

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 3, Episode 6

Simon: Urghhh

Melissa: Yeah! Woo!

Simon: Urgh, bit of energy

Melissa: Hey!! *laughter*

Simon: Hello everyone!! Melissa, now with added pop *laughter*

Anyway, enough of that, are you ready? *laughter*

Intro music

Simon: Hello everyone! My name is Simon Hunter, I'm the editor of the English Edition of EL PAÍS, and this is ¿Qué? A podcast from El País that aims to put a ferret up the trouser leg of the Spanish news.

Whether you're having a clara, a cava or a kalimotxo, tenemos la copa para ti.

So sit back, relax, and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say,

[Sound bite] "¡Que España es una gran nación y los españoles muy españoles y mucho españoles! Muchas gracias."

Simon: Nice to hear from our old friend Mariano Rajoy there. He put out a very cryptic tweet this morning which was just a picture of his bearded face saying that, very soon he will be giving his "personal vision of some decisive years in the history of Spain." So, basically he's got a book coming out which I'm sure you'll be rushing down to purchase Melissa.

Today is October 30, 2019 and I am here as ever with my...I haven't got a new adjective this week.... my treasured...what have I said? Oh I said 'treasured' last week, my beloved, my... *laughter*

Simon: I need to think of a word

Melissa: Favourite

Simon: What are you? What are you today?

Melissa: I'm....

Simon: No I can't say favourite

Melissa: No...

Simon: ...Alright, alright

Simon: Today is October 30, 2019 and I am here as ever with my favourite Australian colleague Melissa Kitson. Hello Melissa!

Melissa: Hello Simon!

Simon: How are you?

Melissa: Good, good! I'm happy to be here, excited about the podcast *laughter*

Simon: Any news?

Melissa: I went to the circus

Simon: Really? And how was it?

Melissa: It was good! It was amazing, I love the circus

Simon: Yes?

Melissa: When there's no animals of course

Simon: Oh fantastic, yeah well have to have an animal friendly circus, good choice!

So, tomorrow is Brexit day, oh no hang on...no, tomorrow isn't Brexit day! Now we may have some ads automatically playing in our podcast this week so look out for those...

Advert:

Simon: “Get ready for Brexit. The UK is leaving the European Union on October 31, so you’ll need to...”

José: Oye Simon, que no, que al final no es, Simon

Simon: What? What?

José: No, no, que no vais, que ahora ya, al final todavía no

Simon: Oh for f***s sake

“The UK is not yet leaving the European Union but at least we’re not having a general election...”

José: Err Simon, de hecho sí, hay una nueva elección

Simon: What?

José: Una nueva elección

Simon: F***ks sake!

“The UK is still in a holding pattern, please wake me up when it’s all over.”

Music interlude

Simon: Alright, so we’ve got a bit of correspondence this week. As always, we encourage you to get in touch, you can find me on twitter @simoninmadrid you can also use the #quepodcast.

Please can you...let’s start using that hashtag people! We haven’t had any use of the hashtag recently, apart from us when we’re sharing the podcast. Or you can email EnglishEdition@elpais.es

Tell us where you're listening from, why you're listening and suggest topics for us. And leave us a review on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. Share this episode on social media! Get the word out, please! Let’s see if we can find some new listeners who might be interested in our weekly droolings.

So, I heard from 'Elcaballer', that's a twitter name I certainly recognize.

He says: "Simón, Good Episode. You left out Miguel Primo de Rivera buried at the San Isidro Cemetery in your "Dead Dictators in Madrid Tour". The father of Jose Antonio, Franco's most prized Falangist relique. Just a thought Un abrazo, Brian"

It's true! So, there's another...we went through the dictators buried in Madrid, apart from Franco and, yeah that's one that we missed.

Then I heard from Kate Bishop. "Hello Simon,

Having now moved back to the UK after living in Madrid for 4 years I have been listening to the podcast to make me feel like I am still in the loop, so thank you.

I have a couple of queries:

1) What has happened to the English section on the El Pais phone app? It seems to have just disappeared? What a shame if this is no longer a feature."

Now, we just published a story about this yesterday so you can go and check it out on our website, but we are still on there. We used to be on the far...I was going to say 'we used to be on the far-right,' no that's for Vox *laughter* We used to be on the extreme right *laughter* of the top tabs in the Spanish version.

But now what you need to do is tap on the little menu icon, and then tap on the cog for settings, and then you'll see it says 'edición' and if you tap on 'edición' you can see the five different editions: Spain, America, Brazil, Catalonia and down at the bottom 'In English.'

So we are still there, just a bit fiddly now to switch between. We have had a few complaints from readers about that so sorry if it's a bit more difficult to use, but once you're there it's actually pretty cool. You can actually download all the stories from our front page for offline reading. Perfect if you're about to get onto a plane.

Then she says, "2) Something that has been bugging me for a while, with regards to the homeless people in the Paseo del Prado how did they manage to have the same tents? Were these bought for them? Perhaps I didn't fully understand the details of their reasons for being there but I was always unsure about whether giving them donations was fuelling something greater going on. Perhaps this could be covered in a future episode."

Well no, let's cover it right now! It was interesting, for about 100 days a group of people were kind of holding a demonstration in front of the Health Ministry which is on the Paseo del Prado in central Madrid, where the Prado museum is.

Basically they were camping out to draw attention to the homelessness situation in Madrid. Apparently, according to statistics from the Samur Social service - Samur is one of the ambulance services in Madrid - there are nearly 3,000 people living in Madrid homeless, according to their last report from 2018.

So, yeah it was a strange demonstration in that, as you say, all of the people had the same tent. They must have gone and bought tents specifically for this purpose, I'm not sure why they all had the same one, maybe it was just the cheapest one on offer.

But also, the council claimed that only 12 of the 80 people that camped out there were really homeless. But, then the organizers came back and said, "the fact that the organizers said this just shows that they're completely uninterested in our problems."

So yeah, it was a strange process, it's gone now, it was actually removed by the council so yeah, perhaps not the most sympathetic approach to that.

Melissa: No!

Simon: Then we heard back from John Tkac - T, K, A, C - John, I wish you'd let me know if I'd pronounced your name right the first way round.

He says, "Queridos Simon y Melissa,

As always, phenomenal podcast." Thank you very much John.

"I thank you for the mention in the correspondence section from a few weeks back. In fact, I was so taken aback that I accidentally woke my wife up while we were driving to a Vetusta Morla concert in Washington (What a show!). You should interview them about the rise of the indie music scene in Spain."

I'd love to know, John, how you woke up your wife *laughter* did you just hear your name and go, "Aahh!" and she kind of jumped out of her seat?!

He said, "It saddens me to think that you will have to cover the same issues, yet again, in the upcoming podcast." Or will we....

“Since I am sure that you will discuss the performative theater that was the exhumation of Franco, I have found it ironic that his descendants complain that his body is being moved against their will while overlooking the thousands of people buried in the Valle who were moved there from other graveyards by the Franco regime, many times without the consent of their families, in an effort to increase the numbers of those buried there.”

He also says, I love this, “I also echo the mythical Chris Thompson’s previous suggestion about moving deeper into the headlines,”

Now I love the use of ‘mythical’ there. I think it’s a false friend, like ‘mítico’ is what you say in Spanish when what you really mean is ‘legendary,’ not mythical. Because ‘mythical’ makes Chris Thompson sound like some sort of...

Melissa: Fairy

Simon: Some sort of ancient Greek monster *laughter*

Sorry Chris, you’re not a monster! An ancient Greek, I don’t know, something ancient Greek, the mythical Chris Thompson..

But anyway, he says, “delve deeper into the headlines as opposed to summing up a few topics from the week’s news.”

Alright so yeah, we’ve had this request from a few of you now, a few of our readers. From John, from the mythical sea monster Chris Thompson and from Carl Painter, our friend on the London Underground who, last week, he mentioned the stolen babies case.

Never say that we don’t listen to our listeners’ requests! We have indeed, we’re not going to talk about Franco this week. I promised you two weeks ago a Catalan-free week, which then we went back on because there was so much stuff going on last week.

But, yeah we’ve picked two topics not in the news, but have been requested by our readers, starting with the stolen babies. So, Melissa, tell us all about this story please.

Melissa: Eduardo Vela, the doctor in Spain’s first “stolen baby” case, died last week at the age of 86.

During the Franco dictatorship, thousands of children were taken from their mothers by a network of nuns and doctors, and handed over to wealthy parents who were unable to conceive. The mothers were normally vulnerable women known to have supported the Republican cause and were often in prison.

The hospital would tell the family that the newborn had died, and then deliver the baby to the new parents, who would be registered on the birth certificate as the biological parents.

It recently emerged that this scheme could have been operating until 1990, well after the death of Franco in 1975 and the return of democracy in the late 1970s. According to victim associations, as many as 300,000 children could have been stolen.

Inés Madrigal is the first confirmed “stolen baby.” When she turned 18, the person Madrigal thought of as her mother told her the truth.

Inés Pérez said that although she was named as her birth mother on her birth certificate, she was not her biological mum.

Madrigal was born in 1969 in Madrid’s San Ramón clinic, but was given as a “gift” to Inés Pérez, who had been unable to conceive. Pérez said she was told the baby was the product of an extramarital affair and that the mother did not want her.

The person responsible for handing Madrigal over to her new family was Dr Vela. Instead of going through the proper legal channels for adoption, the doctor signed a “bogus” birth certificate that said that Pérez was the biological mother.

Madrigal filed a complaint against Dr Vela and became the first “stolen baby” to take her case to court. During last year’s trial, Vela claimed not to remember anything about what had happened.

But in a historic ruling Madrid’s High Court, found the doctor to be responsible for child abduction, faking a birth, and falsifying childbirth records and other official documents. The court however ruled that the statute of limitations had expired and the 85-year-old doctor was spared a possible 11-year prison sentence.

Madrigal, meanwhile, has connected with her biological family. Just this year, thanks to a DNA database in the United States, Madrigal met her siblings, who had also been looking for her.

But while Madrigal's case has a happy ending, thousands of Spaniards continue to search for their real families. Some are mothers who believe their children did not die in childbirth but were instead stolen, others are children who think they were gifted to their parents. Then there are siblings like Madrigal's who are also hoping to connect with their stolen family members.

Simon: Yeah so, really fascinating story and this has been going for a long time now. I seem to remember this kind of first broke around 2010/2011, as far back as then. And the Doctor Vela actually tried to have the sentence overturned, even though obviously it meant no kind of punishment for him, he was determined to try and clear his name despite the fact that, as you said Melissa, the offences had prescribed.

Looking back at this story I was reminded of back in 2011 Katya Adler who's the BBC journalist, one of the Brexitcast BBC journalists, she's fantastic, she actually confronted, she went in to talk to Dr Vela slightly under false pretences although she was genuinely put in touch with him because she just had a baby. She went in there with a hidden camera and confronted him about it. I recommend that you go and dig that video out because it's pretty interesting.

Now, you were mentioning about Inés Madrigal who managed to find her family, she went through these DNA banks.

Now, this is really interesting. I find this whole topic really interesting. This is basically these home testing kits where you can send off a saliva sample and they'll do a check, apparently the best ones are in the United States.

She managed to find her family through one of these services from the US because it uses certain, you know more genetic markers. In Spain it wasn't possible.

But actually if you look for news stories about these, there's some incredible stories about these kits and how they're causing unexpected surprises and people finding out that they're not...the children of who they thought were their parents. Or there was one extraordinary case where all these children found out that their father was actually the family doctor! *laughter*

Melissa: Nooo

Simon: Yeah! Or there were cases of doctors using their own sperm in assisted reproduction cases. It's pretty extraordinary.

But yeah, I feel like even though we're so far into this story now, I feel like we're nowhere closer to really knowing exactly what the truth is. There's been certain stories that have come out that confuse the issue, and there's some that seem to back up what was happening.

So, for example, last year, in a little town in Valencia called Venta del Moro, they opened up the grave of a supposed stolen baby which had died 66 years before, back in 1952. And when they opened up the niche where the body was, well where the body of this child was supposed to be, they found the remains of a mummified adult. I mean, you read stories like this and you just think well what on earth has gone on there.

In a story that was published in the Spanish edition of EL PAÍS from March this year, it drew attention to the fact that the Justice Ministry back in 2013, it did create a sort of office to help people who suspected that they might be victims of the alleged stolen baby ring. They've opened 876 files, but as of March this year only 11 cases was it possible to reunite them with their families.

What the government is doing now apparently, or caretaker government I should say, is to create a group of experts in terms of archives to try and help people to get to the paperwork that they need to. Because this is one of the biggest obstacles that families are finding - that they can't get access to the documents that they need.

I don't think the Spanish Catholic church has been particularly helpful in this respect, as it probably not massively surprising. And also, of course there's the fact that either these cases go so far back that records are either not available or never existed in the first place.

Yeah I think we need to wait for some more definitive evidence. Really interesting article published last year by one of our colleagues, Manuel Ansedé, which we did in English, you can find it if you google, "DNA tests cast doubt on Spain's stolen baby network" and what Manuel found was that although victims associations estimate that up to 300,000 children were stolen during the dictatorship of Franco, there's actually very little evidence has been found so far.

Most of the 2,100 legal investigations that have been opened by the public prosecutor since 2010 have been shelved for lack of evidence or because there's no hospital records or living witnesses.

But 522 cases did reach the courts and in 120 of them prosecutors and judges ordered the graves exhumed to see whether they were empty. When bones were found, they were tested by the National Institute of Toxicology and Forensic Science and the DNA tests showed that none of these babies had actually been stolen. Out of 90 newborns who were positively identified, 81 matched with their parents – so that means that 90% of the suspected stolen babies were not stolen.

I think obviously there's a lot more work to be done there. I mean really it might be the case that we'll never get a proper picture of the extent of this, just purely for the lack of evidence and the fact that it all happened so long ago. But in the meantime, I don't know...I was going to say I recommend everyone take one of those DNA tests *laughter* but I don't know!

Alright, so let's head to our second topic. We've got an email here from Steve Crittenden.

“Hi Simon, Melissa, and Veronica,” - Well, hello to José who's our stand-in.

“Long time listener, first time caller. I wonder if the state of research and innovation in Spain, post recession, would be an interesting topic for your podcast.”

So, Melissa, tell us what you've found about this story.

Melissa: Well, there is a lot of debate about the state of research and innovation in science in Spain.

The first big issue is over Spain's National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation, known as ANECA, by its Spanish initials. This is a state body that accredits academics to work or conduct research in Spain. Their aim is to ensure high education standard in Spanish universities.

But professionals who have worked at Cambridge University, who have been granted millions of euros in research grants, and who are some of the most cited researchers in their sector have been denied accreditation by ANECA.

Researchers like Ivana Gasulla, an engineer who developed an ultrafast fibre optic cable and received a €2 million grant from the EU, told EL PAÍS: “A Nobel prize winner could not get ANECA accreditation.”

She has received offers to work in universities across Europe but she cannot be a university professor in Spain without the greenlight from ANECA.

Interestingly, this accreditation system does not exist outside of Spain. While ANECA’s aim appears positive, researchers say it focuses too much on how much class time and experience an applicant has, and not enough on the quality of their research.

ANECA critics also say the system stops Spanish universities from being internationally competitive. One of the factors that determines a university’s ranking is its level of internationalization. But critics say that the ANECA system makes it difficult for universities to attract foreign professionals, and many of the academics who do apply are rejected.

Those who support the system, however, say it is an important measure to stop ‘clientelismo’ or ‘favoritism’ in Spanish universities.

Now, the other big issue facing science research in Spain is the lack of funding. Funding for development and innovation research was cut by 9% between 2009 and 2016.

Young researchers and engineers were the hardest hit by the cutbacks to science. Thousands left the country during the financial crisis, while others were left without work as they waited for research centers to complete the long administrative process to formalize their contracts.

But it should also be noted that Spanish scientists have been behind some of the most recent groundbreaking research. This year, a research team led by Juan Carlos Izpisúa, created the first human-monkey chimera in a lab in China, while Spanish researcher Sergio Boixo was part of the team that built Google’s breakthrough quantum computer.

Most Spanish scientists however agree that university reform and more funding are needed to put Spain at the forefront of the science sector..

Simon: You love that monkey chimera story, don’t you?

Melissa: I love that monkey

Simon: *laughter* That was the story that really caught my eye when I came back from my holidays. So yeah, we'll mention it any time we possibly can.

I wanted to mention, because what Steve's talking about, he's not just talking about research and development but also really the salary levels and all that kind of thing. And it brought to mind this article that we ran in 2015 which is headlined: 'Spain – A great place to live, a terrible place to work?' And this was, it's one of our most read stories of all time and every so often it goes viral again, and a lot of what it says I think really does still apply now.

It starts: "Spaniards sleep fewer hours and work longer days than their European neighbors, but are less productive. At the same time Spain fails to attract overseas talent, while tens of thousands of well-educated Spanish youngsters are heading abroad in search of work."

Now, I mean I guess it's almost a cliché to say that Spain is great to live in and tough to work in. But it is kind of true isn't it! It's like all good clichés, there's definitely an element of truth there.

Speaking personally, I mean obviously I'm in a very happy position now but, God, my first full time journalism job I earned under €1,000 a month and you look back on that now and just think, "Oh my God, what was I doing?!" I told a friend of mine that, who worked in London and she just looked at me like I was a complete piece of dirt!

But you just have to weigh it all up. I mean, for me, the quality of life here is just so much better, you can live so much better here for no money, especially if you compare living in the center of Madrid to living in the center of London, for example, I mean it's just no comparison at all.

I've been here for 20 years, and Spain has changed so much in those 20 years and still continues to change and I think that the outside influence, international working practices, more international companies in Madrid, I think that it is changing the work culture.

I also think that the return of young people from abroad, from having moved abroad and lived and worked abroad, is definitely having a big effect. My wife's cousin, she always says that she wouldn't have got the job that she landed in Spain were it not for the fact that she'd worked for a similar company in London, and that was what really caught their attention when she came back to Spain.

There's a lot of criticism of the university system in Spain in general. I mean, people who come here to study from abroad are always just amazed by how the university system seems to be an extension of the school system, where by you're basically learning stuff, learning facts off by heart.

Your lectures, instead of it being a discussion, or a tutorial discussion with your lecturer where you're putting out your own arguments, coming up with your own concepts and critical thinking, instead you've just got to sit there and listen to some old 'windbag' droning on, who loves the sound of his own voice.

But I think things are changing, if we could just sweep away some of the bureaucracy and some of the systems, and you know, a modernization of the university system would do very well. Because it's just Spain shooting itself in its own foot, if examples like the one you gave Melissa, of Ivana Gasulla, if they're having so many problems just getting in to give classes at universities, you just think, "well what on earth is going on in this system?"

Music interlude

Simon: All right, so let's wrap up there, the sixth episode of season three!

My name is Simon Hunter

Melissa: I'm Melissa Kitson

Simon: And?

Melissa: I'm a little kitten *laughter*

Simon: And this was ¿Qué? A podcast that tries to explain what happens in Spain to those of us who sometimes get a little bit lost in translation.

This is an EL PAÍS production, it was recorded right here in Madrid, in the EL PAÍS newsroom under the expert guidance of our stand-in producer José Juan Morales - who takes the Oscar for radio acting of the week!

And you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app. You can also request it via Alexa, Siri or your Google Assistant. We'll be back next week with a brand new host of issues. Thank you for listening, adios!

Melissa: Ciao!