**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews – Juanra (pseudonym)**

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| Interviewee: | Juanra |
| Interviewer: | Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez |
| Interview date: | 30th March 2008 |
| Location: |  |
| Duration: | 1 hr 15 mins |
| Countries of migration: | Germany |

**Synopsis:**

[00.00 – 10.13] **Childhood and working life in Germany**

Born in Burgos, village called Quinatanar de la Sierra in 1947 (now aged 61). Sixth son out of seven born to working-class parents. Born in the post-war period, the years of hunger; family had difficulties. Went to primary school and then to secondary; completed his *bachillerato elemental* (10 years – 14 years) without problem but struggled with *bachillerato superior* (15-16) and in the end did not complete it, but this was more due more to political and religious issues . After leaving school at 16 he went to Barcelona, was there a year and a half working as an admin assistant at a sales company. At 18 (Jan 1965) decided to go to Germany; left in September 1965. At that time many people went to Germany on work contracts but Juanra did not have one; simply that one day the idea came to him to go, so he went with a tourist passport to an area beside Lake Constance near Switzerland.

There he met people he knew from his home town, working in a foundry; once immigrants started working there, companies employing them had to give them residency permits. Did not go illegally. Arrived as tourists but then became legal workers. At that time Germany was offering a staggering number of employment opportunities: company representatives/business owners would even wait outside Juanra’s place of work looking for workers wanting to do extra hours.

Juanra spoke no German before he left Spain, but promised himself when he arrived in Germany that he would learn, and to this end he would buy two newspapers a day (*Die Zeit* and *Frankfurter Rundschau)* and read them after work with a dictionary; within three years he was able to speak fluently. Agrees that German is not an easy language to learn, but highlights the fact that he was young and had put his mind to learning it. Does note, however, that some days after work he wouldn’t feel like studying, especially as he was working three different jobs: Monday to Friday at the car factory Opel till 3 and then in a carpentry workshop from 4 till 7, and at weekends as a waiter in a nightclub; minimal free time.

Working atmosphere was good at Opel, aside from some difficulties caused by communication problems between workers of different nationalities; lists some of those working on the assembly line: Turks, Moroccans, Algerians, Greeks, Italians. However highlights that these problems were not symptomatic of the German system itself, which was known to be very good. Workers were given continual training, and Juanra himself was given the opportunity to train to become a factory supervisor; did training course of 11 months and passed the final exams in 1977, after which he started working as a supervisor

When asked about the way of life of the workers in Germany at this time, explains that it was the Franco era, during which there was very little work in Spain, so more or less selling labourers to countries that needed them. Since Spaniards therefore represented the majority of workers in Germany they tended to form “ghettos”. Most were not interested in adapting to German culture, i.e. learning the language, and their integration was poor; they worked hard and well – notably so – but it was to send the money they earned back to Spain where many had wives and families, so they could buy a flat or build a house in the country. This was not Juanra’s case, however; he did not leave Spain for economic reasons but more political and religious reasons, the same which had caused him problems at school. Nevertheless does note that his job in Barcelona was poorly paid with few opportunities to advance, and he wanted to see other places, so decided to go abroad. In Germany he integrated very well, made friends with many fantastic Germans; his experience in Germany was a wonderful time in his life of which he holds many fond memories. Was there 16 years – returned in 1981, by which time Spain was free once more, though things were still uncertain as there had been a coup d’état, people were still afraid.

[10.14– 20.19] **Family life in Germany and reasons for returning to Spain**

Germany was where he met his wife, who had arrived in 1963 with her mother after her father had died after a fall at work; an elder brother of hers was already living in Germany. Met in 1966 and married in 1969 in Germany but by a Spanish priest – Spain was sending such priests to Germany at that time, was necessary for Spaniards to be married by Spanish priests – and then began their life together.

Formed a Spanish parents’ group in Nauheim where he and his wife were living (near Rüsselsheim where Opel factory was; both towns part of the German state of Hesse). Group focused almost exclusively on teaching German people about Spanish culture and on giving their own children some instruction in Spanish. Managed to get in a Spanish teacher, who would give the children classes in the afternoon after they had had their German schooling from 8am til 1pm. This was a way of helping children learn Spanish and of ensuring they would maintain a connection with the country and culture into which their parents had been born. Juanra has 3 children, of which two were born in Germany (in 1970 and 1977) and one after his family moved to Zaragoza.

Children were perhaps what made them return to Spain. Family was very settled in Germany, renting (as most – around 80% - did) a lovely house; but because the first two children had been born and educated in Germany, they began to struggle with Spanish – the boys spoke in German to each other and, whenever possible, to Juanra and his wife too. Difficult for the couple as they both worked at Opel but he would do one shift and then she the next, so each one would have to act as two parents while the other was working. When shifts overlapped they would leave the children with a neighbour. In 1979/80, Opel suggested he return to Spain to work for a new branch of the company in Zaragoza; the family weighed it up, and it was not an easy decision, but in the end they decided to go because their elder son by that time was 11 and they believed that if they didn’t go back now, their sons never would. They knew returning to Spain would present certain problems, but did so since Juanra and his wife were both Spaniards, had lived in Spain and did wish one day to return. However says that when he left in 1965, he did not have a plan in mind to one day return to Spain for good. He went back to see his family in Burgos every summer but it never occurred to him to stay. After he and his wife got married they would go on holiday to Burgos and to Malaga, his wife’s home town, for the 4/5 weeks they would have off work. However they felt more like foreigners in Spain than they had in Germany: felt that people stared at them, at how they dressed, spoke, behaved. When asked if they noticed if or how Spanish society was changing, responds that because they only ever went for short stints, with the specific purpose of seeing family, they did not really feel the changes taking place.

Not until 1979 that Opel called to say there was a job for him in a new factory branch in Zaragoza. Until that point they had not considered going back to Spain: were happy living in Germany, well-integrated, though they did from time to time have parties with the Spanish club they had formed. Then in 1979 when the job was offered to him, they began to consider returning to Spain, and in 1981 they made the move back. The car company Opel was looking for people who spoke both German and Spanish to work in the new factory, and in the end around 40-50 people moved to work in Zaragoza. Among them was a Spaniard who went on to become head of the company and many Spaniards who had come to Germany for the purpose of training to work in the automobile industry; formed a migrant flow that went from Spain to Germany and back again.

[20.20 – 30.59] **Social life in Germany (integration and economics) and first thoughts on return to Spain**

Many activities within their Spanish association. Mass every Sunday in Spanish with a Spanish priest; dances every Saturday in *centros españoles* with Spanish food and drinks; a football league featuring various teams made up of Spaniards (mostly the younger generations). They would have parties to celebrate a particular holidays such as Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve; meetings; cultural trips and excursions. Club was in part funded by the German authorities. They and other Spanish groups often invited to certain events to represent Spain, where they would dress in their traditional clothing and play Spanish music from Andalusia, Galicia. Their Nauheim club very involved with others and with German society.

They were not *Gastarbeiter*, though the Germans may have referred to them as such. They were more like those foreigners who now work in Spain, doing the jobs the Germans were unwilling to do. Didn’t feel marginalised. Those who didn’t want or try to integrate did experience problems because they didn’t learn to speak German, as from their point of view they were only there for the number of years it took to pay for a house or flat back in Spain.

There were positive and negative aspects to their return to Spain. On the one hand he and his wife had left Spain very young, and the country they now returned to was completely different to the one they had left, one they had to adjust to; also difficult for their children to leave behind the customs they had picked up in Germany (speaking German, German food etc). On the other, so keen to show their children the positive side of living in Spain that they were certain the transition was not going to be as difficult as it sometimes appeared during dark moments; this positive side being the return to their heritage, ancestors, values etc. Nor did they have financial problems as they had earned and saved a great deal in Germany. Had bought two flats in Malaga at his wife’s request: her mother had now returned to Spain but was alone (father had died as aforementioned), which gave his wife more incentive to return also. He had a stable job as supervisor at Opel; his wife had decided she would not work back in Spain, to have more time to be with the children, helping them adapt, and because they had plans to have another child. Hoped for a girl but turned out to be another boy. As their financial situation was stable, as she would not be working and he continuing more or less the same job as in Germany, and as they were both still young (he 34), they were greatly looking forward to going back, especially with their sons.

The European economic crisis was not felt so strongly in Germany; it was detectable – Spaniards returning to Spain for example – but the country had so many resources it was not evident. There was also a fuel crisis, but the country is so disciplined that all the German economic minister had to do was appear on television asking the German people not to use their cars at weekends unless absolutely necessary, and after that the streets were empty of cars Saturdays and Sundays. The crisis of 1973 was barely noticeable: one or two companies did have to close but others still had work going. Opel itself lost around 800 employees, but six months later they were sent a letter inviting them to come back and work there again, and the majority did so.

[31.00 – 40.00] **The death of Franco and the trials of re-adapting to Spain**

For Juanra in Germany, the effects of Franco’s death were mainly felt in the changes at the Spanish consulate in Frankfurt that they would go to to sort out any documentation: whereas before the atmosphere had been rather steely, was evident that now it was changing. Most Spaniards who had migrated to Germany had done so for economic rather than political reasons, and therefore, because they had resolved their financial difficulties by working in Germany, that majority returned to Spain after the death of Franco. Some did stay – those who had formed families with native Germans for example – but the vast majority returned to Spain.

When Juanra and family returned, they began by renting flat as they did not know Zaragoza at all at this point; stayed a year in this flat, and that first year was the most difficult. After Germany, where people were polite and tended to mind their own business, his wife struggled to adjust to Spain where people were noisy, big groups on the street would make a racket and not let you pass, markets were so full of queues his wife often came home with nothing. Struggled, too, to adjust to the different television schedules: in Germany, programmes of particular interest shown around 8.30pm, but in Spain on at 11 or 12pm, people like Juanra who had to be up early to work could not watch something on so late at night; football, even today, is the same, with matches shown far later on Wednesday night than elsewhere in Europe. School schedule was different also: in Spain the schoolday was broken up, whereas in Germany it had been back to back classes from 8am til 1pm, with the afternoons free for sport or other activities. Difficult to adjust to these changes. With regard to work, in Germany there had just been one trade union to which workers could go to with any problems in the company, whereas in Spain there were too many centralised trade unions, a far more complicated system.

Eldest son, Pablo, was 11 (born 1970) when they moved back to Spain; had serious problems. Now lives in England, has been divorced twice already. Started off going to German school but after a year asked to move because he said it was full of rich kids. Changed to a new Spanish public school. Was not a very good student, perhaps because he was looking for things to work the way they had in Germany. They got him extra tuition but he was struggling so much that eventually he decided to leave school, and at 17 he went to join an airborne army regiment. Was there 1.5-2 years, got married after he left but the marriage didn’t work out. Then went to England for 5 years. Speaks fluent English and German.

[40.00 – 50.24] **Children and the pros and cons of returning to Spain**

In England, Pablo married a Latvian woman so that she could stay in the country; but as is often the case with such marriages, it did not work out. They split up and he returned to Spain after 7 years in England; now speaks perfect English. Came to Guadalajara where he did some temporary work; has now left the position and is looking for work in Madrid.

Pablo never expressed any particular desire or reluctance to return to Spain, nor said he disliked it once he was there. Struggled to integrate because there was no one at his school who had lived abroad like him so no one to talk to about it. Meanwhile younger brother Miguel Angel had no such problems as he was only four when the family moved; had only really spoken German in Germany but lost it once he started going to nursery. Suffered bad case of whooping cough to begin with, but otherwise went to nursery and then to school with none of his brother’s problems: is now married and has a family.

Arrived in Spain the year of General Tejero’s attempted coup, but not until several months after the event (coup was in February; Juanra and family arrived in September). However when it occurred they were already making preparations for their return to Spain, so the attempted coup did worry them considerably, and if it had been successful they would not have gone back.

Third child, Jorge, born December 1984. Knows his family lived in Germany for some time and that his brothers were born there, but no more attachment than that. None of the children nor Juanra’s wife have ever been back to Germany; he himself has for work reasons, but though they often talk about going as a family they never have. Perhaps they will when he retires.

Feels that the decision to go back to Spain was the right one, in spite of the problems experienced by his eldest son. Feels that on the whole they have integrated well in Zaragoza and are happy where they live now because it’s a quiet area, almost all rented properties, suitable for work. Also have a small house in Setavia and inherited his mother-in-law’s flat in Malaga after she died, where they go every year so that Juanra’s wife can see her family, go back to her home town. Every so often they also return to Juanra’s home town of Burgos, around 125km from where they live now.

There are aspects of German life they miss and/or maintain. He still goes to bed at 10.30pm every day. Also maintained German mealtimes: family has dinner around 8.30; if Juanra is working then they will have lunch late, around 3 or 4, but if not then more like 12.30. Maintain the discipline they learnt from the Germans. They miss the German public health system. In Germany you can choose your doctor; you fill out a form for the doctor or specialist of your choice, and then for three months you are only seen by that doctor, going to their own house or office for appointments, and if you don’t like them you can change. Doesn’t wish to imply that the Spanish system is bad, but perhaps it needs reorganising: he now is seeing doctors to run tests on his knees, and the waiting time between appointments is often months. This is something he misses about Germany, along with the support given by German schools; though he acknowledges that things have improved since they first returned to Spain, especially under socialist government, in Germany textbooks were free for pupils and this is still not the case in Spain. There are things they miss even after so many years: in September it will be 27 years they have been back in Spain. So there are things they miss but also things they like. For example in Spain there is more of a sense of community and friendship between neighbours; sometimes it’s a bit of a selfish friendship, but a friendship nonetheless, whereas in Germany one often didn’t know one’s neighbours at all. Again, they are happy and feel they made the right decision in returning to Spain.

[50.25 – 60.00] **Thoughts on German reunification and the concept of *Heimat***

Says that they have maintained aspects of the German way of life, but nothing of note, nothing concrete. Have continued making certain German dishes: *Kartoffelsalat* (potato salad), steak with small chopped onions, sauces; this food reminds them of Germany. German food is, on the whole, not like Spanish food.

Juanra has continued to follow news of Germany with interest, found the reunification of East and West very sudden and strange; comments that it caused an economic crisis that the country as a whole still hasn’t recovered from. He knew East Germany before the reunification and has been there since (most recently about 7 years ago) because Opel opened a factory in Einsenach, which formed part of GDR, and says it has changed hugely. It is like a new country entirely, completely modernised: they have had to rebuild their roads, motorways, railway lines. All this has cost a huge amount of money and caused the country to go backwards in social terms. For example, before if someone had to go into hospital they would still be paid their full wages, but after reunification this privilege was lost; many budget cuts were made, including those for child benefits; all because of the annexation of the East by the West. Feels it was badly handled, only done because the Chancellor of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) wanted to win the elections, and in the end caused a huge setback in terms of social progress the price of which Germany is still paying today. Indeed believes Europe as a whole still suffering the consequences of the brutal manner in which reunification was carried out.

Now considers Zaragoza his *Heimat* – explains that *Heimat* is one’s homeland, doesn’t have to be where you were born but where you want to spend the rest of your life, where you are settled. Juanra’s wife also now considers Zaragoza her home though she is originally from the South. Discuss the difference in climate between Zaragoza and Andalusia and difference between their people’s personalities; neither is better than the other, simply one tends to favour the character of those from one’s homeland. Wife’s siblings still live in the south. Juanra mentions a German custom of referring to one’s wife as “mama”, which he says he still does. His wife would like to go back to Andalusia as her brothers are there, but she has her children and two grandchildren in Zaragoza.

Juanra knows Alicia’s father. In the end did get involved in trade union activity in Spain, as well as joining the Socialist party. However does not wish to talk about his own political motives for leaving Spain. Concedes that there would have been a small political aspect to the migrant flow of the 1960s; he is convinced that the vast majority of migrants left for economic reasons, but there were some who left for political reasons.

[60.00 – 69.10] **Social assistance in Germany and the logistics of migration**

In 1965 when Juanra left, the dictatorship was in full swing, life was difficult for those with other political inclinations. Difficult to get a passport. Two ways: either had to give written proof that you didn’t have a criminal record, or your local *guardia civil* had the power to give you one for “good behaviour”. Juanra could not take the first option because he had a criminal record after attending workers’ association demonstrations where the press had called them collaborators. Fortunately for him, his father had struck up a friendship with the head officer of their local *guardia civil*, who gave Juanra a document testifying to his good behaviour, saying he hadn’t stirred up any trouble in the town. Without this he could not have got a passport, and without the passport he could not have left. The process was the same for those whose departure was facilitated by the IEE (the Spanish Emigration Institue), they too had to prove they had no criminal record. At that time travel was very strictly controlled, often there would be passport checks on trains.

In terms of social assistance in Germany, there were the Spanish clubs and associations, but other than that in terms of assistance from Spain there were just some Spanish priests. Germany charities helped them: gave them interpreters, helped the Spaniards to resolve any problems they had. Juanra encountered several of the Spanish priests and all were Francoist: suspects they even sent reports back to Spain on the activities of immigrants like himself, used by the regime to keep tabs on Spaniards abroad, their political and trade union activity.

Never had any problems crossing the borders between Spain and Germany when going on holiday: he was not a marked man; if you had a passport you could pass, no stringent luggage checks. Some people tried to smuggle Spanish ham, chorizo, bottles of cognac out of the country, forgetting they would get stopped by customs officials. Nor was it even worth it because in Germany there were Spanish shops selling these things – more expensive than in Spain but worth it to avoid problems at customs.

Was unable to vote from Germany in the Spanish elections of 1977 and 1978: tried twice, and informed the consulate in Germany that he wished to, but was never given the documentation to do so. However Manuel Fraga and a number of other politicians from the *Partido Popular* came to Germany to speak to the Spaniards there about the elections; did not allow them to ask questions but talked about what they had not achieved so far in Spain and what they planned to do if they won the election. But it was irrelevant because the Spaniards in Germany couldn’t vote in the end.

In terms of the organisation of Spanish associations in Germany, there would be several associations under one federation in each *Bundesland*, and all those federations under one national confederation. All the associations in the confederation would come together at one annual meeting, as well each federation coming together for one meeting prior to the AGM and whenever a problem was raised. Each association was, however, to a certain degree responsible for itself, and the political inclinations of each group did influence their actions. Spanish government organisations did provide some funding for the associations in Germany, but in general the relationship between them wasn’t especially positive.

[69.11 – 75.15] **The role of Opel and thoughts on 21st century immigration**

When those workers from Opel in Germany returned, there were people in Spain who were well trained. Those returning from Germany perhaps had more experience in terms of working for a large company but when it came to technical knowledge they had nothing to teach the Spanish workers. In most cases those from Germany became interpreters of sorts because all the machinery, usage manuals, systems of quality control, had come from Germany; therefore those from Germany would explain how everything worked, but the Spanish workers were highly trained, had just as much technical knowledge.

If it hadn’t been for Opel opening a new factory in Zaragoza, Juanra is almost certain he and his family wouldn’t have returned to Spain: had never really thought about it and were so well integrated in Germany; but the time and circumstances in which the offer was made spurred them to take it. Perhaps later, in his retirement for example, they may have, but at that time would not have returned were it not for Opel. Opel in Zaragoza no longer employs workers from Germany; they no longer need to, their employment uptake is entirely from Spain.

Thinks it’s wonderful that these days if Spain needs workers, it takes on immigrants from other countries. Only criticism would be that perhaps Spain should control its immigration better, like countries such as Switzerland, France, Germany, to prevent illegal immigration. Finds it fascinating that Spain now takes on many immigrants in the same way many Spaniards had to move to other European countries; but cannot understand the people who criticise immigration, who call immigrants criminals, who want them to sign contracts forcing them to adopt Spanish customs. None of the countries which hosted Spanish immigrants did this, they were simply expected to follow the countries’ laws like anyone else. But thinks it’s fantastic that Spain has reached a point where it can offer employment to those who have left their countries for economic reasons and for better way of life. As to whether those people might one day go back to their home countries, Juanra thinks perhaps not: in Spain life is great, the weather’s great, the country has wonderful traditions. Maybe the immigrants will consider going back, but thinks it’s more likely that Spain’s future generations will be comprised of many nationalities.

**Glossary**

***Bachillerato elemental / superior* (Sp.)** – Spanish secondary curriculum, from ages 10 to 14 and from 15 to 16 respectively, in the 1950s and 60s

***Bundesland***(Ger.) – term referring to one of the 16 federal states which make up (the Federal Republic of) Germany

***Centro español***(Sp.) – term referring to places or buildings where Spanish associations in Germany would meet

***Gastarbeiter***(Ger.) – literally “guest workers”, term used to refer to immigrants who moved to Germany in the 1960s and 70s to find work, originally stemming from an official migrant employment scheme called the *Gastarbeiterprogramm*

***Guardia civil*** (Sp.) – Spanish “Civil Guard”, military police force

***Heimat***(Ger.) – home, homeland

***Kartoffelsalat***(Ger.) – potato salad (German dish)

***Partido******Popular***(Sp.) – People’s Party, Spanish conservative political party