**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews –** Antonio ROJAS CASTRO

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| Interviewee: | Antonio ROJAS CASTRO |
| Interviewer: | Darren Paffey |
| Interview date: | 19 June 2008 |
| Location: | AGER Centre, Granada. |
| Duration: | (a) 73:00 (b) 55:42 |
| Countries of migration: | Civil War: Barcelona  1952-54: Panama  1959-62: France |

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** OpenLIVES materials are interviews with individuals and describe the personal memories, perspectives, and knowledge of those individuals. English synopses for OpenLIVES were created by students and researchers working on the project. The idea behind the synopsis is to give a broad outline of the content NOT to give an exact translation of an interviewee’s words. In some cases, there were sections which were difficult to hear or summarise and which we have been unable to clarify. These areas are highlighted in red. If users of this material do further work in contextualising this testimony, please share your work with the world through the HumBox!

**Synopsis part A:**

[00:00 – 10:00] Life in France

France 1959-62. Described flat again. Had formerly been a school. Bathroom for the whole block was downstairs. He managed to get the flat from the *Ayuntamiento* (local council) due to playing football for the local team. After returning to Spain to marry and taking his wife back to France, they moved into the flat. His wife took 5 suitcases of clothes to France. ARC had already lived there for 6 months with his father. They used to eat in the hotel, but had bought some pans and cooking pots. Bought a gas heater (*estufa*). ARC says they didn’t really like the flat. When people asked him if he liked it, he used to say ‘*comme ci, comme ça*’ (so so). Didn’t like because of not having a bathroom. Wasn’t bad for a recently married couple however. Kitchen room in flat had a window overlooking the patio.

Says initially that they didn’t have any belongings which reminded them of Spain. Then says that he had taken some frames (made of *taracea* (inlay?)) with photos of when he and his wife were courting. Everything else, they bought in France. In the house they still have bits of silver and some cups from their time in France.

They bought a flat back in Spain, and worked very hard (on the buses) to buy it and worked very hard in his spare time doing other jobs: did varnishing work, sold books, sold cleaning liquids. His daughter was a good student and got a scholarship; his son wasn’t so good and had to have outside tuition. Daughter went to Ireland for a month when she was learning English. ARC had to pay and worked hard, but didn’t mind as she was good student.

Daily life in France: ARC’s life was about work. He started work at 8AM but was always ready by 7.45AM to get going. Did the jobs that the French didn’t want to do. Learnt to *barniar por pistola* (varnishing by gun) Learnt *barni-poliester* (varnishing with polyester). After learning this, he asked for higher salary at work.

[10:00 – 20:00] Immigration policies in France, Germany; Republican refugees

One of the main differences for ARC in France was that lunch was at midday. ARC noticed a seriousness in everything there. He took particular care when he first arrived, because he was illegal and knew that this would not be tolerated for long. In France, the police keep an eye on immigrants and immigrants need certain documents which they have to present to the police. ARC says this is good, and that this doesn’t happen in Spain, which means that the police, employers and town council are not communicating.

Tells story of Spanish worker in Germany who used to go to Holland at weekends and once carried drugs back over the border. *Persona non grata* stamped in passport. He went to ARC’s brother for advice and he said he couldn’t do anything for him. In Cologne the Spanish worker was caught riding the trams for free: first time they charged him double, on the second occasion he was taken to the police and expelled from country. ARC sees this as good. Spanish proverb: *Adonde fuere, haz lo que viere* (‘when in Rome…’). This is necessary in order to integrate. ARC tried to live as the French lived. There were 7 Spanish political refugee couples, ARC and wife used to meet up with them every weekend to play cards and socialise. One of them, Maño, hardly spoke French. Those refugees always used to talk about the civil war. They were all Republicans. There were three or four officials, ARC’s father amongst them, and only one trained soldier.

Remembers one – Don Arturo Ortega from Murcia – was personal secretary to the President of the Republica in exile. ARC was having lunch with him one day and Arturo was saying the rice pudding in France wasn’t the same as his mother used to make it in Spain. ARC invited him to dinner at their flat, and ARC’s wife prepared rice pudding for him: he began to cry as he ate it, saying that in spite of travelling around Argentina, Chile, Germany, he had never found anyone who made rice pudding just right, until that day in ARC’s house. ARC and Arturo used to talk lots. Arturo was originally a journalist and had been national president of journalism/press in Spain.

[20:00 – 30:00] Spaniards in France in World War II

The Republicans used to tell all their stories together. ARC’s father used to tell him that armaments came to Spain from Czechoslovakia. His father once said that it wasn’t that Franco won the war, it was that the Republicans lost it.

ARC arrived in France September 1959. Until he married in April of the following year, they only occasionally ate Spanish food.

The French used to celebrate Armistice Day, and the end of the 2nd World War. Most Spaniards in France were members of the Resistance. In Realville, there was an Avenue named after a Spaniard: Santiago/Jacques Rodríguiz. He and his girlfriend held the town in World War II when the Nazis invaded Realville: they had machine guns and were some of the last to resist. The Nazis killed them both, and after the war a street was named after each of them. ARC used to attend the commemorative acts in the town square. He remembers the Mayor used to read all the names of those from the village who had died, saying after each name ‘*mort pour la France’* (died for France). Jacques Rodríguiz’s name was included.

ARC got on well with the neighbours and the community. Last year (2007) ARC and several members of his family (children and grandchildren) visited Realville and were treated very well. They were all invited to dinner by an old friend there. ARC’s grandson said ‘Granddad, you must have behaved really well when you were here, for how they’re treating you now.’

[30:00 – 40:00] Life in France, Spanish and French community

ARC’s son was born in France. The butcher used to keep aside liver for ARC’s wife when she was breastfeeding, as this was good for breastfeeding mothers. Now doesn’t remember the French word for *hígado* (liver).

Realville had a population of 2,000. Their favourite places included the hotel where they used to go at the weekends to play cards. The football pitch too. ARC used to like the French way of football, playing the ‘*copa de Francia*’ with other amateur teams, but the match always took place at the weaker team’s home pitch.

There were no associations for Spaniards. ARC knew lots of Spaniards, and in nearby Posade where there were also lots of Spaniards, there wasn’t an association there either. There was a cinema run by a priest. Every Sunday evening he showed a film, from 6-8pm or in the summer 7-9pm. They paid for their tickets, around 2-3 French francs, and went to watch the French films. He was once invited by the head of the village school to watch the end of year theatre production. Some years, they did a Christmas production too.

ARC worked with 2 others from Realville, one of whom invited him to go fishing with him, but ARC said no, he didn’t like it, it wasn’t his thing. When he started work, there were 7. Things grew and they produced a lot of television tables and the workforce grew to 40. The boss made ARC a supervisor. His work colleagues already used to come to him with questions, problems, issues, etc.

[40:00 – 50:00] Work life, unions

ARC realised he was actually producing twice the number of wooden products (wardrobes, etc.) as the French workers. Realised this was what he had to do, therefore he wasn’t bothered by the situation. He was there for the whole 3 years he was in France. He wasn’t a member of a union at all. There was only one colleague who was a union member. The boss didn’t prohibit them at all, it was the decision of workers not to syndicalise (join a union). Although ARC’s father had been a member of the CNT in Spain, he never joined a French union. Even a colleague who had been a union representative In Barcelona did not join a French union, saying it was better just to get on with your own business.

ARC talks a bit about contemporary union activity, the years of *cotizando* and the 48-hour working week. Back in Spain, after 5 years of working there, he became a UGT member and representative, recruiting a further 200 members. He was *Secretario General de Transporte Urbano* in Granada. Recounts the story of a colleague in another transport company who was laid off because he underwent surgery, and how ARC was involved in trying to resolve his case through the union.

[50:00 – 60:00] Unions, politics

ARC became somewhat disenchanted with the union movement as it wasn’t really working effectively in favour of workers.

ARC never arrived a minute late for work, which is important when working for a public transport company. Mentions again having gone to Madrid a couple of times to negotiate with the Minister for Work to get the 18-hours working week reduced to 44 hours.

ARC never participated in politics, either in France or Spain. He has known various politicians, including three general secretaries of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party), people that actually believe. He remembers very well the de Gaulle referendums in France.

[60:00 – 70:00] Returning to Spain

Talks about a local councillor he knew who was also a surgeon.

Interviewer asks if return was a topic of conversation when in France. ARC’s father worked in Marseille and they used to talk by phone. ARC went to the *Consulado Español* in Toulouse to ask what furniture he could take back to Spain. He had to write to the Director of Customs in Madrid. Had to fill in forms (10 copies!) declaring what he was going to take back. ARC sent furniture ahead one day before traveling himself. He arrived in Irún and the authorities said he had to pay around 30, pesetas entry taxes into Spain. ARC refused to pay 2,000 pesetas extra tax on a bike (*velosole*), so had to leave it at the border. Went straight to the customs office in Granada on his return. Every customs office had its own set of rules in those days. Managed to sort out delivery of his bike to Granada without paying another cent.

Christmas 1959, ARC came back to Granada for a week’s holiday. Got on a train that had left from Switzerland. ARC had just one suitcase with him. Someone on the train who had got on in Switzerland had a large radio-cassette player, and there weren’t many around in those days. Border guards asked this person for the receipt/paperwork, but it had already been his for several years, so he didn’t have it.

[70:00 – 80:00] Customs processes

The border customs guard took the radio-cassette and put it with lots of others they had stored in their building. The owner was given a number and then picked it up when leaving Spain again. ARC’s point is that there were lots of abuses of returnees to Spain who hadn’t gotten the correct documents from their country of migration. It’s different now with the common European market. [ARC wants to explain something and asks interviewer to pause the recording.]

**Synopsis part B:**

[00:00 – 10:00] Deciding to return to Spain

ARC talked with his wife about returning to Spain. They lived better there. They used to save quite a lot of food, i.e. if they didn’t finish a meal, they’d save the food for the next meal. However, they didn’t have money left at the end of the month. It occurred to him really, they weren’t necessarily much better off there in France. When they used to go to Montauban, things were cheaper than in their village 15 km away. In Spain, they didn’t have a fridge, whereas in France they had a fridge to store food in. These were the kinds of small things that were different. ARC remembered that going a whole year without being able to go on holiday was something that would have happened if they’d been living in Spain too, so they decided to return to Spain.

When they returned to Spain, there was quite a lot of emigration of Spaniards to Australia. ARC went to find out about it from a priest who knew, and started to investigate earnings and the cost of living. ARC had a 1-year old son at that point, and found that they would have to pay for the child to go with them, so decided not to go.

ARC knew all the time he was in France that he would have to return at some point. He had contact with people back in Spain the whole time. Talks about an Asturian who was working there and in the end was sent back because he wasn’t earning enough to pay his way in his hotel.

[10:00 – 20:00] Book about return migrants

At 13 mins, ARC asks one of his colleagues in the adjacent office for one of the books interviewer had asked about (a book of returnee life stories mentioned in the AGER Memoria, published by AGER (*Asociación Granadina de Emigrantes Retornados*, Granada Association for Return Migrants)). We go off to try and sort out getting a copy – the recording continues. Noticeable is the amount of activity going on in the Centre.

[20:00 – 30:00] Returning to Spain

Interview resumes at 22:52. Interviewer asks how he felt on returning to Spain. He was happy to return because he was coming home, back to his country/land. Money was less certain in France, he was always paid on the 5th day of the month, whereas back in Spain he was never quite sure when he would be paid. Because of that, he thought about Australia. ARC got a job on the buses from 1 November 1962 until 3 March 1992. He was retired off on health grounds with 75% of pension to begin with, rising to 100% later. After this he started working on a voluntary basis for the AGER.

When in Spain, he missed the customs of Spain, the people he associated with. When back in Spain, one of the things he missed about France was the straight talking – if people say something, that’s how it is. In Spain, people are more friendly and warm on the surface, but as an example of what they’re like, he tells me that the other day he asked for a pen from one of the colleagues at AGER, and even though she had a bag full of pens, she said she didn’t have one to lend him.

Returned to Granada 5th/6th October 1962. ARC did have work when he returned, but not in the conditions he wanted (e.g. payment security and terms). Things were difficult.

The journey back to Spain wasn’t bad, They had to get off in Madrid but there were no problems.

[30:00 – 40:00] Experiences of American and French migration

First impressions on returning were bad, because of the work conditions. With time, though, they got better, and he ended up spending 29 years in the same company.

Interviewer asks about reactions of Spaniards: This issue touches all who have migrated. When you go to another country, your country of migration, you’re a Spaniard. In America in particular, because we shared the language, we were ‘*españoles de mierda’* or ‘*gallegos de mierda*’. His father ran the workshop and employed several employees. ARC remembers one employee called Rubén, was working in the Ministry of Information and Tourism, and then came to the workshop to work in the afternoon. Took him off to see, for example, an indigenous girl giving birth in the river Darín. These are things that you remember forever. Worked also in Cartagena de Indians in Colombia, and also Venezuela and Cuba, doing woodwork in churches. He remembers his father commenting that how could a Republican live by working for the church!

Interviewer asks about experiences from American migration and return which helped in France-Spain return: Very different. What he learnt in America wasn’t valuable in France. There was the language problem in France. ARC is fed up of meeting people in the Centre who have been 8-10 years in Germany and don’t speak the language. Some don’t bother to learn. This is bad, and for ARC is a bad aspect of migration. Senegalese come here and ARC speaks to them in French, and they tell him that when the English, French, other colonisers were in Africa, life was better – they lived better. To the colonisers, tribes were all the same so they were treated in the same way, whereas amongst themselves now (used word *moros*), there is a discrimination amongst tribes.

[40:00 – 50:00] Work and home in Spain on return

There, where you migrate, you’re a Spaniard; then after a few years you’re a Frenchman, German, etc.; no longer a ‘*granadino*’. Some migrant workers used to hire Mercedes to give the appearance of living very well there in France, but with their actual earnings, it would not normally be possible to drive such a car. ARC didn’t even return with a car. ARC brought everything back that he had in the flat in France. With time though, they’ve got rid of most things that they brought back from France.

Had very well paid job in spare time varnishing back in Spain, where he earned 25 pesetas/hour when average pay was 80 pesetas/day. He had to be up to drive buses at 5.30AM. If on late shift, back at 1.30PM.

With varnishing job, ARC was told by doctor that varnishing with polyester was very bad for chest. ARC used to have mil every 3 hours though. Had to work a lot.

When they returned from France, they rented a flat for then, and later bought it partly using some savings. Mortgage now paid, and only paying for the family’s beach place. Because of being director of AGER, bank was more than willing to give him a mortgage. Also looked at children, both professionals, and so the banks though that ‘if he dies, the children will carry on paying for loans’.

[50:00 – 60:00] Objects from France

Interviewer asks about material culture in the house that reminds him of time in France*:* *Una olla exprés* (pressure cooker). 40 years ago his wife bought this pressure cooker in France, and it finally stopped working 3 years ago. So she bought one in Spain and it only lasted 6 months. For ARC there aren’t objects that remind him of France, as he’s too busy working to deal with that. ARC’s brother helped them lots in the France flat, as well as here.

ARC requests that copies of anything published from research be sent to the AGER.