

## [Transcript] Leading / 32. Miriam González Durántez: Navigating Silicon Valley, the Cameron-Clegg years, and the fight for gender equality

Hello, and welcome to the Restless Politics Leading with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

And today we have a very special guest, Miriam Gonzalez Durantes.

Miriam is an international lawyer.

She set up an incredible movement in Spain, which has focused on generating new policy ideas inspired by young people.

She's a leading activist for women and girls, but she's also well known in the UK because she's married to Nick Clegg, who was the deputy prime minister.

And she's obviously been at the centre of so many things.

Central of the California tech revolution.

Nick Clegg is basically number two at Facebook.

Central European politics.

She worked in Brussels.

Central British politics.

But she's also an amazing person in her own right, so I think thank you to Alistair for getting her on.

Well, my pleasure.

I really like Miriam.

I shall declare my interest straight away.

I suppose she did.

She sort of exploded onto the British scene as, and she would hate me for saying this, but it might as well say as it was.

I mean, she was first came to the attention of the British public because she was that very glamorous woman walking alongside Nick Clegg when everybody was briefly agreeing with Nick.

But she does have a very, very fascinating story herself.

So we're going to talk about her life growing up as a woman in post-Franco Spain.

Her dad was a quite a well-known politician, so she knows politics as a daughter, as a wife, and now in her own right.

Now, and also, as I think we made clear, we recorded this before the Spanish election, which ended in a hung parliament rather than the centre-right, far-right coalition that many Polsters have predicted.

So we were happy about that.

The current president, Pedro Sanchez, from the Socialist Party is now trying to cobble together some kind of coalition that will have to encompass the far left and the independentist parties from the Basque country and Catalonia.

And if you can't do that, we could be in for, yes, another election before the end of the year.

And if that happens, we should all doubtless talk to Miriam again.

So here without further ado, Miriam Gonzalez Durantes.

I could wind her up from the very, very start by saying Mrs Miriam Clegg, that would really get her on the starting on the wrong foot, or I could say Miriam Gonzalez Durantes.

How was that?

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How's my pronunciation?

That would be much better.

Much better.

And I guess the reason, Miriam, that you're on leading is because you've actually set up two pretty amazing organisations.

The first was Inspiring Girls, and you can tell us something about that.

And now, at the risk of mangling the Spanish language, an organisation called España Mejor.

Very good pronunciation.

Okay.

Which really, if I get it right, is trying to find a way of giving the political parties the confidence to actually do some proper policy work, and we're speaking in the middle of a Spanish election that will probably be over by the time the podcast comes out.

And then, of course, you do have an awful lot of experience of living in three continents, well, not three continents, but Britain, Europe, and the United States.

And you do have a lot of experience, particularly of our politics during the time of the coalition government and the Brexit that followed.

So we'll no doubt cover all of that, but I think if we just kick off on those two campaigns that I mentioned.

First of all, Inspiring Girls, what it is, how you built it, and then why you've set up this new organisation in Spain.

Inspiring Girls is a very simple organisation.

All that it aims to do is to connect girls with women who can inspire them, women from all walks of life, and it has had tremendous success.

We have just reached our seventh year, and we are in about to be 33 countries because this week we are going to open up in Emirates.

And there are thousands of women, all sorts of women in all sorts of jobs, working at work, all young, whatever, going back to schools or either doing it remotely, and going to tell girls what they do and how they can become, what they have become, and we do an awful lot also in social media because we feel that we need to use social media to get girls in the right direction.

And is it essentially a mentoring programme?

It's not really as deep as mentoring, it's kind of like the initial stage of just showing to girls all the different things that women already do and telling them, look, whatever you do, that is up to you.

Just look around and look at the possibilities, and once that you do, just try to make an effort because in life everything is better if you make an effort, of course.

So Miriam, thank you, and we're very happy to have you on.

Tell us a little bit about your own experience growing up, and if you were talking to one of those women or girls, how you would share your own personal experience and how you saw opportunities expand around your own life?

Well I was born in Spain at the end of the dictatorship, and I was really lucky that I managed to, you know, my early years were the years of the transition to democracy in Spain that was a period of remarkable social mobility.

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But it is true that at that time there were very few female role models that I could look up to.

So many women in my village didn't work.

My mom was one of the few ones who actually worked there and had to justify all the time that she was not disrespecting my father by doing so.

And she was a school teacher, is that right?

She was a physics teacher.

She has taught three or four generations of people in my village.

In a way the things that I saw myself, something that worries me is that many years later there are still girls who feel that obviously there are more female role models that they can have access to than I had at my time.

But they still complain that they don't have access to enough.

And I thought well how stupid there are millions of amazing female role models, let's connect them with the girls.

Why do you think we're still at that stage where we have to actually say to girls you need to find role models?

How well advanced are we on what I guess you would define as the battle for genuine equality between men and women?

Yeah, completely.

Well, I think like listen, we are not equal.

That is, if you look at the top of pretty much every profession, women tend to be around 10, 12 percent, so you know there is a real issue with access to powerful roles in particular.

We do know that there is a lack of self-confidence that affects girls more than boys and we do know because the OECD does really good measurements of this, that there is a fear of failure that happens in girls that does not happen in boys.

And a lot of this is just inheritance and a lot of this is also like the stereotypes that we are still letting in society.

For me, more than analyzing in a lot of detail, why have we come to this point, it's like can we sort it?

And this one, we can sort it.

You've had a very interesting life.

I mean, you've been living recently in California, obviously you grew up in Spain and then you were married to the deputy prime minister and you were running a very successful law practice in the United Kingdom.

What is your sense about some of the cultural differences between the way that women's lives, professional lives work in Spain and the United Kingdom and in California?

It's actually rather similar.

I think that sometimes British people or American people think that, oh well, there is much more of a macho attitude in Spain.

I actually think that it's not true.

The fundamentals, the problems are very similar in all the different countries.

There are some cultural particularities.

For example, some British people would be outraged to hear the kind of physical comments

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that sometimes are made about women when they go in a professional environment to a meeting in Spain.

Spanish people would be outraged about the comments that are made in British media about women.

In Spain, for example, that cover page of Lexit that happened here in the Daily Mail, the editor would have had to resign.

That was when Nicola Sturgeon and Theresa May were pictured on the front.

Completely.

And the headline, the story was about their legs, the picture of their legs.

So you say a Spanish editor would get fired for that.

I would have shamed that Paul Dake is not in Spain.

Not ashamed.

Then, for example, I have been for four years living in California and you would not believe how many women either don't work or there is, I think, that that model of the ideal family means that they tend to go for one member of the family working, another one not working.

You know, you look at tech, very, very few women.

Those who are visible, they tend to be totally curated so they don't give an image of authenticity that the girls can then use.

So they are issues everywhere, really.

So, Mermin, just to continue on this theme for a little bit.

You also grew up, in a sense, in a political family.

So your father, as well as being a school teacher, became a mayor, became a senator for your region.

And if I'm right, was the senator for the Spanish equivalent of the Conservative Party, although your politics have become quite different.

Is that right?

So he started in what was called UCD, which was the party of the first president of the country.

We call it president rather than prime minister, who was very much a moderate center person at Olfosuarez.

And then that party collapsed because it was a sort of coalition, so to speak, bits and pieces from different parties that's put in the interest of the country above the ideologies.

And then he moved to many of them, went to the Conservatives and many of them towards the left.

I think that I am much more of a traditional liberal in the sense that the thing that obsesses me in my country is to make sure that there are checks and balances and power.

To me, that is the root of all the issues that Spain has, is that we do not have enough checks and balances.

And this comes really from the transition.

We had a constitution that gave a lot of power to the political parties to make sure that nothing went in the wrong direction.

So they were given all this enormous amount of power.

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The problem is that they kept it and they grew it.

So now we need kind of like the second transition, which is to give back that power to people, so that people control the power rather than people serving power.

I've talked to you about Spanish politics before and I always get the feeling that you who have experienced both of politics in the UK and of Spain and probably share a lot of our views about the state of British politics, I get the sense that you think Spanish politics isn't frankly even a bigger mess.

Is that right?

Well, I don't know.

I think that there is a mess in both countries and to me it's a source of enormous frustration because obviously I love my country, but I love the UK too.

I have spent decades dreaming of the Spanish political system becoming more like the UK political system.

When I was living here, I used to go to talk to Spanish people, say, look, they have conflict of interest systems and this is clean and when there is something wrong, everybody steps in and it doesn't become such a big issue and the media really controls it and they are resigning sometimes for even swapping points, for driving badly or whatever and now to my frustration, the problem is not that Spain has become like the UK, it's that the UK is becoming more and more like Spain.

Issues of nepotism and lack of transparency and giving contracts to friends and so on that never happened here, that happened much more in Spain, that patronage and clientelism now is happening here, so I don't know what country is worse, we just need to get them both to a mejor state, better state.

So part of this presumably is about populism.

It's about the way in which populist leaders, Donald Trump or Boris Johnson, once they get into power, lose their respect for the constitution for traditional checks and balances and begin to try to impose their will and their cronies on other people and it's a kind of global phenomenon, isn't it?

I mean, what is your sense of what the origins of this are?

Why is it that Britain, like Spain, like the United States, like Brazil, became vulnerable to this form of populism?

Well, I think that in the case of Spain, it's a little bit different to the UK and the US in the sense that in the UK and the US, what you have is a system with checks and balances that whenever the populists go to power, as you say, they start breaking those systems.

In Spain, we never had those checks and balances.

We have to put them in and obviously the political parties don't have any interest whatsoever to do proper political reform because they will lose power, which is by the way why I'm trying to instill the concept of reform from outside the political parties with España Mejor.

If I may, where I think that the situation is very similar is that in the case of Brazil or the UK or Spain, we have countries that are having difficulty to adapt to a new economic phase, a tech-driven, much more agile, faster situation that requires big, quick decisions.

We have poor leadership.

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We have nationalism that in the case of the UK comes from a reaction to Europe, in the case of Spain, the reaction to Catalanism and the Basque country and all that explodes into what?

Polarization and populism.

So, this organization, España Mejor, just tell me what it is.

Is it a think tank?

Is it a campaign organization?

Is it a political reform campaign?

What is it?

It's none of that and all of that at the same time.

We are trying to create a new space where Spanish people of different ideologies can put the ideologies aside and start working on the solutions to the problems of the country. Not on how to get votes, but how, you know, can we work out the range of solutions and then, you know, we all understand that, you know, a socialist will put a code of ideology on that solution and a conservative, a different perspective and I, as a liberal, would put a different perspective.

But at the very least, we need to have the solutions to an open platform for absolutely everybody.

We are focusing a lot on young people because they are the ones who are in the worst possible situation in Spain.

We have around 30% youth unemployment and we want to give to those solutions proper social volume so that we influence the agenda.

So it's not just a thin tank, it's a very pragmatic, practical, loud organization.

So one of the things that I love and I think Alice is interested in is the idea of citizens assemblies.

So gathering, as it were, 300 people, almost like a jury randomly selected from the population, sitting them down with experts for two or three days to really get into an issue and then come to a joint decision, not politicians but members of the public.

Is that part of this or have you decided that you prefer a different approach to this problem?

Some of that.

We operate with open groups.

We have just started, so two months ago it's incredible the traction that we have got in just 60 days, but we operate with open groups of citizens from all different areas.

They just need to have an interest or to know about the area we start by listening to the people.

We are conducting, for example, a mega poll of 50,000 young people.

It has never been done and that concept of listening to the citizens is almost revolutionary in Spain, but we obviously apply a very rational, analytic methodology at the very beginning.

It's like, you know, what is the problem?

What is the solution?

What have others done about it?

Does this work?

Et cetera.

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So it's not just general discussion.

It's a mixture between that general discussion and an analytical methodology.

Is there anything happening within the election campaign now that you could say you've been able to influence on policy?

Well, very little because there is very little political discussion really during the election.

The election has been very much about one candidate attacking the other.

The manifestos do not really have concrete policy ideas.

What do they have?

Well, general, general blah about, you know, I call them letters to Santa is like in an ideal world, I would like to do exquisite, not a single figure.

There are no costings attached to the political manifestos.

But what we have done is to put the focus on debates with citizens.

You need to talk to the people and there is a very concrete thing that we have done and is the campaign of the Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is Mejor España.

So they are obviously listening, not to the substance.

We want them to listen to the substance, but at least they are listening to the slogans.

The three of us are very pro-European.

We campaigned on the remain side and we're against Brexit.

But I was having a very interesting conversation a month ago with Enrico Letta, who was the Italian Prime Minister.

And of course, Enrico, again, very pro-European, but his observation about Italian politics is that one of the reasons he feels why there's no costings, why everything feels like a letter to Santa, is that people don't feel fully responsible.

In the end, they're relying on Brussels to sort out their problems and that creates a slight unreality in politics.

Do you agree with Enrico?

Is that true of Spain or not?

I think that in Spain is even more pronounced than in Italy because of the particular historical circumstances of the country.

So during the dictatorship, nobody had to worry about money because why would you?

You have no power on that.

Then immediately Spain got a whole lot of money because of the accession to the EU.

When things started getting better, then there was not enough reform and we went down in 2008.

Despite Spain doesn't score particularly highly on financial services.

We managed to recover a little and then COVID came and it hit back very hard on Spain, despite that was a global pandemic.

So very clearly, the fact that it hits the country hard is because of the internal circumstances of the country, not because those are things that only happen to Spain.

And I think that in a way, all that money coming from Brussels, which is great, there is a feeling that it may keep coming.

One of the things that I keep saying in Spain is we need to be able to live within our means to be fully independent financially, not only because we need it as a country, it's like

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we need it in Europe.

Countries that have been there for many years, like Spain has, need to start being net contributors and not to be net recipients.

Now, Miriam, I interviewed you for GQ Magazine almost seven years ago, shortly after the Brexit referendum.

And even though it was pretty clear what you thought of Brexit, you said, quotes, it's too early to say exactly where it will land.

What's your assessment of where Brexit has landed, both for us, the UK, but also for Europe?

I think it has been, without any doubt, tremendous damage and tremendous damage on both sides.

I think that the situation in the UK is obvious to everybody, if anything to me.

It has been a surprise to see not just the effect on the economy and on trade, but how quickly the UK has lost a lot of the international clout.

And that has been a little bit faster than I thought it could be.

It has been tremendous damage in Europe.

I mean, Europe is very much in a defensive position now.

When you live, as I have done in the US for a while, and you look at this part of the world, you think, oh, my goodness, everything is huge, the US is huge, China is huge, India is huge.

Why are we the Europeans trying to make ourselves smaller?

It doesn't make any sense.

I mean, it is a paradox, isn't it?

A lot of the people leading the Brexit campaign dreamed that by leaving, they were going to create this great global Britain.

But in reality, as soon as they were elected, Boris Johnson cuts international aid, merged the Department for International Development with the Foreign Office.

There hasn't been significant investment in the British presence in Africa.

In fact, what Brexit led to was not global Britain, but to more isolationism, more focus internally and an essential surrender of Britain's global objectives.

How did that happen?

Well, it was always clearly the very wrong idea.

And you cannot, from a movement that basically is nationalistic, get to something that is global.

It's almost a contradiction in terms.

I think that there are many reasons why things have not been done well.

So A, you had a decision that didn't make any sense, that happened for whatever circumstances.

But if you look at it objectively, of course, it doesn't make any sense for the UK to step away from its biggest market, its source of international influence, at least to increase the international influence.

In addition to that, lots of very bad, very bad decisions.

I think that the hard Brexit was a killer.

We started seeing the UK taking erratic decisions, like trying to replace Europe with trade in the Pacific.



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Well, you know, understanding geography, you know, the UK has been always really good to have geography, good geographers in the world don't know why that has happened. So, you know, a lot of erratic decisions and bad luck. I think that Ukraine meant that, you know, from one day to the other, we woke up and we saw the world divided in blocks. So that idea that the UK could be a free spirit running in a very agile manner between different countries that was off the table. So all that together has led to the situation we have today. And your experience going back to an earlier part of your life working inside the European Union, what's your assessment of the whole trade negotiations? Because that was a big part of what the big promises were. We'd get these great trade deals. And part of populism was essentially to sort of say the words without understanding how hard that would be. So what's your take on the trade deals that have been done and how difficult it's going to be to get the ones that they keep promising? We have been around that discussion for so many years. Now, there is no way that the UK is going to replace what it had with Europe, with anybody else. The only option would be a really good, deep, sophisticated agreement with the US. There is no way that the US is going to get into that. You know, it doesn't work in their interest. And if they wanted to do that, they would probably not do that with the UK. There would be many other candidates. So the only way forward is to try to come to a better situation with the UK, whether it is outside the membership or inside the membership. I don't want to put this in the sense of all the issues are on the UK side. There are big issues on the European side. Europe needs to reform and it's a continent right now drawn on procedures and bureaucracy. And we need to simplify it and the UK played a really good role on that for years and years. So we need to recover that in Europe too. One of the things that I feel in politics is how brutal it is, how unfair it can feel. And I wondered whether you would like to reflect on this. I'm an admirer of your husband. I've been promoting his book, which I liked very, very much on the podcast. Well, if you just make it, he hasn't written a book on the podcast. I can suggest that. The Rest is Politics by Nick Clegg. On the podcast, you have been promoting his book. Yeah. An analysis of why Alistair wears a tie and I don't. Yeah, exactly. No, so, you know, here is a figure that I really admired.

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I thought that he was very smart, very idealistic.  
He was incredibly popular in those leadership debates in 2010.  
He played a very constructive role in the coalition when I was a young MP watching him as deputy prime minister.  
And then he went down to an absolutely brutal defeat where his party collapsed around him.  
And I just wondered whether you can sort of reflect a little bit on it because we're trying to attract young people into politics.  
I have people saying to me all the time, go back into politics.  
But can you reflect a little bit about the emotional journey of that and what it actually feels like to go through that experience?  
Well, of course, it's hard.  
And, you know, we all fail at different things in our professional careers.  
It happens only very now and then that you fail spectacularly in front of everybody.  
And, you know, there are the cameras there looking at you and that no matter how strong you are, and he certainly was super strong dealing with the criticism of media from all different corners for many years.  
That is a hard thing to deal with.  
But it is true that when you come out the other side, you can come out much stronger.  
I think that, you know, he will have to explain himself what he thinks led to that situation.  
When I look at it with my Spanish perspective, I think that trying to change some of the fundamentals of how power is allocated in the UK, obviously, was going to provoke a massive reaction.  
He probably tried to do it too early on.  
You know, he probably needs the years to look at it with that perspective.  
But coming back to something that you said, Rory, about attracting young people to politics.  
And we have the same problem in Spain.  
Many young people, you know, they are repelled by, but they don't want to have anything to do with it.  
We only managed to attract the polarized ones on both sides.  
And part of the reason, you know, we have done quite a lot of polling in Spain about it.  
We have young people and in small groups, when we have the results of the 50,000 young people, we will have better figures.  
But we ask them, what does politics suggest?  
Oh, dirty.  
I don't want to have anything to do with it.  
If you had a way to be involved in politics and to shape the policies that affect you, 88% tell us that they would want to do that.  
So there has to be a way to allow them to get into politics that it is different.  
And in the last 15 years or so, we do everything differently.  
We travel differently.  
We entertain ourselves differently.  
We educate ourselves differently.

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We work differently.

The only thing that doesn't change is how we get involved into politics.

That is why we are trying to see whether we can create a different kind of instrument that obviously doesn't take the legitimacy away from the political parties.

That's very important.

But that is a different way to get involved.

And I think we need to start innovating and we need the political entrepreneurs, I think, in every country.

I completely agree with that.

But it's very hard to see how it happens unless, for example, you take what's happening in Spain.

Why isn't it attractive to a politician to come along and say, we have to change the way we do politics?

Why can't that be a winning platform?

They are super comfortable, the politicians, with the situation they have.

Why can't a challenger come along and say, this has to change and I'm the guy to change it?

Because the political parties, I mean, in the case of Spain, is even more pronounced than in the UK.

In the UK, at least some parties are open, some are open than others, but some are open.

What Nick did, for example, from outside the Liberal Democrats at some point when he was working in Brussels to step in and to become leader of a party, that there is no way anybody can do it in Spain.

There is a pyramid and you need to be within the hierarchy of the pyramid, so there are no challengers.

There's still something very strange which Alastair and I struggle with a lot.

We feel that there are a lot of natural votes in the centre ground, that there's a form of reality and force and power in the centre ground.

And yet the truth is, both in Britain and in Spain, it seems to be quite difficult to break through in the centre ground.

Why is that?

Well, in the case of Spain, it is because you have those old-fashioned structures that have accumulated too much power and it is difficult to find the space in the middle.

That is why traditionally all the moderate parties, you know, we have just had one that has disappeared, but I would like to say that if you look at the polarization right now in Spain, the debate is super emotional.

Anybody who is a witness of it could be thinking, oh, wow, this country is going from the extreme left to the extreme right.

Well, the majority of the votes are really for the more moderate parties, I mean, not centre parties, but more moderate, so society is somewhere else where the political parties are not.

We just don't have the instruments to move the picture.

But can I just follow up on that for a second and move the discussion to Latin America?

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There too, there's something very striking.

You've seen the emergence of more and more populist parties, increasingly populist parties of the left have emerged.

And yet somehow there is a gap between the rhetoric where everybody thought in many of the leading countries in Latin America, oh, my goodness, you know, we're going straight to Venezuela.

But the reality is that many of these people like Boric have not actually delivered on the radical platforms, even in Colombia, for example, that the rhetoric is very extreme.

But the reality is that nothing much is actually changing in the politics.

Do you have any sense of why that is?

What's going on?

But don't we know that that is happening everywhere?

Even Trump himself, you know, he didn't deliver on his rhetoric.

And if anything, you look at the mandate of Trump and you say, well, he didn't manage to do half as much as what he said that he was going to do.

I don't know if he gets the second mandate, whether he would be able to do it or not.

I don't know.

I think that in Latin America, the situation is very different.

This is super worrying what is happening there from both left and extreme left and extreme right.

My own feeling, and I dealt with relations with Latin America and the European Union for many years, is that part of the reason in Latin America is a failure of the elite.

The elite hasn't taken up responsibility.

They have been living with huge differences of income that were obscene in many cases.

OK, Miriam, Rory, we'll be back after a short break.

Now, bringing you back to the UK, were you invited to the great recent social event of the wedding of a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne?

I was not, but I was told that they played the Oat of Joy, didn't they?

They did.

They did.

But the Europeans should have copyright on that, so that a Tory politician should have to ask for permission to play that at the wedding.

So that wonderful pro-European moment, apparently at the end of his wedding, you did have a pretty

unique ringside seat to the coalition.

How do you reflect on it, on the characters, on what it did to Nick, on how hard it is for coalition, smaller parties?

Also, I insist that you relive two dining stories related to the former Prime Minister and the former Chancellor.

Well, Alistair is referring to the fact that once the former Chancellor came to my house and I refused to cook for him, but it's because, honestly, it's not personal.

I cannot cook for people that I don't like, and at that time I didn't like him.

I have respect, intellectual respect for him.

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But it was a very difficult relationship.

So didn't they just go in the base of beans or toast?

They had to take away.

It was terrible.

But, you know, it really does happen, you know, the Mayonnaise Cardinals and the Cakes Don't Rise, and it's just beyond me.

And your culinary experience with David Cameron?

And with David Cameron, it was very different.

He came with his wife and I, you know, proud as Spaniard.

I did roast fish that I, you know, I went through so much trouble to find a wonderful piece of fish there and I baked it.

And of course, in Spain, we eat fish with bones.

So I realized that I served this with so many bones and it was such a terrible picture, everybody with a hand in the back.

Bad, bad, bad. So thank God there was no media there.

And your sense looking back, though, at that period and this issue of how do smaller parties cope in a coalition?

Well, it's very difficult for small parties, but it's especially everywhere.

But it's particularly difficult in a country where you have such strong media on one particular side of the political spectrum, as you have here in the UK.

So you are constantly fighting four or five different battles at the very same time.

I think that with hindsight, it is already possible to see that, you know, when everybody was saying, oh, yeah, there is going to be no stability, the country is going to collapse, whatever.

Well, it was by comparison to what has happened later.

A period of tremendous stability were lots of very, very difficult decisions.

And I think that sometimes labor forgets where the situation was just before the coalition.

This was a period where many countries were, you know, it was like driving and in the fog, and you thought, well, where do I go now?

If I turn a little bit here, problem.

If I turn there and all those difficult decisions were taken, it ended up being one of the countries that grew most by 2015.

I think that it is terrible that after all that effort, that, of course, it's traumatic to come through all that.

But it's terrible that then the country didn't take that and continue growing.

And, you know, it all has been wasted.

All that, all that effort now is, is terrible.

And we do discuss this a lot because Alistair's instinctive sense,

I hope I'm not being unfair to him, is to be very, very critical of austerity

and to suggest that the financial decisions made between 2010 and 2015 were catastrophic.

And I guess I have more sympathy with the situation that the government was in in 2010 with the debt situation, with the deficit situation.

I wonder what your reflection is looking back on the economic policies

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that the coalition government took through.

But that is because Alistair doesn't like Gordon Brown, because the plan...

That is not true. That is not true.

That is pure, unadulterated, liberal Democrat propaganda.

You know, the cuts that Labour had on the table just before were bigger and faster than what actually happened in the coalition.

And I think that I have no doubt that there would have been many mistakes and things that could have been done differently.

And I also understand that in a run-up to an election

where everybody's thinking and some even hoping that there would be political change, you know, you build some narrative that is much easier to build around the conservatives, taking it from the very beginning of the conservative arrival to power, till the very end, and that includes that period.

But I think that even Alistair would concede that this image that sometimes Labour tries to put forward of,

you know, the politicians were waking up,

even those that I didn't like and I didn't cook for,

they woke up and they would say,

where am I going to create damage here and put these people in a terrible...

Of course, it doesn't happen in that situation.

It was a very, very difficult time.

So I think that that comes to something that, to me, what is worrying about that is the lack of, I don't know whether it is understanding,

but lack of realism from those who criticize that situation,

and mostly come from Labour, really, in terms of the economic situation of this country.

This country is not the US.

It doesn't have a currency of reference.

So like Spain, it has to live within its means.

And you can step out a little bit, but generally speaking,

you need to have, you know, credibility in terms of,

if we go through a difficult situation,

we cannot simply put more money than we could afford in the long term on the table.

And that is tough for some of us.

You know, I wish we had the dollar, but we do not have it.

And the best manner to handle countries, it is having realism.

Realism about the geographical position of the country

and the economic position of the country, I think.

Well, Roy and I have argued about this till we are blue in the face,

so I don't need to revisit all the reasons why I am right about austerity

and the damage is done and our failure to secure the recovery.

But I tell you why I am interested in this, is the psychology of the whole thing.

Because, you know, I have got to know Nick and you reasonably well,

particularly since those years.

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And I get a sense of incredible sort of equanimity in his personality and his character.

Is that right? It never seems to get to...

But certainly with me.

Well, no, you are, I think it's fair to say.

Less equanimous.

I think you're quite an emotional character in a way that he, baby, is...

Is he sort of just always that level headed

and does treat kind of victory and defeat in the same way?

Because that's the impression I get.

I think that... talking about your husband is always difficult, right?

Because you don't know him as a public figure.

You know him as your husband, the person who is there all the time.

But I do think that Nick is very, very level headed.

He has a lot of perspective always on things.

And he's somebody who I think has always had a hinterland.

See, he is able to use that to kind of look at, you know,

this is happening right now, but can we look at this in the longer term?

I tend to be much more impatient, yes.

I wouldn't call it emotional for any British person.

We, Spaniards, are emotional.

Well, you just said that even your cooking is a kind of emotional act.

I wondered about your most recent life.

I mean, you've been extraordinary.

I mean, you've been at the center of a different part of the world's events.

I mean, both of you have been through extraordinary things.

I mean, the heart of Europe, the heart of the British coalition,

and now the heart of the California tech revolution.

And which is now, it seems, not just redefining our world through social media,

but now potentially redefining our world through artificial intelligence.

And I wonder whether you could give us a sense of this culture.

I mean, these are the people, including your husband and many of the other people

you must have known, search in California, who are, in a sense,

the leaders of the next 20, 30 years.

What is their culture?

What's their personality?

Who are these tech people?

How do they see the world?

What are their strengths?

What are their weaknesses?

Be honest.

Well, for me, it was a cultural shock when I went there,

probably because I was thinking, well, you know, California, they speak English.

They are basically what, you know, and I have always been an Anglophile.

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My whole life working for British companies, British politicians and everything. I know these people are not really British at all. They are Germans who speak English. It's a world of engineers, super young. There is a very conservative side to it. I have mentioned it earlier in relation to women. I felt at the beginning, oh, wow, you know, I'm going backwards in terms of having to, you know, to be seen as just the person on my own, you know, rather than attached to anybody else. And I saw many, many women not working there. But in terms of the economy and how they look at the world, it's very humbling because you realize once you are there that they don't really look at any of us. You know, they are only looking at China. That's about it. It's very interesting that they don't look at China in the Pacific direction. They still look at China kind of in the European and then they come to China. But that is what worries them. They are totally focused on that. And it really makes you think, wow, we really need to cut up and, you know, to accelerate all this. But what they really do have is tremendous optimism. And to me, it did change my life. I mean, the two big moments in my life when I changed everything, one was coming to the UK that I discovered the freedom of you can do whatever you want. And then going to the U.S. and it's like all this pessimism that we have in Europe. And it's like, we need to move away from that and we need to start doing things. And they are all about the future. All the conversations are about the future. Once you are there, it's about making it bigger. It's unbelievable, really. So, Miriam, I run at the moment a nonprofit which is about poverty in Africa, supporting the extreme poor in Africa. And I've just been in California. I've been on the West Coast for the last six, seven days, meeting many of the people that you know, trying to persuade them to invest in delivering cash to the extreme poor in Africa. And I've been struggling. I don't know what's happened, but somehow, whether it's their engineering, Germanic mindset, they don't seem to be very interested anymore in ending global poverty or thinking about people who are living on a dollar a day. Everything is about, for some of them, climate, for many of them about tech,



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for many of them about AI, many of them saying to me, can I just give a smartphone to poor people in Africa? But not really wanting to engage with the issue of global poverty. And I wondered, is that something you recognize and whether you could suggest to me why that is? That is not really my experience. I think that in terms of philanthropy, the U.S. and not only in California. Well, they're very generous, hugey generous, but just not to global poverty. My experience is that they are very tough. And when I have been doing fundraising for inspiring girls, I mean, you cannot come just with a half cooked plan. They would take it as any other business and they want to see the results and the delivery. I suspect, I mean, I don't know exactly the situation that you have faced, but I suspect that what has happened in the last few months is that they have refocused all their efforts on the race and artificial intelligence. To me, it's the most significant thing that has happened lately, that when I went to California four years ago, the discussion was, this is a race who is going to come out first. In the last six months, we have seen the U.S. pushing the accelerator. They have managed to go ahead. Now the issue is, is China going to cope and be able to come to this level? And what is going to be their next big announcement? So they are an extraordinary country. It takes a while to focus the minds. But once they do, I mean, they really are like a tank. They go with the strength at it, you know, that perhaps that is what you are finding, that they are focused on something else. But they are super generous on philanthropy. Do you think Nick is more powerful now than he was a deputy? Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. I live with him. I'm the power in the head. No, no, no, no. I know that, I know that. But it's interesting that these guys, do they have real power? Or do they actually just have the ability to make change in the tech world? How would you define it in terms of politics? I think that probably you and I look at power differently to how they look at it. For them, change is power. They do not necessarily understand the political power. They tend to look at politics as something a little bit alien to them. And it is understandable. All this has been basically generated in California. When you are in California, the first thing that strikes you is like,

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wow, I'm so far away from any center of power.  
I have never lived so far away from centers,  
but ever, you know, in Spain, in Brussels, in London, wherever.  
There is something there with power.  
In California, you need to take an airplane six hours from it  
to find the center of power.  
So our concept of power is probably not the one they share.  
As we come to the end, and I'm so grateful,  
and we've done so many wonderful things here,  
but I just caught you saying that there have been two big changes in your life.  
And one of them was moving to California,  
but the other one was moving to Britain.  
And I'd like to tempt you as my last question before I hand back to Alastair  
to talk about what it was that you found was a positive change when you came to Britain.  
Well, to me, really, when I came to London  
was the beginning of a love story with this country.  
And I was coming from a very close traditional culture  
where, you know, I was brought up in a village in the middle of Spain.  
I studied law.  
It was very clear that if you study law,  
it's because you are going to become a lawyer.  
And if you become a lawyer, you are going to work on XYZ.  
And that was my track, and I couldn't move away from it.  
And then I came to London, and I thought, oh, I need to reinvent myself.  
How do I do this?  
And I started going just to talk to people to get ideas.  
And the very first time somebody told me, they asked me,  
so what do you want to do?  
And I say, what, you think that I can choose?  
You know, that was a revolution for me.  
And the freedom that I have always felt in this country, you know,  
I have done interviews, I have said this,  
I have criticized the prime minister, whatever,  
never, ever I thought this is going to have a negative repercussion.  
I never thought that the system was going to move away just because of that.  
That, you know, I honestly think that sometimes you British people,  
you do not know what you have, so please don't waste it.  
OK, I've got a few quick fire questions to end with, Miriam.  
Oh, God, I hate fire questions.  
I know you do.  
First of all, in order, which is the best country to live in?  
Britain, Spain, America.  
Spain, Britain, America.

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OK.

And ideally between the three.

In order, which of these five prime ministers has been the worst?

Cameron, May, Johnson, Truss, Sunak.

I could say Johnson, but Truss really fierce competition.

OK, in order.

Are the other three Johnson, Johnson, Truss.

Then you've got Cameron, May, Sunak, Cameron, May, Sunak.

Sunak is insipid, rather than that.

So he's insipid, but he's the best of the five.

Is that what you're telling me?

Everything is relative, you see.

It's incredible that we are at that level already.

But you are now about living in Britain, aren't you?

I am in between in between Madrid and London.

So I spent roughly half of my time in it.

And Nick is able to do his job in an airplane.

Nick is between here and California.

And we have two children in the East Coast of the US and one with us.

And I know that when I say all these people think like you are bad, they sort of works.

I don't know how they sort of works.

Well, it's been it's been lovely talking to you.

And thank you as ever for being so fresh and so frank.

And good luck with Espania Mejor.

Very good.

Thanks so much.

Thanks. Thank you.

And I think we could have a great tripartite podcast.

I thought you were a fantastic dynamic with the two of us and very good for us.

So thank you very much.

You need a woman.

Exactly. Exactly.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thanks so much.

Thank you.

Alisa, I think she is the most amazing woman.

I mean, I'm not quite sure whether I've got more of a sort of fan obsession with her husband or with her, but I thought she was incredibly articulate, charming and wonderfully kind of frank and outspoken about everything from British politics in Georgia.

I was born to the tech bros in California.

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But she's she's she's someone you know quite well, right?

Yeah, I do.

And and I can't remember why I got to know them as well as we did.

Partly when Nick Clegg was in office as deputy prime minister, but more so afterwards.

I think she's she's really, really smart.

Part of me really wishes she would go into Spanish politics.

But it's, you know, I hadn't quite understood

that Spanish politics and the parties were as dysfunctional in terms of what they should be as parties as they are.

And I guess what she's decided is with this organization that she's running there now, that it's almost like a sort of off the shelf policy production factory.

And I wonder, actually, if there are any people from British parties listening, it's probably worth checking out, putting them into a bit of Google Translate and find out because I think, you know, we've talked a lot about where the new ideas are coming from.

So if you actually say our aim is to generate debate about new ideas within the Spanish population, then that could that could spread.

I can't wait to look at it.

I mean, it's something that I remain a little bit skeptical about because I tried when I was running as independent to do a little bit about this.

And I tried a little bit when I was running for leadership to do it.

It's surprisingly difficult to generate really high quality, detailed, practical ideas from these types of public consultations, which is why I was trying to encourage her to a more formal structure like a citizen's assembly.

I'm a bit worried that these websites can become a little bit full of platitudes because obviously any number of us sitting around with a pint can come up with what we think the country should be doing, but the devil's in the detail. And that's quite difficult to achieve.

Yeah. No, but I think it's a really interesting idea.

And her inspiring girls thing has taken off.

In fact, I talked to her for the book, she decided when she started inspiring girls that doing it through the conventional media was pointless because either they just wanted to talk about Nick or they wanted to sort of create some sort of story that was bad for her.

And so she just built the whole thing using social media and targeting different platforms at the different parts of the operation she runs.

And she said, I think she's 33 countries now.

That's amazing.

On Spanish politics, I was reminded I was talking to a Spanish member of parliament about the difference between Spanish and British politics.

And I think he's probably exaggerating a bit, but he said that one of the things that the Spanish system doesn't do is encourage very much interaction

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with constituents because a lot of people are running on a list system.

So the public vote for the party, they get a percentage of the vote, they get a percentage of seats in parliament and depending on your seniority in the list, you get in.

So he was saying there's not much point in my going around, knocking on doors, delivering leaflets, engaging with constituents because it's really to do with the national vote and where I am on the list.

And I think maybe I should tease her a bit more about that because, of course, there are bits of the Lib Dems that are often trying to push for a more pure proportional representation system in Britain, which would break that constituency link, which I guess is one of the things that maybe is more valuable about our system.

Yeah, I thought she was fascinating about the the psychology of defeat.

And of course, you know, we talked about that a lot to Michael Ignatieff.

And at least Nick Clegg became deputy prime minister.

But I think it was a pretty shattering thing.

And so he has really landed on his feet in terms of the the new job that he got and seems to really enjoy it.

I still harbour hopes that I think I'll keep on persuading her that she actually would be I think be a terrific front line politician in Spain.

She's also a good she's although she's lovely and charming.

She's a good hater as we as we as we were showing her out.

She was sort of we were both lamenting the fact that we resisted to indulge our shared loathing of Mr.

Baldaker. I think Miriam is one of the few people who loads him even more than I do.

It's amazing. I mean, I remember not long after Brexit being on a stage with her.

We were the two keynote speakers in some event and just feeling it was a moment where I think she was incredibly angry with the Conservative Party over Brexit.

And I just sort of felt this incredible sort of waves of antipathy directed towards me with me trying to say, well, well, well, I'm not that part of the Conservative Party.

I agree with you about remain on it.

But boy, can she get passionate and outspoken.

And I think that's something that if she did become a politician,

I think it's a real asset.

She's not a sort of hyper cautious kind of technocratic person.

She's somebody who, well, the great cliché about Roosevelt's cliché,

people only care what you know, if they know that you care really comes across with her.

It's not a cliché. It's a wonderful statement of wisdom.

It's true that no, listen, she cares, she cares.

Good. OK, Roy, well, that's Miriam.

Onwards and upwards. Onwards and upwards.

Thank you very much. See you soon.