racial stereotypes of Jews, Muslims and Gypsies are prevalent, and Ojeda Mata finds that often when something does not conform to conservative Catholic ideals, it was Judaized as a manner of justifying its complete distaste. Her conclusions demonstrate how through the meticulous detangling of the complexity surrounding Spanish policies and attitudes towards Sephardim, the story that comes through is a clear ambivalence around the idea of Sephardim in contemporary Spain.

A recurring motif throughout this monograph is the instrumentalization of Sephardim for various political reasons. The first instance of the reawakened awareness of the potential importance of Sephardim for Spanish political interests is when Spain lost its colonies in the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico and decided to turn its armies and colonial eyes towards the Maghreb. It is then that they started to write about the "forgotten" Sephardi communities of the Mediterranean basin that promised a lucrative key of entry into a new venue for colonization. The Sephardim, for their part, saw better economic and educational opportunities for their families with a renewed relationship with European powers, and began to act as cultural mediators.

It was only in 1869 when the law permitting religious diversity was established in Spain, only to be partially rescinded in 1876 (a mere seven years later) and finally in 1909 special permissions granting synagogues the permission to open and operate started to be given. With this new permission, real communities could be established, and began to settle in the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The author shows two different official attitudes regarding the Jewish communities of the Peninsula and its North African enclaves: in Melilla the Jews were part of the elites that built the city and were celebrated in Spain for it, whereas in Barcelona the community of Mercado de San Antonio was one of peddlers and humble workers, which was almost invisible to outsiders (110).

The negotiation between religion and nationalism was present in Spain since the *Reconquista* and what the author conveys is that it continues to be a marker of belonging to the Spanish culture. The non-Spanish status of the Jews in the eyes of the Spaniards, shows that Catholic and Spanish were usually interchangeable. This officially excluded the Jews from being considered Spanish, even though they might consider *themselves* Spanish, and might even be Spanish citizens. On the other hand, the Sephardi Jews that lived throughout the Mediterranean basin served Spain's political needs more as representatives for Spain outside the Peninsula rather than in Spain itself.

It is during the rites of the life-cycle that the government's political ambivalence becomes clear, guarding the supremacy of the church in questions of civil life. In 1870 Jews were officially permitted to immigrate. However, Ojeda Mata returns to the issue that Jews were considered foreign in peninsular Spain and indigenous in Melilla (159), and that the church and the State were intrinsically connected for life-cycle events thus confirming the fact that citizenship for Sephardim was clearly not a part of Spanish political policy. Her bringing together of Spanish anti-Semitism and its relationship to national Spanish identity and the nation's history explains the constant contemporary ambivalent relationship to Sephardim. Ojeda Mata reiterates the importance of weighing in on their permanent conceptual, legal and political inclusion and exclusion (328).

Ojeda Mata's book is an important contribution to the understanding of the century-long issues at play in the complexities within Spanish nation building. Her book explores how philo-sephardism was used to their advantage and to the detriment of Sephardim in the long term. Ojeda Mata recalibrates the perspective of philo-sephardism looking at the actual benefits (and mostly non-benefit) to Sephardim. Her study presents an important warning call to other countries who are presenting philo-sephardism and philo-semitism for their own political needs, without taking into account the actual members of these minority groups. It is an extremely well documented study on the complexities that go into building a case for plurality, where plurality in its true sense actually does not exist.

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