

CULTURE

How Spaniards see themselves

MADRID

'Spain in a Day' weaves together amateur video to portray the country

BY RAPHAEL MINDER

"Spain in a Day," a documentary movie made from hundreds of video clips filmed by ordinary Spaniards, says much about the enduring family values that have helped this country weather arguably its worst crisis since the civil war in the 1930s.

In fact, the movie, directed by Isabel Coixet, barely mentions any of the issues that continue to dominate headlines here, like the country's rampant political corruption, terrorism threats or a territorial dispute with Catalonia that is threatening to split the country. Only Europe's refugee crisis is featured, in video footage of migrants reaching the Spanish coast in an inflatable dinghy.

Judging by their video clips, Spaniards prefer to be seen holding hands with their partners, helping an elderly mother lie down on her bed or arguing about how to prepare the family lunch.

The film was co-produced by Ridley Scott, whose own 2011 documentary, "Life in a Day," was the starting point for national versions of his project. Such movies have already been made in Japan, India, Italy and Britain.

But Ms. Coixet — whose films include "The Secret Life of Words" and "My Life Without Me" — said that she worked without any guidance from Mr. Scott in terms of what kind of videos and topics she should focus on, so that her movie

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bears little resemblance to the others. If some comparison could be made, she said, it would be with the Italian version directed by Gabriele Salvatores, because it also reflected a Mediterranean society.

Mr. Scott "just told me to enjoy the ride," Ms. Coixet said in a telephone interview. "I was surprised, but nobody really sent in a video in which somebody just stands before the camera and rants about our politicians. It is as if the level of resignation about politics and other negative things that are covered by the media is such that it doesn't even form part of our daily lives."

The movie, released in Spain on Sept. 30, was made from 404 videos selected from about 22,600 video clips shot by Spaniards almost a year earlier, on Oct. 24, 2015. Coincidentally, that was the day when Amancio Ortega became the first Spaniard to top the Forbes list of the world's richest people. Mr. Ortega — who has since been leapfrogged by Bill Gates on the list — founded Inditex, the giant clothing company whose brands include Zara.

But apart from Mr. Ortega, Spaniards are unlikely to link that day to a sense of wealth or even job security. In October 2015, Mariano Rajoy, Spain's conservative prime minister, was preparing to call national elections amid rising political divisions, with new parties denouncing corruption, record income inequality and a level of joblessness only second within the European Union to that of Greece.

The videos that make up the film, however, focus overwhelmingly on the simple pleasures of life rather than on the murky worlds of politics and fi-



Images from "Spain in a Day," culled from thousands of submissions taken on Oct. 24, 2015. The movie was directed by Isabel Coixet and co-produced by Ridley Scott, whose own 2011 documentary, "Life in a Day," was the starting point.

nance. One video maker, looking forward to the year-end festivities, conveys his feelings to his relatives with heartwarming simplicity: "I love Christmas

not because I love Christmas but because it's the time to go home to my family."

In another family exchange, the fa-

ther tells his son that he took a short walk, then had some beers and was now ready for dinner. "That is what you could call a great day," the father concludes with a beaming smile.

In a food-obsessed country like Spain, eating features heavily. The clips are mostly about the social occasion rather than the food itself, particularly when it comes to paella, one of Spain's most famous dishes, normally cooked in a pan large enough to feed a big family. In one of the scenes, two sisters playfully disagree over the best way to make the dish.

Despite the largely upbeat content in the film, there are some reminders of how the economic crisis has forced thousands of Spaniards to find work elsewhere rather than join the unemployment lines here.

"You sent a very good CV, but you know how things are now..." a deflated father tells his son, who is looking to return to Spain from some foreign city, during a video conversation conducted from the father's laptop. But even in this clip, the parents and their son soon

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switch from his work problems to lamenting the fact that the son will not be able to return home for Christmas.

The simpler videos convey stronger emotions than the artificially constructed ones, like that of a man who promotes his sexuality by revealing a T-shirt that reads "Spain is a gay." There are also fiancées who film their staged wedding proposals: in one clip, an actor proposes in the midst of a medieval play in front of a delighted audience; in another, a sky-diving woman jumps from an aircraft, with a giant "Will you marry me?" sign awaiting her on the ground.

The documentary has received favorable reviews, many of them expressing surprise at the gap between how the media tend to portray the country and how people actually portray themselves. Ms. Coixet has presented a Spain "which perhaps doesn't have so many things to feel ashamed about," wrote Ángel F. Fermoselle in *El Español*, an online publication.

Would "Spain in a Day" look similar if shot in another Western country? In Italy and other parts of southern Europe, probably, Ms. Coixet said, but much less so elsewhere.

"What we see is how Spain is a country where elderly people still have an important role and generate respect," she said, adding that there is "a family network that helps you understand how this country has managed to forge ahead despite all its problems."

There are, however, a handful of videos that suggest that the social fabric is at risk, as Spaniards migrate overseas in search of work or leave the countryside. In one clip, a man films the deserted streets of his village. "Without people, the village is dying," he says.

While the initial selection involved discarding thousands of videos because of their poor technical quality, Ms. Coixet said that modern technology had helped raise considerably the level of amateur filmmaking. There is a slick sequence showing a ballerina rehearsing, for example, as well as images of a child letting sunlight run through his fingers. There are also spectacular landscapes, including aerial views of a lighthouse on a cliff.

"People can now spend a few hundred euros on a drone and do that," Ms. Coixet said.