**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews – Emilio Madruga 1**

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| Interviewee: | Emilio Madruga |
| Interviewer: | Dr. Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez |
| Interview date: | 29 March 2008 |
| Location: | Miralbueno, Zaragoza |
| Duration: | 01:17:57 |
| Countries of migration: | Germany |

**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 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:**

[00.34 – 10.00] Family & early life in Valencia & Madrid

Born in Madrid in ’37 during the Civil War. As a result he was evacuated to Valencia and baptised there in secret. It had to be clandestine otherwise they would’ve been shot. Shows interviewer the baptism certificate. Baptised on 9 May 1938 in the diocese of Valencia. Born on 26 January 1937 in Madrid at 11pm. The details of the parents, all grandparents and godparents were included on the certificate. In Madrid at the time there were 2 different zones, the “red zone” (*Zona Roja*) and the “national zone” (*nacional*). The red zone was under the control of the communists whilst the national zone was in the hands of the right-wing conservatives and catholics.

Family - he has 1 older sister. Both his parents were deaf-mute. Both children went with mother to Valencia whilst the father stayed in Madrid to work. Was a cobbler and was in charge of repairing boots of government soldiers (the Republicans). He doesn’t remember this time because he was too young. Shows interviewer a drawing his father did of him as a baby.

Did father join you in Valencia? He heard a rumour that Emilio and sister were to be evacuated to Russia. Didn’t want this to happen so he went to Valencia and took them back with him to Madrid.

After the war father used to take them to his natal village in Extremadura during the holidays. They ate well there and went horse riding. His father had a ranch there where he bred bulls for bull fighting. This is where Emilio has his earliest memories. He recalls farming black pigs to make Iberian ham. They were fed on acorns and chestnuts.

Then he started working as mechanic for a relative of his father’s in Madrid, repairing cars. But this relative didn’t want him to be working there. Used to go to work on foot to save money. Metro cost more than his daily wage. One day he asked if he could borrow a bike from the garage, to get to work quicker. He punctured the tyre one day and his boss got angry, so he wasn’t allowed to take the bike any more. After he turned 16 he left to work in other repair garages.

What was Spain like at the time? Very poor. Everything was done by hand. They used to have to place rocks in winches. This process took longer than actually lifting the rock once it was in the winch.

He worked in primitive garages without showers or changing rooms. At best had a sink to wash hands. Lived with his father in Madrid until 21. Started working in slightly better conditions in a workshop making parts for electric motors. The work was still hard as they couldn’t sit down or rest. Learnt very little on the job from older workers.

[10.01 – 20.00] Military service & emigrating to Germany

This is because they didn’t want to teach the apprentices much because they feared they may take their jobs off them. These older workers were illiterate. But his generation had gone to school. Remembers his school which was run by nuns. Life there was very relaxed and they used to play a lot. He learnt most of what he knows through work experience.

Then he had to take part in the military service for 3 years (1957-60) as a paratrooper. He shows interviewer diplomas he has kept, as well as photos of his regiment jumping out of planes. The military service he did was voluntary. All the male members of his father’s family were obliged to serve their military service in Africa. He thought he wouldn’t have to, but he did as there was a war between an Arab uprising and the Spanish in ’57.

8 of the men from his company were killed. Were all young, just 20 or 21. Spent 1 ½ years in Africa, on the coast opposite the Canary Islands. The country at the time was called Spanish West Africa (now southern Morocco). Spent his time there fighting, providing convoys, carrying out ambushes, etc. Was lucky enough not to get hurt in combat, but broke a bone fighting with one of his own men.

Afterwards they returned to Spain by boat and he finished his military service. At the time there was no work available in Madrid. Was 24 years old then. Word started spreading that workers were needed in Germany, Argentina and Brazil. One day he got his passport which gave him permission to go to Germany with transit via France (on a tourist visa). It was very easy to get. He thinks it is because the Spanish government wanted 4 million Spaniards to go and work abroad. The passport had used to cost 150 pesos but the price rose to 300. Then they sold 4 million passports. He had some money saved and he was also given a grant. This money allowed him to travel to Germany.

He didn’t have a contract before leaving, but as soon as he arrived in the station in Essen, Germany, he was offered work. The following day he started work at a place where he stayed for 2-3 months. The companies that needed workers put people at the stations to offer work to the Spaniards who they knew to be arriving by train.

After this job he went to work in another factory, in search of better working conditions.

First impressions of Germany? As a Spaniard he was used to bright, sunny conditions. Germany was always cold and wet. At one point (between ‘61/’62) he recalls that it rained every day for 6 months. He sees Germany as his second country.

He adapted well to the good working conditions. He got to work with machines and when he left work he was always washed, well-fed and had clean clothes (unlike in Madrid). All these services were provided at the factory.

[20.01 – 30.00] Working in Germany and meeting his wife

In Germany he had a uniform for work (suit, tie, hat). Used to shower after work, in the factory and then eat in a restaurant at 8PM. He could then return home without having to worry about cooking or cleaning. He had a one room house at the time. He got married to his wife in ’61, who he met out there. She was Spanish, from near to Zaragoza. They returned to Spain in ’67 after leaving Germany.

His wife was a rural girl who wasn’t really educated and had no professional training. As a result she became a servant, but she didn’t get paid. She worked from 6AM-10PM and without a contract. As a result she didn’t get any pension from this job. Got job through a French engineer she met in Spain, who owned a factory in Germany. She wanted to leave Spain because her dad took all the money she earned from her, so never had any of her own money.

They stayed in Essen for a bit, but then decided to leave because they found it depressing. They went to Dusseldorf (which was known as “little Paris” back then).

At the time it was difficult to find housing there because it was just after World War II and there was a real lack of housing for the Germans, let alone foreigners! Rent would often cost more than you would earn at work. You could earn around 600 German Marks[[1]](#footnote-1)/month whilst rent would cost around 450. So they got a very small room to live in, with one sofa-bed and a small kitchenette.

In Dusseldorf he worked in a very large factory. It was a very nice, clean working environment with very nice bosses. He recalls the day when his boss came to wish him happy birthday and gave him a beer and a cigar. Thought he would lose pay for the time taken off work, but his machine was broken at the time, so they didn’t take pay off him for this break.

There were many other Spaniards working there too. They were used to communicating together in Spanish, so they didn’t learn German. Thinks it’s a shame because the Germans were nicer. Spaniards were often jealous and spiteful of the success of other workers.

He didn’t exactly *need* to learn German for work as it was all mechanical. The machinery used metric measurements, as they did in Spain, France, Belgium, Holland etc., so he understood this. Only different in England, but imperial can still be converted to metric.

He received his German residence permit in ’61. This was so fast because they needed workers. Gave him the right to live in Germany for the rest of his life, and also gave him medical cover (wherever he liked) and social security. His wife was Catholic and received treatment in a Protestant hospital.

Wife worked in a city called Krefeld. Took her 30 minutes by tram to get there. He has always had luck of working close to home.

[30.01 – 40.00] Life in Germany and returning to Spain

Wife worked sharpening drills and was given performance-related pay. She saved money up whilst working. She claimed pension payments for the years she worked in Germany. Now wife is dead. She had worked in Germany for 6 years and he had for 7.

Emilio and wife met through a mutual friend. Accompanying her to her house he discovered that she had no passport (her boss had it). He thought it was illegal for her to be in Germany without a passport, so they went to the trade union together, where Spanish speakers helped them resolve their problem. After denouncing her boss she got her passport and pay and her boss was fined for breaking the law.

Life and society in Germany at the time: German people were very polite. It was obvious when Spanish, Greek or Italian people got onto a tram because they were very rude. Germans were very hard-working and cultured. Some were very racist (Nazism still hadn’t totally died out). He felt victimised at times as a foreigner, called names.

He could understand it because there were 4 million foreigners in Germany who were willing to work for 3 Marks/hour whilst the Germans wanted 5 for the same jobs. Spaniards were more desperate for the money.

Spare time: He’s always been unlucky with free time because he’s always worked in small factories doing long hours (with exception of last year and a half). Worked day and night, in poor conditions. Used to eat sitting on boxes or standing up. His last job was the best by far. Had he not returned to Spain, he would’ve stayed there until retirement.

Emilio and wife planned to return to Spain as soon as they could buy a furnished flat purchased there. Had they had kids at the time, they would’ve stayed in Germany so that they could learn German. But they didn’t have kids. So returned to Spain in ’67, with money saved up to buy their flat there and furnish it. Began working in a workshop in Zaragoza (one of the best). However they weren’t allowed to wash hands while working because reduced productivity. If caught doing so, 3 days holiday would be taken away.

When they got back to Spain they wanted to go straight back to Germany. His wife had never wanted to leave Germany. He wanted to come back because he missed Spain (weather etc.), even if it meant being poor.

Had Spain changed over those 6 years? No... Apart from that they had put a tramline in Zaragoza. Why back to Zaragoza and not Madrid? He didn’t mind. Was wife’s decision. Didn’t have a flat in Madrid and wife’s family was near Zaragoza. They lived in a road that used to be practically countryside when they left to Germany.

[40.01 – 50.00] Readjusting to life & work in Spain

They lived in a very small flat (50m²). Didn’t have kids. Eventually bought a bigger house (where they now live) with a pool, large patio, tennis court, large dining room. They lived comfortably.

Also changed his job to work in a different workshop. In the previous factory he earned 6,500 pesetas/month (performance-related pay) working 10 hours/day. One day he saw an advert for a company looking for workers elsewhere. Didn’t give it much thought but applied to the job anyway. They got in contact and offered him a starting salary of 14,000 pesetas/month! They warned him the work would be arduous. At that factory workers alternated between doing the night shift for 1 month and the day shift for the following month. They took him to and from work by bus. There were no controls and he worked at his own pace. They made a deal at the factory between the workers that those on the day shift would work a little harder in order to let the night shift workers relax a little bit more.

He was in this job for 20 years until retirement. He retired 6 years ago, at 64 years old. The company was called Inadesa. His salary was raised 4 times without him ever having to request it. He was treated sternly but fairly. The other day his boss called to offer his condolences for the death of his wife.

Did you ever regret having left Germany? A bit yes, and a bit no. In terms of the working lifestyle, yes. But when it comes to socialising and relaxing with friends, he prefers Spain. Bosses were always kinder in Germany if you broke something.

He laments that, until recently, all technology was produced abroad (Germany & France). All the best engineers etc. have to go abroad to find work, because Spain lacks the technology.

His wife had been paralytic for 5-6 years. She couldn’t walk, she was blind. After one year’s wait she received a letter from the government of Aragon, granting her the right to financial aid and domiciliary care due to her advanced state of poor health. Once he was taking her to the hospital and his car broke down but they didn’t bring an ambulance to take her there because they didn’t have any spare. It took them this long to decide to grant her the aid despite the fact that she has the most severe case of her illness. Says the help wasn’t there when they needed it most and she never benefited from the help offered before she died.

[50.01 – 60.00] Living in Spain under Franco

Had they been in Germany, he is sure she would’ve been offered all the help she required. Germany has provided them both with a pension, and doing the paperwork for it was easy. He had only worked 6 years in Germany but he still gets 200 euros per month as a pension from that time. In Spain you would have to work minimum 35 years to even begin to get a pension. His Spanish pension is based on his last 2 years of work. Should not be like this in his opinion.

What customs have you brought from Germany? The way of working, which he introduced to the factory he worked at (i.e. organisation and using new technologies). He felt strange when he came back to Spain because he felt he couldn’t have a conversation with a colleague without raising the supervisor’s suspicion, such was the level of suppression under Franco.

How did Franco’s death affect life then? People were very scared. They thought there would be a war because Franco’s cabinet and his henchmen didn’t want to relinquish power. This provoked an uprising on the left, in an attempt to seize power.

A relative of his had to leave Spain as a fugitive (to Switzerland) because he didn’t want to do the military service under Franco. At the time people were very tightly controlled. Now he can freely return to Spain because Franco is dead.

Whilst in Germany he came back to Spain on holiday at times, but he was always very scared when it came to crossing the border. He was scared of the *guardia civil[[2]](#footnote-2)*, although they never actually did anything to him. He used to travel by train or coach (with a company called “Europabus”).

Many Spaniards came back to Germany at the time that they did. You can see that lots of Spaniards used to work in Germany because many of them go to the town hall in Zaragoza to collect their pension from Germany. Has to go there every year to inform them that he is still alive. Has to go tomorrow to inform them of his wife’s recent death so that they will stop paying her pension.

His wife used to cook wonderfully well, although she couldn’t knit at all. They used to eat Spanish food in Germany. Once his wife was cooking a *Tortilla de Patata[[3]](#footnote-3)*, and the German neighbour came around to tell them that what they were cooking smelt. She told him what it was, gave him a piece to try, and he liked it. The Germans hadn’t tried Spanish food, like Paella, before.

Didn’t take any German culinary customs back to Spain with him. He thinks the German food is very nutritional, but not very tasty. He says it’s good, and better than Spanish food, although not as tasty. He had the best meat he’s ever tasted in Germany. Their food wasn’t very varied; always *sauerkraut[[4]](#footnote-4)*, potatoes and chicken.

[60.01 – 70.00] Memories of life as a Spanish emigrant in Germany

There were Spanish clubs in Germany, but they always seemed a bit dodgy. One time the miners organised a strike in Spain. The Spanish communist parties in Germany wanted to send money to Spain to help the communists there. Rather than working together, the different factions of the political left couldn’t agree on which party to send the money to (the communist, socialist or anarchist party). As a result the money wasn’t sent and they just held on to it.

There were underground anti-Francoist clubs (not strictly communist, just anti-Franco). While there was freedom to discuss politics openly in Germany (no censorship), this was not the case in Spain.

Did many Spaniards leave Germany to return to Spain? Not all of them. Those who did had to leave mainly due to the problems caused by the lack of housing in Germany. If there wasn’t enough for the Germans, it was even more difficult for foreigners to get access to housing. This is why he thinks Germans are more protective of their country, people etc.

What did the Spanish Institute of Immigration do for all those Spanish immigrants in Germany? They sent them singers to perform over Christmas at the “Spanish Houses”, of which there was one in Dusseldorf (Emilio didn’t go there). He didn’t like the atmosphere there because it made him miss Spain. He used to work, drink with German and Spanish friends. He frequented a bar where they served mussels, dutch cheese and beer.

He used to cross the border to a town in Holland to buy butter, chocolate etc. But he then had to pay customs duties on them. Alcohol, tobacco and chocolate were all subject to tax.

He took his family in Spain gifts from Germany. They were always high quality products that were made to last. He bought his brother-in-law some walking boots which he has worn for 40 years. He had bought himself a Bavarian hat, which he had for 40 years until it broke. Do you have any objects/souvenirs left from Dusseldorf? He has a look. Shows interviewer a photo of Köln, and a photo of him & his wife in Bilbao.

[70.01 – 77.56] Souvenirs from Germany & the German Unification

One photo shows the station from which he returned to Spain from Germany. Other photos show bars, an airport, the Rhine etc. Another photo shows friends in Zaragoza. The lady of the couple is now a German teacher in Valencia, Spain. She got married and had children there. Then a photo of him and wife with his nephew.

He took the exams (in German) to apply to work for General Motors. His boss didn’t let him leave to work with them.

He has several boxes of German silver cutlery. They have barely used them. He doesn’t know what to do with it. His nephews didn’t come to visit his wife while she was ill in hospital.

He still has a sister and nephews in Madrid. These nephews had come to see his wife before and after she died.

His 6 years in Germany have been very useful to him in his life in general. His work-experience was very useful for him when he came back to Spain. He still gets 100 Euros –worth of pension for his wife from Germany, as well as the 150-200 that he gets.

He follows the news of what happens in Germany on the television and internet. He watches German TV channels although he doesn’t understand all of what they say. He followed the unification of Germany on the TV because it happened after he left Germany.

He remembers going to Berlin in East Germany at the time he was there, out of curiosity to see what it was like. He was given a piece of paper from the East German police upon arrival giving him the right to be there for 24 hours only. He got rid of the paper from his passport afterwards because it had the hammer & sickle symbol on it, which would’ve caused him problems on his return to Spain. He got the impression that in East Germany there were very similar levels of oppression to that of Spain under Franco. It was a left-wing regime, unlike the right-wing regime in Spain, but the oppression was the same. He wanted to go because it was forbidden.

1. ***German Mark*** was the official currency of West Germany (1948–1990) and Germany (1990–2002) until the adoption of the Euro in 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ***Guardia civil*** (Sp.) – Spanish “Civil Guard”, military police force. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ***Tortilla de Patata*** *(Sp.) -* The Spanish tortilla (*Tortilla de patatas* in Spanish) is the most common gastronomic specialty you can find all over Spain. It is generally made with eggs, potatoes and onion and is a bit like an English omelette. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ***Sauerkraut*** *(Ger.) -* directly translated: "sour cabbage", Sauerkraut is the most well known German food. Sauerkraut is finely sliced green cabbage that has been fermented by lactic acid bacteria. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)