

FREEDOM SEEKERS

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THE NEW SETTLERS IN LA ALPUJARRA

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Introduction

The present work is an attempt to describe the lifestyle of western immigrants in La Alpujarra in the province of Granada, Southern Spain. The study deals with one of the phenomena increasingly emerging in Europe: moving out of cities and industrial societies to the country, towards simpler forms of living. We can also observe movements within the European Union that have already started to form a new face for the old continent. State borders have begun to weaken and nationality to play a smaller role in the new inhabitation of certain zones with natural lifestyles gaining more importance. Apart from these migratory movements, we can see the emergence of anti-consumerism, a reaction to the materialism of a post-industrial western society.

The method chosen for this research, suggested by Radan Haluzik, proved very fruitful. Following techniques of the material culture method – observing households and tracing “stories of things” - we obtained an interesting and coherent picture about an otherwise diverse group of people from different countries and social settings. The huge series of photographs taken will enable other student researchers to conduct studies generating further interpretations. In particular, those interested in the material culture and visual anthropology might find them useful for their work.

Another method emerged during the process of collecting data: I myself decided to settle down in the area, and thus I joined in the process of “going through” similar problems in conditions comparable to the group under study. Using the word “method” may be less appropriate in this case. My own experience has been a helpful tool and has enriched my observations in the fieldwork.

I would also like to thank for their help and encouragement the following people: Emma Glen, and Pete and Abi Bouvier.

Migration

I migrate therefore I am.

“We live in the age of migration”; one can hear those words from a university lecture of sociology, from a TV documentary on black immigrants, even from a travel agent who’s trying to persuade us to buy a cheap holiday package tour. Migration has many forms, from refugees and labour workers, to all different forms of tourism. The mobility of the population is indisputably increasing. But, except for tourism, which fully flourished as late as the second half of the twentieth century, moving place and country has always existed in history as a consequence of different causes: overpopulation, war, or famine. Also movements of seasonal labour or travelling in order to see the world have a long history dating back to the age of Roman Empire. These movements were, of course, slower, but not slow enough to prevent the spread of humankind around the world long before our “age of migration”.

As migration became cheaper and faster with the development of transport, it resulted in a greater number of migrants, and mobility became almost obligatory. Until recently, travelling for its own sake was a privilege of the upper classes; today all social groups can, without much effort, enjoy the pleasure of exploring foreign countries. Still, even now, temporal migration is seen as a sign of a good lifestyle. Both temporary stays abroad and sensible holiday travelling can raise a person’s status, in the same way as purchasing luxury goods in order to demonstrate one’s superiority. Conversely, not migrating might be perceived as laziness or narrow-mindedness: an individual without experience from abroad can hardly get a decent job at home¹.

Thus, migration becomes a very natural thing, comparable to regular visits to the dentist. Unfortunately, too many people can afford the pleasure of mobility; harmful consequences of mass tourism are already known. Spain is one of the countries that

¹ Statement valid for the Czech Republic. As far as I am concerned other western countries do not put so much importance on experience from abroad.

suffers enormously from hard tourism² and recklessness of developers who carry on further development on the coasts despite public protests and alarming reports by ecological organizations³.

It is not only the accessibility of travelling that makes people move. As I stated before, people always moved, though considerably more slowly. Michal Maffesoli⁴ speaks about “migration drive”, the force that pushes humans to go for changes of places, occupations, or partners, in order to fill the plurality of an individual’s life. The migration drive, or instinct, is not found in the same quantity in all people. It ranges from one extreme to another. Some people remain dwelling in the same place for the whole of their lives refusing change to the order they were born into. The majority accept small moves and modifications as life processes. An extreme case would be the figure of a rolling stone with his never ending vagrancy that both attracts and appals. Nomadism and migration are a part of human nature; according to Maffesoli, it is an anthropological constant. We thirst for change, wherever and whatever we are.

Sociologists work with terms “push and pull factors” when examining migratory movements, usually in reference to the external conditions of migrants. I will discuss some of these external “push” factors in the following pages. However, the natural instinct for migration plays an important role in the group studied in this work.

Betterment migration

According to many authors⁵, migration throughout the twentieth century directed from the poorer south to the more developed north. At the same time, huge urbanisation could be observed. At the end of the twentieth century the flux partly changed its direction.

² Librova (1993), p.72, cites Robert Jung who defined hard tourism and soft tourism. Hard tourism is characterized by mass travelling on long distances with fast means of transport, lack of time and strict schedule, directed from outside (travel agency), shopping, souvenirs and postcards, in comfort and passivity, noisy, and, without knowledge of foreign language.

³ Andalusian Costa del sol, favourite destination of hard tourists, faces considerable danger of desertification. The dry region is not able to saturate water requirements of tourist resorts with their pools and golf courses. Another problem is the weight of concrete used for recreational complexes causing erosion of soil on the coast.

⁴ Maffesoli (2002): 23-41

⁵ Cf. Drbohlav or Castels

Westerners were charmed by exoticism of the East. The French began to buy their second homes in Morocco. Rich Northerners discovered the beauty of the Mediterranean and started to occupy its forgotten (sometimes forbidden) zones which were, until recently, under the threat of being totally abandoned. Poor seaside regions of Croatia, Sicily, Malta, and Spain became centres of interest for a new kind of inhabitant. First newcomers could profit financially from their decision: the prices were so low that buying a house implied a trip to the closest town to withdraw money from the cash dispenser. Times changed and prices rose, mainly thanks to the introduction of numerous English property agents. Buying a house on the coast is not possible any more unless you are one of the few lucky rich. Poor villages are not poor anymore; interest brought money and unaware indigenous people let them to destroy places of irrecoverable beauty.

Nevertheless, there is not only the coast in Spain, and still, there are places where even the less fortunate can start a new life. Some come and discover their new homes themselves; some come according to principles of chain migration following friends or family. Some come because a zone was popularized in magazines or books. Some escape from difficult situations in their previous environment. All these examples can be observed in La Alpujarra, in the foothills of Granadian Sierra Nevada, the zone on which we focus in the present work.

Betterment migration is a rare subject in social studies; numerous serious books were written on labour migration and refugees rights and many similar studies are carried out in many specialized departments and institutes. We would find more information about betterment migration in novels or magazines than in scientific reports. Logically, pure betterment migrants do not present problems like labour migrants or needy refugees. The migrants concerned are financially independent and have legal status within the united Europe. The free movement of goods, persons, services and capital in the European Union makes settling down easier. Still there are barriers: language, different mentality and customs, unwritten laws, and paperwork.

When the southward flux began about twenty years ago, Northerners were considerably richer than the indigenous people and could profit from this advantage. The situation has reversed. Children of poor villagers now come back from towns with money. After the

death of Franco⁶ many young Spaniards seized the opportunity, left for schools and jobs in towns and built their careers. In comparison to foreigners, they are richer now. They own land and properties. They have agricultural know-how and work within large families. Though we can find a few rich foreigners in the zone, most they do not reside there permanently. Spain is their second home; they come for weekends or for vacations to “veg out”. Most of those who do live here permanently would call their houses low economy living. Building laws have become more complicated. Whereas until recently one could build or renew a building on its land virtually without any papers at all, now people can wait a year or more for their building permission. Many foreigners had to deal with corruption and strong unwritten laws.

Despite many other inconveniences, still new betterment settlers come to start new lives in this area of extremes: unbearable heat in summer and freezing cold in winter, constant lack of water, villagers working on dry land with their mules and a fast developing construction industry.

Consumerism and New Standard of Living

Popular TV series such as *A Place in the Sun* or *Living the Dream*⁷ were certainly not the decisive impulses for the waves of people moving south and out of towns. Neither was the book *Driving over Lemons* by Chris Stewart, an acclaimed bestseller and an autobiographic novel about breeding sheep in La Alpujarra. Rather, those who took the steps and changed their lives, usually despise those popularizing works. Some might have been inspired by them, but most people took the step before or despite of it. However, there is something in the air. It is something that pushes people out from the “civilized” world towards life closer to nature. Having electricity, running water, and central heating are not the most important issues any more. Our standard of living has changed in recent

⁶ General Franco died in 1975 and established King Juan Carlos as his successor, hoping that he would preserve the former regime. Franco’s expectation was not met. Juan Carlos started the process of democratising of the country and soon after (1977) Spain became a member of the EU.

⁷ BBC series about English families moving abroad, mostly in Spain, Canada, or Australia.

years. It is not easily measurable: the heights of income or buying power are not sufficient parameters.

Towns mean an opportunity to make money or to build one's career, but westerners are already well aware of many drawbacks presented by the city lifestyle: stress, the pace of life, the lack of space, pollution, noise, traffic jams, inadequate public transport, and, not least, the ever growing expense. The formerly comfortable urban life now becomes uncomfortable, for some people unbearable. A busy city environment is a paradise for psychiatrists and psychoanalysts as the sense of life disappears with the senseless everyday routine. The "comfortable" city life becomes one of the pushing factors to migrate as people look for some form of escape. Some are happy with temporary solutions: holidays, weekend and leisure time activities, or excessive drinking and drug taking. More sensitive individuals go for resolute changes to ensure the desired standard of living. But what changes are necessary? And what is the desired standard of living?

New quality of life factors are more abstract considerations: unpolluted air, living space, time for the family, sensible work, and good relations with neighbours. Librova⁸ cites Hans Magnus Enzensberger who defines six new luxury goods. Those are time, attention, space, tranquillity, nature, and safety. Few people can enjoy these luxury goods without restraining materialistic needs; to live in a calm and safe environment, not to be a slave to one's diary, and not to travel squeezed in an overcrowded means of public transport is a privilege of the top rich. Librova mentions other authors, Krutilla and Fisher⁹, with their term "environmental amenities" the price of which will grow in future years in contrast to electrical energy for example which low prices can be ensured by technological development. All these "luxury items" are still accessible in La Alpujarra. In contrast, some basic things which are accessible in towns are hard to get.

Apart from living in the age of migration we live in one of consumerism, too. As for travelling, the same applies for consumption: it always existed, but more people can buy more things and faster. Travelling, in fact, is just one of the services consumed. Under the

⁸ Librova 2003, p.54

⁹ Librova 2003, p.62

attack of commercial advertising we create artificial needs or we just follow the pace of the society we live in; belonging to a certain class, one has to constantly affirm one's status through buying goods and services. Thus, one finds oneself caught in the cycle "making money → buying things → throwing them out unused → buying new things". Failing to live one's life to the full, allows new industries creating "prêt-à-porter" emotions to exist. Some people claim they are forced to consume. Logically, western economies are based on the growth of GDP which is based on consumption. Government and state bureaucracies will certainly support consumerism. Who would pay taxes if the pace of consumerism slowed down?

Still, a decision not to be a part of this circle, a mere cog in this social machine, could be made. People are able to renounce making money to buy unnecessarily. It does not mean to work less, but rather to work differently with different results. An important step on this path is a move to a rural setting, because an anti-consumerism revolt in the city is, in my opinion, very close to poverty. The lack of running water and electricity in a town is a misery; it need not be on Spanish cortijos. Doing manual work in worn out clothes is a task for unqualified labour in cities but it might be a pleasure on one's own land when one follows his own vision and sees the fruits of his work. The new standard of living can be seen as a "step down" from the point of view of a westerner, e.g. a run from a well paid office job to unqualified manual work. But the number of people who go for it still grows.

Consumption or Production

Recent sociological and anthropological studies showed how different social groups define themselves through consumption. Pierre Bourdieu in his *Distinction* shows how the classes differentiate through taste acquired and maintained during the long process of upbringing and education. The taste encompasses all the spheres of consumption from eating habits to purchasing works of art or holiday trips. Daily practice differentiates between classes, not only their education or actual economic power. His broad study about French society, the classes, their habituses and capitals, explains the structure and

the functioning of the society in question. The method he uses rests on examining taste and practice of consumption.

Similarly, David Brooks describes a class through consumption in the book "Bobos in Paradise". His observations concern the new American elite, Bourgeois Bohemians, people from good families, graduated from the best universities, with free spirit and inexhaustible creativity. They are at the top of the social ladder and earn well but at the same time they are forced to invest their fortune, because saving is not up to date. In case of Bobos, consumption has strict rules or rather, it is a philosophy. A Bobo cannot waste money on luxury, but "can buy a faux-authentic trowel for \$35.99"¹⁰ because using professional quality tools is in accordance to the codex of financial correctness. Buying Porsche is unacceptable excess, but a Range Rover is a tool. No investment is too small when it comes to the kitchen. Regarding taste, Bobos would certainly adore everything in the houses of my informants and probably would attack them with credit cards in order to buy all the rubbish from tips and decorate their million dollar residences in America. No wonder, here also live Bohemians with a passion for the authentic, natural, and pure; but they are not Bourgeois, they do not have diplomas or money. And I can hardly speak about a class (not yet, but the children might form one). What they definitely have in common with Bobos is *metis*¹¹, the skill of insight and improvisation on changing natural and social settings. Thanks to this *metis*, they are very successful –in a way- in their lives. If we consider the very different conditions the American elite members and my Alpujarran settlers come from, they achieve a comparable standard of living.

Both works mentioned examine taste and consumption in order to characterize a group or a class. In many cases described the consumption is ostentatious; people buy things not because they need them but because they are expected to buy them. The consumption is not voluntary; people are forced to buy. What I found here seems to be the opposite; ostentatious consumption is replaced by ostentatious non-consumption (we do not need it and can do without it) or by production (why buy it if you can find it or grow it?). It may be seen as a response to low family budgets, but we have to bear in mind that a low

¹⁰ Brooks, p.9

¹¹ Brooks, p.133

budget economy, in many cases, arises from a deliberate decision to get out of the consumerism treadmill. Also ecological awareness plays a role; it is a refusal to participate in devastating the environment. Whereas in studies of Bourdieu and Brooks people are defined through consumption, my group defines itself by production.

A similar group of people was observed by Hana Librova in her work about “Coloureds and Greens”, when studying new individual ways of living with respect to nature and world ecology. But whereas her group was defined as such at the beginning, my group was first defined as foreigners – westerners in La Alpujarra. Nevertheless, the groups in question emerged to be very close, especially when considering one of the major aspects of their lives: the voluntary modesty¹².

Peoples of La Alpujarra

There Is Something about the Hippies

It is not easy to define hippies. “Peace, Love and Happiness” was their motto in the 60’s. “Peace” was at first the revolt to the war in Vietnam, and then it took a more general sense of overall pacifism. “Love” can be seen as a revolt against the rigid society, to its strict congenial rules and sexual norms. “Happiness” is a turn toward a life which is lived for its own sake, for the joy of it. The flower children were refusing to live in the industrial society and consumerism; they came back to nature and vivid experience, back to the life in communities, which they preferred to an anonymous life in society. At that time, we could also speak about a movement in the political sense of the word. Later the label “hippies” corresponded to a certain look and fixed behaviour patterns: long hair, coloured and sometimes torn clothes, or people who smoked marihuana.

Considering La Alpujarra, hippies discovered the zone in the 70’s and 80’s. According to Miguel, my Spanish informant, they occupied abandoned lands all around the area happy with entire nature and non-electrification. The overall free spirit of the time was

¹² Librova excludes from her work people who live on a low economy budget because they are forced to. She argued they would probably go for more consumption if they could.

indisputably in accordance with the ambience after the fall of the dictator regime. Nowadays we can still find hippies in Orgiva, a town on the west side of La Alpujarra. They are “true hippies”, living in communities near the town, growing and selling vegetables, producing small arts and crafts, or doing seasonal jobs in agriculture. They do not have all the characteristic of the American members of the movement. The free love attitude disappeared with the loosening of the sexual rules in mainstream society. However, the anti-war attitude stays strong. Ecological awareness seems to be the most important subject of their thoughts (and they are serious about it, beware of joking on global warming!). And conversely, personal hygiene is not among their top ten of priorities. They colour the area and bring eastern religions into local life. There is a Buddhist temple near Pampaneira; yoga and tai-chi classes are given in municipal cultural houses. Markets in Orgiva have a markedly hippie ambience, with cereal bread and home-made incense sticks sellers, as does the Dragon Festival organized by another community at Cigarrones, the area of followers of techno music culture. Those people are extreme cases of new inhabitants (and each group would deserve independent research) but they also give us a good picture of the cultural and international mix and tolerance in this area of extremes and contrasts. The festival struggled with restrictions from authorities for many years. Actually, the event was illegal until recently. Now you can meet all different age groups and social classes; I was completely taken aback when I saw a brand new Mercedes with a couple of pensioners inside, zigzagging in dust among techno music tents full of dancing youngsters with dreadlocks.

I started with hippies for two reasons. Firstly, they could be taken for the first newcomers who appeared in La Alpujarra. Now only a few live here, in the communities described above. The second reason is the freedom thinking spirit that can be observed in many cases of newcomers. However, I could not accept the label “post-hippies” proposed by my teachers for the group of my interest, because, apart from the quest for freedom they have in common, their philosophies do not match (and some of them might get angry, hippie is often perceived as an insult). If it comes to labelling, I would propose a looser term for this quite diverse group in question. They might be called Freedom Seekers.

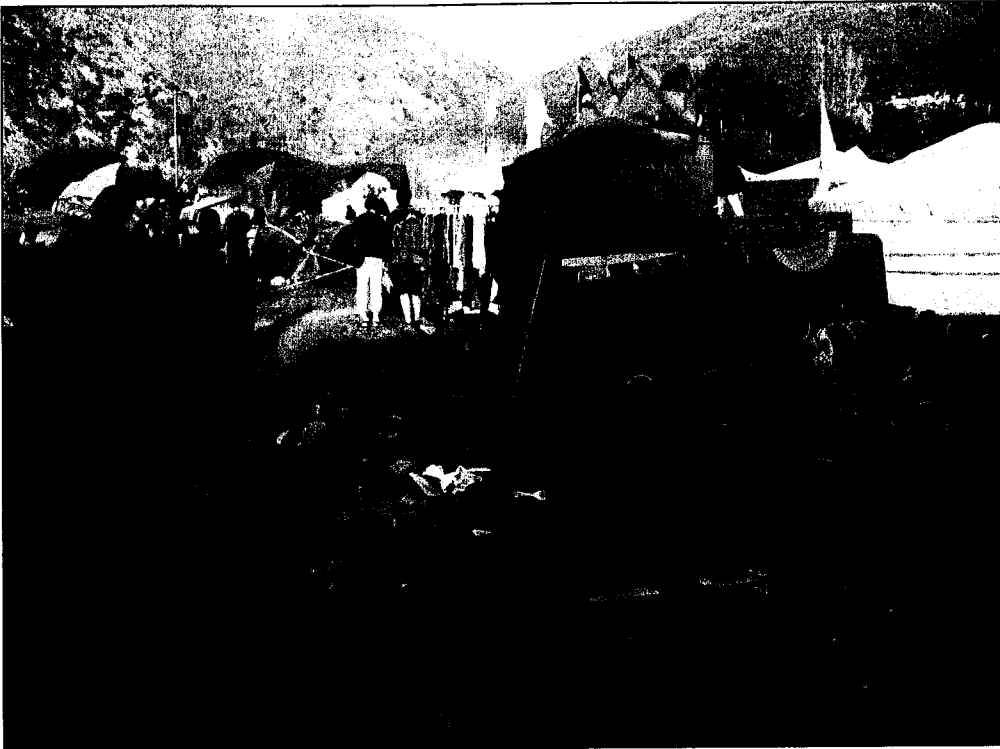


Figure 1. Dragon festival: the hippie spirit of La Alpujarra.

Freedom Seekers and Town Loonies

“The Loonies are an eclectic crew. They come fully equipped with bountiful amounts of optimism and unhealthy obsession for land ownership, dogs and bacon sandwiches. With their own funky brand of entrepreneurialism, these Loonies are Thatcher’s Children with their very own variety of hybrid karma/belief system. (...) Moaning simpering; sibling rivalry, men with fragile egos, emotional wrecks with massive Alpujarran paint jobs. They bring with them their ungodly problems, and general lunacy. Suicide, northern European drinking habits fuel the ensuing carnage. They come Holiday headed; they leave their small children fend for themselves while they prowl the bars...” I briefly cite here from an essay by Damian, my English informant, on his compatriots in Spain. The negativism of his statements partly arises from his own negative vision of the world; on

the other hand, he brings to light some things I would agree with in the case of English newcomers. They definitely differ from other foreigners. They are the biggest in number which enables them to work and co-operate, to a certain extent, independently of the Spanish society. Thus, they are not forced to learn the language and to give up the hated English habits. English bars and shops make them feel at home for considerably less money. There are local newspapers in English and a radio station. The “unhealthy obsession for land ownership” comes in the form of English property agencies that raise the prices of houses and land. They come with large families or in troops of friends which might evoke the colonialism of the past. Also the reluctance to register their vehicles and change the yellow car plates for Spanish might be perceived as a sign of demonstrating superiority of colonial times in America or India¹³.

In general, the Spanish way of educating children is less strict than in England. Thus, children can take pleasure from a freedom incomparable to that of their contemporaries at home, but in fact, they are under more parental the supervision of parents than in England. In comparison to kids I could meet in London, they are well behaved. I would not say the Alpujarran English drink more than the Spanish. In contrast, feeling that they are closely observed they hold back. The negative comments concern mostly people living in towns where the “lunatic” behaviour can be observed. Those living in small villages and cortijos¹⁴ are in closer relationship with locals and do not have many opportunities to “prowl the bars”. They might not be fluent in Spanish, but they are able to communicate and do their best to do so. They are not intellectuals but farmers; when one spends all day planting, watering, harvesting, and keeping animals, he does not have much time to practise the foreign language. It is true that some village loonies do not

¹³ The colonialist manners of the English deserve an independent study. When watching English settlers, especially on the coast, their reluctance to learn the language and to mix with locals, observing how they operate within their own labour nets, bars and newspapers and magazines, I dare claim, they were able to colonize half of the world mainly thanks to this feeling of superiority, which makes them ignore “indigenous people”, and consequently impose on them their own culture. They bring large families including children and grandparents; the natural community structure is preserved and it enables them to work as they would in England. If we could measure “Migratory Intelligence of a Nation” England will score the best.

¹⁴ Cortijo = a separate house in a certain distance from a village. The length of the distance is not important; it can be two hundred meters or four kilometers. Cortijos are very popular among foreigners; the Spanish prefer living in a village, and thus they are happy if they can get rid of their ruins.

leave their houses and do not communicate; they are almost invisible. On the other hand, there are English who refuse to speak their mother tongue if not necessary.

Some people come with ideas to “save the planet”. They look for sustainable ways of living. Self sufficiency and complete recycling of the waste people produce – it is not easy task to achieve and it takes many years of practice and a lot of energy to get some results. We can find organic farmers here, builders organizing workshops on building from natural or recycled materials. Deep interest in ecology and environmental issues sometimes result in different kinds of apocalyptic visions: the planet is going to be destroyed in thirty years because of the waste and pollution we produce, or it is getting warmer so quickly that we all will soon burn down, or the sea level will rise and all people will escape to the mountains (and that is why we live in La Alpujarra).

Some people come with ideas to “save themselves”. They come to reinvent their lives. Concerning these people, comes another quite strong statement. “Là, c’est la poubelle,” said my French friend who brought me first to La Alpujarra three years ago. She described La Alpujarra as a dustbin where all the human rubbish heads. The truth is that we can meet some so called “rubbish” but it is an intelligent rubbish; people who might not be very fortunate in life (and did not give up looking for solutions) could find a second chance here. A single mother with children is able to build a house in La Alpujarra; she certainly would not in England. “Men with fragile egos” sometimes find their hideaway in the calm setting, far away from a too demanding society. Also former drug addicts resist relapses more easily when working all day in the garden growing tomatoes than in a town among other desperate cases. A curriculum vita is not required by employers; skills and will to work are important. Many people claim they simply could not afford living in the country they come from.

Loonies and Freedom Seekers sometimes cross paths which results in conflicts. A perfect example of such a clash would be a case discussed in a local English newspaper¹⁵. A British Labour MP M.M., with her home near Orgiva, bulldozed access to nearly a dozen homes (and cut off a path her neighbours have been using for more than 20 years) claiming, they have no rights to hang around on her terraces. Of course, the clash was

¹⁵ The Olive Press, Issue 12, November 22nd.

inevitable: the Guardia Civil was called to restore order when angry neighbours wanted to break down the fence she had built. The case went to the court and newspapers. The appalling behaviour of the MP was not acceptable for either the Freedom Seekers nor for the local Spanish; there are unwritten laws and old paths are untouchable. On the other hand, for the English MP, it was not acceptable to share her private property with other people and she claims the Alpujarra region is the Wild West. Partly it is: she lost this case and she was ordered to re-open the access. In England, the right would be probably on her side (and that is also why many English fled from the country).

Not only are we reminded of the unwritten laws of the Wild West, but also of the women. As a female observer I noticed early after my arrival that women are in high demand. People usually come to La Alpujarra in couples and their relationships are firm. Very few women come alone and those that do are not very interested in mixing with men. Both the women with partners and single females are strong, mentally and physically. They build houses and milk goats, while looking after children or cooking dinner. A nice picture is to observe in the morning rush in front of the crèche in Cádiar. Whereas Spanish mothers come tidily with their kids in prams, female foreigners come more dramatically. First emerge clouds of dust, then one recognizes a dusty all terrain vehicle. A slim mother in working trousers jumps out of the car; she grabs her kids and hurries to the school. When meeting another Amazon, they swap information about the weather and what to plant today, or about plans for next week's demonstration. With clouds of dust they disappear again. Or even better, men bring the kids to the crèche before going to work. Sharing housework seems natural and it is not rare that women have younger partners. They are not feminist; but they are intelligent and energetic, able to plan and organize lives which are not provided with instructions for use. Ability to think and do counts more in this setting than youth and "vogue magazine" beauty.

Foreigners engage in local politics, particularly in subjects concerning environment. Recent demonstrations and public protests were held against felling of some old trees for the purposes of a new road construction, or against building a new water reservoir for the needs of the coast. La Alpujarra gets dryer every year, and so does the whole of Andalusia. Despite this fact, construction of tourist resorts and golf courses continue and the number of plastic greenhouses on the coast grows. One reservoir has been built some

years ago and according to activists' reports it should cover all the needs of the coast region. In this case, their effort was fruitful and the plans for new reservoir were slammed. Thus, foreigners add political awareness among local villagers which proves to be an important asset.

So far we could see there is a huge variation among the group. Foreigners of different origins live in towns, in villages, or in seclusion at their cortijos. They are rich or they have hardly anywhere to live, they are farmers or real estate agents. Is there something they have in common or is it just a mix of totally distinct people? One thing is clear from the beginning and it forces me to this comment (and the first pre-selection). I sometimes speak about westerners, northerners or foreigners. The group observed are people of Western Europe, or Spaniards from the north of the country. I exclude other foreigners, like Senegalese, Romanians, Moroccans, Lithuanians, or people of the countries of the South America, because they mostly come because of economic reasons. As I was told by one Romanian: "None of us would be here, if we could make money in our country. I don't like Spain at all". My foreigners love it.

Lemons, Olives, and Hamburgers

I already mentioned a novel *Driving over Lemons* by Chris Stewart, the UK bestseller translated into several languages. The book was translated to Spanish just recently and it seemed to be successful here, too. Despite good sales, Alpujarran newcomers' critiques are not very positive. I have the Spanish version from Carlos and José, Spaniards from northern Spain, who run a small bar and a hostel in Castarás. I was warned the book was a rubbish but insisting that reading it was important for my work I eventually got it with the following inscription: "Este libro no sirve, Este tipo no tiene idea de nada, solo de escribir basura y hacer dinero. No pierdas el tiempo con él."¹⁶

The book is an autobiographical novel of a man who gave up living in England and started a new life as a farmer on a cortijo in La Alpujarra. It describes well the setting, characters of indigenous villagers, and problems new settlers deal with. He brings some

¹⁶ This book is useless, the guy hasn't got the foggiest idea of anything, he only writes shit and makes money on it. Do not waste time with him.

clever observations about the social life, the old family relationships, and the new relationships among the foreigners. In a funny way, he creates quite an accurate picture of the ordinary life of a guiri¹⁷. Though, neither Spanish nor English inhabitants like it. What is wrong with the book? It might be its idealism, or the romantic way the author writes. The poetism of quotidian life in the country is more attractive for people rushing to the office on the early morning bus than for those living it. The biggest problem, as I see it, is the first person narrative, deep description of feelings and emotions towards animals and the author's daughter, the pride of becoming an "Alpujarran citizen". There can be recognized the usual novelist pattern, the way to appeal to an average reader. But local readers are not sentimental. Stewart may be much too enthusiastic about ordinary things; he's able to write several pages about the first egg that was laid by his own hen and how he cooked it. Local people are more practical; concerning hens, sheep, or lizards, they are "just" animals for villagers, not beings that would deserve special attention. Another reason for despising the work can be the personality of the author: he was already known (as a drummer of the music group Genesis), came with money and was able to buy a house-ruin with land. Although only a few people come to La Alpujarra without any financial means, they do not openly speak about it. It is fashionable not to have any money. Nevertheless, many people read the book, and the lifestyle, feelings, problems, and mistakes would correspond to their own experience.

Similar distance is to be felt towards the *Olives*. Newsstand in Cadiár, a town of approximately three thousand inhabitants, offers a variety of newspapers in different languages; you can buy The Times, Independent, Guardian, Le Figaro, Die Welt, and others. I was ensured they sell everything. Also, there is always a free local newspaper in English: *The Olive Press*. It is not the only newspaper in English; many others are printed on the coast. This one covers the whole area of Granada province, i.e. it is an inland press. It also differs from the coast newspaper and magazines in the topics it discusses. Whereas *Costa Tropical News* or *Sur in English* resemble health and cultural magazines with useful tips where-to-go, *The Olive Press* is more concerned with daily activities: how to build, deal with authorities, or farm like the Spanish do. With its name in an

¹⁷ Guiri is a Spanish name for a foreigner who lives in the area. Usage of the word is not very clear but I dare say it coincides with my group. English, Dutch, French, or Germans are guiries, but Rumanians are Rumanians.

Andalusian green frame, it is ecological oriented; if there is not an article about a petrol tanker capsized by the seaside or another black construction of golf courses revealed on the first page, we would learn how many dead whales have been found this year or how many plant species were destroyed when developing new tourist paths in the Sierra Nevada. Very popular topics are global warning, plastic greenhouses, and Greenpeace reports extracts, e.g. the September issue 2006 offers three articles on page three: Ávila Rojas destroyed land to build luxury houses, Junta golf plans to hit Playa Granada complex, and Junta to switch off light pollution.

Even though it seems to be an apolitical press, it inclines strongly to the left. Spanish enemy number one is Partido Popular, the right wing party, whose members are responsible for all corruption affairs concerning greedy developers with their dubious projects; Blairite Labour party represents the evil of the rest of the world. In fact, world politics is almost excluded from this reading. Local news is given more importance: Almuñecar dustmen on strike, royals visiting Motril, or the election of the Alhambra as one of the modern Seven Wonders of the World. Local crimes are popular in News in Brief column, an average tabloid routine. However, culture and sport is missing, or emerging very sporadically. We do not do deal intellectuals or sport fans; people are supposed to be more interested in construction or renewing houses, farming, cultivating olive trees, harvesting almonds, or working local products. Though, we can learn something from the local history: popular subjects are Spanish civil war stories especially those concerning the martyred death of Federico García Lorca.

Concerning building, we can find useful series like *Diary of a Cave Dweller* (about renovating cave houses in the Guadix province), *Women with Trowels*, or *A New Life on the Sun*. We can learn about using indigenous materials like stones, lime, and plaster. Whereas in England a specialized firm would be called to do the tasks, here it is challenging D.I.Y. opportunity. The physical contact is important, an extract from *Women with Trowels* about rendering with lime reads: „We worked by hand. We could have used a mixer but there is something really lovely about a quiet building site, solely powered by human energy with the pleasant hum of conversation“. Similar tips on working with yeso from *Diary of a cave dweller*: “Plastering with your hands, just mix your yeso and slap it on filling in the gaps, you will soon have a very rustic cave interior

ready to be painted. This technique goes back years in this part of Spain and is how we have done many rooms in our cave.” I could observe the passion for rendering and plastering in Jamanidels, the English bar in Cadiár. Men doing the job would not change clothes when going for a beer after finishing the task, because coming in in white spotted working clothes would elicit a very interesting and fruitful conversation starting: “Oh, are you rendering? I was rendering the other day...” and followed by useful (or useless) hints how to get the best mix and final structure. This game of giving advice is also popular among local Spanish. “...It is luxurious to be lacking a deadline...” continues the author of *Women with Trowels*. Slow pace of one’s own work is a praised factor which stands in direct opposition to the prototype of an English office where people always work to deadlines. (Less praised is the slow pace of local tradesmen and servicemen which I would claim as one of the cultural shocks of newcomers.)

Close to the tactile approach to building materials is gardening. Anna, a Belgian woman living in Cadiár, mentioned in the last issue article *How to Plant in Pots* in *Down the Garden Path* column: „I don’t have a garden here... At least I have the pots. The other day, I did planting in pots. I love it, mixing the soil with hands. The feeling... Look at my nails... (showing the dirt underneath which you won’t get rid of unless you spend three hours in a hot bath)”. Damian, an Englishman fond of experiments with plastering and painting, described his experience as follows: “I do buy brushes or tools, but eventually, I always end up using hands”. Thus, clean and soft hands become something that a sensible individual would rather hide. I witnessed a half drunk dispute of an English and a Dutch on whose hands are harder and dirtier from manual work.

Characteristic are names of materials kept in their Spanish forms: “We also tried some launa (ground stone plate)”, and “yeso controlado y yeso rapido (varieties of plaster)”, or “cal (lime)”. Neither are translated names of places, offices, plants, and food. *In the Garlic* is a language column (publicity for the book) introducing some useful expressions in local Spanish whose translation is not easy to find in ordinary dictionaries. Much space is dedicated to food and drink. The topic is unlimited: healthy food, local food with its cheeses and serano hams, vino de tierra, recipes for traditional dishes, history of “matanzas” (pig slaughters), or restaurants’ valuations. It might look as if the English

came to Spain to drink and eat. By the way, this is what many Spanish think about English.

But they are also saving. Announced fiestas are equalled by the list of alternative markets and car-boot-sales. Spanish rarely buy second hand stuff, and neither do they share the English passion for bric-à-brac. In fact, foreigners are both the buyers and sellers. The Saturday market held on the first week every month in Almuñecar is its best example: though the conversation usually starts in Spanish, the speakers quickly swap into more convenient language if it comes to

bargaining. Similarly, announcing second hand stuff to sell or to buy is peculiar to foreigners not to Spanish (to be discussed further on). The notice board in Jamanidels, the English bar, internet café, restaurant, library, cinema, and concert hall with children's corner in one, was always full of adverts for goods and services: from selling land or cars, used furniture before going back to England, asking for second

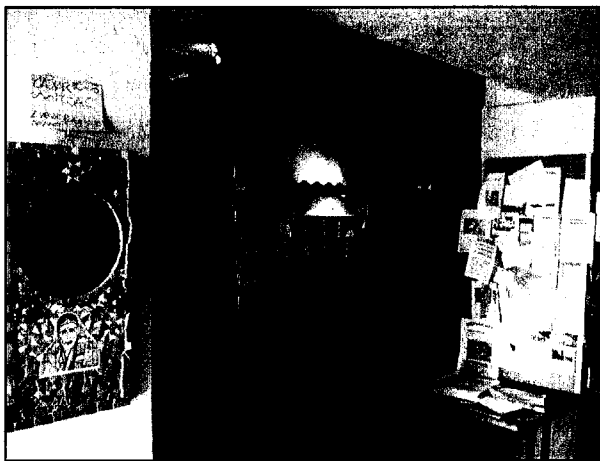


Figure 2. Jamanidels with its library and indispensable notice board.

hand children's clothes and toys, to desperate demand of egg boxes, or sharing car offers. The café was an important social space enabling to the community to exchange information and the feeling of belonging. I say it was, because it changed ownership recently and the multifunctional space disappeared. Different information channels are being formed and different places of cultural interest developed. The importance of Jamanidels did not lay their hamburgers, but in the variety of activities offered, which brought together variety of people of different interests. Above all, it was an ideal example of bricolage, the concept for living in La Alpujarra.

Living in La Alpujarra

Bricolage as a Concept for Living

I borrowed the concept of bricolage, like many others, from Lévy-Strauss who introduced the term into anthropology. When writing about religion of primitive cultures, he compares it to bricolage and puts it in opposition to engineering. Bricolage, in English D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself), is the way we do things at home using materials and tools available. This way the primitive cultures, according to Lévy-Strauss¹⁸, construct their religion thoughts, myths, and cults. Engineering, similarly to big monotheistic religions, uses appropriate tools and materials in accordance to what is to be built. The term bricolage describes well the lifestyle of the newcomers. They improvise, using what is available to achieve what is necessary. It does not concern only little repairs in the house; the whole concept of life is improvising with available sources and tools. In towns, we usually rely on one mayor source of income. But here people improvise and combine several lower incomes. To make living, it is more profitable to offer a variety of services, because single profile occupations are few. And what is more, a variety of tasks is welcomed. Modern industrial society is built on maximum division of labour which reduces a human being to a mere wheel of the process. Albert Camus¹⁹ mentions the writings of Simon Weil about conditions of labourers. Though it refers to conditions in the time of industrial revolutions it is still relevant. The situation of a labourer is doubly degrading: for the lack of money and dignity. Even a badly paid job, if it is interesting and creative, is not degrading. One of the push factors for this kind of migration is indisputably the routine experienced in the dynamic economics of western countries. Single profile jobs are boring and tiring for creative individuals. And as their curriculum vitas become longer with changes of different occupations, they lose their value on the labour market. Of course, specialised workers are more efficient and save time. And time is money. But time does not present the major problem here. Days are long and there is

¹⁸ Lévy-Strauss, *Pensée sauvage*, p.30-31

¹⁹ Camus, p.236

not much to do, except work. Workdays and weekends do not differ much. One can work slowly and constantly, because he is not disturbed by cultural events or firm parties.

Bricolage is a popular hobby in western societies. People love it. The French and the Americans are crazy about it. There are specialized shops and magazines on bricolage, and even television programs with popular entertainers. Logically, the modern employee lacks the time to create and improve his domestic space. The Czech phenomenon of weekend houses rests on bricolage; serious life is left behind in towns and men can finally enjoy themselves doing small “unimportant” improvements while the women are gardening. Time is strictly divided into working time and leisure time. Bricolage, belonging to the second category, is seen inferior. It does not match with highly specialized jobs required in the present labour market. Though job advertisements in looking for job section read “we appreciate creativity and flexibility”, it actually says “we appreciate maximum conformity at work and talking about our hobbies during the lunch time”. Also the phenomenon of personal web pages shows that people can make a lot of effort and spend a lot of time to create and realize themselves; creating a page, putting pictures or writing, finding a space on the net – an individual goes through the process from the beginning to the end, and, what is more, can see the result of his work, which gives it meaning. In contrast, being a wheel in the industrial machinery means not to see fruits of one’s work. Consequently, consumption, instead of being the action of fulfilling actual needs, is a mean of self-realization. Alpujarran foreigners do not speak about their hobbies as there is no distinction between work time and leisure time.

Bricolage Building

Building is the best example of bricolage. If buying a land, in most cases there is already something that used to be a house. Thus, the new owners become bricolers from the beginning of

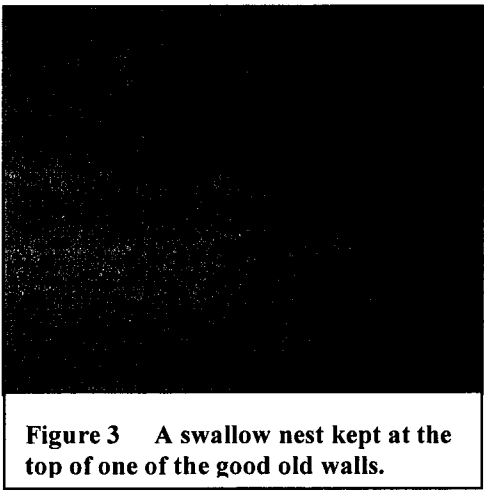


Figure 3 A swallow nest kept at the top of one of the good old walls.

the process. The house (rather a ruin) already has a plan. Good walls are usually kept and made a bit higher, odds are respected. People have to do with what is already half built. Actually, they do not have to. The Spanish prefer to break the old building down and to start building a whole new house. But foreigners can feel the spirit of an old house and they want to preserve it. The right angles may be missing and wooden beams are not tailed in. These things are kept as they are. Or, in the case of the beams, those painted with lime are brushed in order to uncover the texture of the wood. Regarding bricolage, foreigners actually did not bring anything new to the region. They only developed the technique at the moment when Spanish started to abandon it. Building materials were not, until recently, transported to hardly accessible zone. People used what they could find in the closest area: stones, wood, iron, lime, clay, plaster, and reed²⁰. Old village houses lack a plan; they were built according to space between existing houses and it is difficult to say where one building ends and another starts. Original houses are low: one or maximum two floors high and some date back as far as to the Moorish period²¹. The second floors were built if the family could afford it, and thus one floor buildings prevail. When the first foreigners started to buy ruins and restore them, they did not need any permission.



Figure 4 Unbreakable window on the terrace brings sun light to the bathroom bellow.

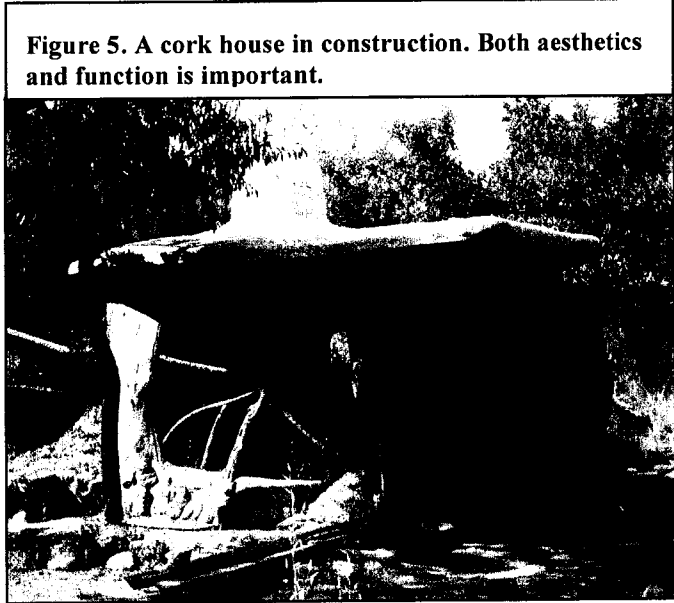
This chaos is over; La Alpujarra is both a natural park and a cultural heritage reservation. Materials used and design are under the supervision of the Junta de Andalusia and Consejería cultural which is a real blessing for the zone of snow white villages with Mediterranean style flat roofs of when we compare it to what is

²⁰ López Tovar, p.19

²¹ Moors (or Moriscos) were made leave the country when the Queen Isabel (Isabela Católica) came to power in 1492 Moors were sensible builders regarding appropriating living space to climate (e.g. small windows that do not let heat enter in summer) and good farmers. They constructed irrigation system which is still in use today (known as acequias).

being built on the coast (actually, the danger does not come from foreigners of fine taste but from the Spanish nouveau-rich, who “have no culture at all,” as stated Ema). Though some norms drive people mad, especially the flat roofs when it comes to snow, the region maintains its lovely impression.

Despite the norms, the foreigners, who build their houses, do not give up experimenting. Fascinated by the fact they might use accessible materials from nature, they study carefully old approaches and the potentiality of materials available. And they are not limited by natural sources. Spanish are not sentimental. When it comes to restoring houses they prefer to knock it down and build a brand new building. The rubbish goes to tips, where foreigners can find almost anything they need from unused bags of lime and plaster, doors and chairs, to electronic equipment. Foreigners mix old approaches with new ideas (which are not always in accordance with the Consejería cultural²²). For example, the roof window looking into the bathroom at Niki’s place made from old car windows was considered to be against norms. The parts that show the origin of the glass had to be covered with clay or plaster. Advantages of the window are evident: the glass is



almost unbreakable (new would cost a fortune and one will never get the shape required), it is both an original and a half-finished product (thanks to the tin linings) and it is recycled material.

Near Yator lives Achim, an artist and specialist on using different materials, who bought a valley in the area five years ago. Soon he turned his land to the “Valley of

²² Consejería cultural is in charge of control over historical monuments (similar to English heritage council).

Wonders”²³. Small houses and restored caravans are dispersed on the terrain, forming together with sculptures and gardens a unique and spectacular place. It has its own energetic system, partly sourced from solar panels, partly from water mill: all made by Achim.

By the time I used to see him, Achim was working on a cork house. I was explained that this building experiment would take a year before it can be run as a workshop. The cork building can react on weather and temperature changes, heats, and rains. The workshop will not be the only one organized in his valley; he and his likeminded friends teach their know-how regularly, e.g. on clay mixing or on building of earthships - houses from used pneumatic tyres. This kind of a house is missing in the Valley; tyres were used for construction of a swimming pool. In the hexagonal central building we can find a bricolage master piece: a black star made of a marble plate found accidentally by the road. As Achim was limited by the quantity of material, he designed the required star on the computer and let it count the size of shapes of single pieces. Thus, he was able to get the design without wasting or supplying additional material. From another marble plate of distinct colour found on the same place he made a kitchen working desk with a built-in sink.

Using a computer and other useful electronic tools is very common among my bricolers, but the contrast –using modern technologies and old materials- is doubly visible in the case of Achim. He practices yoga and he usually walks bare foot wearing only slippers. He is also very good in mathematics and friendly with modern technologies. And, speaking to him one feels as if Tarzan was giving you a tutorial on the latest computer graphic programs.

Figure 6 Though mathematics was used in this case, the impression is very natural.



²³ See: www.sensaciones.de

We Have It from the Tip

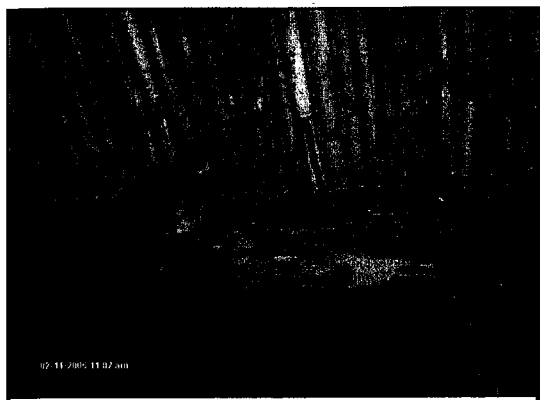


Figure 7. Old nails used to make the railings “more authentic”.

I already mentioned that municipal scrap heaps serve as a source of building material. Chiara and Andy would not go to the shop to buy isolation, but to the tip; to collect polystyrene from old boxes, than crush and puts in small gaps between windows and walls. Old chairs, tables, or doors can be found at all cortijos. Sometimes only parts of furniture are used, drawers or doors from a wardrobe. Old agricultural tackles are given new

use, not put on the wall as a decoration. Foreigners can appreciate old good work; even nails are re-used to make railings more interesting. Most common is using old materials for building or furnishing the house. Also smaller items get to houses from tips. In houses inspected I found pot flowers, kitchen equipment from mugs and plates to pans and pots, children toys and clothes, or a table football. Chiara put it this way: “Some things... you just cannot leave there”. Actually, she is one of the local specialists on the rubbish recycling; she can tell what scrap heaps are the best to go. And she is not very happy with the way the Spanish do with old things. In Italy, there are (eco) groups that sort rubbish before it goes on a heap and one can go literally shopping there. To demonstrate her words, she showed me a lovely red enamel tea-pot bought at one Italian tip.

It is the Spanish way of dealing with waste that makes people using rubbish. Young travellers would agree that Spain is a country where one need not suffer from hunger when being without money. In Torvizcon, I met young Czechs guys who had been living in Spain for five years. Tomáš told me about their first years in Spain before they settled down. They were very young (at their early twenties) and without commitments; they could enjoy the life without doing much work. At the seaside they did just with the fishing and “basura”. Basura is the word for rubbish which is quickly picked up when living in Spain. Supermarkets or shops leave basura (food) they would not sell in front of the doors; there is always plenty of basura (fruit and vegetable) left after open air markets. Nice furniture is being left in front of houses when new one is bought. In

Granada, in the 80's and 90's, young travellers lived in lovely furnished caves underneath Alhambra; everything was found on the streets. It might let us think the Spanish leave their surplus to the less fortunate because of charitable reasons. The truth is they are lazy to carry it away; they are happy that somebody else will do it instead of them. There is no ecological awareness in Spain; fridges and other dangerous waste still appear on scrap heaps, or even worse: thrown by the road if a tip is too far.

I myself could not resist collecting rubbish. From tips, I regularly use planks for shelves; we have some chairs and a table, a reed basket, my son has a "new" bike and roller skates. Our biggest discovery was a stereo with amplifiers and a radio-cassette player. Soon I learned not to buy things that I do not need at the moment, but which I would like to have at some point. This was the case of the bicycle; it was somewhere on my "shopping list", and waiting paid off.

People also share their findings: What if somebody else found it useful! People inform themselves about what is available at tips or they collect it and offer to another person. Once I went to pick up my repaired computer by Bootz, a computer specialist, haecker and a boyfriend of LouLou. The girl runs dance classes at Cadiar. When she opened the door from her studio we found a box full of things from the "basura" from Chris and Helen. LouLou was not happy with it at the first moment, but then she started to go through it and –despite her initial disgust- some items did not return to the dustbin. Once rubbish gets into a house it becomes an object and it is not easy to get rid of it any more. When a thing is singled out from the rubbish, it is not rubbish any more. Some rubbish can be also commodized²⁴: it is the case of old doors or coffers that become antiquities when found and cleaned. Most things found are virtually valueless but "what if..." The following concerns all of my informants: they find difficult getting rid of things.

²⁴ More on commodities see: Kopytoff (p.64-91) in Ed. Appadurai (1986)

Virtue of Doing with Things

The Freedom Seekers find getting rid of things very difficult. It does not mean that they tend on things. If they did, they would probably not move home. Jane from Cadiar has



Figure 8. Emma and José's cortijo piled up with things.

many plaster plates on the walls, but she did not buy them. Her father, who died few years ago, made them. She will not throw them; in fact, she does not like throwing things in general. That is why she does not go to markets any more even she liked it much (yet another van full of stuff is waiting in England to be brought).

Concerning getting rid of things, Emma has the whole philosophy of

giving and getting. In spring, I found her little cortijo piled up with a sea of things. I was explained that she and José Miguel (her Spanish partner) had to move all their possession out from the house in Alcutar and other places they lived up to now. The space at the front of their house kept overstuffed for a month, and then things started to disappear. Emma was giving things away, carefully looking for new owners. Massage table went to a friend with a fitness studio in Granada; amplifiers went to LouLou's dance studio, gas heaters and satellite dish to friends of José Miguel. They gave books to the library in Juviles, put clothes and shoes in the containers for shoes and clothes in Granada. In a similar way, things get into the house. The oven was from her uncle, dishes from her grandmother. "Most things we were given", she says. "We are lucky we live with people who give us things. Drinking yogee tee, she explained to me that for her giving things was a part of carma yoga. "Giving things is a philosophy. These [not being used] things are like burden on you. You have to get rid of them. Not like Ben [another English from the village], he's got his house full of things after his mother, I cannot live like that.

Organizing my life makes me calm. If I read a book, there's nothing on the table, it's just me and the book. And I like things to be recycled."

Not all has the virtue of getting rid of things. Most people just store them. Emma herself has plenty of stuff that might be useful one day. Things found anywhere on her walks or found in the ground when gardening might be used at some point. However, she holds back and tries not to over do it.



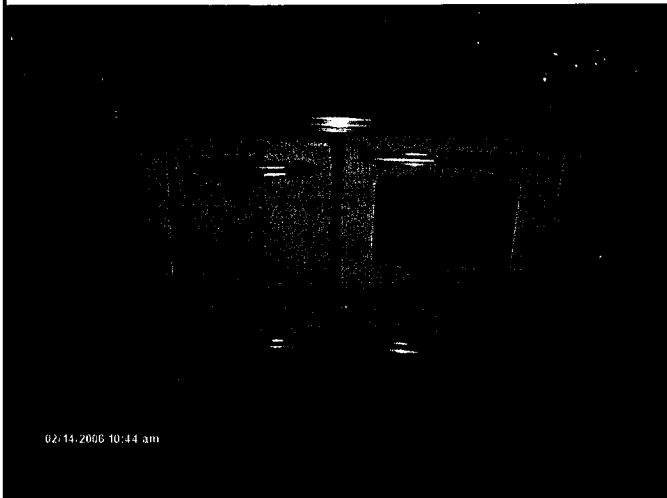
Figure 9. Emma's things "to use later".

Big home "scrap yards" are very common. Paths to cortijos are lined by things that might be useful "at some point". Building material, stationary cars, variety of tiles and glass for mosaic, and working tool indicate that humans are closed. Some things get incorporated in the houses and gardens but, at the same time, new found or given stuff aggregates.

Things become burden on people when they let them to. In the age of consumerism, things quickly get in a house even though nobody buys them. Patric and Anne Marie, who came only with a car and a caravan five years ago, also fight with things. Patric builds houses; when one house is finished they move in and start to build a new one. Then the "old" one is sold to someone richer. By now, they have already built three exquisite houses in the area and even though they sold two of them fully furnished, things keep piling up. The last time I visited them I was given a freezer they do not use. Fiona from Atalbeitar took advantage of my inquiries; when going through her boxes with cards, pictures, and other memories, she considered most of it a rubbish, then carefully sorted, and threw out. When she realized I had a little child I was given some jumpers and trousers after her boys. Her problem was, like of many others, that with every visit to the UK she brought more of her personal stuff she left there when moving to Spain.

The relationship to things is strong; people prefer transporting things with difficulties for long distances to throwing them out. Chiara drove an oven from Italy in her Opel Astra car. The oven was stored for two years in the garage of her parents after it was bought in a special outlet shop; an Italian oven seller offers to its clients -when buying a new oven-

Figure 10 Chiara's Italian oven for baking bread.



to take away their old one. These old ovens, if functional, are resold for reasonable prices. Chiara's oven cost 80 euro and, according to her, it was worth it; it has a plate which is important when making bread to let the dough heave. From Mallorca, where she lived with her partner Andy for some time, they brought a flue boiler which, attached to the oven, heats water

for the central heating in the house. I wondered if the oven is important to her personally; if there is a kind of personal relationship to the thing. I was said that no, that she would change it for another, more practical one. The type that has the flue boiler already installed would be ideal.

I do not doubt Chiara would sell most things in the countries she lived and from which she brought her things. Unfortunately, her things do not have a commodity price yet. They are too old to be sold as second hand stuff and too new to be considered antiques. Their importance consists in the fact that Andy is able to make them work, and thus the family need not spend money on new equipment.

Jane and Peter, a couple in their fifties running a hotel in Trevelez, told me: "We do not tend on things. We sold or gave away almost everything before coming here". They are considerably richer than Chiara; their things still had commodity prices. Further, their grown up children were setting up their own households by the time they were leaving for Spain; the parents gave many pieces of furniture to the children. Jane and Peter brought one sofa and an eating table and a little outdoor stove which they turned into a flower pot and put as a decoration in front of their hotel. Another decoration they brought is mainly the stuff done by Peter, pictures and little sculptures which have a personal value for the couple. Chiara leaves bringing the stuff of personal importance to the

moment they will have finished the house; “I would not put things after my grandmother into this building site,” she stated.

As we could see the foreigners have quite strong relations to things; not to single objects of personal importance, but to things in general. Even in the case the things are virtually valueless they still hesitate to throw them and, conversely, they do not hesitate to pick things on a scrap heap. Damian, the author of the short essay I cited from at the begging, explains this behaviour as learned at the time after the Second War and during the Margaret Thatcher’s governing. The same could be said about Czechs who lived under the communism; that necessity and economic limitations lead people to saving strategies of this kind. There are, at least, two contradictions to this hypothesis. Firstly, it is not the time of necessity; things are in abundance and can be easily replaced. People who collect and keep things even do not repair them (like in times mentioned) unless they really start to use them. Secondly, the local Spanish also experienced the period of shortage but they do not follow this pattern, though there are many who are not well off. In my view, collecting things corresponds to the bricolage nature of the Freedom Seekers: things must be “by hand” when one needs them (and one never knows!). It is also the idea of recycling things; foreigners have much more respect to environment than locals. They need not be necessarily eco-activists to think about the waste they produce and they carefully sort it. This corresponds with the second point: with different perceptions of cleanness and dirt of Spanish and my foreigners.

Cleanness and Dirt: Two Points of View

Spanish would not pick up anything from a tip neither they would buy any second hand stuff. Car-boot-sales are occupied by foreigners, second hand shops are run exclusively by foreigners. Renting things is very rare; in fact, shops specialized on renting went broke. I have not seen any bric-a-brac shop (closest to it would be “rastros”, see later). Old things go only one direction: to scrap heaps. A Spanish construction of a house begins with total clearance, usually using a dredge. Everything goes to scrap heaps: stones, rubble, wood, doors, window glass, furniture, clothes, or food. Of course, it is a question of working effectively, but men fond of D.I.Y. would not stay indifferent when seeing

piles of excellent quality stones tumbling down the hills of the Sierra Nevada together with rotten potatoes. Nothing is left when construction is finished; spare unused material is not kept for another construction or returned to the shop; everything goes to the municipal scrap heap again including unopened bags of cement and lime. Some foreigners already addressed the builders with their requirements: Andy gets stones and Achim is interested in good quality wooden beams. If the workers come across an oak or olive piece of wood they bring it to him, “if they recognize it from pine”, added Achim laughing. Authentic doors, window frames, or shutters are also in demand. The price for the authentic old door in good condition ranges between hundred and fifty to three hundred at the car-boot-sale in Almuñecar. Patric is respected among villagers for his building abilities; still he was suspiciously questioned by locals for the reason why he put that “awful” old door in his new house.

Using purely new materials, equipment, or furniture cohere with the enchantment of “being rich”. La Alpujarra was indeed very poor region, and, despite recent changes, it still is. Buying new and wasting is a usual way of demonstrating a status, or an “affordable-ness”. Apart from this, old

is dirty in the point of view of locals. It is associated with the hard and dirty agricultural work of the past. A peasant who worked from the age of ten in the country does not find a wooden horse-collar beautiful. He would definitely not make a chandelier out of it. The same is for doors; if one remembers the time when cattle used the same door as

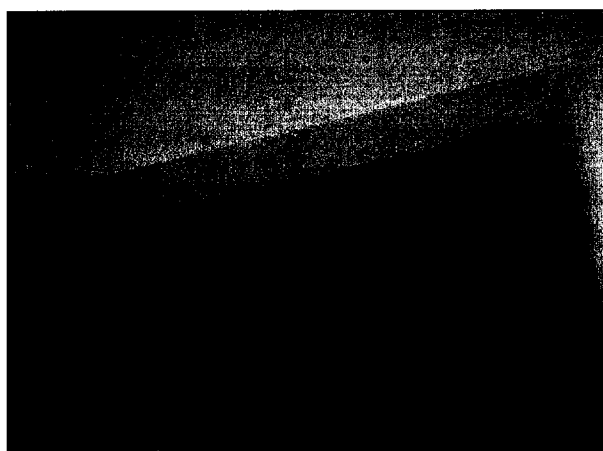


Figure 11. Chandelier made of agricultural tackles cannot be seen in Spanish houses.

peoples to enter a house, he sees the door dirty. Sharing houses with animals, horses, sheep, and hens, was usual in La Alpujarra; richer families could afford to build a second floor and not to share the same room at least, but there were not means for building separate stables. The upper part of the old door could be open separately so that horses could look out. Nowadays animals are usually not allowed to enter a house. Even dogs sleep outside houses on streets which, e.g. in the eye of my father, was perceived as

cruelty. José Miguel, the Spanish partner of Emma, would not eat in the same room with animals; he neither eats outside because of them. Dogs do not enter bars or restaurants as they usually do in European cities.

The Freedom Seekers are animals' lovers; they are blessing for abandoned cats and dogs. LouLou and Bootz adopted some cats and recently, a husky bitch. Though LouLou does not like dogs but she could not refuse it in this case: only one another man was interested in keeping the abandoned dog in question, but he had a breeding station. LouLou could not stand the feeling the dog would be locked in a cage and bear puppies to the end of her life.

Niki has horses and several dogs and cats. The horses have their stables and enough free space for running. But dogs and cats share the house with her family. I have become a "lucky" owner of a dog, too, when my children brought it at home; I just could not kick it out of the house. Heartbreaking is the relationship of Martin and Tony and their sheep, they are a real family. Of course, Spanish also do have animals. The difference is they keep them as far as possible from their dwellings, whereas the Freedom Seekers –mainly English- share households with them. Anne Marie and Emma belong to the group of practical animal owners: their cats and dogs live outside. Their place is by the house; they do not travel with their masters as English dogs usually do.

Emma thinks (under the influence of her Spanish partner) that living on the country requires a radical change of attitude towards animals. The truth is, country animals are considerably dirtier than those living in cities and they bring loads of undesirables animals into house, too. When I needed to put my child in the crèche in Cadiar for a month I got a list of rules and obligations one has to fulfil. One point stated: "a child must come clean in clean clothes or he would not



Figure 12. Martin and Tony in front of a bar in Berchules during the fiesta of San Marco.

be admitted". I was afraid there were some exaggerated hygienic regulations and the first day my child came in the crèche shining clean. In the front of the school I understood: English Alpujarran parents have "slightly" different perception of cleanness and dirty from the one of mine. As I learned later, they are usually English children who bring fleas or other "animals" in crèches or nursery schools. José Miguel thinks that Spanish see English as dirty: "when they come [in La Alpujarra] they look smart. Then you see them after a year and you wonder how they could get so far [in the way they look]". Generally speaking, foreigners tend to neglect the body aesthetics and they enjoy themselves. English joke on a typical hair style called "campo hair" which develops on a head after few days without washing; no artificial hardener is needed: dust and sweat make the work. Many foreigners come from cities where people are -and their visages- under permanent supervision of others. Much time is spent on one's look and smell in a town; especially women could get depressed if they are not able to be always in. Thus, neglecting one's visage might be also a sort of revolt. Similarly, the punk fashion comprises neglecting: old leather jackets, torn trousers, and a bit of bodily smell. The punk revolt wants to say: "I can afford to smell bad because I am independent". Or, in La Alpujarra, it can be also a step closer to "nature". Of course, city westerners often over do it; too much bathing, using shampoos, shower gels, and deodorants lead to many skin illnesses. Doctors advise to mothers of little children not to succumb to advertisements and not to use much soap and lotion in order to prevent allergies. The dirtier Alpujarran lifestyle is -by some foreigners- presented as a healthier one.

There is, certainly, an ambiguity in the perception of clean and dirty of the Spanish and the foreigners. Whereas Spanish are clean, their children do not wear worn off or second hand clothes and they have clean houses, they produce considerably more waste than the eco-friendly newcomers. Not many Spanish ever noticed new trends in eating habits; they consume pork meat in abundance and let their children grow fat on crisps. Foreigners try to grow organic vegetable whereas locals are known for putting "anything" to get required size of tomatoes. Foreigners are happy they can finally wear off the clothes they could not wear in a town; Spanish women buy cheap three euro shoes they can throw out in two weeks and buy new. I generalized a lot in this chapter; not all foreigners are dirty and ozone free and not all locals are superficial consumers leaving their dogs sleeping

outside. But my description will certainly match with the opinion one group has about the other. The Spanish often perceive the English as dirty and the foreigners blame the Spanish for the destruction of nature because of seeing only financial profit.

More on the Furniture

As I said before, it is not only need or saving that leads people to “basureras²⁵”. It is also their taste for the specific type of furniture indigenous to the area. Not everything is to be found at tips. What furniture will complete the restored houses of foreigners? Definitely not the heavy oak and leather sofas from the shops with prices starting from 150 euro for a chair. The Freedom Seekers will first go to Betel to buy “rastros”. Rastro was first introduced to me by Patric and Anne-Marie when examining their cortijo. I was explained that rastro is restored old furniture (but later I saw shops offering brand new rastro furniture). I was advised to go to see Alquería de Moryama, a tourist complex down the valley between La Alpujarra and Contraviesa fully furnished in the rastro style. Dark wood tables, chairs, night tables, and cabinets, match well with local heavy doors and shutters. Despite this similarity, the rastro furniture is not indigenous to the area; most of it comes from northern Spain and is being despatched here in great quantity. One



Figure 13 A rastro cabinet (purchased in a Betel shop for 35 euro) and a bureau. Not restored but functional.

²⁵ Basurera=scarp heap, tip, dump.

can get it for reasonable price in Betel in Motril or Granada, or in other rastro shops. Our westerners prefer shopping in Betel, a charitable organization shops with branches all over Spain, which sell furniture and other odds and ends. The charity employs, among others, former drug takers who collect and repair the furniture and thus, they get a better chance to get back to normal life. No wonder the Freedom Seekers did not forget to provide me with this information when mentioning Betel. They are well informed about the profiles of companies they get things from. It is also the only place in the 200 km distance where old clothes are accepted as donations. And the foreigners hate throwing things, so they welcome any opportunity to get rid of any stuff they do not use.

I was told that rastro furniture was not expensive, but the actual prices were more than surprising (Of course, I could not but buy one piece). One would not get cheaper furniture from IKEA. It ranges from €10 for a night table or a chair, to € 50 for a massive dinning table or a cupboard. The furniture has a unite style²⁶; one need not spend much time looking for matching pieces. A hotel or a restaurant (like the tourist complex Moryama), can be furnished in one style without much work and high expenses. The result is dazzling. It entails dignity, austerity, and mark of time which tourists from abroad can appreciate. It could be restored for the purposes of hotels and restaurants; in the households of the foreigners it usually stays as it is. It is not a collectable antiquity but functional and durable furniture, considering the time without any maintenance in abandoned houses.



Figure 14. Bungalows of the Moryama tourist complex in the new Alpujarran style.

²⁶ I tried to trace back the origin of the furniture, but neither the foreigners nor the Spanish were able to say when and where it was fabricated.

On my visit in Jaén, another provincial city of Andalusia, I spotted a rastro shop with purely new furniture: table, chairs, stands, shelves, and chests. Everything was made of light wood with an offer of variety of varnishes to apply. Thus, originally meaning “restored”, the label “rastro” became a term describing a certain style, very closed to the “rustic” style. When speaking with the owners of Moryama complex I found that many pieces are not restored pieces, but stylized imitations of the old furniture. Especially in the case of doors, window frames, and shutters the imitations were more frequent than the restored furniture. The outdoor parts are more liable to wind and sun; repairing them requires more effort than making “authentic” copies. There are specialized carpentries in Trevez and Berchules; the style is sometimes influenced by Moorish design, another style characteristic for the whole province of Granada.

It is Moorish!

La Alpujarra is grateful to the Moorish presence for many things: Moors developed the system of “acequias”- the irrigation channels, “bancales” – the terraces for horticulture, or the local architecture (terrace houses with flat roofs and small windows withholding

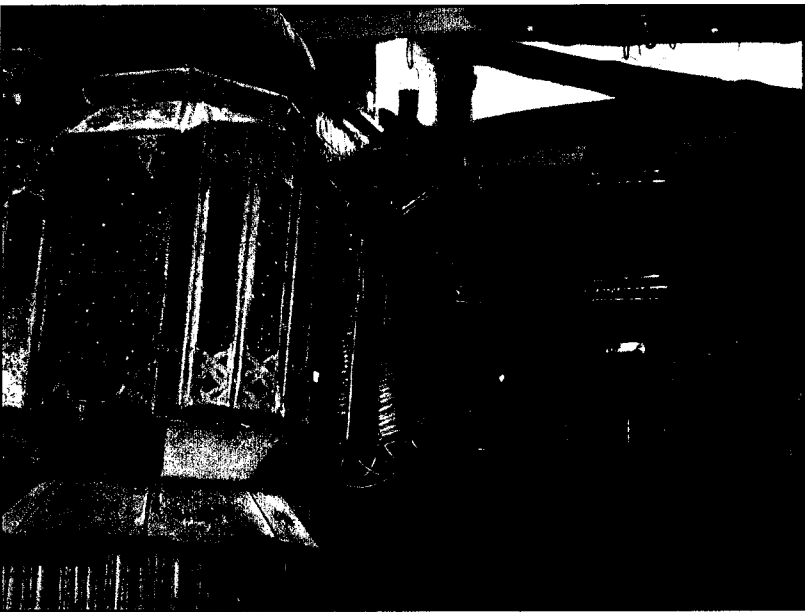


Figure 15. Moorish lamps and chandeliers are favourite souvenirs of both Spanish and international tourists.

from excessive heat and cold entering inside). La Alpujarra can offer beautiful nature with huge a variety of flora, but it would not be considered the cultural heritage reservation without the snow white “Mediterranean style” villages. Design on tiles, lamps and chandeliers, glass, carpets, most

souvenirs for tourists are Moorish. Thus, the “Moriscos”, five centuries after being expelled from the region, still serve to the Spanish as a source of income. I could feel that the Freedom Seekers strongly sympathized with the expelled nation that was able to prosper in the harsh conditions of the hilly region. Also the religion plays role; the times of Moorish presence is perceived as a period of overall tolerance whereas the period of the catholic kingdom is seen as a violent dictatorship. I could observe the enchantment by the Moorish design in three households: in the house of Jane and Peter, an older couple living in Trevez, and in houses of young couples in Capileira. Hana (Czech) and Jeremy (French) were the strongest advocates of Moors: they visited Morocco and praised a lot their skills and sedulity. Living in La Alpujarra was a kind of compromise for them; they would move to Northern Africa if it was not too much Islamic. They brought many things from Morocco: a cork seat, bellows, tea glasses, carpets, beads, a mirror, etc. For them, Moorish was a mark of good quality for reasonable price, and conversely, Spanish was a synonym for a bad quality fake.

Lucile and Bibi, a French couple working on refuges in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, were not especially interested in design or history. However, things they bought in the area, mostly decorations like table lamps or textile, were Moorish. Jane and Peter from Trevez were not experts on history either. They liked the design of things of daily use: lamps, glasses, and small furniture. In the entrance hall, they had a reproduction of a well known picture in the area: The Abdication of the King Boabdil to Isabel, the Catholic. They liked it much, but referred to it as to “that known picture of some kings”. Both the older couple from Trevez and the young people from Capileira, were without children. They did not come neither for economic nor for environmental reasons; La Alpujarra spoke to them similarly as it speaks to tourists: through its natural beauty, original design, and the rich history.

Adapting the Living Space

When Peter in Jane bought the house in Trevez they immediately started to adapt the place. While sitting in a spacious multiuse room Peter was explaining me the former plan of the house. There were many small rooms when they moved in. The first thing they did

was that they broke down all the walls and kept just necessary pillars in the middle. Now there is a kitchen corner, a dinning room, and a living room in one. The spacious room is light and very comfortable with a lovely view on the village and into the valley, and with a direct entrance on the terrace.

Peter and Abby from Juviles did not buy the house, they were renting it. They did not break any walls. However, they also made the house lighter: they opened windows to the street. Open windows are not usual in Spain; shutters or window-blinds keep the house cold in summer and people hidden behind them. Peter and Abby let the sun come in and did not mind they could be observed from the street when having lunch. They also went through the whole house and made every room working; they cleaned the rooms and gave a name to each of them. Cleaning all the rooms was not necessary: thirteen rooms for just two inhabitants are more than enough. But they enjoyed themselves exploring the space and various things hidden inside lumber-rooms which were never used for other purposes

than storing things. “We slept in every room at least once,” said Peter satisfied with their work.

Patric and Anne Marie did not have to break down walls when adapting space on their cortijo “La Pluma”. There were not many. And they neither did bother with putting too



Figure 17. Space at Emma’s cortijo is partly divided by the bookcase. However, it does not go up to the ceiling.

many: the upper floor resulted similarly to the multiuse room of Peter and Jane. There is a kitchen corner and a little pantry, a living room corner, a dinning room in the middle, a bureau corner, and a corner with Patric’s electric guitar combo and amplifiers. Of course, from the room there is a direct access to the terrace.

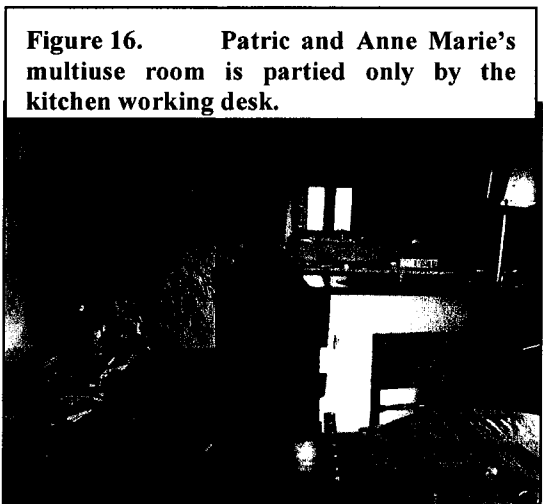


Figure 16. Patric and Anne Marie’s multiuse room is partied only by the kitchen working desk.

Squeezing variety of functions into one room is not a question of necessity; many other rooms are downstairs. I already wrote about time and work; the division of tasks is less remarkable than in the industrial or post-industrial society. Similarly, the space is not strictly divided because the tasks are rather coherent and dependent one on another. Thus, separating different spaces would make a work more complicated. Going through households was very inspirational; rooms were used for different purposes they were originally made for. They are used as necessary at the moment. There is usually not division between working and living space, an open passage on a terrace or into a garden, and working tools change places according to actual working place.

At Emma's cortijo I remarked another characteristic detail of Freedom Seekers' households: there are no wardrobes. This piece of furniture might be seen in rented apartments, but it is rare. Wardrobes are being replaced by stands, shelves, or boxes. Wardrobe is heavy and not easily transportable. And also, wardrobe is not transparent. It does even not look good. Things get lost in wardrobes like socks in a washing machine. A wardrobe itself is a big piece of furniture which needs a lot of space, and even more space when opening. When unwelcome animals look for a dwelling place in a house they will almost certainly find it in a wardrobe.

I spent half a day with Damien, an English renting an apartment in Cadiar, moving a wardrobe around the flat looking for the right place where to put it. I came another day and was curious where this particular piece of furniture ended up. It was nicely dispersed in the apartment; Damien dismounted it and turned it into useful shelves for his home



workshop. First, I was taken aback (the furniture belonged to the landlady) but then I realized he was right; the wardrobe was awful and it served much better like that.

The Czech expression "Skeleton in a wardrobe" refers to a family problem which is necessary to keep secret. Conversely, the

Figure 18. Emma's whole wardrobe. She was proud to show me how little space she need for it.

absence of wardrobes might be saying: there is nothing to hide.

Not only wardrobes are missing, but also a sacred space: a place where people would display things of no practical use, but of high personal importance. I did not find a place or things demonstrating status of a person or a family. Anna, the Belgian whose daughter goes to school in Roquetas del mar on the coast, told me about Spanish nouveau rich of that town. They build huge two floor houses, but they actually live in a garage. A garage is the place where children play, where a family gathers for a meal, where people come to discuss work and business. Two floors upstairs are only for sleeping and showing to distinguished people. There is no move; the dead space is like shopping window or like a petty bourgeois' Sunday room opened once a week, cleaned, and locked again. The phenomenon of showing the surplus can be observed when there are aspirations on a certain status in a society. Nicely decorated rooms of no practical use, obesity in agricultural societies, collectibles of an archaeologist, or expensive dresses to wear once a year are here to say: "I belong to those who can afford it."

There are also things of personal importance in the household of the foreigners, but not displayed on one place. They are dispersed all over the place, sometimes hidden in boxes or drawers. Fiona has a little shrine (she is a Buddhist) in the sleeping room; i.e. it is in her privacy, there are no items around the house that would manifest her confession to visitants as is usual for Catholicism. And conversely, dining and tea services after parents and grandparents are normally used; they are not in the kitchen just to take up space in the cupboard.

When I asked for "important things" I got surprising answers. Fiona considered the most important thing her washing machine, and Emma her car (for which she felt a bit embarrassed).

I insisted on "personally important" things, but it was not any better. Fiona

showed me a bottle for hot water which she put in a bed when it is cold. The importance

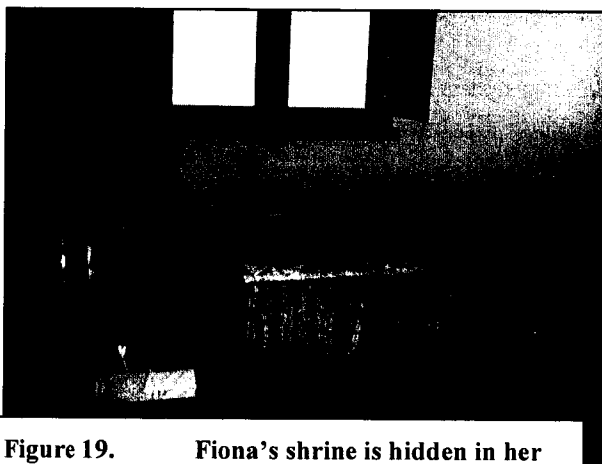


Figure 19. Fiona's shrine is hidden in her room, open to her kids, not to public.

of things still rests in their usability. The spaces and the things of the Freedom Seekers are practical. I dare say there are very low aspirations for statuses in a society. Vivid experience and achieving personal goals are more important. And what is more the personal goals aim into the consumerism opposition, to “do without things”: not to have a car, not to travel, to live with less money, or to be self sufficient.

On Decoration: Everyone Is an Artist Here

At Fiona’s house, I adored much her mosaic table and painted mirrors. We were trying to evaluate the importance of things by playing a simple game “what would you take with you if you had to move again”. She would not take any of her artistic works. She likes decorating but gives just little importance to the result; the process of fabricating is more important.

Anne-Marie is also fond of mosaic; when I visited her in August she was finishing a wall hanger (for keys maybe) by compounding little bronze hangers. The piece was intended for the market of the “Asociación de mujeres” to make some money for the association. Emma decorated her bathroom with

mosaic; in fact, there are only few houses when these popular coloured glass squares would not decorate at least stairs.

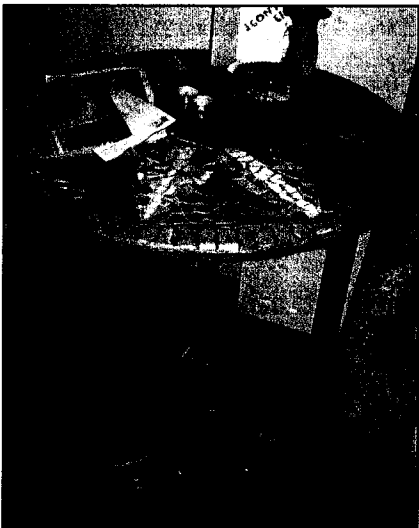


Figure 20. Fiona’s mosaic table would definitely stay in the house if she had to move.

Damian presented to me his “conceptual table” made of an old piece of furniture from the Cadiar tip. He is an expert on remaking things: he uses old chairs to make shelves and wine glass containers to make lamps. He loves plaster casting; his last series of plaster Buddhas was breathtaking. He loves colours and experimenting with materials; he thinks about casting an eatable Buddha (chocolate maybe). When we spoke about his favourite dish he said he preferred the way it was decorated to the taste. Like Fiona, he enjoys most

the process of doing things; the result itself is less important.

At Peter and Abby’s house I found something strange hanging on a wall. It looked like paper headphones. I was explained it was a part of the costume for the village carnival: Abby was the princess from the Star Wars, and Peter the Dark Vader. Not many adults put on masks. Actually, the



Figure 22. Damian’s conceptual table with wax lovers and Buddha, almonds and Chinese balls.

event is for children; Peter and Abby were only two adults who joined the kids. They say they enjoy it much. Elizabeth, a Dutch woman who came to La Alpujarra only for eight months with her two children to “slow down a bit” did not bring many things with her, but she did not forget pastels and colours. Although she does not paint when at home in Holland, she knew her temporal stay here would be very creative. And indeed, her rented house turned very quickly into a small gallery of naïf art. Achim, the German artist from Valle de sensaciones, is an undisputable master of decoration. Everything is decorated; even the dry toilet at the entrance into his valley is an artistic work. Also Niki’s toilet is a lovely room with the collection of dry pumpkins of all



Figure 21. Achim’s dry toilet in the Alpujarran style.

different sizes and shapes.

Creativity of the Freedom Seekers emerges on all levels; it can be building an unusual house, making a mosaic table, a mirror, a carnival mask or just minor details like spraying old glasses silver. No matter where they live; it can be a proper house, yurt, or a caravan. They decorate it.

Burikova, in her work about the strategies of au-pairs shows how non-decoration can reveal refusal to be seen as a part of a foreign family when a young girl works. Burikova also mentions Parrot's study on the position of patients in a medium-secure mental hospital in London. While the authorities encouraged patients to decorate their rooms in hospital, many of those living there refused, insisting on the transitivity of the space²⁷. Conversely, Alpujarran foreigners would decorate a table cloth in a restaurant; no space is transient enough for not to be decorated or adapted. They feel very at home in the world.

Disorder with a vision and without

It was shown there was not visible division between working and living place. I could neither see any division between children's and adults' worlds. If families have children their toys are everywhere. If the Freedom Seekers build a house, they usually work in the same time. Thus, a family with small children live on a site where piles of sand for building are covered with toy dredges and trucks. If the people have a piece of land, they usually have some sheep, goats, hens or horses. Considered there are two adults building, going to work, doing house work, keeping children and breeding animals, they necessarily must renounce on having pressed clothes in piles in the shelves. As a consequence, emerges a little disorder (or a big mass in a view of some). It is a kind of disorder which is necessary if following a vision; a simple vision of having a house and being partly self-sufficient (which is not a small thing at all).

²⁷ Búriková, p.100

Leslie is a woman living up the Rambla [river bed] close to Torvizcon. She is a single mother with three daughters, building a house, having a horse and hens. When I saw her place I was impressed by all the tasks she was managed to do. Horse's stable and its pen, chickens run, the outdoor kitchen and living room seemed much elaborated to me. It occurred to me one day that I was picking up my in-laws in Granada and I was offered by another friend of mine, Fiona who was staying at Leslie's place over night, that she would take care of my older son. I agreed to pick him up the following day at Pitres. But at night, came a strong storm and in the morning the track to Leslie's place was not passable by car. I and my in-laws went walking up the "rambla", jumping over stones and piles of soil on something that used to be a track the day before. My in-laws were horrified when we arrived on the place; they could not believe a woman with children could live there. In their eyes it was an incredible

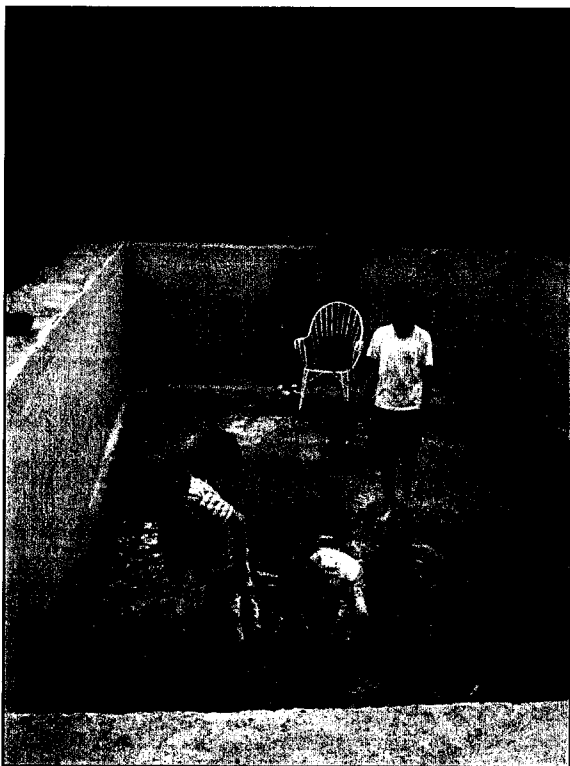


Figure 23. Children playing in an old swimming pool at Leslie's building site.

mass. In my eyes, it was very organized disorder: animals' places were clean without any smelling waste around. Those are the most important things; other tasks are fulfilled when there is a spare time. One has to be well organized to manage this kind of disorder. Leslie proved she was well organized; she finished the house in winter two and a half years after her arrival in Spain with three daughters and virtually no money. Similarly Chiara, who recently gave birth to her second child, did not have much time for the housework. Apart from building a house with her partner, translating and looking after children, she ran a bar in Cadiar where she spent much of her time. I would not say her house was a tidy one, but her sheep and goats had always clean pounds and stables.

On the other hand, I could observe vision-free disorders in single men households. For them, coming to La Alpujarra was a life line accomplishment: no more worries, no more stress, and requirements from mothers and society. One Englishman spoke proudly (and seriously) about his rubbish corner: “Rubbish bins are waste of time (...) I just throw things in the corner and take it out when it’s too much”. The same is with small reparations; instead of fixing a leaking tap they develop elaborated bucket systems or close an inlet pipe. In this case, there is no difference between English or Spanish in La Alpujarra (or there is no difference between all the bachelors in the world). However, single men seem to be very numerous and happy here, enjoying themselves reading, observing people working and moaning.

Playing with Nature



Figure 24. Forty years old cactus brought from Holland.

There is another entertainment for the “happy bachelors” that enables to them to escape from the unbearable life in the major society. Esteban, a Dutch man who came fifteen years ago, is not a proper bachelor. But in fact, he is happier with his cactuses than with his Spanish woman. He can tell a story of every single exemplar; one of his cactuses has more than forty years. Esteban has it after his father. He brought it from Holland, together with some other plants, when his father died. I learned about different colours, shapes and spines of cactuses. Unfortunately I could not enter Esteban’s vegetable garden. He claimed it was in a mass at the time being; I doubt it, his house was surprisingly clean in comparison to other

households. Another thing caught my eye: his collection of old keys. As he was working in construction, he also did the initial clearance of old houses and sometimes kept things he needed or liked. Keys became his passion, especially the Moorish ones. Like Hana and

Jeremy from Capileira, he praises everything Moorish: their houses, “acequias”, and their agricultural knowledge in general. Esteban despise foreigners, who raise prices of houses and have no idea how to live. He speaks with disregard about the Spanish who were not able to learn what the democracy is since the end of the Franco’s regime. He moans about hard life in La Alpujarra without any social security. His cactuses and keys are nice manifestations of escape mechanisms towards nature and history. Living in a distance from the village centre and leaving the house just when necessary is a sensible way how

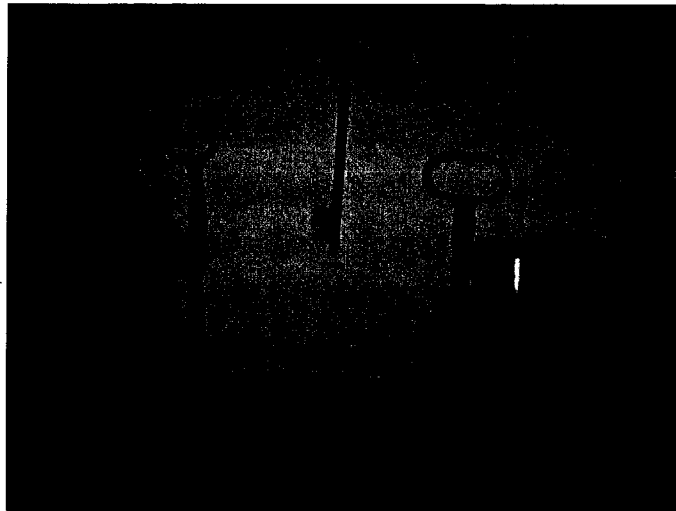


Figure 25. New exemplars in the collection: two Moorish keys from the last construction.

to manage one’s misanthropy. José and Carlos, Spaniards from the North of Spain, run a

bar and a hostel in Castaras and thus they do live a social life. But they, too, praise the past and despise the contemporary “crazy” life. Despite being at their late thirties, they spend afternoons playing cards with old men from the village in front of their bar. Carlos is a graduated forestall engineer; here he writes about indigenous plants²⁸ and organizes walks following forgotten paths of the Alpujarran people. In co-operation with Ediciones Raros, Carlos and José have written, collected and edited a series of books about places of local interest. They have been organizing common walks on these places when a book appeared. Now they seem to be sad: times change and the forgotten paths become official tourist tours.

Developing closer relationship to nature does not concern solely single men looking for tranquillity. The variety of species also invites many specialists on flora. But one need not be a studied botanist; everybody quickly learns about plants of La Alpujarra. Even those foreigners who do not speak good Spanish can name some local plants. No wonder, many trees bear eatable fruits and you can get them for free: the most popular are

²⁸ See. Carlos Gil Paloma: *Sobre las plantas silvestres de Cástaras*

almonds, chestnuts, figs, and mulberries. There is great variety of spices in the nature, e.g. oregano, thyme or a bay leaf; also wild tobacco cold “churasca” is being picked up and smoked both by the locals and the foreigners. Indigenous people have really deep knowledge concerning plants, but their interest is more or less exploitive.



Figure 26. Thyme roots growing into interesting shapes are favourite “collectibles”.

Walking in the nature for its own sake is a popular discipline of the Freedom Seekers; apart from shepherds, indigenous people scarcely sort out of the village. I organized some outdoor games and a treasure hunt for my son and his Spanish schoolmates; for them, it was for the first time they were on a place ten minutes walking from the village. The foreigners love hiking, and they often know their surrounding better than the locals. They observe plants and

trees; they look for the hidden history of places expecting every ruin. And, of course, the sometimes find things, and bring them home. In pine forests, the direction to the mountains of Sierra Nevada, are giant cones, a common decoration of the households of the foreigners. Fireplaces are covered by collections of stones and roots of different shapes. We can often see a glass crystal suspended close to a window. I wondered if it had some function; its only function is to bring the light spectrum into a house. Mulberry trees present a unique opportunity to observe the life cycle the silk-worm. “Gusanos” – the silk worms are very picky; they eat only those juicy mulberry leaves collected by children curious to see the worms growing. There is no disgust with insect and other little animals; I was also shown alive “scalopendre”, a dangerous millipede found on Jeremy and Hana’s terrace. They were amazed how hungry the scalopendre was: it ate three butterflies a night. Anne Marie showed to me a scorpion she found in her shoes and told me the last year story when her partner Patric was bitten by one. I was warned not to put on shoes unless I checked first what was inside.

Women like growing their own vegetable; even it is not very profitable. “It is just too much work,” said Fiona, “and then come greenflies or a storm and everything goes.” But she still grows tomatoes, though it is easier (and maybe cheaper to buy them in a shop). She likes to be sure her vegetable is a hundred percent organic. Anne Marie and another French woman, José, they

grow vegetable and spices to enrich the variety: their “rucola”, a kind of green lettuce, is delicious in salads or on pizzas. And it is not available in shops: you have to grow it. Emma loves “infusiones” [herbal tea], thus herbs would prevail in her garden. But not everything has to be useful: she creates the “conceptual garden” where spinach plants share the bed with ornamental flowers and the whole picture is completed by old vases and pots found in the garden. Carlos is more interested in curative plants and Alpujarran eco-systems; I was regularly given camomile and various herbs conserved in olive oil by him.

We could try shearing corn at Miguel and Margarita’s field; it was for the first time I sheared and sheaved. If the Freedom Seekers live in apartments, there are at least herbs in

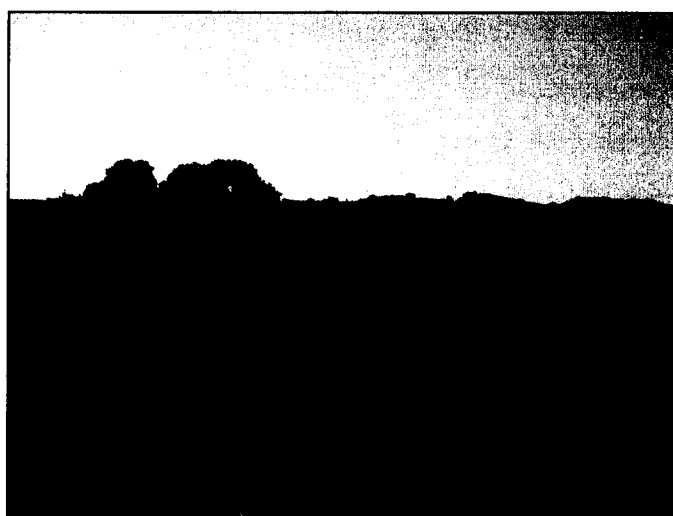


Figure 28. Harvesting must be done in the late afternoon. The crop is dry and sun does not shy strong.

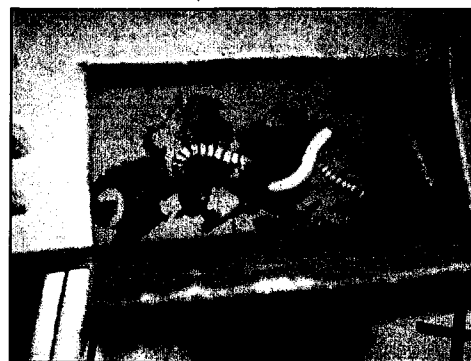


Figure 27. “Gusanos” in a box

pots (and marihuana at English households) on a terrace or a balcony. I mentioned couples and families that try to be partly or fully self sufficient; they are here, but majority of people do not aspire so high. Having a garden is a pleasure; seeing things growing, working with soil, and living in accordance with the natural seasons of the year. Foreigners do not differ from locals in this

aspect: Spanish have vegetable gardens and orchards, too. When there is the harvest time they are not able to eat or work up all they have produced. Then it is given away to neighbours and relatives from towns but, the following year, despite problems with lack of water, they grow fruit and vegetable in the same quantity again. The foreigners never refuse those gifts; immediately and enthusiastically, they go and consult old cook books and preserve it for the winter.

Cakes and pickles

One lovely December morning we woke up in a pension Posada Maria in Castaras. The barman Carlos was preparing breakfast outside: coffee with milk, toasts, butter, and jars of marmalade. There was a bitter orange marmalade from Anne-Marie, lemon-courgette from Caroline and Martin, and some other jars without labels – definitely not from a shop.

At Jamanidels, you could buy Toni's home made marmalades, chutneys, and pickles. Although the price was two or three times higher than for industrial products, the jars disappeared quickly. Forgotten skills of grandmothers come into light again. Working up local fruit also helps in the process of socialisation with indigenous people. Newcomers investigate "mayores" about harvesting and about local recipes. The truth is the shared passion for the horticulture breaks ice between the old villagers and the young newcomers. Whereas the Central Europeans would judge people according to their attitude to domestic animals, the Andalusian people would judge them according to their attitude to land. Villagers are always happy to counsel, but not all their advices could be followed; every one has his own theory how to do it best. However, discussing agriculture disputes in bars are the best way to assimilation.

Conclusion:

Adaptation/Integration/Assimilation

Foreigners adapt quickly in the region. Basic administration is not difficult to do; the foreign police department in Motril is a place with shortest queue in the town and certificates of residential registration are being done within two weeks. Children are admitted to schools immediately. In fact, the foreigners fill in a demographical gap and, especially families with little children are welcomed. Some town halls are so desperate for children that they offer a flat for free or a minimal rent. Getting work may present bigger problem, but men can always find work in construction. There is also high demand on seasonal workers in agriculture. Language can be picked up in one year if people work or are in contact with locals. To sum up, an adaptation on warmer weather, slower working pace, and lower prices is not very difficult for anybody.

My foreigners, the Freedom Seekers, are also integrated. They often work or co-operate with locals. I mentioned that the foreigners are active in local politics, they work in municipal corporations. Cultural gaps and distances are to observe in the case of groups of hippies and rich Northerners on the coast. Also into my village, Juviles, came some groups of hippies about twenty years ago. They were expelled but not because of their origin: villagers did not accept their behaviour; walking naked and sitting around on the streets, stinky and dirty. Living at cortijos might be sometimes perceived suspicious; the physical distance is not seen in a good light. The villagers are very tolerant, but also very curious; they do not like when people live out of their supervision. But the geographical and social distance from centres is voluntary in the case of the Freedom Seekers. This is also why they chose this region: La Alpujarra was for long time hardly accessible place. In history, many persecuted found their hideaway in this hilly region, from Moorish kings chased by catholic kings of Spain to rebels of civil war. In present, the people look for a hideaway from consumerism and insurance agents.

I dare say we can also speak about assimilation. Traditionally, in Spain the main Christmas ritual falls upon Reyes Magos (the three Kings). Pageants go through villages and towns following the three Kings on camels (or something that moves) who throw sweets in the crowd until they get to a square or another public place where they give out presents that people brought in advance for their children, familiars or friends. The Kings and their crew, of course, are people from the community in masks. In my village, I met Abby and asked her where her husband was. She pointed at the black King on a trailer. Peter was apparently enjoying himself, speaking in low heavy voice, throwing sweets and other presents from the allegoric vehicle. At school, where the presents were distributed, I was even more surprised. My children got, like other children from the village, presents from the town hall. We've been living in the village only seven months by the time.

Mixed marriages and partnerships become a common thing; there were three mixed pairs among my informants and choosing them was not intentional. The "adopted" members of the new Spanish families did not complained to be excluded. On the contrary, they are immediately incorporated in the Spanish family name system. My Spanish landlord spoke about his "prima inglesa" – the English cousin. Later I learned the girl was going out with my landlord's cousin for four years, but they were neither married nor planning it. Alpujarran Spanish are extremely tolerant; assimilation in the community is not difficult when the foreigners will to assimilate. Locals do not make difference between countries of origin, they do not refuse mixing neither with English nor with Rumanians. Only Moors are not very popular, but the xenophobia towards them is not irrational; apart from the historical and political background (the fear), there are things like drugs and religious intolerance they bring in the country. The tolerance I write about is not solely local phenomenon; in the EU, Spain is known (and persecuted) for its extremely liberal politics towards immigrants. Spain was among the first countries that open the labour market to the new members of the EU. They do not strictly persecute immigrants from Senegal and other African countries. The truth is foreigners help to raise GDP of Spain, but the tolerance is not only utilitarian. When ships with exhausted Africans land by the cost, the first aid usually comes from the inhabitants of maritime towns, not from official organizations. The only reason for their care is humanity.

In villages of La Alpujarra, the Spanish newcomers are accepted under the same conditions as the “guiris” – the foreigners from abroad (if they behave, work and celebrate). “When in Rome do as Romans do,” is often used by English who aspire on being assimilated in the Spanish community. Let us see now, how the Spanish do.

Mañana, Siestas, and Fiestas

Time is an important item on the list “why to leave home”. People from cities want to have more time for themselves and their families, and generally, to slow down. What surprises the newcomers is the fact that everybody works slower. Spanish “mañana” - tomorrow is proverbial. Another frequent expression is “la prisa mata” – speeding kills. Builders or service men hardly ever come on the day previewed. The same applies on offices; fixed schedule is often interrupted by national holidays or other special days off. And of course, all shops, banks and offices are closed during siesta (even some bars and petrol station do close). Although swapping to slower living pace was planned, the Spanish (or Andalusian) perception of time could be a cultural shock for foreigners used to get everything immediately. The first year is being claimed the worst; one has to arrange most things and nothing works! At the first sight, Spanish might seem doing nothing. But the villages with lovely houses and gardens speak opposite. The explanation is easy. Time is organized differently, in accordance to weather and seasonal works. A plumber and a tractor driver also have gardens and grow vegetables; this work is decisive, other tasks can wait.

Southern Spain, especially in summer, reminds of medieval town, where carnivals and fests formed a third of a year. All age groups and social classes celebrate; babies in prams are in the streets until early morning hours, so are the seniors. A local fiesta is the subject of the highest importance and all other tasks are inferior to it. Fiestas ensure the continuity of the community; during that time come all relatives who live in towns at present, and may come back in future. Those people are very important for the community; they repair houses, bring children, and money. Fiestas are also important for local economy: people do spend, but also earn. Money move and villages do not stagnate. The foreigners who understood these rules of Spanish rural setting do not have problems

with integrating and further assimilating. Some people leave claiming that nothing works here. Some leave because they are not able to make the living. These people were not able to understand the principles of this particular society and went to look for other places that suit better to their nature.

We Might Move again

One would suggest that the foreigners who built a house, were able to make the living, and successfully assimilated in the community decided to root for good. But the Alpujarran foreigners do not claim they are decided to stay forever. Chiara, the Italian informant with two small children, building a house and farming on her land, told me: "Who knows, we might move again". But their house is not a provisional dwelling. Conversely, compared to Spanish houses it is being built with perfection and regard to the future. Similarly, Achim surprised me when he referred to his Valle de sensaciones as to musical instruments he used to make: "When I make one [the instrument], I look for a person who would be able to play on it. If I want to move I would look for a person who would take care of the valley. I don't care moving again".

Some people moved during my research: I did not find the young French couple Lucile and Bibi and the Czech-French couple Hana and Jeremy from Capileira. Both couples were under thirty: in the age when many of my older informants were travelling and looking for their place in different corners of the world. Patric and Anne Marie were travelling in a wooden gipsy caravan through France for two years, and then lived on a little island by the Atlantic coast fishing and keeping animals. Chiara and Andy lived on Mallorca, Richard and Hana spend two years in South America, other English have experience with living in different Spanish cities. Another French couple, José and François, live half a year in La Alpujarra and a half a year in the Dominican Republic. All my Freedom Seekers have a good moving know-how.

I long thought about posters I found in both houses of the couples that left. The posters were reproductions of Mucha's pictures of women. The Mucha's period represents the spirit of free France that would coincide with the free spirit of the Alpujarran Freedom

Seekers. Also, a poster is a sign of temporality, of transition. Posters decorate walls in a college or in a hospital. Walls in rooms of adolescents are decorated by posters: their idols change quickly and posters can be easily replaced. Putting a poster on a cupboard in the kitchen was a kind of a message: “we might move again”.

Nevertheless, once on a place there is little need to travel. Miguel praises vacations on his own cortijo. He and his Dutch wife Margaret chill out in their own house after a hectic summer of visits from abroad, fiestas, and harvest. Esteban and his woman go every winter down the coast. They enjoy the seaside when there are no people. Emma and José have garden and horses; it is almost impossible to go somewhere together. From time to time they go separately for a weekend, but they prefer staying close to the house. Emma has gone to India now for a month and half to follow an intensive course of yoga. As a yoga teacher she felt the necessity for further education for a long time. She pondered a half year course in Granada, but driving twice a week more than two hundred kilometres did not corresponded to Emma’s vision of calm yoga exercises. Damian hardly ever leaves Cadiar. He only goes to towns when looking for new materials for his casting. And when he goes, he prefers going on bus. Foreigners usually need to go “home” from time to time; these visits of families and friends are enough to satisfy the travelling moods. My foreigners prefer moving to travelling: temporal stays are too short to discover the beauty of a place.

Living in Paradise?

Jehovah’s Witnesses entice potential new followers with coloured magazines with lovely smiling people in paradise on the front page. We can see happy families playing with animals, white people and Negroes next to each other having wonderful time together, and bright green meadows... These pictures make many people sick. It occurred to me one day when sitting on the terrace looking at the hills of Contraviesa observing the sunset that La Alpujarra could remind us of these magazines. When jogging in the morning I waved at Ema who was happily gardening in her lovely garden hat. I got home refreshed and got on working. A telephone rang: Anne Marie announced to me that we

were invited for lunch to Mecilla. At two I got in the car and went down to Nieves and further down the track to François and José's place. They have built an outside oven recently and that day they were making their first home made pizza there. We spent few hours eating and chatting on the terrace of their lovely cortijo. After the meal men helped to François to unload some building material for a new stable, we said good bye to each and went home to enjoy the rest of "siesta". It was not too hot that evening, and we went to the playground to train a basketball. We were not lucky; the playground was busy. Three little boys and three big boys were playing football. It would not be anything unusual if the three big ones were not black Senegalese, summer labour coming regularly for strawberries and tomatoes. People of different ages, different nationalities, and different religions can live and work happily together in a small village, virtually in the middle of nowhere; Jehovah's Witnesses would turn yellow with envy.

According to Librova (and authors cited by her²⁹) living in La Alpujarra would be considered a luxury, the luxury of Enzensberger's definition with time, attention, space, tranquillity, nature, and safety. The lifestyle of foreigners is close to "ecological luxury" which voluntary aims to lessen an ecological trace³⁰, entails self-restraint, and relates to non-material, cultural values. Ecological luxury denotes rather elements or segments of behaviour than the whole lifestyle.³¹ The foreigners reject wasting and are able to pay three times more for ecological tomatoes or home made marmalade. They avoid travelling on long distances and share cars when going shopping. In opposition to the ecological luxury, Librova puts a "predatory luxury" which also strains after luxury like time, space, and safety, but instead of lessening the ecological trace, it strives for getting as much as possible for any price. We can also find examples of those "luxury predators" here: I mentioned the British MP who did not hesitate to bulldoze the access to her neighbours' dwellings in order to enclose herself in the weekend residence.

The Freedom Seekers resign on consumerism. They are not anti-materialists; they build houses and are not able to do without things. They are modern, (self) educated, and use

²⁹ Librova (2003) Chapter I. Modesty and Luxury ps.25-65

³⁰ Librova (2003) Any product of human activity leaves an ecological trace: material, energy, transport and liquidation or realisation of a service.

³¹ Librova (2003) p.61

modern technologies. They escape out of the major society, but not to an extreme solitude. They enjoy life in a community, in this particular Andalusian rural community with its perception of work and free time. The Freedom Seekers are modest: they know they are not able to change the world, but they do not give up trying to live without feeling guilty for destroying the planet for the future generations and for the nature itself. They are modest but not humble; they have problems with false authorities. They could get as far as to La Alpujarra just thanks to their disobedience. They were able to make the decision to take the step back and abandon their regular jobs in the civilisation. They are able to doubt about what is said or written. They are explorers and bricoleurs. The Freedom Seekers are able to move again without being sentimental. The ability to change a place, an occupation, or a lifestyle bespeak about a high level of understanding of the temporal nature of life. Philosophically speaking, there comes a modest man without fears of Gods.

“Going to the Futureval” is an essay of Petr Milén, where he thinks possible ways of development of the civilisation. In general, he is not very optimistic. However, he sees, that living in the post-industrial age of globalizations offers to people possibilities to live interesting lives thanks to our knowledge, technique and accumulated wealth if we give precedence to non-merchant values. Thanks to electronic communication people can spread again in the country and extenuate the unequal territorial development, which will enforce the role of community and as a consequence also the confidence among citizens. According to Milén, we should go more for saving than for more consumption, using the modern technologies but with respect to nature. Globalization is not a process we can stop; but instead of increasing uniformity we should work in smaller communities. Like Librova, he sees the chance for the future in changes of individual behaviour patterns. I could observe that the changes are possible and even not extremely painful. Within a year the number of the foreigners in my village arose again; new Freedom Seekers came to try if they will succeed in the quest for a better life.

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