

# Spain

**Jose Luis Espinosa** interviewed **Rosa Regàs**:

**Interview date:** 29 February 2020

**Espinosa:** *Here I am in Girona, the guest of Doctor Rosa Regàs: a real privilege and honour for me. What can we say about her? An intellectual, as they come. We're about to sit down with her and she'll be talking to us about the most important aspects of her life and her experience in Europe.*

*Rosa, born in Barcelona in 1933, has worked as an editor, translator, traveller and writer, the latter having been her main occupation over the last several years. We're going to talk about all of it and I have the honour to be her interviewer. My name is Jose Luis Espinosa, a philologist with a doctorate in Modern Languages from the University of Salamanca, Spain. Let's get started, if you're ready, Rosa.*

**Regàs:** I'm ready.

**Espinosa:** I'd like to start by asking you about your home life. Your home life and your origins: I'm interested in hearing a little about how you would define your childhood. What it was like?

**Regàs:** Well, my childhood was really pretty miserable, actually. Not at the beginning. My father was a playwright, a lawyer, who worked for the Generalitat [the Catalan regional governing agency]. He was a man with left-wing ideals. My mother was raised in Germany and in Paris and had worked before marrying, at the Bernat Metge Foundation [a Cultural Organization founded in 1922 dedicated to publishing Greek and Roman classics into Catalan]. They were an intelligent couple who had 4 kids in the 5 years that the Republic [The Second Republic of Spain, 1931-1936] lasted. But then came the coup of '36 and things started to change. They changed so much that, when Barcelona was getting bombed, my parents decided to send me and my little brother, Oriol to France. We children were all just about a year apart; Oriol and I almost two years apart, but the rest were one right after the other. So, Oriol and I were sent to France with my grandmother, my mother's mother, and the other two were sent to Holland to live with some diplomats who were friends of my parents, hoping that things would blow over at some point. But it must have been the case that my grandmother got tired of having us, or I don't know what happened; she must have got tired of us because my brother wasn't even a year old yet and I was just three and must have been a demanding little thing. To cut a long story short, then my parents sent us to a school of Célestin Freinet, one of the greatest educators that France had in those years – I believe he died in 1940 or 1950 – but back then it was still the '30's, and he took in a group of kids that were escaping the Spanish civil war. Sowe ended up there.

I mention this because it was really important in my life. The education that I got while I was there – in my memory it might have been 6 months just as easily as 3 years, but in reality, it must have been two and a half years, I guess. I was really little, but the education I got in those early years, when everything counts much more than later,

was all very progressive. In every aspect, every single one. Like helping out in the school's printing shop and being able to say what I thought. Even our running around the house naked when it was hot was no problem, and it never even occurred to us that there could be one problem. So much contact with nature, conversation... I naturally don't really remember because I was so little, but a lot of conversation was held about the war and was about to break out. I don't remember anything else, only the topic. Then each of us had our own little garden. We would all talk and interact whether you were fifteen or two or three years old. I mean that, often, as the years have gone by, I've realized that the ease with which I've adapted to different social situations in so many situations, could only have come from that. I don't remember, but that's my only explanation for where it could have come from; for example, I don't have regrets, I still don't have them. I do regret something that I didn't tell my father once, but I don't have regrets about things in my life that didn't turn out well – I've always thought, simply enough, that they didn't work out; I could have done them better, but I didn't. I don't have any regrets; I don't have the feeling of dependency on anyone; all these things have helped me so much to consolidate my vision of what freedom is.

It then happened that, in '39, my grandfather, who was from the Catalan bourgeoisie, had switched over to Francoism. When the Civil War ended, my grandfather was a very powerful man because he had worked in favour of Franco, and so he was able to get parental authority and guardianship over his grandchildren. There were four of us: the ones in Holland and the two of us in France back then. Neither my mother nor my father was able to intervene. Back then, at that time they had their differences and were separated, but who knows what actually happened during the war. They couldn't intervene because they had absolutely no rights in Spain, they couldn't even enter the country. They were able to get in after some years, under some pretty rough conditions, but by then I had got used to my life in boarding school, I had ended up in one run by nuns.

At this boarding school, funnily enough, there was a priest who was probably one of the most cultured people I have ever met in the priesthood. He was a fantastic man; for example, he had us singing Gregorian chants every day. He told us about the relationship between Christianity and the Greek and Roman religious traditions. He talked to us about how all religions were an expression of our desire to find a reality that was something greater than ourselves, so that it was not just a meaningless cycle: live, die and disappear. And there I spent fourteen years. So, between what I had learned at my first school and what I learned there, in some way, all of it, allowed me to make peace with my terrible, Dantesque childhood. Well, it wasn't really Dantesque, more like something out of a nineteenth century novel, wouldn't you say? I mean, we only got to see our mother once a month in the Court of Guardianship and Family Supervision, we could see her for an hour and a half, but we weren't allowed to kiss her because my grandfather had had my mother certified as having weak lungs...well, really, this and lots and lots and lots of other things like that.

My father was able to return, but he was hiding: he couldn't go out, he couldn't work, he couldn't practice law. Little by little, when Francoism loosened and softened a bit, he started working in theatre, which was his great passion. There he organized series of Greek and Latin theatre [performances]. Thus, in this way, let's say, he worked to make his life a little more bearable. He could never see his kids, he could never work

again, he couldn't do anything. And everybody asked him, "Come on, how can you live like this, how do you cope? No wife, because you're separated, not being able to see your kids, not being able to work, having to check in with police on a regular basis, how do you deal with it?" And he would say, "None of it matters. I just came into this world to spend the summer." That's what he would say, but when things changed with the Transition [the name of the period of time after Franco's death in which Spain transitioned to a democracy] my father had made it through everything that happened with the Allies: how they didn't force Franco to step down, with everything that happened in those years [of the Dictatorship], how he thought and believed, how we all believed, including myself in my youth. We believed that the Allies were left-wing, and the Nazis were right-wing. We came to realize that it was the same. What they had were just different faces. That is to say: the Americans proclaimed democracy, but it was democracy with the condition that we submit to the United States. And that is how it was, in any case. But those are the things that became clear to us afterwards reading this guy's work or reading that other guy's work. At that moment, in 1975, the disillusionment, for all these people, who had given everything, was huge. When my father saw that the kind of democracy, they were trying to establish was not a return to the legal democracy of the Republic, but only a version of democracy, one that came directly out of Francoism, he simply stopped talking, literally, and would not speak another word ever again. And then he died after two or three years [Rosa's father, D. Xavier Regàs, died in 1980].

**Espinosa:** What time are we talking about here? When did your father come back and when did he start working again?

**Regàs:** My father must have come back in around '46 or '47; he came back and spent a year in prison, I think, or a while in prison and after that, sometime hiding at my grandfather's. Then in about '55 or '56 he started to work again. I got married in 1953. I remember me getting married very well – to a very nice man, by the way. I was really lucky because I said: I'll marry the first guy who asks, and that's exactly what I did. I truly loved him, and then we separated, of course, but throughout our whole lives he even spent his vacations here even after we were separated. So, really, in the end I was lucky: even though he wasn't the ideal person for me to live my life with, he always respected me and when I told him that I wanted a divorce, he said, "Well then, you can go." But I couldn't just leave; if I did, I would lose the children. "Good point, that's true, let's see how we can work things out." Any other man wouldn't have done that. I really mean that, aside from the stupid little everyday complaints that I could have, I can't have any real complaints about my marriage. That was a point of contention with lots of other women around me. Let me tell you, this following thought helped me to form a different sense of feminism, you know? Many would say, "Why don't you leave him? Why don't you ask for money?", and I responded, "Why should I be asking him for money?" When I finally separated from him, I told him, "OK, but I'm not leaving the family home," I really stayed there, separated, but both of us living in the same house. We were a happy, very happy family. The proof is that we are still right here, and if my husband was alive today, he would be here, too. But, of course, people, especially women, wanted to know, "Why haven't you asked for alimony?". I said, "Come on, what alimony". And they kept going, "How much alimony are you getting?", so I simply responded, "There isn't any alimony". Then the same question again, "And why not?" Then I would say: "Well, he's not giving me any because I can earn my own living."

This helped me to give myself a more sharpened perspective on feminism than these women had, but also more nuanced, I think. But I can't be exactly sure.

**Espinosa:** We'll get back to this topic. Having left home and the country at such a young age, what impact did that have on your idea of what borders were? Leaving the country where you were born, then returning to it under different circumstances. At that time, people didn't used to travel so much.

**Regàs:** No, not at all. This is just what happened to me, but like anything that could happen to anyone, I never really stopped thinking about it. More than anything, it allowed me to understand, at the age of 6 or 7, what the World War was. This war was true because I had to postpone my journey home. We were in the South of France with Mr. Célestin Freinet and his wife and we had to put off our return because the War was about to start, so I knew about the War, and I knew, although I don't remember how,—that my mother and father, who I never saw, or rarely saw, sided with the Allies, and that, on the other hand, my grandfather was on the side of the Germans. My grandfather had quickly switched sides, like all the Catalans, who are great at switching sides, but I never had, I've never had, nor do I have now, any sense of nationalism. I don't know what people mean by nation.

When they talk about nation, I don't know what they mean, I can't understand it. (*laughs*) God forbid I say it out loud, because I'll be shot, but I don't understand it. I just don't get it. What difference is there, if Catalonia has its own laws and defends its own laws, whether it belongs to Spain, or to the Iberian Peninsula or to Europe? Whether it is independent and needs its own army, its own trains...I don't understand it. I just can't get my head around it. What also has had a great influence on my thinking in this area is how much I've traveled. Maybe that's because I don't understand the concept of nationalism. I traveled all around the world, to so many, many places, I've seen for myself. Whether I was in China or in New York, or Chile, Africa, wherever, the feeling was the same. I always felt at home where I felt at home, for a host of different reasons, but none having anything to do with the specific territory, you know?

**Espinosa:** And, today, is there anywhere you call *home*? Besides, here, your house, where we are.

**Regàs:** (*hesitantly*) Well, still. Of all the places I have been, the place where I have felt most at home is Cadaqués, where I spent summers in the sixties and was very happy with my young children, all barefoot, we had a boat and I felt at ease, I felt good there and nobody cared if I had separated parents, because this is another scourge of society. Then, where I have also felt at home, funnily enough, is in Syria. In Syria I felt totally at home.

**Espinosa:** When were you there?

**Regàs:** I was there in '92 or '93. And then I went back later, and finally again two years before the war. But while I was there, I didn't stop to appreciate it, I was so comfortable, in that room that I rented, with a driver who I had met by chance. I would hear the sound of the guy who sharpened the knives passing by, the sound of swallows and the cats that meowed on the rooftops, and working all the time because I was writing

a book about Syria. I have never felt so much at ease, never had such a sense of belonging.

**Espinosa:** And what brought you there?

**Regàs:** This man called me up one day - I had already written three or four books by then - and he said to me, "I would like you to write a book about an Arab country, Morocco, for example". Writing a book about Morocco wasn't appealing, it had never occurred to me, so I started to think about all the countries, and I said, "Syria!" "Why Syria?" he asked. I mean, I didn't even know exactly where it was on the map, and I remember that I went to Paris to buy a travel guide and I couldn't find one. Back then, there were no travel guides. And still, I went off to Syria and it was a delight, a total delight. You haven't read my book on Syria, have you? Then I'll give you a copy, it turned out so well. From the reading you can tell that I enjoyed myself and that while I lived there, I was very happy. Now, it's true that the whole thing was quite comfortable, because I had been given some of money to spend - not to waste, mind you - so I was able to rent a car, if I had to go on a trip or go from one place or to another. I have never been a big spender, I have no desire *to have*, I simply don't. I can have a sweater my whole life and I still wear it. So, it wasn't the money, but the tranquillity. Maybe the reason why I enjoyed writing the book so much was this tranquillity, the way I felt in that room, which I remember as a paradise. Not all books give you so much satisfaction.

But to answer your question: I can't even understand what "the homeland" is. The truth is that I don't understand it at all. I understand even less how someone would even consider giving their life for their country, I can't get my head around it. I've had all of this stuff inside me since I was very little. I remember that even in school as a young girl, I got into some arguments when the nun told me, "What is our homeland? Our homeland is Spain". I answered back, "Why? Why Spain?" And when the nun got a little nervous, I would say things like, "Which Spain? The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs? The one before the Catholic Monarchs? The one after? The Spain of when the Bourbons came to power? Why should I feel like a citizen of Spain? Is La Coruña my homeland, a place where I have never stepped foot?" How can that be?" And she replied, "The homeland is carried within, something you're born into." Well, not me, I didn't have it.

**Espinosa:** You were talking about your years at school in exile. What memories do you have of those years? What stands out most from that first part of your life?

**Regàs:** Memories of total freedom. Freedom, but not in the sense anyone would understand: that we did whatever we wanted or broke glasses if we wanted to, no: the freedom that sometimes I was with the elders, sometimes I was with the little ones, that I could leave. When I got tired of a place, I would get up. If we were going for a walk, and I didn't feel like it, I wouldn't go. If I felt like it, I would go. I remember it like that, but I don't remember more than that.

**Espinosa:** What was the return to the religious school in Barcelona like?

**Regàs:** I adjusted well to religious school. It was there I became aware of what it meant to have separated parents, leftist parents, because there were families that

wouldn't let their daughters play with my sister and me - we were daughters of 'Red Parents'. But instead of giving me the feeling of being separated and marginalized, on the contrary it gave me the feeling that I was superior, funnily enough. That never weighed on me, just the opposite: when I saw those poor girls, whose parents came to see them and the father or mother brought them a cake and sat there for hours and hours talking, I didn't envy them. Back then the idea started to emerge in me that I wanted a family, but not one of those.

**Espinosa:** And after, how was it when you decided to go to college?

**Regàs:** Oh, that was quite complicated.

**Espinosa:** There was a moment when you were very determined that you wanted to go to university, and there were particular circumstances, as you tell in one of your books. Can you talk about that?

**Regàs:** I was quite determined, yes. I got married, I had a son and then I had a second son. Suddenly, one day I realised that someday I would be carried out of that house in a body bag, having done nothing more than what I was doing, which was simply taking the children to the park in the morning. So I started to think and reflect on all those things that I had wanted to do when I was in school: what I planned to study, all the places I wanted to travel to, everything that I wanted to discover — what happened to all that? So a kind of despair came over me, a great despair that I didn't even dare to mention to anyone; partly because it wasn't fully formed but also, because I did not want to hurt anyone, since I didn't know exactly what it was what I wanted.

I started doing things, just experimenting, and then one day I was walking down the street and a man stopped me. "Hey there, blondie!" - And it was Mr. Armando Blume, who had been a gym teacher at my boarding school. "Hello, hello, Don Armando, how are you?" "I have a gym. I have set up a gym." he told me. "Oh, have you? Perfect!" I started sneaking out, because at that time, a twenty-two-year-old woman, like me, was not supposed to go to the gym. All that would come later, but back then, it was a real no-no. So, I went to the gym and started working with D. Armando. It was a collective thing, they played the same music the played at school, with a harmonica [*singing a bit here*]. All went fine, and then one day, as I was leaving, Joaquín Blume, D. Armando's son, asked me, "What school do you go to?" and I said, "I don't go to any school, I only live in my house". And he said, "Well, what I would like for you is to get you in training. Because in a year there are the championships; I have seen you around here, you have potential". And so, I started training, also on the sly, I needed to train three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. I had a woman at home who took care of the children when I wasn't there, but it was very difficult. It was also the time when I started to lie, telling all the lies in the world because, otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to manage it.

**Espinosa:** What kind of training was it, Rosa?

**Regàs:** It was everything in sports gymnastics. My brother Oriol knew about it and he came to see me sometimes. I was working and, when I was late, I always made up a lie. I don't know how I had the audacity to tell those lies and how my husband believed it all, because he did believe everything. He was a bit put out - but he believed it all.

So then, the day of the championship came around and I came in fourth. We were dressed in a little maillot that showed all our legs and a black shirt. And then there I was in La Vanguardia [a daily paper in Catalonia]. I do remember very well my husband sitting there, reading the newspaper at breakfast, a man who read everything, and suddenly he came to the sports section, and saw what had happened in gymnastics. Of course, for him it was tremendous. They hadn't told me anything, I didn't know anything. But at that very moment, there was a knock on the door and Jordi Pujol [born in 1930, president of the Generalitat from 1980 to 2001] came with his wife and some friends, who were couples in our prayer group, and they were all outraged. They just attacked me, verbally. Father Llumà wasn't there, but Mossén Briba was, along with another priest whose name I can't remember. I began to cry and couldn't stop crying. I had been selected for the Rome Olympics and they made me swear that I wouldn't go there and, that I wouldn't go back to the gym. Of course, I swore to everything because I was scared and terribly afraid, and my husband sat there without saying a word. Ultimately, this is how this story ended. It is not that it was my dream to be a gymnast. I only wanted to do gymnastics in order to do *something*.

One day, I remember that my mother who lived in Madrid came to visit. I was really down, and she asked me, "What's the matter with you?" - "I don't know, I'm bored and nothing makes sense." "Do you want to have more children?" - "What do I care?". Then she said, "Okay, let's see here... if you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?" For understanding the meaning of what she asked me you have to know that my mother lived together with a woman. Can you imagine the horror? For my in-laws! And even my own husband used to say, "My mother can't sit in the same chair as your mother." We went to the restaurant and my husband came along, because he was a bit of a rebel, and he was all charm. So, I was at the hotel that day and so was Matilde [the mother's partner] and she said to me, "What would you do if you could do anything?" - "I would go to college." - "And what would you study?" Back then, I wanted to study Philosophy and Humanities. "Well, why don't you go?" - "Because I can't, they'll kill me." - "They won't kill you, just give it a try." At first, I didn't dare, but then I took the risk! My mother gave me the money to enroll, which wasn't a lot And I enrolled. I remember perfectly when I went to college and met Doctor Petit, who stopped me and said, "What's your name?" - "Rosa Regàs." - "You are Mariona's daughter". Petit was a friend of my parents and recognized my face because I looked a lot like my mother. "We were all in love with your mother, she was a charmer." He turned and left. I followed him into the cloister of the courtyard of Humanities and I realized at that very moment that my life had changed.

Everyone was always telling me, "College is very bad". I would say, "I'm in another world, and the things that we discuss here have nothing to do with the things that I hear every day". The concerns of the people there had nothing to do with the concerns of the petite bourgeoisie world that I lived in. This changed my life.

**Espinosa:** As you were starting university, what concept of Europe or of Spain's relations with other countries did you have or were you developing?

**Regàs:** Back then in 1959 it was very unusual for Spaniards to take trips outside the country. It was difficult, we had very little connection. I was able to boast that I had lived in France. I bragged about it, although I didn't actually remember anything, but nonetheless I bragged because I realized I had been abroad. Then I went to work at

the Carlos Barral publishing house, which was another impressive leap. There we didn't just pay attention to what we published, but also what was published in the world, so, we had a very different perspective. I even got a chance to meet people at international literature awards. Carlos Barral was not allowed to go abroad, and he sent me. I met Roboldt, Einaudi, Gallimard, I met them all. So, I moved in circles which made coming back to Spain something else.

**Espinosa:** Was that your first job?

**Regàs:** It was my first job, yes. I was hired to work in the press office, and I had to learn everything along the way, because I had no idea about anything. But little by little, I moved up.

**Espinosa:** What had led to you meeting Mr. Barral?

**Regàs:** I had a rented house in Cadaqués, nothing fancy, but a very nice house, and a man called my phone, although I don't know how he found out my number. It was Luis Goytisolo. I knew him because in university, Miguel Barceló, Salvador Clotas and Francisco Rico sometimes held get-togethers, called "sobrasada parties" because someone always brought sobrasada [a raw, cured sausage, a specialty of the Balearic Islands]. There we talked about poetry and I began to meet poets, José Agustín Goytisolo or even Carlos Barral, although he and I didn't talk there. One day they called me, on behalf of Luis Goytisolo, and asked me if I could rent the house to him in the months of May and June. I didn't use the place at that time of year, so I told him he could have it, because I wouldn't go up until the children finished the school year.

In our conversation he mentioned something that Carlos Barral had said. I told him that I was at university and that what I liked most was mathematical logic. My professor had told me, "Here is nothing more you can learn. This is it. You have to go to Germany". But I already had five children. I started university with two and I finished with five. I didn't care that I wasn't seeing my kids, that they weren't seeing me, I did not care. By then I was living my life with total freedom, which was making my husband nervous. I had twins who were born in January of the last year and I went to talk to Carlos Barral in June, and we agreed that I would start working part-time in October. I started and the following year Carlos asked me if I could work full-time because he was already giving me other tasks apart from the work of the publishing house. And I spent six or seven years there.

**Espinosa:** Do you remember receiving your first pay cheque? What was that like?

**Regàs:** Yes. I left the office. We were at 209 Provenza street in Barcelona if I remember correctly. Right next to the main entrance door was a Banco de Bilbao and it said, "Banco de Bilbao believes in women's rights", so I went in and said that I came to open an account because I had been given my pay cheque. They told me, "This fills us with great satisfaction. But, of course, there is also something else to be taken into consideration, which is the tradition that says that marital authorization is necessary." - "Are you asking for *permission from my husband?* I'm leaving!" And I left.

All these things that I kept stumbling into were shaping my idea of what a woman was and what a feminist was. In the end, I went from bank to bank and only in one I was

able to open an account. One day I was invited to a feminist association and I was very interested in going, but once there I was horrified. At the time I thought - and perhaps I'm unfair – that they had a brutal nostalgia for the ironing board. They were separated women, who had found themselves alone, but being alone was impossible, really, because it was so hard to be alone at that time. So, when they asked me, "And you, Rosa, what do you think?", I was foolish enough to say: "Me? I know only one solution." "Which is....?" - "The solution is for the most beautiful of us to become a minister's lover and make him change the laws from bed." - "Don't talk nonsense, that would be selling out." And I said: "It would be selling out, but we would have laws in our favor." And I never went back.

**Espinosa:** Professionally speaking, you have done so many things and such important things. Looking back, what gives you the most satisfaction? What accomplishments from your career are you most proud of?

**Regàs:** What I find more and more satisfying as the years go by - I didn't always feel this way - is having done whatever I proposed for myself, whatever I decided, whatever I wanted to do. Sometimes it was really hard, other times not so much, sometimes with great conviction, other times without so much: I wanted to have children and I had them; I wanted to get married and I got married; I wanted to go to university and off I went. And it took a lot of finagling, for example, how my husband's family turned against me. It was absolutely outrageous: my husband's sisters tried to take my children away from me because they believed I led a libertine, hedonist lifestyle. On top of this my mother-in-law was also against me. But I won her over, day after day, with sweet gestures and compliments, which did not cost me much. I did it and thought, I want to live in peace, in the same way that I lived in peace with my husband, from whom I was separated and yet, who was still in love with me. He was very much in love with me. I also used strategies that I should be embarrassed about, but I'm not. When my husband said to me, "My sisters have spoken to a lawyer to get custody of the children. I would like you to go and speak to him", I went to speak to the lawyer, like he told me to. And you know what I did? I slept with him. And that was that. Not once, no, two or three times, whatever was needed, I didn't care. I didn't do it out of madness, because I couldn't take it anymore, no, I did it because I thought about what I could do to take care of this guy, to shut him up...? A feminist would see it as all wrong, but I had no other choice. What else should I have done?

**Espinosa:** Apart from all these family difficulties, on a personal level, to balance your career with being a mother, how did you do it? How did you organize yourself?

**Regàs:** Very well, I didn't have any trouble. I found out about some nuns, when the little ones were very young, who came at six in the evening and stayed until six in the morning. It worked very well because I started working. When I got out of college, I started working and started having money, so I could pay for other people's help. That's how I spent all of my money, there was never enough. If I had to write up philosophy notes, I would do it. If they gave me three hundred and fifty pesetas, I would spend them on a woman who would come over for the weekend.

I had a good relationship with my children. Now they are older and when they start talking about those years, maybe they wouldn't agree, but I think so. Everyone likes to think that they had a difficult childhood, we all exaggerate a little.- But I think that,

in general, theirs was good, especially considering the brutality of that era. There came a time when I fell in love and then I couldn't make a life with the man in question whose name was Juan Benet. He got all mad, and said, "If you don't come, I'm off to do whatever I want." And I said: "Well, well, do what you want, but I am not leaving. It is one thing for me to have a lover and another thing to have to abandon my children." I would never have done that. I would not have been able to live without my children. In fact, I think that never left them because in my childhood I had such a strong idea of for having a family that, when I finally had it, I wanted to do it right. No complaining, no asking for more than I deserved, trying to help, trying to make sure there was money for them to do this and or have that, and that's how I did it. Of course, I made mistakes, for sure, but I don't regret anything. In the situation that I was in, I could have done infinitely worse things and I did not do them. I mean I don't have that feeling of guilt, I'm quite proud of my family life. Yes, I know that I made mistakes, I know that I am not the Virgin Mary. I know that there are people who would find a million things to criticize, but, from my point of view, considering the circumstances and what was possible, I always did the best I could. I never stopped. Like when I had started working at the National Library, every time they gave me an award, I splashed out and coddled them all. On my sixtieth birthday, I took them all to Africa where I had also lived. The advantage is that I got married very young. When I was thirty-five years old, my oldest son was already seventeen, so when I was fifty and started writing I was free. If I had started writing with young children, I would not have been able to do it. Not only was I able to write, but because of something that happened I left the country. -I am not going to tell you about it here, it is too complicated. Long story short: There happened to be an immense betrayal within my group of friends in Barcelona. One of whom was Jorge Herralde, who is the person I detest most in the world.

So I went to the United Nations: I did three brutal months of English courses. I took the official exam and became their translator. And there I spent fifteen years during which I tried to transform all my experience of reading books for my publishing house and for Carlos Barral's into something useful for me: to use it to critique my own work as a writer, something I didn't achieve yet.

I have not managed to critique my own work, because it's as if I wanted to measure a road in liters instead of meters. But I worked very hard, very seriously – I worked until four or five in the afternoon to finally figure out that all my criteria for judging other people's novels were useless for judging my own writing.

**Espinosa:** Concerning your career, what was it like in the political and social context that existed in Spain at that time?

**Regàs:** I have already told you that, somehow and without really knowing why, I knew that Franco was my enemy. I knew that my parents had fought for the Republic, even though I was only six years old. I knew that this put me on the side of the allies and against Franco. I remember very well the day I crossed the border with Baron de Esponellà who, on behalf of the Red Cross, brought children into Spain so that they could rejoin the peacetime life under Franco. We saw the Spanish flag and I said: "No, that can't be the Spanish flag, the purple [the 3rd Republican flag has a purple strip in addition to the red and yellow of the current flag] is missing." I remember saying these exact words. For me, it was a lack of respect for a man who had come to save us and get us away from the war that was about to break out. I understood that that flag was mine. I still think so, and I really do, because I believe in what my father said:

“Flags can only be raised when they are prohibited. Anything else is just a tacky campground.” He was right. All flags are nonsense, why a Spanish flag, a French flag, an Italian flag, why? We already know the story, don't we? Meanwhile a Palestinian flag in Israel, that's fine. Or the other way around, but I'm not going to go into this now.

To cut a long story short, when I got to school, all my friends, girls at the age of six, seven, eight, raved about Francoism as if it was the best thing in the world, but not me. I was on the losing side of the war; I had lost the war. I was conscious about it back then and am still today. To this day I cannot read anything about the exiles without crying. The other day I had to write the prologue for a book by a Frenchman who has discovered a series of documents that show that Léon Blum, the bastard, made a pact with Franco in July '36. I can't even express the immense pain that it caused me. When I was little, the same thing used to happen to me. I knew that I was on the losing side of the war, I knew that Spain had lost the war and had become this nonsense. And this nonsense, as I said at the beginning, kept revealing itself to me. For example, I could not see my mother for more than an hour and couldn't contact her, but when we were in a place with priests in the juvenile court system, the priests tried to fondle us. I knew that the Catholic religion was exactly this.

Fortunately, the priest we had as a teacher, Manuel Trens, was a person who gave us a sense of religion, that I don't want to call *mystical*, but *liturgical*. It regarded everything: what he had learned over the course of his life, how he had converted, how the mass was celebrated... The importance of colors, the robes and the songs, all things that I loved. That religion didn't bother me. The one that bothered me was the religion of the only priest that the nuns had managed to bring in on the day of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the 7<sup>th</sup> of March. He came in, took off his watch and set it and then proceeded to tell us that we had to sit in silence and think. I thought “Oh, come on, man!” I saw this difference.

When I left school and found that the liturgical religion that I had learned and that I got used to didn't exist. And that there was all this other shit. It took me five years to finally tell the priest who was my confessor to bugger off! My husband said, “Let's go to confession,” and together we went. I only went because the guy was also deaf and wouldn't get most of my confession - “What's he saying? I don't understand”. I, who was having a tough time and had just come for my husband, got up and never went back. But I didn't tell that to my husband. What I did was when Sunday came around and my husband liked to sleep a lot, I told him: “I'll let you sleep in and you go to 11 o'clock mass with our older son, and I, meanwhile, I'll go before and then I can prepare things for lunch.” I lied through my teeth. I remember it all so clearly. When I got to the door of the church at 8 in the morning, there was an open café across the way I sat down and had coffee. I remember it as having accomplished something very important. Whenever I pass by although the café is no longer there, I think: “My God, how happy I was! How couldn't I see that?” Well, I did see it, and I went on evolving and learning, and turned all of these feelings into my own life story.

Spain was the only world I knew: with its civil war and with the fascists, who back then we didn't call fascists but Francoists. They won and the good people, like my parents on the other, lost. To me this was everything when I started university. The rest was like history, like talking about the Punic wars, I just didn't feel it. One day something happened that helped me a lot. I saw an announcement: “Manuel Vázquez Montalbán

[1939-2003, an important writer and a close friend of Regas'] will tell us about Lumumba”.

I knew who Lumumba was and I only knew about the Congo because my brother Javier, the oldest, had already run away from home, got married, separated, and came back... well, a whole other story. One day we got a telegram: “I'm happy to tell you that I have gotten married. Love, Javier.” In the end my brother came back as the richest and most elegant person I have ever seen. He had married Michelle Stoclet of the Stoclet house in Brussels. She had inherited the Katanga mines in the Congo from her grandfather. I didn't know who he was at the time - and I still don't know today.

So, I was aware of what was happening in the Congo because this woman, who, by the way, was a complete nut, told us about the things going on there. My brother Javier was a guy whose reaction to the horrid childhood he had lived was much more violent than mine. He ended up doing whatever he felt like, in the most brutal sense: he ran away during the War and he was just gone for six months and then they found him again, don't ask me how. It was always like this for him, but he has done some great things, like the *Boccaccio* [a famous discotheque that he opened in Barcelona]. He did all the interior design without ever studying anything and then he left again. He got married to seven different women. Since every girl's parents wanted them to get married in the church, he got an annulment every time. He was a genius, poor thing.

**Espinosa:** We were talking, Rosa, about the issue.

**Regàs:** (*interrupting*) Let me tell you about Manuel Vázquez.

**Espinosa:** Ah, sorry! You're right!

**Regàs:** I knew what Manuel Vázquez was talking about through this story about my brother Javier who had married the heiress of the Katanga mines. I don't know why, but I was set on going to see what had happened with Lumumba, who had died a year ago then. He must have been sixty-one [Lumumba, Congo's first democratically elected president, was assassinated in 1961].

I hadn't met Manuel Vázquez before. At lunchtime he walked into the classroom and, when I left that conference, I had become a new person. Suddenly, for me, the world had grown. I realized what the world was like. that not everything revolved around the Spanish civil war, around our good guys and our bad guys, around the people who let you see your mama and the ones who didn't let you see her. Yes, it was all the same, but on a larger scale. On a larger scale, it was all the same. I still feel exactly the same way. Today I am able to justify that view ideologically speaking but, above all, I could justify it intellectually speaking. At that moment, it seemed to me that it was all the same and it gave me a window, opened a door to the knowledge of the politics of the world and not just of the country I lived in. — This experience opened many doors for me. Right now, I'm reading a book by an old American man whose name I don't remember, published in 1978 or '79 that could have easily been published just recently. I don't know why I'm reading it, because I already know it all, but this desire for knowledge has been growing alongside my desire for commitment and it is very important. I realized what Manuel Vázquez was risking in telling us all of this, the circumstances that led to Lumumba's death. The bastards from the university would come and, didn't put him in jail, but they did issue him a fine and beat him up. Imagine:

he had done all of this to make us aware of something we didn't know. How the United States had killed Lumumba and not only did they do it, but they affirmed to it. I thought "Ah! This means that it is not okay to say everything is the same, no, no. Everything is the same, but we have to fight for all this to change." And this was the beginning of my political awareness.

**Espinosa:** That's where your political awareness began. What was it like for you, being an independent woman, a working mother, your children in a society where there was a dictatorship and I suppose that freedom of expression...? (*Rosa interrupts*)

**Regàs:** Well, it was tough. Creix [The Creix brothers, Vicente and Antonio, were officers in the Social Investigative Brigade (the thought police) of the Francoist government, who focused on the communists and Catalan intellectual circles] stopped me three times in a demonstration with my children, took me to some place and gave me a beating that left my face black and blue. They put Manuel Vázquez in jail, and I went to see him. The only thing I didn't do was to join the PSUC [United Socialist Party of Catalonia] although everyone wanted me to join, but I said, "No, I am not having anything to do with them". And I never have.

I have worked hard my whole life, above all, not so much to do things as to have a real knowledge of what was going on. I believe that the first big mistake that all of us, who work to change the world, make is that we do not have enough insight. So, we cling to anything that might give us knowledge because it is the only thing we can do. That's what I have done all my life. I am going to tell you something that I shouldn't mention; but I am going to anyway. A week ago, I received an award from the Spanish Human Rights Foundation for my career.

**Espinosa:** Congratulations!

**Regàs:** It's ludicrous because I am no longer doing my best work. But anyway, someone noticed, and they gave the other award to Lula da Silva [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil in 2003-2010]. It gave me the feeling that not everything was so shitty, after all. You know, I have done a lot of work, especially in the past, I am a hard worker and have a brutal amount of energy, in the past and still now, although now it has mellowed, of course. I had a lot of energy and I was up for anything: if I had to go to China, I would go to China. If I had to come back, I would come back.; If I had to make a speech, I did it. I've done everything and I've done it all my life.

**Espinosa:** Over the last few years, what were the issues that have inspired you to go deeper, that have been on your mind or kept you busy?

**Regàs:** What concerns me the most and what I can't wrap my head around, is the injustice of the fact that twenty percent of the Catalan and Spanish population hovers near the poverty line while the top eight percent are able to hold on to all the wealth.

*At this point Anna, one of Rosa's daughters, enters the room. Rosa introduces us, between them some affectionate chit-chat They make a few jokes and we all laugh.*

**Espinosa:** We were talking, Rosa, about the issues that have been on your mind in recent years.

**Regàs:** The brutal unfairness of the world is what I cannot bear. It hurts me intellectually, more than emotionally, you know? And more than anything, I realize that nobody cares. I see everyone here talking about what is happening here in Palafrugell [the area where Rosa lives] and anywhere else, but nobody, not even for a minute worries about people having to sleep in cars because they have no home. Another thing that worries me is culture, meaning the lack of interest in culture. That's why it is one of the things I have worked on the most in the official positions I've had.

*Loris, another of Rosa's children, comes in.*

**Regàs:** When I was at the Casa de América [Regàs was Director of the Ateneo Americano de la Casa de América de Madrid between 1994 and 1998, the year that she stepped down] I tried to put into practice what Carlos Barral had taught me. He started publishing Mexican authors and Brazilian authors because he said that it was actually just one language. They ignored him because the same difference that there was between Mexico and Spain, was between Mexico and Brazil. Or between Mexico and Chile. This was a part of his work and I remember that, when I left the Casa de América, I did a tribute to him: *Carlos Barral, the editor on both shores*, as I called him. It was very good. I tried to highlight underground culture, culture that had been banned for so many years or that, even if they are not banned, people still look down at you if you champion it. When I got to the National Library, the first thing I did was open the library up to everyone, which cost me blood, sweat and tears because the extreme right-wing newspapers turned against me. No surprise: there were some old geezers, who were the head honchos of the National Library, who could publish their own books and nobody got in their way, because nobody knew what was actually there. So, we went from two thousand people to forty-five thousand or I don't know how many. Then we also did the digitalization of, I don't know how many, millions of pages of 19th century magazines because I didn't have too much time. And we did a very big thing with computers so that people could look up everything in the library. On top of that, we transformed the National Library Museum in order to being able to show things. We opened a room - the hypostyle hall, which had been full of rubble - for exhibitions of stamps, old tickets, and that kind of thing. In short, I have always tried to broaden access to culture, make it available to more people.

**Espinosa:** Do you think that this lack of interest or disengagement with culture has been a failure of Europe, in general, of the different countries that built it?

**Regàs:** Well, there are a lot of countries in Europe. I have lived in countries that have a very intense conception of culture, like Hungary. But that has nothing to do with mine.

*Another of Rosa's family members comes in again to offer us something to eat and drink, and to drop an ironic hint that I am starting to get a bad reputation among the Regàs family, who are waiting for us to be able to start lunch.*

**Regàs:** I have got to know Hungary quite well because I have met authors who later went into exile when communism came in. Sándor Márai, for example, of whom I am a completist. What I did not know then and discovered only later, is that they were really and truly fascists. Little by little I saw the things that were happening. Now I

understand why they vote for the extreme right, and now I understand that they have an idea of the culture that is that of their glorious periods, but not contemporary culture. In short, I have come to realize that there are people who understand culture differently. I have true admiration for France, along with all the flaws that I find. In France they gave me the Legion of Honor to the maximum degree when I was in the National Library. I was very proud and very sorry that both my parents were dead because they were Francophiles to their graves, and they would have been so happy. I never lived with them, so if I am also a Francophile, I don't owe it to them.

Concerning your question about Europe, I believe that to coalesce around one idea of culture for all these peoples who all see it so differently, it will have to be done with another approach, and I don't know what that could be. I should not say a culture for everyone, because that is not what it is. It is the acceptance of diversity, and even more, the acceptance and interest in diversity. Until we achieve this in Europe it will not be possible, because we are too different from each other. This is what I think. Before I said that it's impossible to predict because I just don't know. But it is good to take it into account. Like when I go to León, for example: what interests me is not what tourism shows me but what it doesn't show me: which is what is truly unique and hidden so that tourists don't see it. This happens to me a lot, like in Italy, or in other countries that I have got to know. Maybe that is why I felt so comfortable in Syria, because I had no idea about anything, and I found a country with four thousand years of history where all religions were equally important. I simply couldn't believe it.

**Espinosa:** Do you think that the current policies in Europe are going to foster this idea of diversity or do you think that it is going in another direction?

**Regàs:** I think it hasn't been brought up for debate, even. What Europe lacks is debate; it lacks debate about culture, debate about unity, debate about total unity, debate about whether we want to stay as we are now, debate on the economy, debate on political and social commitment, debate, debate, debate. Maybe within twenty years we will be ready for a union. Those debates would be fantastic.

**Espinosa:** I wanted to ask you about some questions related to culture and artistic movements. I would like to know what songs or songwriters, music in general, and movies have had an impact on you, that have stayed with you or have had a special importance for you, if it is something you like.

**Regàs:** For me, music stands above all, fundamentally, classical music. I started studying piano and almost completed my degree, I only have one course left. I have always lived with classical music. There are popular singers that I like, but for me the most important thing is classical music, especially Schubert, one of my passions, Mozart, too, but mainly Schubert. There are also times when I go for Bach. And lately, in the last twenty years, I have tried to get to know the Russian greats, who had so many difficulties to surmount, and everything they gave Europe. But, honestly, I don't believe in talking about music because I don't think it makes sense. Music is not spoken with words. Sometimes I hear somebody say "and this sonata..." on the radio, when I drive and turn on Radio Nacional de España, the classical station, or the Catalan one. They start up in that dry, boring way, and they are talking to you in words about something that has no words! It gets on my nerves. And movies, I couldn't tell you.

**Espinosa:** Have you been a movie buff?

**Regàs:** There have been films that I've loved, but lately I only see very little in the cinema; I go to see films, but I have three children who are dedicated to cinema, so I have many films and I watch them all. Let's say that, for me, artistically speaking, the most important thing in my life has been literature. Yes, there is one thing I would like to talk about, a kind of movement. Actually, it was rather a lifestyle, a group of people in Barcelona in the sixties and seventies, who later Joan de Sagarra jokingly referred to as the "divine gauche". That gave Barcelona an air that, from my point of view at least that is my opinion. Not so much for what we were seeing or for the enthusiasm of the publishers or the painters, but for our enthusiasm of getting to know each other. I remember that there was this place called "Boccaccio" that my brothers had founded, and it was very successful. There all the intellectuals gathered, it was sublime, very beautiful and elegant, and they were all there, people from Madrid, from Seville, from New York, from Milan They all ended up there. And, like me, everyone was just as interested in talking about what we were trying to do in the world of publishing or literature as much as in knowing what those in design, architecture, and poetry were doing. It was the only time in my whole life, that I have seen creation not only as a solitary process, because we shared things all the time: "What are you doing? Tell me all about it. I would like to see it, because in literature I am doing something same thing." That kind of exchange was constant. It lasted about nine or ten years and it was wonderful. I have never seen anything like it again, not in this city nor in any other. Of course we had Francoism, of course everything was prohibited, of course we didn't really understand anything about politics but we pushed forward with what we did understand, even if it was little We were deeply anti-Franco but we had no tools, everything was prohibited, we didn't know anything, we had not been educated in politics, nothing. However, we pushed forward, we fought, and we did what we could. We did all these things and we felt something that no longer exists: hope! Not only that Franco died, but also that the number of projects that we started would end up educating society in some way and we would end up making the world a little bit better. All this ended with the death of Franco, the Transition came, but what came before was really very important. Since then, the cultural world, for me, has been a world of lonely people. I go to a book presentation and I don't see even one other writer attending. I go to an art opening, there is some guy who talks and talks - blah, blah, blah - but where are the painters? They're not there. I don't see any musicians, either.

**Espinosa:** And how did La Gaya Ciencia [the publishing house that Regàs herself founded in 1969] happen? At that point in your life, you embarked on a serious adventure.

**Regàs:** I really had no choice. I already told you before that I had wanted to keep going with mathematical logic, but it wasn't possible here in Barcelona. It reminded me of a saying by that priest I told you about, who always expressed himself with very funny phrases. He said, for example, "If you are looking for a helping hand to help, you will find one at the end of your arm" and things like that. One thing he always repeated was: "There is no freedom without economic freedom." When I was in school, I used to say it because he used to say it, but I didn't really understand what he meant. I finally came to understand it when I was already married. suddenly I thought, "Of course! How could I not have understood it?" It was then when I thought that I can't

go to Germany, what I had to do was getting a job. So that's when I started working with Carlos Barral, with whom I spent seven years, getting to know all the world's intelligentsia, the great wealth of Latin America, and of Spain, too. By the way, the Spanish one is clumsier and less creative, but also very important. But there came a time when big money was arranged to get rid of Carlos Barral. Barral was, along with Víctor Seix, heir to the men who had founded the graphic arts company "Seix Barral" twenty years earlier, and they turned it into a publishing house. When Victor Seix died – he was hit by a tram while attending the Frankfurt fair - the right-wing people in his family, under the command of an evil guy named Antonio Comas, got together, and pushed Carlos Barral out. He continued with a small publisher, but they had left him with nothing, and he had no money to hire us all and make a real go of it. That meant I had to figure things out for myself. At first, I was offered a job at another publishing house and then I got it together to set up one of my own. I named it La Gaya Ciencia at the suggestion of Eugenio Trías, a great friend of mine with whom I had studied philosophy. And one of the first books I published was one of his.

I set up this publishing house, which had some very important moments. We had a collection called "Moby Dick", based on the theory that children can understand the same things as older people, but you do not give them the most difficult book by an author. You can look for an easier book. The collection was divided into three segments: from six to nine years old, from nine to fourteen and from fifteen to seventeen and it was very successful, more than I could have ever imagined. When Franco died, my brother Oriol and I came up with a collection, a bit in the style of Seix, with volumes on what democracy is, what dictatorship is, what social classes are, what the right is, what the left is, I collected thirty titles. My brother Oriol was quite a powerful man in Barcelona back then; not moneywise, but because he had opened some fantastic fun places with a lot of style and he had also dabbled in the cinema. He was one of the most important figures in Barcelona in those years. He told me, "Now we've got thirty authors and thirty titles; if you get twenty-five more, I can get you financing". So, I went to Madrid. Many authors hiding, like Felipe González [democratic Spain's first Socialist president and held that office from 1982 to 1996] himself. There was a hiding spot that was called the Political Education Outreach Library. The motto was: "Know what you are talking about when talking about politics.". I asked for texts from all the men who gave talks there and who hoped to be thought as leaders of their ideologies. And they all said yes. All but La Falange [La Falange Española was a political party of fascist inspiration founded in 1933] and Christian Democracy [a political party founded in 1978]. I commissioned Ruiz Jiménez, who said yes and then didn't produce anything. In the first editions, all the volumes came out except those two. How funny!

**Espinosa:** The phrase "There is no freedom without economic freedom" brings us to the topic of freedom. What is freedom for you? You told me before that you have basically always done whatever you have you decided you wanted to do.

**Regàs:** What I thought I wanted to do!

**Espinosa:** What you believed in (*laughs*).

**Regàs:** No, what I thought I wanted to do, because there have been many times that I have done something believing that it was what I wanted to do and then I said, "What

an idiot I am!”. I allowed myself to be influenced by this and by that, but it didn’t bother me, because they are things that belong to me. I have always believed that living means making mistakes, and maybe, from a mistake, something important comes out and it can really solve a problem. The only thing I regret is not having taken advantage of the moments when I could have given more tenderness to my father or my mother before their deaths. Or to my brothers, who have also passed away. I adored them; the four brothers were such a tight group. But not because we did anything wrong, but because perhaps I didn’t say something that they would have liked me to hear. But I have never regretted any of the disasters that I have created, and that are infinite. It’s not a problem actually! But we are used to judging things gone wrong as a disaster because we have been taught from childhood what you are supposed to do and what you are not: you are doing something and suddenly you stumble over a stone and you fall, and something breaks. But there you find something you didn’t have before and it turns out to be a gold coin and this opens up new possibilities for you. That is how I see life.

**Espinosa:** Do you see freedom as an under-appreciated concept in periods of democracy?

**Regàs:** Manipulated.

**Espinosa:** In what sense?

**Regàs:** Manipulated by television, manipulated by advertising, manipulated by everyone, manipulated by politicians. Like the ones in the United States, who spend their lives talking about freedom and the only thing they actually do is screw people over and crush societies around the world that follow their rules. They give them freedom on the condition of always being subjected to their will, which is naturally that of economic interests. And that’s not all: Catholics also talk to you about freedom because God has given us freedom. Damn, it’s so untrue! They don’t want freedom! If you like sleeping with a man it is a mortal sin, and then there are obstacles and more obstacles. That’s why I say that, in both feminism and in politics, what you have to do is start from scratch. Try to get rid of everything they have fed you without you realizing it before because it is in the very air we breathe. But, as I’ve moved forward, I have realized that we didn’t start from scratch; we started at minus thirty, or forty or fifty. The case of women is very clear: a woman who wants to be free doesn’t start from scratch, she starts from minus twenty, because first she has to get rid of everything that should define success for a woman, like she has been taught all her life.

**Espinosa:** What is your take on the rise of feminism in recent years?

**Regàs:** Very positive. There are plenty of things I disagree with, but this does not bother me because, although I may disagree, I am infinitely more in agreement with these things than with all the brutalities that have been done to us throughout our lives. I experienced all of it. All the women, that we don’t even know, who fall in love with a guy and, suddenly, he goes off with another and doesn’t say anything to you, have experienced this: they have been hooked and then are afraid of what people will say about them. We have to get rid of all of this: enough is enough, I’m leaving and that’s it. You don’t need to ask for money, and you don’t need to fight, you don’t need

anything. We have to get rid of all the absurdity at any price, of what society tells us that we are supposed to do or be.

**Espinosa:** Do you think that has also been the breeding ground for violence?

**Regàs:** Sure. I don't understand violence, especially against women. I don't know what goes on inside men who decide to kill women, I simply can't get my head around it. They must be crazy, because sometimes they kill themselves. Out of cowardice. I don't get it, because no matter how short-tempered you are, you don't decide to kill people. Naturally, I am all against it, but I do understand the abuse - the desire to dominate a woman. What I don't understand is the killing. It has to be an outburst of fury, but even so, I still don't understand what kind of outburst it is, and anything and everything we can do to fight these things seems necessary to me. For example, with everything that has happened now with Plácido Domingo [Domingo, born in 1941, the famous opera tenor and director, was accused of sexual harassment and abuse by numerous women in 2019, ending in his admission of guilt], I understand that people are sad, but indeed he did do it. There is a very nice article by Cristina Fallarás [born in 1968, a Spanish journalist and writer known for her feminist activism] talking about how we didn't believe the stories about Plácido Domingo. We only finally believed it when he admitted it, because before we couldn't believe it. It is infuriating and she is absolutely right, because the word of the man is worth more than the word of the woman. If you look closely, it is not only the word of a man, it's also what he does. A man does not work as much as a woman and reaches much higher. A man does not work in the house and, even so, he is considered the owner and head of household. A man does a thousand terrible things to his wife and it is no big deal because men already know what they are like. Then one day it occurs to a wife to cheat on her husband and.... We're not just talking professionally anymore, it's everywhere. This leads to absurdities like those of girls who began to defend the rights of hens - they are crazy, I know. This brings us back to what we were saying before: you fall, you find something, and you don't know what will come of it. These girls who got pulled into the insanity of defending hens have never been told "no is no". How are they going to say it? All this can lead to other things, I couldn't care less. It is all nonsense.

**Espinosa:** Do you always see visibility as a good idea as long as the ultimate objective is a valid one?

**Regàs:** What I believe is that the more women there are, who have the courage to call out injustice, to *protest*, the better. I have always been a big believer in *protest*, and I'm always ready to say it again. Someone asked one of my grandchildren, "How do you see your grandmother?", and he answered, "My grandmother has taught me the value of protest and commitment to life." It became the title of a book that I published. But he said it when he was twelve years old, and it's not a question of me teaching him, per se, it was simply seeing the kind of things you do. So, yes, I do believe in protest, and if it sometimes goes overboard or gets twisted, so be it! If we are wrong, next time we'll do better, but protest is always something worth doing compared to the brutality of things that women have had to endure throughout their history.

**Espinosa:** So, shall we take a look at the future, Rosa, as we move toward wrapping things up? Are you more optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the generations

to come, with an eye toward the idea of Europe that we have already discussed? Has your way of seeing things changed as far as this is concerned?

**Regàs:** Everything has changed. I used to be optimistic; I believed that the fight led to improvements in the world. Then I fell into the deepest pessimism, thinking “There’s nothing we can do, it’s all the same.” Or as Semprún [Jorge Semprún, 1923-2011, was a writer and Madrid intellectual, and Minister of Culture between 1988 and 1991] said: “This country has no solution.” I didn’t believe in anything at all, but now I’ve come around again. Like I told you before: there is a movement of the world that just is what it is. This means simply that all things that are happening are happening, and in this movement, I include the reactions in favor and against the ideas that are emerging... But a particular future is something that we can neither achieve nor prevent. Does this mean that we should just stand by and let things slide without doing anything? No, because what we can do is have an influence. What we can’t do is fix things. For example, when I see everything that is happening around the world, then I come to the conclusion that the world simply does not have a solution and in fifty years this world will be absolutely rotten. But how can I know if something else might happen, if things will swing in another direction, if some people find a way to fight, find another way. You never know.

What I mean is that the world moves in its own direction. It has its own way of moving forward and assimilating everything that happens. Things that we do well and things that we do wrong, things that animals do, what we people do. Everything is colliding and, suddenly, someone builds houses on a seaside promenade, they build a promenade and then a storm comes that wipes everything out, no more beach. But all this leads to other things that we cannot anticipate. But this does not mean, I insist, that we should stand still. Just the opposite. I believe in a commitment to life, really and truly. I believe that the best way we have to express this commitment is for people who are of a certain age, like myself. I am an old woman, at my age, most people are already dead. I am eighty-six years old; I can no longer do the things I used to do: go places, give speeches. I am too old and in so many ways I can’t do it anymore, but we do have one possibility: It is to protest. And I’ve always protested. If I didn’t, it would have been something I regretted. Just imagine this scenario: One day the mayor came to our house, and he hadn’t fixed the path to my home. I went to see the mayor to tell him that. “You haven’t fixed our path!” and he said, “Get in line because there are a lot of people”. I responded, “Then you get in line to charge me my IBI [property taxes in Spain]!” And he said, “One thing has nothing to do with the other.” - “Ha! Nothing to do with the other? So, what do I have to do, wait?” - “You have to understand that we cannot just take care of it.” And I said: “Well, enough with the blah-blah-blah and that nonsense that you are proposing, like prohibiting smoking on the beaches.” - “It is full of stubs,” he said. “Well, if it is full of cigarette stubs, start issuing five-hundred-euro fines to people who litter.”

And that’s what I told the mayor, who didn’t pay me any attention, I really did. If I did not say it one way, I would say it in another. If you do not want me coming into your office, I’ll send you a WhatsApp or an email! “Whatever the mayor says...”, says the mayor of Barcelona [refers to the need to protest however the authorities may respond if it is the right thing to do], with whom I generally agree.

I write little articles, I cannot write many because here, in Catalonia, it’s like I don’t exist. But I have the possibility of doing a bit on a radio show called Radio Capital and,

well, something is something. If I can write articles for things abroad, I try to get them seen here so that people know I always protest about things that seem important to me. Not because I believe that I'll be able to fix it, but because I believe that I can influence the path and that, perhaps, what I do, if I do it well, will influence things for the better. This is what I think.

**Espinosa:** We were talking before about your ideas and your optimism about the concept of Europe. How have you lived through some important moments - the year 1989, for example - and this idea of a united Europe? What was that initial optimism like and how has it fared with the passing of time?

**Regàs:** Initially there was this very powerful experience, but I believe that the European Union has been distancing itself from critical issues in the lives of its citizens and it has since stayed away. In economic issues, for example, that matter to the upper classes. There, yes, it gets involved. But in economic issues that matter to the poor classes, it doesn't. Currently, there is no policy to fix the world we have, or to fix the world that is upon us, there simply isn't. Occasionally the EU will make a statement and then say, "We've done our part." No, I believe that for Europe to be Europe, a united Europe, what the EU has to do is to truly lead all its member countries, and to straighten things out. What must never happen is to send in a few guys from the Right, *that* is not freedom of expression. The idea that there should be parties, such as VOX [Extreme Right political party established in 2013 which currently holds 52 of the 350 seats in the Congreso de los Diputados in Spain] that continue to advocate that the idea that women are inferior to men - the European Union must ban it, I am very sorry.

We should be able, in some way, to hold the EU accountable for our economic situation, to go directly to Europe. There should be a well-designed system, like in China, for example, which surprised me. By which communities or countries should be forced to do so, creating the opportunity for transparency, so that people see the real numbers, in such a way that corruption would be obvious. This is what they could do. So, why don't they? Because they are not interested, because the man who was president of the European Union [refers to Jean Claude Juncker] was a thief in his own country before. What happens when you find out something like this, is you think: "This man a thief? No!". Just because he was a thief wearing white gloves?

**Espinosa:** And what do you expect for your grandkids, from this Europe?

**Regàs:** I don't want to think about it. When I think about it, I get very discouraged. Not so much because I think things will go wrong, but because I think maybe I won't be able to understand them anymore.

**Espinosa:** Let me rephrase the question then. With all your personal and professional experience, what conversations do you have with your children and, above all, your grandchildren who are in the first few years of their careers? What advice do you give them? Do you tell them to do things your way?

**Regàs:** I never give advice. Never ever. In the same way that I think a child will brush their teeth if everybody brushes their teeth at home, or they won't speak out of turn or interrupt a conversation if nobody interrupts a conversation at home. But no one has to tell them because they just live it. I also think that the only way that I and my life

story can be useful, is what they can see, nothing more. It's just not in me. Today, for example, I spoke to María [one of Rosa's granddaughters], who is a photographer and has a good job in a place where she is doing quite well. It's exactly everything she hoped for. At a certain point her career really took off with her photography. She was up to three hundred thousand followers, which is apparently quite impressive but then she realized that, even so, she actually was a bit lacking the professional training she needed. Now she is studying again. I asked her about it and whether everything was going okay. Because I do try to know how they are doing. And she said to me, "Yes, but do you know what is happening to me now? It is that I am just not motivated, I have things to do, and I don't get them done. Then I feel bad about not having done it. I guess I need to work a bit more on myself or develop more self-confidence." What do you say to something like that? I could not say anything more than ask what *she* thinks she ought to do. "Well, I'm not sure. There are some classes to take, maybe I'll get my nerve up to take them. I might go to see a woman who helped my mom a bit, to give me a boost, to help me."

So, well, I'm not going to tell her what I would do, just as I didn't tell my kids, either. My kids all got involved in the cinema. Eduard is a photographer too, but Loris, Mariona and David are in film. Film is a challenging industry and sometimes they have slipped up, but I never said a single word. I don't say anything because I'm quite conscious I can't tell them the truth. I don't know what that truth would be, I can't see the world as they see it. The other day I was reading something from Oscar Wilde that said, "Artists don't see reality like we do, that's why they are artists". Isn't that right? I do not see social reality as they see it. Why? Because I am their grandmother and there are these sixty years of experience that I cannot get rid of. My experience is very useful *for me*. but I do not think it's useful to anyone else; for the other person, experience is something that must be earned.

So, I am not very hopeful that the world will improve. I just don't see it; from a political point of view, they are all just cheating scoundrels both here and abroad. If I think of Macron, I fall into despair. If I think about the guy from England, I fall into despair. I find it hard to imagine that things won't just improve, but who knows? If we can claw our way back from the despairing levels of mediocrity in politics that we have reached now, perhaps something will happen and we will save ourselves from this mediocrity, and we will all begin to take action. It could be, but I don't know.

**Espinosa:** What role had literature for you from a creative point of view? In all your biographies you are spoken of as a late-blooming writer. You started to write - or at least to publish, to write for the general public – later in life. What was that like, why *then*, and what role has it had in your life?

**Regàs:** That's very easy. I'm not like most, who have one calling. I've had many. I remember, when I was twenty years old, that one of my great callings was to figure out who I was, what I was capable of, and I realized the immense work I would have to do to achieve this. I was used to seeing myself as the girl who had gone to school and knew exactly what she was doing, and I had to shift my perspective. I have had many callings: grand callings, small callings that I have dedicated much effort to, and literature has always been there. It is true that literature, back when I started, gave me the ability to ponder small creative problems or problems of style. *What is style?* And other things like that tortured me a lot in those years before I got to publishing my first book. Actually, I started to think about where an argument comes from, where I get it

from, coming to the conclusion that I was getting it from within myself and then it was up to my imagination to play with it.

Now I have gone much further. Now I know that there is no art. I know that for sure. In other words, if someone comes and gives me a description of some landscape, that's all very nice and good, I am not saying anything against it, but it is not art. What this man gives me *through his gaze*, *that* is art. Either because he has a different perspective than mine or because he plays with reality with amazing imagination and fantasy. And then he gives us a different version. To give me the same version of a lady who is at home crying because her husband cheated on her? I already know this. It is of zero interest, zilch. When I start a book, I know whether or not I will continue. I didn't used to, I used to think "Let's see maybe, it'll get better", but not anymore. Now I see it right away.

**Espinosa:** What are you working on? What projects do you have lined up over the next few months or years?

**Espinosa:** Now I have got this project. First, I started with a very complicated book, which was, at its core, the story of a man who goes in search of *the* definitions of political and social concepts. I wished to merge all of this in some way with my own experience, even if the gender of the main character was different from mine. But I could not, it just didn't work out. I have written stories and other things that have not come out, but for a while now I have been on a roll! I have found the key, but do not make me tell you what it is. If I tell anyone, I'll lose it.

**Espinosa:** By all means, don't tell me what it is!

**Regàs:** It's true that I am *interested* – not *excited*, that is not the right word. I think it's good, and I think that, if I have enough life to finish this book, it'll make a nice close to my relatively few years as a writer, during which time I have published these twenty-five or thirty books. Quite a few if you think about it.

**Espinosa:** Quite true, yes.

**Regàs:** I think, it would fit well as a close for my work. Starting with my very first novel and trying to find a bit of what I was looking for when I wrote that first one as I write this last one that, somehow, this would give it all closure. I like things that end well.

**Espinosa:** What would you say is important to you in life, Rosa? I don't know if maybe this is a very banal question.

**Regàs:** No, no. (*thinking for a second*) Lucidity. More than intelligence, lucidity. If you are lucid, you have the courage to be lucid and, if you do not understand it, to look for it. Nobody will be able to deceive you, nobody will be able to dominate you, nobody will be able to do you any harm. You will safeguard your person and your freedom. But if you are not lucid, you will give your vote to the first handsome guy who appears on television just because he asked for it.

**Espinosa:** And what have you done throughout your life to try to stay lucid or what has helped you to do so?

**Regàs:** It has helped me to not believe anything. A tenet. You see news on television: either I do not believe it or, if the news interest me, I look in one place and then I look in another. It's not that I'll end up knowing the truth, because I'll never end up knowing the truth, but I will end up knowing the traps that have led this guy to say what he has. That doesn't mean that it tells me exactly why he did it, but somehow my skepticism is justified. My rule is to not believe what the newspapers publish, until I have been able to verify it myself. I remember that it was one of the first things that I started to say when I started speaking in public. I used to always tell people to never believe anything, even if the Pope of Rome, your husband or your wife said it. Do not believe before running it through your own intellect first. We are so used to watching television and hearing "I heard that..." No way, it doesn't work like this. So, what I try to do is keep my mind constantly working. I was inspired by a wonderful interview with Rita Levi Montalcini, who won a Nobel Prize in medicine in 1986. That interview was she published on the day she turned 100. She said, "Everything ages: our skin ages, our eyesight ages, our ears age, our bones age, our skeleton ages, everything ages. There is only one thing that does *not* age and that is our mind. Our mind does not age, but on one condition: that it is active all the time." That it is in constant action and working and working and working. I have worked up such a pace that with all the things I am looking at (*points to the space in front of her*), I have already discovered at least six things that I see from this window that I have to change. I have got used to analyzing things, looking for what can be improved, what can be changed, what is not true, what is wrong, what is in its proper place, etc. This always helped me. I would like to finish with a Turkish saying, that I love, which goes like this: "When the house is finished, death enters."

**Espinosa:** (*after a few seconds of silence*) Well, Rosa, I can't think of a better way to end. It has been a pleasure; it has been an honor. Thank you for your lucidity, above all.

**Regàs:** No, no. I try, but I'll never reach full lucidity. But really lucidity is like freedom: it is simply a series of paths, they are not destinations; you can never reach total freedom. Never. You can be on the path to freedom, on the path to lucidity, on the path to helping others. on the path! Helping others, when will you be finished helping others? Never!