
The erasure of Valencian identity

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[...] I consider abolished and repealed all the aforementioned charters, privileges, practices and customs observed until now, and it is my will that they be reduced to the laws of Castile and to the use, practice and form of governance that exists and has existed there and in its Courts *without any difference whatsoever* [...] [italics added]

King Philip V, in Buen-Retiro by decree on 29 June 1707. *Dero-gación de los fueros de Aragon y Valencia; y su reduccion á las leyes y gobierno de Castilla*

The erasure of *Valencianitat* or Valencian identity was programmed 327 years ago with an over-writing that re-signified it as Castilian. This programme has experienced periods of notable acceleration and others when it has lost momentum. However, we are now at a time of acceleration.

The Castilianising spurt that followed Aznar's second term in office along with the education and economic laws of Rajoy's governments, has fostered the rise of far-right discourses and the presence of fascist political parties in Valencian institutions. For three centuries, the Valencian people have been living in a state of "internal" colonisation (Anderson, 1979; Hechter, 1975) in terms of both linguistic treatment and received culture, as well as economically and politically. The most recent change of government in Valencia is only intensifying this process.¹

The Valencian palimpsest

Lledó-Guillem (2023) posits the construction of Valencian identity as a *palimpsest*. A good metaphor. According to the dictionary of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC), a palimpsest is a "codex or document that has been used twice; after the first text is scraped away, a new one can

1. Today, the Kingdom of Spain's explicit desire to erase and rewrite Valencian identity is compounded by globalisation processes, accompanied by heavy intercontinental migrations, international capital flows and the digitisation of our social activities. The effects are "external" cultural and economic colonisation, English linguistic imperialism and technological dependency.

be written over it". In the words of Lledó-Guillem (2023: 177-180), when analysing the PP-Vox² agreement to govern the Valencian Country, this entails:

[...] support of the anonymity of Spanish at the expense of the erasure of the authenticity of Valencian as representing the Valencian essence. In other words, the Valencian identity can be maintained without the need for linguistic markers by using cultural resources such as genealogies, music, rituals, visual art, etc. [...] As a result, it can be argued that Valencian identity is akin to a piece of writing resembling a palimpsest [...] the former text written in Catalan has been partly overwritten by a new Castilian text.

The programme of the PP-Vox government (right and far-right coalition) continues the erasure of Valencian identity, accompanied by a Castilian overwriting originally pursued by the Bourbon dynasty. Much of this government's programme has been legislated across all spheres of social life within its first year.

Political erasure

Valencia's position on the losing side of two of the current regime's essential foundational conflicts (the War of the Spanish Succession in the eighteenth century and the coup d'état leading to the Spanish Civil War in 1936) led to the brutal repression of its people (Pagès Blanch, 2009) and the consequent loss of its once powerful civil society's ability to participate in politics.

This is reflected in its recovery of self-governance via article 143 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, as if it were a non-historical community: even though it met all the requirements stipulated by the Constitution, the pact between the UCD (centre-right political party) and the PSOE (Spain's socialist workers' party) made a negative exception of it – unlike the case with Andalusia (Aguiló, 1982). This is also reflected in the name it was given as an autonomous community (Comunitat Valenciana) and in the history of its creation.

This remained the case until 2011, when Compromís (a Valencianist political party) entered the Parliament of Valencia with seven MPs. Until then, no seats had been occupied by Valencianist MPs who had won them through openly Valencianist campaigns. This means that the Kingdom of Spain's party structure had been replicated in Valencia for almost 40 years of democracy.

To top it all off, the current government has approved a "harmony" law that immediately repeals the Law on Democratic Memory enacted by the "Botànic" coalition government³ in order to

2. The text of the agreement on the new majority can be found here: <https://cdn.valenciaplaza.com/public/Attachment/2023/6/ACUERDOCONJUNTOPP-VOX.pdf>.

3. "Botànic" is the popular name given to the coalition government of the Valencian Country, formed by the Partit Socialista del País Valencià (Valencia's socialist workers' party, PSPV-PSOE), Més-Compromís and the left-wing political party Podem. It was a

include the participants in the coup d'état who launched and won the subsequent Spanish Civil War as victims. It thus equates victims and executioners, republic and dictatorship, Francoists and the dictator's opponents – blurring the importance of Valencia's republican resistance and thus overwriting history. The dissenting report from the cultural institution Consell Valencià de Cultura, the opinion issued by the Contemporary History departments at all five state universities in Valencia, memorialist associations and the report from the United Nations rapporteur were all ignored during the process of approving this law (Maceda, 2024).

The government has also promoted a reform of the 2016 Anti-Fraud Law, enacted by the “Botànic” government, in order to smooth the way for the Anti-Fraud Agency's political control by replacing a qualified majority with an absolute majority in the election of its leadership and leaving open the definitions of corruption, fraud, irregularities and lack of ethics. All of this is facilitating a return to a devalued Valencian identity that tends towards corruption.

The constant political weakening of Valencian society is clearly illustrated by the tax plundering waged by Spain's financing policy. At present, the wealth of Valencian society is below the Spanish average, yet the Valencian Country remains a net contributor of funds to maintain the state (Beneyto, 2012; Cucarella, 2015), exacerbating its economic impoverishment.

Economic erasure

Valencian society has been experiencing a process of deagrarianisation and subsequent deindustrialisation since the 1960s (Martínez Serrano *et al.*, 1992; Torrejón, 2012). Valencia's financial system has also dissipated with the bank merger policy and the closure of savings banks (Sanchis-Palacio, 2016). Over the course of six decades, Valencian society has seen its traditional economic structure being replaced by a service-based economy, primarily tourism, blurring its productive specificities or reducing them to sun, beaches and hospitality. The promotion of cheap tourism impoverishes and erases.

The effects have been devastating. From being a leading region in the generation of added value and GDP growth in the mid-1990s, Valencia has now fallen below the Spanish GDP per capita average. This is leading to the gradual impoverishment of Valencian society (Azagra, 2019; Goerlich, 2018), which in turn is prompting the dissolution of Valencia's social structure and therefore its identity. The middle classes are a good gauge of a society's health, and Valencia's impoverishment is not only harming the lower classes but also dismantling its middle classes – unlike the situation in the rest of Spain (Castelló-Cogollos, 2022).

progressive government that lasted for two terms (2015-2019 and 2019-2023), earning its nickname because the pact between the parties was signed in Valencia's Jardí Botànic (Botanical Garden).

Instead of rectifying these trends, the new government is only exacerbating them with economic and infrastructure policies that further dismantle Valencia's territory and social structure: more tourism, more cruise ships, more private transport, more urban developments (once again), etc. They are proposing a new Law on Coasts that would repeal the "Botànic" government's Green Coastal Infrastructure Territorial Action Plan (Pativel), removing limits on construction along the coastline. Among other aspects, this would allow hotels to be built just 200 metres from the coast (Torres & González, 2024). Valencia's territory and cities are becoming increasingly hard to recognise. The territorial landmarks are disappearing... and so are the cultural ones.

Culture erasure

In view of the surge in globalisation and Spain's linguistic policy, the approach applied to the Valencian Country has been inadequate and largely ineffective. In fact, it could be argued that the Valencian language is treated speculatively by promoting stronger skills (fixed linguistic capital) while limiting its use (circulating linguistic capital). This is prompting more idealised attitudes rather than loyalty to the language and thus a linguistic speculation bubble that will end up bursting if nothing is done to prevent it (Castelló-Cogollos & Moya-Bañuls, 2021).

The current government is speeding up the erasure of the Valencian language with an educational reform that is marginalising it, despite the fact that this move has no pedagogical justification, while demonstrating a clear political will to remove it from the classrooms (Carratalà, 2024; Tena, 2024).

This attack comes hand-in-hand with an assault on the status of the Valencian language, rendering it invisible in certain areas, such as in cultural programming or Valencian's representation in the media. For example, the Concerts de Vivers series at the 2022 and 2023 July Fairs included performances by Catalan-language musicians like Zoo, Maluks, Antònia Font, La Fúmiga, Auxili and Pep Gimeno (AKA "Botifarra"). However, in 2024 these artists disappeared from the lineup and were replaced by the Spanish-language singers Sergio Dalma, Luz Casal, Niña Pastori, Camela and Bertín Osborne (which was ultimately cancelled due to low attendance). Indeed, in the programming of this year's 9 October celebrations (Day of the Valencian Community), three concerts are planned with a budget of 4 million euros featuring performances by Taburete and Abraham Mateo (Devís, 2024),⁴ also Spanish-language performers. And all of this is coupled – in a totally different arena – with the government's refusal to celebrate the centennial of the Valencian poet and writer Vicent Andrés Estellés.

4. This type of action, which costs millions of euros, requires oversight by the Anti-fraud Agency, as discussed above.

The “Botànic” coalition government’s tentative launch of À Punt (Valencia’s public radio and TV broadcaster) failed to restore the social connection to Valencian TV that had been lost after the abrupt closure of Canal 9 under the last PP government. Nonetheless, the current government has approved a reform of the TV law to limit its budget, change its governance and place its control in the hands of the majority parties (San José, 2024). Following the change of government, À Punt began to broadcast films dubbed in the dual system so that viewers could choose whether they wanted to select Spanish audio and thus avoid Valencian.

As if attacking the language’s status and education were not enough, they are also refusing to support language planning for the Valencian linguistic corpus. From the outset, the new government has pitted itself against a statutory organisation, the Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua (Valencian Language Academy, AVL), accusing it of being a Catalanising “agent” of Valencian society. For example, on 18 September this year, in a debate in parliament, the Vox spokesman stated: “Mechanisms have to be found to banish the enemies from our land once and for all, beginning with the AVL, which is a den of destruction of the unique features of the Valencian people themselves”. It has to be banished, erased.

Conclusion

Valencian identity, like any collective identity, is constructed day by day and materialises in every aspect of the social structure. Within the context of globalisation, the Valencian palimpsest can be found in all spheres of social life. Even though it is nothing new, we are witnessing a heightening of that persecution and an acceleration of the erasure/overwriting, driven by the presence of fascism in regional institutions. This fascism is pressurising and radicalising a governing party, the PP, which in principle is already favourable to the programme started by the Bourbons more than three centuries ago. We can only prevent this through an active, committed Valencian civil society.

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