

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 3, Episode 9

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 refreshes the parts that other cervezas can't reach.

Whether your Twitter profile has a Spain flag, a yellow ribbon or a pretty little flamenco emoji, we are here for you, vamos al corazón del asunto.

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

"You mean to tell me that a racist and sexist political party is full of racists and sexists?!"

Today is Wednesday November 26, 2019 and I am here as ever with my partner in crime, Melissa Kitson. How are you Melissa?

Melissa: I'm good, hello!

Simon: What news do you bring us this week?

Melissa: I've started a different story

Simon: Okay!

Melissa: A different children's story, about a stolen recipe book

Simon: Really? And what's the big twist at the end of the story?

Melissa: I can't really...I haven't got to the...hmm yeah I'm not sure yet

Simon: *laughter* okay...

Melissa: But the book is that the recipe has been stolen, that's as far as I've gotten

Simon: Well fantastic, that sounds very exciting.

Well, yep, we're back! You said just before we started we're back after we took a little break last week because we were knackered *laughter* and we were busy. So yeah, it's nice to be back.

I had a very enjoyable twitter storm last week, which I think you were aware of. I made the mistake of being honest and speaking to a reader who was asking whether we were going to publish in English the Amnesty report about the jailed pro-independence leaders. At the time we were very busy, I was off on Wednesday, travelling to the UK, we were short staffed and we can't - we talked about this before, about editorial decisions being out in the open - we can't always do all the news stories that we want to. We sometimes do have priorities. It was a big news week last week, we had the ERE story, we were also working on...

Melissa: Lagarde

Simon: Yeah, there's the story, the exclusive that EL PAÍS had about Christine Lagarde.

So I made the mistake, of *laughter* saying to someone, "yeah I'm sorry, I don't think we're going to have time to do that this week." And all hell broke loose!! It was unbelievable! It was hilarious, a massive pile on. Mostly from people with yellow ribbons or Tsunami symbols on their twitter profiles.

I got a whole load of insults, I got called pathetic, I got called a loser, and it was interesting to see that the automatic assumption was that I was lying, that we were somehow censoring the story, and it was outrageous that we weren't going to publish this story.

Now normally I don't get involved in this kind of thing on twitter but, particularly as I was off on Wednesday and I was travelling, I was sitting around waiting for planes quite a lot of the time so I really got into it, and it was very interesting.

I really, really liked the guy who went through the tweets that I've liked in the past and screenshotted one about that crazy guy, 'El Pequeno Nicolas' (little Nicolas) and the fact that he had got involved in, he was reproaching protesters, pro-Catalan independence protesters, in the Sants train station in Barcelona recently. And then he also screenshotted a joke that I'd liked about Hitler, which had a picture of Hitler in it. And he tweeted these images as if he'd found my secret hidden tweet likes!! And that

this was some sort of evidence that I was some kind of fascist. So yeah, it was quite interesting to see a sort of level, or lack of, debate on twitter about this.

And the hilarious thing was, by Thursday morning we actually had time to run the story, and we're always happy to oblige either our colleagues or our readers, if readers are asking for a story and my God! People wanted to see this Amnesty story on our publication and I was only too happy to oblige. So we did it on Thursday, but the debate continued.

So yeah, quite interesting, quite an eye-opener, I think I'll think very carefully before wading back into it. In fact, I DM'ed the guy who made the original comment, the reader, Mike Eastbook, I think his name is, after it had all sort of died down a bit and I was like, "Mike, I think you owe me a pint." *laughter* And he was very nice, he'd been very nice the whole way along actually and he said "yep absolutely! I'll buy you a pint if you're ever in Barcelona or London."

So that was fun, if you want to go and check that out just do a search on my twitter handle which is @simoninmadrid as you all know I'm sure already regular listeners. So, you can use the #QuePodcast or you can email us at EnglishEdition@elpais.es

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So, we've had some amusing tweets and correspondence in the last couple of weeks since we've done our last episode.

We got a nice message from @MariaLealRuiz in response to a story that we shared...No sorry this was a response to our podcast! I shared the podcast on twitter and she said: "Nadie os lee en inglés. Dejadlo ya." - Which was very nice to hear from you Maria, always nice to hear from a fan.

And one of our top fans, a very amusing chap on twitter called Miguel Ángel Lara, he responded to this tweet and said: "I'm sorry to differ, Maria, but even in stranded places in the middle of nowhere in my beautiful Extremadura I've heard of people gathering together to listen to Simon and Melissa."

Melissa: Aww that's so sweet

Simon: *laughter* Which is a lovely image, I love to hear Miguel that people are huddling together in the chilly mist-filled Extremadura forest, just to hear me and Melissa waffling on.

Melissa: *laughter* Why are they in a forest?!

Simon: *laughter* I don't know!

Then we've got this piece of correspondence from Miguel. It's nice to hear from our Spanish listeners.

He says: "Dear Simon and Melissa,

I've been a fan of the podcast ever since I heard you talk about Segovia and the statue of the devil, which piqued my interest." - That's going back a bit isn't it Melissa?

Melissa: It's ancient history now

Simon: Yeah, I think that was one of our first episodes wasn't it?

[continued correspondence] "Ever since, I've used bits of it in my English classes at the Escuela Oficial de Idiomas, but I admit that I sometimes cut off the Spanish soundbites as I surely have right-wing voters, and I don't want to be accused of proselytism or brainwashing my adult students." *laughter*

He says: "Very close to Cortilandia" - Which we were talking about in the last episode, which is the El Corte Inglés Christmas display - "you have another Spanish oddity at Christmas: Doña Manolita" - Do you know what Doña Manolita is?

Melissa: El gordo lottery!

Simon: Exactly, it's a lottery vendor. And it's one of those hilarious things that people go and buy their tickets there for the Christmas lottery and for El Niño as well, because, they think, it's got this reputation for being more lucky. But of course it's a self-fulfilling prophecy because the more people that buy tickets there the more likely it is that it's going to sell a winning ticket.

So yeah, that is something that's a very Christmassy thing, to see those massive queues outside.

Miguel says: “Keep up the good work!!!!” and he says, “P.S. Melissa, I’m sure you know Borja is a typical pijo name.” - This is the name of your giant, in your other story!

And he gives us a list of other pijo names that you can consider, “Other pijo names can be Piluca, Menchu, Marina, Polo, Guzmán, Pelayo, Cayetano”

[Sound bite: #Cayetano! Cayetano!#]

So there you go!

Melissa: Cayetano!

Simon: For your next story! And another email here from Rachel.

She says: “Hey Guys!

I am a new listener of the ¿Qué? Podcast and I must say that I’m a huge fan!

I’m American but I lived in Madrid for two years doing what pretty much every young American in Madrid does - teaching English!

I love listening to your podcast because I’m a bit tired of hearing about American politics at the moment. Spanish politics are pretty bananas as well, but now that I live in Washington, DC, it feels a little more removed from my day to day life, so I can sit back and enjoy!

As for topics, might I suggest a segment about the rise of VOX as a political party? I’m very curious as to what is going on in Spain which has more and more people turning to a very right wing party.

Un besito!”

Well thank you very much Rachel. Now, Melissa, we’ve talked plenty about Vox in the past, in fact every time we would mention Vox we used to go,

Together: Dun, dun, duuuun! *laughter*

Simon: But we’ve kind of stopped doing that because I guess we’ve been talking about them more and more and it would take up a bit of time if we went, “dun dun duuuun,” still every time we mention Vox.

But yeah, good choice, let's have a little revisit of Vox. So, tell us what’s been going on with the far right party.

Melissa: Well, Vox often makes headlines for its controversial statements on issues like immigration, abortion and gay rights. This week it was in the news over its refusal to recognize the existence of gender violence.

The far-right party has been blocking regional and local governments from issuing institutional declarations against gender violence for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which was observed on Monday.

Vox's position meant that the regional governments of Madrid, Valencia, Castile and León, and Murcia were unable to issue a joint declaration against gender violence. The far-right party also stopped similar measures from being passed in the city halls of Madrid, Córdoba, Seville, and Granada.

In the case of Madrid City Hall, it was the first time in 14 years that the consensus on gender violence had been broken.

Since official records began in 2003, 1,027 women in Spain have been killed by their partners or former partners. But Vox believes "violence does not have a gender," and that the 2004 gender violence law has been a failure – even though the number of victims has fallen since then.

At an event to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Vox's spokesperson in Madrid, Javier Ortega Smith, claimed that more attention needed to be given to violent lesbians who abuse their partners.

[Sound bite Javier Ortega Smith: "Hay hombres que sufren violencia de mujeres y son asesinadas por sus mujeres"]

During his speech, many women walked out of the room, while others yelled out "shame" and booed him. But it was the response of gender violence victim Nadia Otmani that made the news. **[Sound bite of Nadia Otmani]**

Otmani has been in a wheelchair since 1997 when she was shot three times by her brother-in-law while trying to defend her sister.

When Ortega Smith returned to his seat, she confronted the Vox chief on his disrespect for women and warned that Vox "was declaring war on women." But he did not even look at her.

Vox was also targeted at the marches against gender violence on Monday. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets across Spain chanting: "Listen Vox, the victims

have a voice” and “Abascal go back to your pen,” in reference to Vox leader Santiago Abascal. But the criticism has done nothing to shift the far-right party from its position. Meanwhile, another woman was killed by her partner on Monday, taking this year’s death toll to 60.

Simon: And the total I think now, to about 1,028 or something like that

Melissa: 1,028

Simon:...since records began which wasn’t that long ago I don’t think

Melissa: 2003

Simon: 2003. You’re doing your Stato again, I’m so impressed! *laughter* You’ve always got these numbers at your fingertips.

So yeah, this approach to gender violence is just baffling and it was very interesting to see how Ortega Smith - pure Spanish name there obviously for a party that’s so xenophobic - and to see how he was reacting to being...what was the verb that we used? Challenged

Melissa: Barracked or challenged

Simon: *laughter* Yeah, we were talking about the right verb. Graham Keeley used ‘barracked’ which we liked as well, we used ‘harangued’ to start with but we thought that it might not be quite the right term so we went with ‘challenged’ in the end.

And she certainly did challenge him, and quite rightly so. This poor woman who’s in a wheelchair as a result of trying to actually defend her sister from her attacker.

At the moment, I guess, as is common with an emerging party, they are turning up some pretty extraordinary headlines that I guess you could perhaps attribute to teething problems with the formation of a new group. But I guess with a group that’s as controversial as this one, it’s not surprising that so many of these stories are coming up.

And I’ve been talking to people about this and I’ve been talking to colleagues about Vox, you know, in the wake of the elections, in the fact that they won 53 seats, it was a massive increase on what they managed in April. And I was saying, “well look, but look at what’s happened to Citizens. It arrived only a couple of years ago, won a lot of support in Congress, now that support has completely collapsed, you know, maybe Vox will kind of be a flash in the pan...”

And some of my more veteran colleagues here at EL PAÍS have been saying, “hmmm, not so sure. Once the far-right get into the institutions its very very hard to get them out.” *laughter* So, let’s see what happens.

Other amusing stories relating to Vox that we’ve seen...I love it when people headline stories: “This is not news from The Onion” or “This is not news from EL MUNDO TODAY,” but this really does sound like a news story from a satirical newspaper.

Basically a black grassroots member of Vox who has been doing activism for the party in Catalonia has discovered that there are Nazis in the party and says that he feels that he’s been “engañado.” This is relating to the fact that up in Barcelona, the two current heads of the management of the party are actually facing trial for inciting hate.

So this guy, Sayde Chaling-chong, is his name. He went on twitter and basically started to complain about the fact that these people were put at the head of the party: ““Me siento timado, engañado y hasta descriminado,” he said.

And so, as usually happens, Twitter responded to this somewhat surprising tweet and someone wrote, “I’m opening a thread to express my indignation being black member of the ku klux klan” *laughter* and things like this, it got quite a reaction.

And then we’ve got this ongoing story which we’ve mentioned in previous podcasts about the controversy over Rocío Monasterio who’s a member of Vox, and she’s in hot water over these supposed irregularities involving her work as an architect. We’ve now got nine cases of irregularities and basically what it comes down to, it looks like she was signing off architectural plans before she was actually qualified as an architect.

But then we’ve got this new case, which involves the TV presenter Arturo Valls. She signed off on the conversion of a former warehouse in Lavapiés. But there's the suggestion that there may be forgery of an official stamp on those plans from a Surveyors Association.

She basically is just trying to shrug off all of these stories and she reacts with tweets saying that it’s fake news and with emoticons basically. Madrid City Hall, let’s not forget, the current council in Madrid City Hall is formed thanks to votes from Vox - it’s run by PP and Citizens - and Madrid City Hall has already said that it’s not going to investigate Monasterio, saying “We’re not the Stasi.”

But, we’re seeing this kind of influence of Vox in other areas. On Monday there was an extraordinary story which we’ve run in English already about how the City Hall is removing commemorative plaques bearing the names of Republicans killed by

Francoist forces in Madrid between 1939 and 1944. So just in the post-Civil War era. The plaques were part of a memorial that was being built in La Almudena cemetery in the Spanish capital.

I'm sure City Hall didn't want photos of the plaques of victims of the Franco era piled up, as they'd been ripped out of this memorial, to be widely published and distributed but they have been and it's just pretty shocking to see that sight. It reminded me, because they're black plaques, it reminded me a bit of the Vietnam memorial in Washington and it's a bit like seeing the names of Vietnam victims piled up like that.

And of course we also had the story of the Vox deputy offering ultrasounds to women outside Madrid abortion clinics. This is far-right politician Gad3r Joya [**Sound bite of Joya**] and she's running this project called the "Life Ambulance Project" and she basically said something like "women don't know what's inside of them" or something just before they have an abortion or something like that.

So, um yeah all pretty amazing stories...why are you smirking?

Melissa: I just think, I mean that's pretty much why women have an abortion...

Simon: Yes, because they know what's inside of them, yeah exactly.

And then, also just to mention this whole concept of the "Cordon sanitaire" which is this French phrase. And basically what the Socialist Party is trying to do is to restrict Vox from taking places on the Speakers' committee in Congress, which is of course Spain's lower house of Parliament. The 'mesa del congreso,' as the Speaker's committee is known - it's basically the supervisory body for Spain's lower house of Parliament - it decides on and sets the order for debates, among other tasks that it is responsible for.

Interesting, the Popular Party has said that it's not going to block Vox from taking seats on the Speakers' committee. As far as I can see, it's argument is that it's a "partido constitucionalista," and this is the big thing for the Popular Party.

So, it's quite hard to translate what "constitucionalista" really means in a pithy way but basically it's parties that wants to see the Spanish constitution remain as it is. But of course the PP has other interests with Vox, it has already formed governments, on the regional and local level in plenty of places across Spain, thanks to the support from Vox because of the fractured results of the recent elections that we've had.

Right, okay, so let's turn to another letter which brings us to our second topic.

It says: "Hi Simon and Melissa, as a relatively new but now regular listener, can I suggest a subject for your show?"

It might be something you have already covered, but if not it might be in your interest. I am currently listening to you in Dundee, Scotland, but have the good fortune, along with my lovely partner Anne, to spend 4 or 5 months each year in Spain, much of that time in Los Alcazares in Murcia.

The town sits on the shore of the Mar Menor and while we were there this year the town was inundated with muddy water following a huge 'Gota Fria.' The damage to properties was horrendous and most of the beaches were completely washed away. Since the storm the town has been visited by politicians of every hue as well as the King and Queen, and many promises have been made to protect both the town and lagoon in future.

Thousands of people attended rallies in Murcia and Cartagena under the banner S.O.S. Mar Menor.

Hope this is of interest and apologies if this email is a bit long.

Best regards, David Crutchley."

Thank you very much for that email David. So, it's a great topic, Melissa, why don't you tell us a bit about what is going on in the Mar Menor.

Melissa: So, as David mentioned, in October, thousands of fish and marine animals suffocated in the oxygen-depleted waters of Mar Menor and washed up dead. Mar Menor is Europe's largest saltwater lagoon.

Experts blamed the disaster on intensive farming in the land surrounding the lagoon. They said that nitrates from fertilizers were contaminating the groundwater that leaks into Mar Menor. The excessive nutrients led to an explosion of phytoplankton which reduces the amount of oxygen.

The problem was exacerbated by the huge storm that hit the southeastern region of Murcia in September. The storm caused massive flooding, which dragged contaminated sediment into the lagoon.

Samples taken days after the flood showed that the level of nitrates in the water were 100 times above what is considered normal.

Since the disaster in October, nearly 2,000 tons of biomass and organic material have been removed from the Mar Menor, but the lagoon remains on the brink of environmental collapse.

According to a report by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography, 80% of marine life has disappeared.

The first indication that the Mar Menor was in crisis came in 2016, when the phytoplankton became so dense that it turned the water green. With sunlight unable to reach the bottom, 85% of its vegetation was wiped out.

Although the water cleared, the underlying reasons for the disaster were not addressed. Conservationists say that the real problem is irregular irrigation and illegal waste dumping.

According to a report from the World Wildlife Fund, 25% of irrigated land in the area does not have proper permits. Making matters worse, agricultural companies have allegedly been illegally dumping waste in Mar Menor.

Until these practices are stopped, the future of Mar Menor looks bleak.

Simon: So, is anyone else terrified by the apparently impending climate catastrophe that we are facing?

I was having a little peruse through the EL PAÍS stories just this week that have been published in Spanish about the environment and these are some of the headlines: “UN is warning countries that time is running out to fight global warming,” then there was another story saying that Swiss glaciers are melting. Then we had a big story the other day about greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere hitting a new historic high.

A couple of weeks ago I went to, I was doing a freelance job in Barcelona, at a convention of cardiologists, I was interviewing cardiologists basically and it was really, really interesting. I know everything there is to know now about Dyslipidemia and Familial cholesterolemia.

But also I found out something I had no idea about and this scared the hell out of me - pollution can cause heart attacks, not just atmospheric pollution but noise pollution, and the absolutely delightful doctor that I was talking to that was telling me this stuff, he basically said that what we all need to do is go and live in the mountains *laughter* and get out of the city, get away from the pollution, get away from the noise because it actually could kill you with a heart attack.

The other story that I saw about the environment was that Coldplay have announced they are not going to tour anymore until they can do so in an environmentally sustainable way - so it's not all bad news. *laughter*

Melissa: *laughter*

Simon: So, on that flippant note, let's wrap up the ninth episode of season three

My name is Simon Hunter -

Melissa: I'm Melissa Kitson.

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 the Madrid newsroom, under the guidance of our expert button pusher Verónica Figueroa, 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!