

Spain

Belén Matesanz interviewed **Lidia Falcón**

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Erika Remedio acting as a companion.

Matesanz: My name is Belén Matesanz, from Spain. I am an English scholar, currently studying a master's in literature and translation, with a particular interest in feminism and social issues. I have participated in numerous voluntary projects abroad and I am currently enjoying my second Erasmus mobility scholarship in Poland. I am talking to Lidia Falcón (born in Madrid in 1935 and raised in Barcelona), who is a feminist activist, politician, and writer. She holds a degree in Performing Arts and a doctorate in Philosophy as well as being a qualified attorney. She has done an invaluable job defending women rights, she is the founding mother of the Revolutionary Feminist Organization (*Organización Feminista Revolucionaria*) in Barcelona that developed in the Feminist Party in Spain, of which she is the leader. She is founder of the magazines "*Vindicación Feminista*" and "*Poder y Libertad*". She has travelled around the world lecturing on this subject and has been honoured for her work by the Senate of Puerto Rico, among many other accolades.

Matesanz: I'll start with personal questions about your childhood and about home. To begin with, what is home for you? How would you define it?

Falcón: My home, or home in general?

Matesanz: Home as the place where you feel comfortable.

Falcón: I feel comfortable at home, in my house.

Matesanz: Is there any ritual or tradition you need to make you feel like home when you are not there?

Falcón: No, not really. There's no place like home. You don't feel the same in any hotel, in any other house. Naturally, that's if you can afford to have a comfortable home, because many people can't.

Matesanz: When you were a kid, did you feel safe? Was yours a good childhood?

Falcón: My childhood is that of the Spanish Civil War, so you understand that it cannot be said to have been safe. I was happy because my family environment was one with very educated and supportive members, and we were very solid in our political ideology. When the Civil War ended, we were in exile in Barcelona. There were only 6 women left in the family since the men had been shot, my father had fled into exile, and my grandfather had died. There was no safety, we were in the midst of Franco's regime, at the dawn of the commencement of the Second World War; it was going to break out in a few months and fascism was reigning, all over Europe. Therefore, our

situation was hard, one of the worst childhoods possible. Later on, other kind of infancies have come. I wrote a poem about it.

Matesanz: Were you aware of everything that was going on around you?

Falcón: Yes, completely. What I see now, is that children have been brought up in a bubble of unconsciousness, far from the social situation they are living in. Back then it was impossible to do that. Not just for me, but...I do not think that any child, except for the ones in rich and high-status families, who had wealth and were surrounded by servants, and therefore living an artificial life, the rest of us, the working classes, were terribly exploited by capitalism, and also subjected to fascist repression. And I hope you can imagine that.

Matesanz: Well, right now, that is hard to imagine.

Falcón: Well, fascism is here with us, it has never left, neither our country nor any country. In this very moment, many terrible situations are taking place. But for us, we are Spanish and live in this small oasis that is Europe. But let us think about the war in Syria, about Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Yemen; we know that thousands of refugees arrive on the Spanish shores and on the shores of other Mediterranean countries or die on the way. These are all really nearby stories that do not touch our minds. They have got used to well-being, abundance and unconsciousness.

Matesanz: And the media is partly to blame for that?

Falcón: Well, this situation is the direct consequence of how the history of Europe has developed for the last 100 or 80 years, (*hesitation*) yes 80, I am 84 now. We have been through horrible times. I was born in Madrid 6 months before they bombed the city, and that is when the Spanish Civil war began. Later, they bombed all of Europe. After that, we suffered a harrowing post-war period of repression, misery, persecution, fear and isolation until capitalism started to organise itself. They created what they called the Welfare States. It meant that they gave some advantages to the workers, health insurance, education, and housing, to most of them, but not to all. And that is when the consciences went numb. Consequently, our participation in the Civil War, together with the military forces that came from other countries (The International Brigades), has not been repeated again, anywhere. Spain is the place where fascism was fought. Spaniards realised that the future of the world was disputed then. And indeed, it was decided there. The defeat of the Spanish Republic involved the tragedy that happened afterwards: The Second World War. As soon as Hitler, Mussolini and their armies swiped away the Spanish Republic, they plunged Spain into misery and backwardness. Furthermore, 1 million people fled into exile across all the countries of the world and the struggle continued in Europe. Despite the Allies winning the war, we know that the main purpose—which has been fulfilled- was for capitalism to reign. It is what we have, isn't it? Currently fascist formations are flourishing again in Europe: the National Front in France, we have that party in Germany, the one in the United Kingdom that facilitated Brexit, there is a right wing coalition in Norway, in Austria, Salvini and his people in Italy. The fascist beast has not been completely beaten.

Matesanz: We talked about war and WWII, do you think that the EU has responsibility to the former colonies?

Falcón: Of course, by all means. All the colonial countries, all the countries that invaded others, stole their wealth, exploited their inhabitants, taking them as slaves to the European continent turning them into second- or third-class citizens, and killing so many. All are responsible, not to talk about some truly appalling examples such as the case of Belgium, where the headquarters of the EU are located. They turned the Congo into their own playing ground and exterminated its inhabitants. And now they do not let migrants cross their borders. They let them die in the water or on the way. Additionally, they have set up concentration camps again in Europe¹. In Spain we have the CIEs (Detention centres where refugees are housed until their cases are processed), which I think of as shameful places. I have written an article in Público (Spanish online newspaper) if you want to have a look at that. In these centres, no law applies. The immigrants there are not accused of any crime, and despite not being a jail, the place is like one. They would be better off in prison, because there are rules in prison. There is a judge who supervises the prisons and they would also have to be accused of some crime, right? The detention centres have them piled up in infamous conditions and without any way of knowing when they are going to be released. They are deprived of any contact with friends and family permanently, no legal attention, and this legislation is working across Europe. When countries have hidden interests, as it is the case with Germany 2 or 3 years ago. They said they would take in 1 million refugees. I think that is way too much. It is what they say they took. But it is already known how the calculations are made by the leaders, right? They do not correspond to the exact mathematics. Waves of refugees went there escaping from the war in Syria, and they were rented, which seemed to be with humanitarian and solidarity. Merkel was bragging about her kindness, and they were rented, earning €1 per hour. That is truly beneficial for capitalism because it sinks wages. Competence like that makes the rest of the workers perform for less money. And this is the policy of the EU, together with more infamous things that we can remember if you like.

Matesanz: Are you against the EU? Do you think it is negative? Is it performing wrongly?

Falcón: Not that I find it negative, but I'll give you some information: The EU was created so that the big capital, especially European, but the big multinationals are international, aren't they? They have no homeland, no law and no God. It was created so that they could have a market with 500 million people; therefore, we are the market for those multinationals.

Reality is normally hidden, because telling the truth as it is, is very blunt. They lost the Referendum of the European Constitution; it could not be approved. I don't know how many years ago you will have all the information because France and Ireland voted against it. The French and the Irish were awake. The rest did not even know what it

¹ The views expressed in this interview are those of the author and do not purport to reflect those of Arbeit an Europa.

was about. In Spain, only 20% of the population went to the polls and they did not even know what they were voting about. All the citizens were deceived. They were told about solidarity and sharing, right? And the point is that the big firms, above all the ones of the military and industrial fields, because the majority of the European nations belong to NATO, and NATO is the most terrible criminal organisation in the world. So, when you tell the truth, things seem terrible, but that is the way they are. What have they achieved? A market of consumers, which is all they are interested in, also a market of workers with very different work conditions depending on their country. They have plunged other countries into misery when it looked as if they were helping us, as is also the case with Greece. The rescue of Greece is shameful.

They once said, they whispered: "Yes, maybe we didn't do so well". Also, they have scared other countries off like the UK, which has just left. Moreover, none of the countries that are still part of the EU can even think about leaving, because of all the debts we have accumulated and are eating us. Greece was on the verge of doubling its debt related to their GDP, their debt was 180% of their GDP. Spain is around 100%. And now the UK is going to face the mortgage of what they owe to Europe, and a wild competence in the market, because that is what it was all about, wasn't it? It was a question of monopolising the market constituted by the European population. And please do not believe any other version they will try to tell you, especially to your generation. Because capitalism is ready to kill, torture, imprison and exterminate anyone in order to do its business. When it does nothing of that, capitalism can also buy; something it is doing now: buying European leaders. But the most important part is that you do not buy into its speech: *"that we live in the best of possible worlds, that in Europe all human rights are defended, where there are free elections and where the life is better."* They are trying to fool your generation.

Matesanz: Still, it is in Europe where democracy has been most closely accomplished, isn't it?

Falcón: Well, Europe has just gone through 1500 years of wars. When WWII finished and the atomic bomb had just been thrown on Japan - not by a European country but by the USA also a "democracy". Yes, please, we must not forget about the facts. After this massacre, 3 or 4 countries decided to "stop killing each other", because bombing Paris and Berlin ritually every 20 years is not good business, is it? They created the (European) Coal and Steel community first, which was founded in 1956 [sic: in 1951], I think. Then, it moved towards the current situation, because this way we can bomb other countries. NATO bombed Yugoslavia destroying the last socialist country left after the collapse of the Soviet Union and went so far as to bomb Belgrade in order to destroy it and subdue it under NATO's orders. Later on, it triggered, with the help of the USA, the Iraq war. Also, the one in Afghanistan. Libya has been destroyed, it became a failed state where there are only mafias and gangs fighting each other. And now Syria. And from time to time they bomb Yemen. This is a long way off, Yemen. What are they going to tell us, right? On the other hand, we live very well here. So, why should we think about all the children of Yemen who are being bombed, right? This is democratic Europe.

Matesanz: Has the EU been like that since its beginnings?

Falcón: Yes. Yes. It was only created for that purpose. Oh, my dears. I will provide you with some magazines. The main purpose of the EU is nothing other than the one I am telling you about. First, the Coal and Steel community was created, so as not to kill each other any longer; especially among the French and German people (fighting over the coal mines of the river Ruhr, the large steelworks, and the big industry central Europe had at the time). And later - a common market is created; Spain becomes a member of the Common Market in 1986. When some bandits reach an agreement and share out the spoils among themselves, it happens that among these mafias a consensus is reached. There is peace, right? In the end, this is not like that. But at the time the anti-aggression pact was like that. And that is the European Union. And I don't know what other interviewees will tell you, I don't know if they are going to tell you this.

Matesanz: There are many EU supporters.

Falcón: Yes, of course, I guess it is because they have had a good life. I guess they haven't come to Europe on small boats, right? Neither have they crossed half of the African desert to later get on a boat in Ceuta or Melilla and drown, or not, to arrive in Tariff. Appalling things are going on near us. There is a video, although you are doing a specific job but, there is a video of one of our members of the European Parliament, Marina Albiol, who was in the last political term in Izquierda Unida (Political left-wing party in Spain in which her party, Partido Feminista Español, was contained until the 22nd February 2020). The European Union is planning to condemn Venezuela for not being a democratic country, and the EU "respects human rights" (*irony*). Albiol tried to explain in 4 minutes, the time she was allowed to speak, how democratic the EU is, making deals with Saudi Arabia, one of the most infamous countries in the world: they mistreat everyone, especially women; foreign workers are exploited there and the death penalty still exists, along with mutilations and corporal punishment. There is a special treaty. Naturally, there is another agreement with Morocco. Morocco is a key country because of its location in the Strait of Gibraltar and it has come to an agreement with NATO. And we could keep talking about how much European leaders defend human rights.

Matesanz: They are interested in money and power.

Falcón: Needless to say, some make and move money and others are their accomplices, the politicians.

Matesanz: I totally agree. Okay, is there anything you first considered impossible and ended up happening?

Falcón: What a question! Right now, what I consider impossible is the proclamation of the Republic of Spain. This is something that will not happen. Actually, I hope it is not completely impossible. But it is absolutely shameful that after 80 years since the end of the Civil War we still have a monarchy. And it was supported by many "democratic" countries. It was backed by them and the Tribunal of no Intervention was

set up. Meanwhile, Mussolini and Hitler were fighting for and funding Franco's coup d'état.

Matesanz: On another subject, what is the role of religion in your life?

Falcón: None. No. Tracing back the religious background of my family, they have long been free thinkers, lay and atheist. They didn't teach me anything about religion, or preferably, they showed me the truth about it. But, of course, during the time of my education in childhood and adolescence, we were living under the fascist regime and the subject "religion" was compulsory at school. This means I learnt some things, didn't I? But if you mean spiritual content: no. It shocks me how people still believe the fantastic stories religion preaches.

Remedio: So, you don't believe in anything...?

Falcón: Well, I would like to believe in humans. I would love to think that human beings are capable of constructing a better world, right?

Remedio: Without the help of religion.

Falcón: Yes, because magic tales are only a tool to alienate and lose the sense of reality. If they promise you heaven for eternity, then you might endure being a slave.

Matesanz: Aside from needing to attend religion lessons, how was the school in general?

Falcón: Well, I attended some private schools that were set up in different cities in Spain, mostly in big cities such as Barcelona - Catalonia in particular has a developed sense of entrepreneurship. They were academies, some running without teaching permits, later you needed to take the exams in an institute, the *Instituto de Enseñanza Media* (Secondary Education Institute). I attended some of the academies that had been legalised. The teachers there were the former republican professors, who were persecuted by fascism. Teachers were the most persecuted group during Francoism. Even then we had to attend compulsory religion lessons given by a priest. We also attended and celebrated religious festivities, in a chapel they set up in the school. We didn't go to religious services because it was not allowed. They also tried to teach us the fantasies and legends Catholics believe in. However, religion was not important in my life, in contrast to the poor girls that attended nun schools.

Matesanz: Right. Later on, you studied at university and you have studied many things, what made you choose your subjects?

Falcón: Well, first I studied baccalaureate. My mother paid for that, with all her work and effort. Later, I got married and consequently I did not carry on studying. It still happens. I see that this situation goes on in the present and I think it is very sad. Afterwards I had two kids and I divorced. My family had a strong connection with theatre, they were actors and playwrights. My father, Cesar Falcón, who was at that time a very famous communist leader in Spain, created a theatre company called *Teatro Proletario*. My mother and grandmother were actresses. The world of theatre was very familiar to me; far from being repudiated, as it was by the privileged and rich

families. Therefore, I enrolled in the Theatre Institute. But to make a living from theatre with two children is practically impossible. I could have worked as an actress because I showed signs of talent, but it required spending nights out and travelling. A more rational thought led me to study law, which was also very familiar to me since my mother's partner worked as a lawyer. That was what later allowed me to make a living. And the last thing I studied was philosophy because it is one of the subjects, or processes of thinking, that everyone should study.

Matesanz: Did any subject or professor make a mark on you?

Falcón: Well, yes. Many of them. Some of them were schoolteachers, from the schools I told you about. They were progressive teachers and they were refugees; they were former teachers from the republican schools. I admired some of them, they were specialists in different areas. I liked everything, except Greek. I must confess I was a fool for not wanting to study it. Letters as science as well... At that time we were taught scholastic philosophy, which is an absolutely ridiculous medieval philosophy, a product of fascism, of course. I liked mathematics and physics very much, and of course history, and also what we could understand as politics, which has nothing in common with today's teaching. But the main source of education was my family. The best teacher I've ever had was my mother, and also my grandmother, who was an anarchist and had been very actively involved in the Cooperative movement before and during the war.

Matesanz: In regard to your geography classes, which countries did you learn from and from which ones didn't you?

Falcón: Then... this is good for your historic memory project. I started my baccalaureate very young because, due to many strange circumstances, I was not registered in the civil register. I had no birth certificate nor baptismal certificate, and therefore, not following the rules, my mother registered me when I was really young. I started the baccalaureate very early. By that time, the same education plan established in the Spanish Republic was working. It was on the... let's see, I was 8 years old, so it was 1944. WWII was still going on, so they had had no time to change the syllabuses or make any legal reformation. The education plan was designed by Marcelino Domingo, who was the last Minister of Education for the Republic. The plan was constituted by two main knowledge branches: sciences and letters. Now it has been subdivided and, at the end, students don't learn anything, neither from letters nor sciences. We Spaniards are located in the last positions on the PISA report (worldwide study by the OECD in member and non-member nations intended to evaluate educational systems), due to dropout, and all these horrible things. That is how I could receive a formal education. Also, my family kept many books despite the destruction. Regarding the topics of geography and history, we studied the texts of Ballesteros Beretta, you may know him, and he was one of the greatest geographers and historians from the Spanish Republic. This book contained the correlative information I had already been given by the members of my family. I already knew facts that were later discovered as if they were a novelty. When I was 5 or 7 years old, I was familiar

with historical situations and names that the majority of the political leaders in the '80s ignored. The fascist regime worked very hard to prevent people knowing too many facts, including both the history of Europe and Spain.

Matesanz: So, how could you access art, music, films or literature that were censored?

Falcón: Films and art. Art was under a different legislation, right? Films... there was no television. Can you imagine a world without television? Cinema was banned, so naturally no one could watch anything. We could access books thanks to the personal library of my family, and due to the special circumstance that my mother worked in the Ministry of Information and Tourism, in the delegation located in Barcelona. In this place the Falange brought the books they were taking away. Do you know what Falange is?

Matesanz and Remedio: Yes, it still exists.

Falcón: It is the fascist party. These men, together with some groups of people belonging to the Ministry of Interior, went around all the bookstores in Spain, taking all the books they considered harmful; which they normally were! They also took any book they wanted. They normally took the ones that were included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (List of Prohibited Books) of the Vatican, you know? The Vatican has an index of dangerous books offered, in theory, for their Catholic followers. They shouldn't read them, and, above all, minors should be kept away from them. Among other books, this index includes works by Don Benito Pérez Galdós, which is our most important 19th century historian, chronicler and writer. My mother was able to rescue some of these books and bring them home. I read some books that were censored at that time. Cinema was impossible.

Matesanz: Did you keep them at home?

Falcón: Yes, and I still have them. I am looking at some of them right now; books that were key to my instruction. These circumstances made me a completely different being compared to many of my schoolmates, and from the ladies that were educated under fascist rule. With us a little bit of hope remained alive. We were writers and artists, and of course, all of us were republicans. Some of us had to flee into exile, those who were communist had to be especially careful. We were established in Barcelona. I attended some social gatherings despite being only a child and later a teenager. I went there because I strived for knowledge. I wanted to learn. This is something I don't see in children at that age nowadays.

Matesanz: At that time, did you feel isolated for your political views?

Falcón: Well, yes. We were in what is called... There is a Spanish writer, let's see if I can remember his name, who wrote a book called "The Inner Exile" (Original title of the book: "El exilio interior" written by Gutmaro Gómez Bravo). You may have heard of it. There were two exiles: the external one we already know, and the one we suffered while being trapped in the horrible fascist trap Spain was at the time. We needed to be very careful, indeed. We have always needed to be really careful. I say it in plural

because I include my cousins, the daughters of my mother's sister. We were really wary about what we could say and to whom. However, at some point we found some people we could share our thoughts with, or even people that had had similar experiences to us. At that moment, I am referring to my childhood and adolescence, the trade unionists, political leaders, writers and many workers were either in jail or had fled to exile, if they had not been killed, of course.

Matesanz: Then, the associations that existed were forced to be clandestine.

Falcón: Well, associations as such did not exist at the time. Associations as you now may know them emerged in the '60s – we can find it, we can date it - , when the Associations Law was introduced by Manuel Fraga Iribarne. You may know this character, he was one of Franco's ministers, and he seemed to live for eternity. It was in the '60s, specifically in 1964, when the Association Law was adopted, before then they didn't exist. However, they organised gatherings for young people in the parishes and churches to engage in religious activities and to conduct spiritual talks. What they did was to invade people's minds and lives. On the other hand, the left-wing political parties always existed, with especial emphasis put on the communist party, they existed as an underground movement. Being hidden was the hardest battle to fight. There were also some strongholds of nationalism; ETA was created in the '60s too. And there were the Republicans, but the Republican groups were small and not very active. There was also the Anarchist movement, naturally; the ones that remained here entered into action, it was more their style. All of this was hidden, out of the government's sight, right? But it was of common knowledge, especially to us due to our political perspective.

Matesanz: I also wanted to ask you a little bit about the situation you were in and, what did you think when the murder of Carrero Blanco happened (In June 1973 Luis Carrero Blanco was appointed prime minister but was assassinated by ETA, the Basque nationalist organization, on 20th December 1973)?

Falcón: Well, it was an event, no doubt about it. But now, approaching it from a broader perspective, it didn't have any relevant political influence at all. Then, it was a fuss, and it was also important especially because it meant ETA had succeeded. By the time it occurred we were planning a trip, we were going first to Greece and later to Italy. We cancelled our plans because we were a little wary of what could happen; having to go to the airport and showing our passports. We needed to take into account that we have already... It happened (the murder of Carrero Blanco) in December 1973. In 1972 we had been arrested and had spent some time in prison and we still had some lawsuits due. Later a rumour spread, a kind of rumour that benefited the Communist party, that the crime was plotted by the CIA. Have you heard it?

Matesanz: Yes.

Falcón: It is totally false. It was one of the more successful actions ETA could add to their curriculum.

Matesanz: Yes. And what about Franco's death?

Falcón: Well, he had to die at some point, right? But belatedly.

Matesanz: Yes, very late. What do you think of it?

Falcón: And also a very kindly well, not that kind because...

Matesanz: With no pain.

Remedio: He didn't suffer at all.

Falcón: You may know that his illness was treated in a very incredible manner. The doctors I had acquaintance with said that they couldn't understand why he (Franco) was subjected to such kind of treatments, all of them directed by his son in law, who was a doctor. He directed all these little treatments and tortured him for several days but he had to die. What was worse than this was the transition.

Matesanz: Yes. The transition... Were you let down by it?

Falcón: No, I wasn't let down. I didn't expect much from it. From our point of view, having who we had in power... there was nothing we could expect from the transition. But I did feel disappointed when we discovered the betrayal of the Communist party when they accepted the monarchy. And we are still at this point. Have you watched how they feverishly applaud the king in courts on TV?

Matesanz: Yes.

Falcón: This just happened yesterday. It was on TV. Everyone was applauding, including the people in the left-wing parties. The only exception to that were the members of the Nationalist party, who didn't attend the event. 60 MPs were absent, from the nationalist parties of the Basque Country, Galicia, and Catalonia. The others, the left included, were there, standing and applauding this king in a very enthusiastic way.

Matesanz: When have you missed freedom the most?

Falcón: All the time, in every moment (*laughter*).

Matesanz: In every moment (*laughter*).

Falcón: Obviously, not letting us indulge in demagoguery, since the dictatorship ended and this democratic peregrination started, needless to say, our lives are completely different. When the coup d'état happened on the 23rd February ("23F" stands for the failed Coup d'état carried out by Tejero in the 23rd of February in 1981). I think you were about to ask me about this.

Matesanz: Yes, it was also another question (*laughing*).

Falcón: I felt as if someone had ripped off my head from the shoulders and had placed a new one there instead. I believed we were going back to the days under fascist oppression and it was absolutely appalling. For a few hours we didn't know what was going to happen. But just freedom is not the only thing we should be asking for; we need to ask ourselves: what do we want freedom for? Now they are using the concept of freedom to perform a series of infamous things, and the same happens with equality.

Matesanz: Do you remember the first time you travelled abroad?

Falcón: Yes, I was 17 years old. It was the summer before I got married and I went to France with my mother. She was giving Spanish classes –she was fluent in a couple of languages-, and she got a job: A Swiss family wanted to learn Spanish and they hired my mother for 15 days in the summer. They paid us the journey expenses, we went by car. Well, we took the bus first to the border and later until I think the first stop was Lyon and we later moved on to Alsace. We spend the 15 days there, next to Strasbourg. This is the first time I stepped on non-Spanish land.

Matesanz: What was your first impression of the new country?

Falcón: Well, it was absolutely impressive, if you compared the situation there with what was going on in Spain, especially the situation for women. I hope you are able to detach yourselves from the filthy national catholic education and all of that, because it was absolutely shocking. Just to see their lifestyle, working conditions, their way of dressing, how women addressed men, and what their expectations were. In Spain, the female workers were performing exhaustively whereas the upper-class ladies were stuck in their homes, having kids, only going out to attend church services, and enduring abusive husbands. This was a very brief overview; I was there only for 15 days. Coming back to Spain was painful. Every time I went out, above all when I went to France working clandestinely, it hurt when we came back. In France we had contact with the leaders of the party, and we brought leaflets and illegal propaganda back with us. Being back felt like entering a jail.

Matesanz: Was it easy to cross the borders?

Falcón: No. Well, the first time we needed to bring a passport with us, naturally, and the border was under surveillance. Afterwards, with tourism flourishing, with the tourism business growing it was impossible to have the same strict surveillance. We crossed many times with a forged passport and false identity papers, we needed to fool the guards at the border. However, they had very little interest in seeking anything unusual, especially with a lady like myself, right? But yes, of course there were border controls.

Matesanz: Going back to the topic of professions, what was your first job?

Falcón: Well, the first job I had with a wage (*laughing*) was in a company that imparted courses through postal correspondence. I started this job shortly before I got married. The company was very important at that time, it was called AFHA, A, F, H, A. Now I don't remember what it stands for. I was the secretary and I was only 17 years old.

Matesanz: Who was your first boss?

Falcón: A man that was there (*laughing*). Once they had me writing marketing letters to promote the company worldwide. Do you know what a letter is?

Matesanz: Yes, yes, of course (*laughing*)

Remedio: Yes, of course. Nowadays no one...

Falcón: It's a paper you write on to which you later stick a stamp. Nowadays no one knows what a letter is. That is why I asked you. You glue a stamp to it, and you send

it. I was doing it for a while. By then, I was about to get married, and after the wedding, even though I wanted to continue, the situation became complicated and I had to quit.

Matesanz: Have you even been afraid in your workplace?

Falcón: Afraid in my workplace? How?

Matesanz: In any job, have you ever felt at risk, or threatened?

Falcón: Not exactly at the workplace but I have experienced sexual harassment, is it what you mean?

Matesanz: Yes.

Falcón: Yes, I have thought about it many times when I watch... I think it is good that they report abuses to the police. In the past, women were continually harassed. Always. You could not go out of your house knowing that either in the street, on the bus or in the underground a bloke would say something to you, or would even touch you. And at your workplace, it was a normal thing for your colleague, your boss or whoever, to make unwanted sexual advances, invitations or comments. If they had tried touched me, I wouldn't have allowed it. But, of course, it was normal to endure unwanted sexual advances. Later on, I worked in a cafeteria and one time, it was not in the workplace, but anyway, the guys that were the customers of that cafeteria followed me in Barcelona. I paid for a taxi, which was something I could barely afford to do, and I ran to the front entrance of my building. I closed the door at the same time these guys got to the door. They would have raped me that night, I am sure of it. I managed to shut the door in their faces.

Remedio: So, the situation hasn't changed at all.

Falcón: I think now it is worse. Or either we are more aware of everything now because I did not report what had happened to me to the police. I didn't even think about going to the police station. At that time, the idea of doing so wouldn't even cross your mind. We women were really vulnerable. Besides, we all knew that. My mother told me once that in past times women used hat pins (long pins that were used in that epoch), for self-defence. It was very practical because when a man approached you and he was going to grip you or touch you, you dug it in his hand. Not every woman was able to do it, you needed to be courageous, because the man could hit you back. I have been beaten several times for that reason.

Matesanz: Was it because you defended yourself, or...?

Falcón: That's it. Because when a bloke came and said something nasty to me, I replied, and he answered me with a blow. Sometimes I hit him first and he replied to me in the same way. So, in the workplace unwanted sexual advancements were happening continuously. You needed to take it as a feature of your gender.

Matesanz: Do you think it has changed with the time?

Falcón: Yes, what has changed... Let's see what has changed. Above all the situation we had to endure in the streets. I think you can't imagine what it was to go out onto the street and that every man there told you how you looked, how much they liked you

and what they wanted to do to you. Neither can you imagine the insecurity, they touched you in the underground, this situation was very common. You needed to be very careful. If you defended yourself or if you replied to anything, people around would laugh at you.

Remedio: They didn't help.

Falcón: No, on the contrary. Some of them... I was young and pretty, and I heard some guy say to me: "You wish". This was the moral of the epoch. However, we couldn't know everything that was going on. Also, women's life was more indoors. When I heard about –well, it has been years now- of a girl who was raped at 5am drunk in a street in Pamplona, I can't help thinking that we wouldn't have done so. Of course, it may have happened back then, and we never knew about it. The case of the Alcáser girls, are you familiar with this horrible episode? Well, so these girls went to a village, to Alcáser, and they were hitchhiking at 10pm to go to a music festival, or something, and they were only 15 years old. There is not a single family that... I don't know. I can't imagine us doing that, or our family allowing us to do that. The open-air drinking sessions nowadays: boys and girls that get home at 5am and really drunk, or at 7am, and only being 14 or 16 years old. Not at all. We met at family houses and many times the mothers were there spending the whole evening keeping an eye on us. We were very conscious about the danger for a single woman to go out. It permitted us to be safer. I don't know the statistics about rape... Do you know that...? I am going to quote this data because I have recently written about it: the Spanish Ministry of Interior has reported that between January 2019 and September 2019 there have been 32 rapes reported to the police per day.

Matesanz: My god, in Spain.

Remedio: Oh my god.

Falcón: This was on a daily basis. Monthly there are around 1000 rapes that are *reported*. We will never know the ones that didn't report it. I think these figures were unthinkable back then due to, precisely, the security measures we were taking. I was talking to my colleague the other day and I told him –I don't have grandchildren- but if I had a granddaughter, I would be desperate. There is no way that well, it would be a battle with her and her parents, but, allowing her to go out at night until 5am because she is going out to a club, fair or a village festival? No way. How can one not be wary about this? Do we really think our culture or men's behaviour have changed so radically?

Matesanz: But still, I think you can't control or limit the freedom of girls and women.

Falcón: You can limit the freedom of going out drunk at 5am, dear. (*Indignation*). I don't know about from your perspective, we are two generations away from each other, but of course you can limit it! It is nonsensical. Massive drinking gatherings make no sense. A great percentage of our young people have problems with alcohol. To allow them to work, travel or gather whenever they want is a different thing. But the drinking part is completely unnecessary. This concept has also been introduced by

capitalism: it has turned half of the young population into drunkards and drug addicts. And well, naturally we need to fight for free movement and acting freely, but that is not a very feminist culture, nor is it beneficial for women in any way.

Matesanz: How do you think feminism will develop in 50 years from now?

Falcón: Feminism in Spain suffers one of the worst lacks, along with other countries, but I am most familiar with Spain: it lacks political awareness. In Italy, the feminist groups follow the same line of thought. I have just returned from Italy a few months ago.

Feminist activists are organised in societies. There are myriads of societies, and some of them are really small, only including very few women. They considered themselves non-party and apolitical organisations, and their activity consists in the development of cultural activities, conferences, painting exhibitions, music festivals, contests, and feminist cinema. On the other hand, they do social work: assisting abused women and they work in favour of abortion. They are confined there and have no political influence. The ones that govern the country, from the city halls, the provincial council, and autonomous region or from the parliament are the political parties. That's why I am in charge of the Feminist Party. But neither our pervasiveness nor the number of members are enough. They boast about being in the streets every 8th of March, but we have been out with placards for 40 years. Everything worth fighting for after the Francoist regime: the creation of an associative tissue in different groups such as neighbourhoods, young people, and trade unions has already been fulfilled. But it hasn't happened the same with women and with feminism. Feminists are now divided in a myriad of small associations with no political or social influence whatsoever. Nevertheless, culturally speaking, they have made advancements. Politically, once we have reached basic political transformations, constitutional changes, laws and all we all already know, we are stuck. Unemployment figures are immovable, the pay gap is always the same, and we have had the same one for endless years. Regarding violence –we have already mentioned this topic - 98 women were killed last year and today the number of casualties is already 8 [6th February 2020], and these are official figures. Abuse, and prostitution rates are ascending. And now we have 2 “specialisations” (*laughter*) I have encountered at my age. One is the existence of surrogate mothers, now they hire women to make children for them, and some political parties see it as legitimate, they think it is good to legalize this practice. The other is the transsexual law. With that new law they intend, among other ridiculous things, to give hormone treatments to minors to change their gender.

Matesanz: Starting from the age of 16, I think.

Falcón: Starting from the age of 9, in order to stop the hormonal and body developments. You can stop it with hormone blockers, preventing the maturing of their bodies. It is given to both boys and girls, but more frequently to boys. With all the physical and psychological consequences, can you imagine? And here we are. The fact is that the ones who make the laws are the politicians. Meanwhile, the feminist groups protest, arrange official announcements, and plan demonstrations (not many

of them, though), and later they gather in close spaces, where they all think the same, they resemble a sect. They only understand themselves. If they later go out and ask about it to a waitress, for example, or to a construction worker, they have no idea what they talked about or of what's happening. The only influence the feminist movement has fulfilled, in a very direct way, is the huge social importance, together with the economic and political transformations, that birth control implies. Spain is the country with the lowest birth rate in the world. I don't know if you have the figures. 1.3 children per adult woman. 0.3 per immigrant woman. Birth control proves that the passion for maternity is not that strong. In the last CIS survey, it was shown that 50% of Spanish women at child-bearing age don't plan to have kids. If they finally have, it is only one.

Remedio: Not more?

Falcón: And sometimes very late. The average age to bear children has risen, now it is around 32 years old, which is really a great deal, implying there are women giving birth in their forties. They decided to have their professional careers and to develop them. They study, travel, and enjoy their lives, instead of being stuck at the age of 20 as it was customary before. This implies a huge demographic change the politicians do not take into account. They are disturbed with the impossibility of funding the pension, but at the same time in Europe they want to close borders impeding immigrants to come. The demographic decline, the curve in the graph is drastic because we live in an ageing Europe.

Matesanz: It is possible to live longer now.

Falcón: This is where we can see the immense influence of feminism. But we need to fix it or either let the countries die. I don't know.

Matesanz: Well, some...I think it was Ciudadanos who wanted to introduce a plan in their electoral programme to promote natality.

Falcón: Well, it is being done all around Europe. It is performed really badly, but it has been going on for years. Since the 20th century, France has given financial support and made programmes to promote natality. If no one pays you, and this has already been proven, you don't have kids. Specially taking into account how you have to raise your children nowadays in Europe. It is nothing close to how it was at the end of the war or how it is in Africa, for example, where kids live in the street and eat rubbish. Under no circumstances. Now we need to keep them like bibelots, don't we? They can't be left unattended, they have to study 70 different things, they need to take Judo classes, go to the psychologist, paediatrician, the dentist, and take language courses abroad. And when they are 30 years old, they still live with their parents.

Matesanz: I think that in Basque country they do pay for having children.

Falcón: Well, in Spain there are some... but they are miserable. Now, the support for extended family is given after the third child, before it was after the fourth or fifth kid. They have discounts on the train, for public transport, at school and they also receive a little allowance per month. However, this is not enough to incite women of around 25 to sacrifice their professional careers to take care of a baby. Have you heard about

the infamous advertising they are promoting? I have the argument of the day, every day I have a different one.

Matesanz: Which one?

Falcón: Haven't you watched the news, or listened to the radio? Were you locked down? Well, scientists have reached the conclusion – you can watch it tonight or read it in tomorrow's newspapers. Because religion is not useful anymore, right? The fib they used to tell us that God wanted us to have kids convinces very few women now. They have reached the conclusion that when a woman is pregnant her brain changes. Really. It is published there, together with a drawing of the brain. This change motivates her to look after the child, but their brain cells change.

Matesanz: But the hormones.

Falcón: No, not the hormones, the neurons. This triggers, because during the pregnancy you already have this, the, ah!...maternal love. (*Irony*). Our speeches in the Congress – I'd love for you to come to Congress at the end of this month - we have explained how through human history many infanticides have been committed by their own mothers. Because when you had too many children you killed them, and that's it. This came into being in every culture.

Matesanz: Were they aborting or killing them after birth?

Falcón: Well, if you could abort, then yes. But sometimes you don't know how to do it and you die with the abortive practice. If you couldn't, when the babies were born, you would break their necks and that was it. But this was systemically conducted in many cultures. Of course, these couldn't be "real women" (*ironic*). We can only consider upper-class, white, European ladies as women. The rest are not women, they are queer and despised beings that live in poor conditions, are ignorant, and besides, they kill their children. (*Ironic*).

Matesanz: And there is also postpartum depression, right?

Falcón: Yes. They have also said that... You don't know what giving birth is.

Matesanz: No (*laughter*).

Remedio: No (*Laughter*).

Falcón: Yes, I have calculated it and I suppose you didn't. How is one not going to be depressed after all you have just gone through? Not to mention that they just give the kid to you, and now we need to suckle him or her for 6 months. Have you heard about it? Otherwise the kid becomes a psychopath. If you don't feed him or her, they will never develop.

Remedio: More and more girls are deciding not to nurse their children.

Falcón: Some of them, yes. But they are making a campaign, this is an old one, it already started after the war in 1914. This is a topic in schoolbooks, you can study it. Women played an important role in production during the war, substituting all the men that were killing each other in Europe. When the war ended, the survivors returned home and removed the women from their jobs. They tried to convince women... I have

already told you: Capitalism kills, later buys and, above all, it convinces. They tried to convince women that the best thing to do was go back home to have children, because there were 20 million casualties in Europe and in the US, and they needed to be replaced. In order to make children there is no other way than the natural one, the one of all mammals. Then, they started the “going back home” campaign created for these women. By then, the powder of the infant formula was invented, becoming very popular among women from Nordic countries. Until then, there was not... Cow milk has always been used to feed babies. I have even used it with my children, adding a bit of water to it because it is very dense. Anyway, pasteurised milk, Nestlé: that was the company who carried out the big campaign, started to promote breast feeding, and the advertisement still goes on. There are 1 million more women suffering unemployment than men, the participation of women in the labour market in Spain is, it always fluctuates, around 52-53 %. It implies that working age women in Spain locate themselves 20 points lower than in France and 30 points lower than in Sweden, where 80% of working-age women are registered in the labour market. This doesn't mean they are working, even though the unemployment rate is really low, but that they want to work. I think - it is impossible to get the exact figures in the web page of our damned ministry - that we have 5 million women dedicated to home duties. With this picture, the low salaries and the scarce participation in the labour market, they are still making a campaign to promote breast feeding, for 6 months and with no other food than the milk of the mother. This is the order. The child stuck next to the boob every 3 hours. And there are some people who believe that, of course. Besides, if they tell you that if you don't nurse your child he will become a psychopath and besides you will miss the strong bond it creates... later when the kid is 16 years old and goes out saying he hates you (*laughter*), then the big disillusion has won.

Matesanz: In general, or related to feminism, you choose; what impact do you think your generation has had over the next ones?

Falcón: Well, I think we have been decisive. However, the most self-sacrificing generation, and the one who has been involved in more fights, and had the strongest influence is the one of my parents. They constitute the generation that was involved in all the wars. But us, the daughters, we are important too. First, talking about Spain but the same can be applied to the rest of Europe, we maintained the ideals inherited from the previous generation, this is something I don't see in young people nowadays. We faithfully kept them, the majority, and the majority that were socially aware, the Spanish population was socially aware. Spain is the only country that rebelled against fascism. In Germany they voted for Hitler, in Italy they endured fascism for 30 years, with really small resistant strongholds. The Spanish Civil War is the only one that involved the whole population, the vast majority of the civilians were involved, and half of the military force, that made it possible and we lost due to the participation of Germany and Italy. We received 54 countries here, the international brigades because they knew, as I have said before, that the future of the world was being disputed here. Therefore, our generation, the majority, kept these ideals and that's how we built the country. You should also keep in mind that when the Civil War ended, there were 20

million inhabitants in Spain. 20 years later there were 40 million. All of them were brought to the world by women, right? Because there is no other known way to create life. This is the generation that reconstructed our devastated country, the bridges and the railways were knocked down. Also, the blast furnaces of Vizcaya had been turned down, there were no plantations... the hunger was atrocious during that time. We suffered a horrendous starvation. All of that was reconstructed. The blast furnaces, the shipyards, the factories and houses; everything was rebuilt by my generation. And maybe by the next one, the one who is already 60 years old. I don't see the new generations being thankful for that.

Matesanz: Okay, let's see. Changing the subject, do you remember any political song or slogan?

Falcón: I remember the International, naturally (*laughter*). We sang this in every clandestine gathering, and it is still sang. And we also had *Bella Ciao*, now it has become a trend.

Remedio: From the TV show.

Falcón: Young people above all, they are adapting the lyrics and the melody.

Matesanz: Do you know any other languages apart from Spanish?

Falcón: I know Catalan, of course, because I was brought up in Catalonia. I also know French and English, both are a bit rusty now, since I haven't used them in a long time, but I have given many lectures in both languages.

Matesanz: What is the achievement you feel most proud of?

Falcón: Right now, I would say the Feminist Party Constitution. The Feminist Party, I am sure of it, is the future of feminism. You will see it, not me. But I am convinced it is the only way to make advances in a solid way in terms of equality and letting women achieve their goals. Women and men too, because our party is a mixed space, because if not, it would be segregation and we will make a world only for women. We can find an island to move all women there.

Matesanz: What do you think about associations, or events that are exclusively for women?

Falcón: I don't agree with that. Naturally, some exclusive spaces can always exist, because as there are youth festivals where old people don't go, they can punctually exist. That doesn't mean this notion can be or should be established for an ideological or social point of view. What will we do? Two different worlds? One for men and other for women? This discussion seems infertile to me. Completely. However, it is being argued in some sectors of the feminist party. Women gather in exclusive spaces because they feel comfortable and talk about their own concerns. They don't get along perfectly, because we are all different and we all have arguments. But, of course, they are not afraid, they don't worry about being raped. However, from a social perspective and having a future plan, it is a weird idea that any man belonging to the party is going to rape anyone. Thinking about the future and from a social approach, does it have

any future? Besides, men in these segregations, women keep the social work jobs. Feminist associations are in charge of taking care of the abused women, abandoned children or they make poetry contests. And meanwhile men rule. Men are in charge of the economy, the military forces, politics and the media. We will always have women's jobs. We must actively participate in politics and we should aim to govern, otherwise, this will be the status quo forever. You granddaughters will keep talking about the same topics and they will still need to bring placards to the streets.

Matesanz: Are we stuck in Spain only or it is also happening in Europe?

Falcón: Yes, we are stuck. I am not that familiar with other parts of Europe, but I can talk about the US. For a long time now, I have been in touch with the US, for whatever reason. Remember that when Trump won the elections, 300 women postulated for Congress positions. At the end only 38 accessed it, I think, so the government has a democratic majority. This is a political organisation totally different to the one we have in Europe; the Democratic Party is the "more advanced". Women are really conscious about the importance of politics. They know that in order to change things and have an important role in society, it is necessary to be politically active. Right now, our colleagues are working very hard there trying to avoid Trump winning in the next elections. This is not happening in Spain. They are divided in myriads of association here. In *La Casa di Edone*, in Rome. They showed me a list of associations affiliated there. They were very proud of it. I stared at the list and said: "there are too many". They were in shock.

What we need is to have a strong association like the National Organisation for Women in the US. This is the big association there; it has great influence. The thing is they need to get involved in politics to take part in the decisions. To be organised in a myriad of associations, I have mentioned it before, which is the way it is arranged in Spain; in some of them there are only 3 members, sometimes 20 are gathering. And they are always doing the same things. They feel really satisfied over their social influence. I receive a continuous flow of messages inviting me to painting exhibitions, some theatres, performances, book releases... We were in the middle of the presidential elections, in this country we have recently suffered from failed governments..., and they were sending me invitations for book presentations! So, when I mentioned that we were wasting too much time they got angry. Andalucía, which was the starting point of fascism, in December 2018, we were involved with Izquierda Unida, you may already know it. We were really involved in the election campaign, organising the election manifesto, trying to make the Feminist Party stand out. The result is the one we already know. The next week, they were protesting against the elected government. Does it have any practical sense?

Matesanz: Nonetheless, the feminist party is not very well known.

Falcón: Well, we can't do more than what we have been doing. It seems that, after the new release of our opinion about the new transgender law, we are appearing more on social networks...

Matesanz: It is not appearing on the media though.

Falcón: Yes, I appear on *Público*.

Matesanz: Yes, it is a left-wing online diary.

Falcón: I have also published in *La Tribuna*, in the Basque Country, in *Diario 16*...

Matesanz: Lefties.

Falcón: The media...well, I published some articles in *El País*. *El País* now has turned into the prime example of an elitist newspaper, backing the most convenient political party, at any given moment. We are doing everything we can, it hasn't got many members. We are in 20 different provinces; it is not that small. We are much bigger than the other small parties. The natural support for our party should be the feminist movement. Not only them. In many demonstrations on the 8th of March, they do not let us go in the lead. No political party is allowed to go in the front, that is the rule. Have you taken part in any 8th of March demonstration?

Matesanz: Yes.

Remedio: Yes.

Falcón: The political parties and the trade unions go at the back. On this day, women are the protagonists. They spend 4 hours in the streets, 1 day in the case of Madrid, showing their placards. In the morning they organise breakfast, later lunch and later a performance. After that they play the drums in the streets and then, in the night, they return exhausted to their homes. Until the following year. That is a backward movement. Besides the topics we have mentioned: breastfeeding, etc., and not to talk about the transgender law, which is going to be devastating. They are "dying of success" with the demonstrations each 8th of March. Since 2017 there are many people in the streets, therefore, their objectives have been reached. The next day they go home.

Matesanz: Do you want to leave a message for our generation?

Falcón: Yes. Yes, of course (*laughing*). I would like to give more than one message (*laughing*). The first one, which I have already been talking about: your generation needs to engage with a strong feminist party, one which will govern, with strong political influence, otherwise you will keep going with a placard to the streets, as your mother and grandmother did. Later your granddaughters. Also, more recognition is needed for the work, and fighting, by the previous generations. As bad as this Europe is, for we are talking about Europe, and despite it having many inequalities and injustices, the persecution and wars your parents and your grandparents endured has never happened again. And this is because of the terrible effort your parents, grandparents and great grandparents made. Therefore, you need to respect that, if not, you won't be able to organise what is about to come. Don't think everything has been conquered, that we have fulfilled everything. For the potential readers of this interview that belong to the European upper-intermediate class: going abroad using the Erasmus internship and having free trains in Europe is not going to last forever. In this moment, as I've just said at the beginning, fascism is spreading. It is like this because, naturally, the boys and girls from upper classes believe there is nothing more

than what they see. There are immense peasant layers and huge proletariat layers, and the quality of life of these groups is worsening. and they can vote. This is the worst part, isn't it? The rich people could have taken away their right to vote and choose the governor they like. But they can vote, and they have been condemned to misery, and have been abandoned. Also, there are waves of immigrants arriving on our coasts, and they label them as enemies. This induces people to vote for fascist parties. The last case happened in Italy, but the most serious case is Great Britain. They extraordinarily voted for Boris Johnson, and he received votes from areas that had historically voted Labour. People that had voted Labour for the last 75 years ended up voting for this loudmouth.

Matesanz: I think that in Scotland they didn't elect him.

Falcón: In Scotland they face another situation. It is the same problem as we have here in Catalonia: they believe themselves independent and different, they don't want to mix with the English and the Welsh. Another dramatic situation is the one of the Irish people. A new barrier will be constructed, and we'll see what will happen with Ulster. This is a European drama, the United Kingdom drama. We have reached this situation because the most impoverished people have been abandoned and they can still vote. They should have just taken their vote away, shouldn't they? If you are going to maltreat people offering them precarious jobs...Have you watched the last film of Ken Loach? You should go and watch it.

Remedio: What is the title?

Falcón: "Sorry we missed you". Watch it. In this film the situation of the UK worker is perfectly depicted. It is the same one present in France and in Spain. The Yellow Vests fight for their rights because they have been left in a very precarious situation. When they get tired of the promises made by the social democracy, because communism hasn't advanced but it has been defeated. Social democracy should be able to give prosperity, good distribution of richness, and wellbeing, everything already included. But the reality is different. Now we earn less and work more, the expectations are lower, young people can't find jobs, those who keep studying need internships, special help and the support of their families. After seeing this situation, they cry out: "Ah, the saviour of the country, here he comes, Abascal (Leader of VOX, far-right wing party in Spain)!" In France Le Pen, and so on... They use fascist discourses that have been used throughout history, they assert they can save us, and that is why people vote for them.

Matesanz: What is your opinion about our left-wing coalition government?

Falcón: I think it is better than a right-wing one, of course.

Matesanz: Are we saved from the right-wing parties?

Falcón: I don't know, we can't know how long this government will last. The situation is very unstable because the majority is so small. It also depends on the support of the nationalist parties which are the cancer of Spain. At this very moment they need a pact with them, otherwise no government will be possible. Besides, naturally, they obey the

EU, other European governments, and the multinationals. They need to follow its budgets. *Izquierda Unida* and *Unidas Podemos* keep making promises but they need to comply with these conditions, and these promises are hollow. Iglesias posed several times that the banks should return the 60 thousand million euros we had given to them. But one can always fantasise. You can believe you can fly and jump out of the window to see how far you get. They are nonsensical. This nonsense by the part of the left lead working people to delusion and disenchantment. Then they start to vote for Vox. Now Vox has 56 MPs and Unidas Podemos has 35.

Matesanz: This disenchanting situation of the left, is here and in Europe?

Falcón: I have written several articles about this topic.

Matesanz: And the last question: is there any book or film you would like to recommend to us?

Falcón: I have already said the film. About music. We had classical music instruction. And books I would like you to read mine!