

Trans identity and Catalan independence share key perspectives, research finds

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When Marta Vicente was researching various aspects of transgender identity, one surprising word kept coming up: colonialism.

"There's a sense of breaking free from subordination of political powers," said Vicente, a professor of history and of women, gender & sexuality studies at the University of Kansas.

"That's really interesting because of the political component but also the geographical component; colony has to do with the landscape and the state. Yet colony is also about the body."

Her new article "Rethinking Identity: Transgender Studies and Catalan Independence" finds trans people and those who favor Catalonia's independence from Spain often express their identities as being political bodies that seek recognition as autonomous entities. By merging trans and independence narratives, she provides a new perspective on notions of identity as they apply to discussions over national sovereignty. Her piece is published in *Catalan Review*.

The Catalan independence movement is a political movement that seeks national sovereignty for the area known as Catalonia, which lies on the northeast part of the Iberian Peninsula. Barcelona is the capital of this region.

"It has some political autonomy, but it's not a separate country. People who support the independence movement are seeking for it to become a separate country with its own government," she said. "For comparison, it's somewhat similar to the Quebecois minority in Canada or Scottish independence in the U.K."

For trans people in this region, the geography of the body runs parallel to the geography of the nation—and both are connected to emotional processes difficult to pin down. Vicente notes that debates over identity, its meaning, prominence and recognition have proven central in both transgender and Catalan independence narratives.

Is the concept of 'identity' more important now than it's ever been before?

"I think this has always been important, but now it's even more so because so many people are testing the boundaries of identity assigned to individuals at birth and in childhood. Historically, there has always been a search for one's true, authentic identity. Now it's more visible with modern means of communication, like [social media](#), where you can discuss that in the public sphere," she said.

This has compelled many people to now rethink concepts of what identity truly means.

"Like the sovereignty of the body goes beyond the personal body into the geographical body," she said. "I see these all as connected."

Vicente first became intrigued by this correlation when analyzing the emotional component of identity.

"What makes this particularly thought-provoking is that when it's emotional, it becomes invisible to the eye. And if it's invisible, then establishing someone's identity is very difficult," she said.

A native of Barcelona, Vicente has been at KU since 1997. She is the author of "Debating Sex and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Spain" (Cambridge, 2017), and of the articles ["The Medicalization of the Transsexual: Patient-Physician Narratives in the First Half of the Twentieth Century"](#) and ["Transgender: A Useful Category? Or, How the Historical Study of 'Transsexual' and 'Transvestite' Can Help Us Rethink 'Transgender' as a Category."](#) Her expertise focuses on queer studies, queer theory, feminist history and sexuality.

"I've been working on trans studies for eight years, but in the back of my mind, there is always a sense of, 'I'm not a trans person. I'm not part of that community,'" she said. "But I am part of this Catalan [independence](#) movement. So I can claim a personal connection to this one."

She hopes the article can help people see trans not as something isolated, but as part of a changing political environment that we are all living in and experiencing.

Vicente said, "In a way, how individuals are seeking to obtain sovereignty over their own bodies is not so different from nations who are seeking the same thing."

More information: Marta V. Vicente, Rethinking identity: Transgender studies and catalan independence, *Catalan Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.3828/catr.37.9](https://doi.org/10.3828/catr.37.9)

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