

I came to Barcelona from the UK with the over-inflated and exotic view that I would be more politically stimulated here, that politics in my home country (this was pre-Brexit) was dull and business-like, that ordinary people there didn't discuss politics whereas across the shore in *Europe* they did. Yes, I know that technically we are European and that it's ridiculous to speak of the geographical continent, and at that time, Union that we are a part of, as something 'other'. But welcome to British exceptionalism, I've had to do a lot of deprogramming, and you can see where it's taken us..

Your name can signal your religion, your ethnicity, and your class. Names carry meaning. They also go in and out of fashion. In the MTV fuelled 90s of the UK, the top ten names featured "Ashley" and "Brittany" for girls and "Josh" and "Brandon" for boys. In 2020 the number one spot for both sexes was "Olivia" and "Oliver" in a sign that trash TV has been replaced with the faux classy sheen of the curated Instagram feed.

It's commonly known that there is a robust class system in the UK; we're characterised by strict social codes and bad teeth. We don't all live in Downton Abbey, but some people do and they've been pretty undisturbed for almost 1000 years, probably the 'greatest' aristocracy the world has seen. We don't advertise an American Dream, you can go there but then you get sorted into appropriate strata and rarely move up. If you accumulate wealth then good for you but the old system will make sure some doors stay closed to you, and others invisible. You may have money, but the way you use your language and the name your parents chose for you will denote your class and there is little you can do to control that. Language codes, set by the higher classes, are used to mark us and include or exclude us from the old boys' club. There's a fantastic book called "*Watching the English*" by Kate Fox that elaborates in great detail on the pains and hidden messages in British spoken language. We are closer to the Japanese than our American cousins when it comes to being direct with communication. The author also describes how different words and speech styles fall into a class system that is actually rather rigid. After reading the book I decided to test it too, seeing my fellow university students divided between those who invited you for 'supper' and those who invited you for 'dinner.' The former had attended private schools, the latter state schools. We don't know that when these social cues leave our mouths we are marked down by those who hold the rulebook.

All that being said, names and speech codes in the UK are used as a rule of measure for the highest class to include, exclude or ridicule as they see fit. I want to underline the point that the aristocracy and the higher classes who go to country clubs, own all the land (30%), and whose Daddy has a hedge fund, are making the decisions. However, they are so far removed from us and we so rarely come into contact with them that the judgement heaped on our names isn't necessarily part of our daily life. Of course people attach meaning to your name whether you say you're a Jack, Jeronimo, or Jai but ordinary people in the UK don't make the same distinctions between each other beyond ethnicity and religion and judgements of taste, as the upper classes do with the rest of us. It shouldn't usually cut lines between our belonging to the community on our doorstep or more importantly the community we identify with. What is a Londonder for example? Anyone who lives there and says "I'm a Londoner".

When I moved here, as I have explained in previous columns, I was woefully ignorant of Catalan politics. I also arrived at a time of escalation in early 2016 and as the months went

on, the complex issues around identity, belonging and division started to become apparent before my eyes, flags aside. In typical ignorant foreigner fashion, the names were all 'Spanishy' to me so I didn't know there was a Juan and a Joan and that it made a difference.

Around this time my favourite class to teach was a group of healthcare workers who would help me navigate the peculiarities of this new territory. Some were die hard independentists, while others were less vocal about politics but they all derived from what I came to understand as bastions of Catalan identity. We had the left-wing edgy mothers and fathers from Gracia, the climbing enthusiasts from Olot, and classy independentists from Vic and Girona.

We used to talk about my dating life, which mainly consisted of dating Italians and South Americans up to that point. I didn't think anything of it, as I didn't notice who I *wasn't* dating but people here certainly started to point it out to me. I remember during a conversation with one of my closest friends here that they quipped that I hadn't "dated a Catalan yet", with some sort of smug insider knowledge as if they knew why that hadn't happened without me confirming it. It was true, I suddenly noticed this gap and felt a little strange; had I been being screened out by Catalans in the dating world and hadn't noticed? Maybe, but that's another column.

Around this first year I also hadn't understood that if you answer questions on where you're from with "here" that doesn't necessarily denote you are viewed as from here after all. I was chatting to a guy named Guillermo who said he was from Barcelona and described himself as Catalan. When I went to class that week and said they would be proud that I had my first date with someone from here, they were rightfully impressed, and I should be rightfully ashamed for capitulating for praise in that sort of value system. They asked his name and I confidently replied "Guillermo" to which they started howling with laughter, talking over each other with various versions of; "Lily, Guillermo isn't Catalan". This flummoxed me, if someone self-identifies as coming from here then for me that entails being from Catalonia. They proceeded to draw up a list of nice Catalan names I could look out for: a Pol, a Pau, an Adria, a Joan, a nice Jorrrrdi Lily. I was horrified to see a set list of names where if you don't have one you are viewed by the gate-keepers of identity as not actually being from here, even if you were born here.

As horrible as the sentiment is, I generally understood it. I could see the tension, I could feel the damage on relations Rajoy's PP government in Madrid was doing at the time. I concluded that maybe some people used Spanish names to project their suspicions about the Spanish state and it would seem this person may not be loyal enough to Catalonia. Not right and not ok, but I could see the flawed logic.

In July 2017 I had my first fling with a local, it had only taken 18months and a closed environment where I was the only option! He had a Catalan name, *Arnau, and just in case I needed extra proof, he was a diehard Barcelona football fan and an independentist who painstakingly tried to bring me round to the cause. He even played in a Catalan rock band, how Catalan could he get! That September I'm back in class telling the students that I had cross referenced their naming sheet and bagged an independentist named Arnau. Applause all round, until the doctor from Vic who always had an eye for detail asked his surname. "Gomez" I answered not realising that he had been exposed as a 2nd generation

Andalusian. "...and where does his family live?" she asked with the calm composure of Sherlock Holmes, "Cornella" I said sensing danger and that I had stepped on another hidden mine. The class exploded: "A GOMEZ FROM CORNELLA ISN'T CATALAN, LILY!!!"

As I've said, names carry weight, they affect us in ways we can't always see, they allow us to be included or excluded, judged or accepted. Here, it seems it has become extremely present in the lives of the common person in shared communities. Where people, not aristocratic overlords, can dismiss people's identities and claim for inclusion as if it is the most natural thing in the world. You've got one hell of an identity to prove around here, I'm relieved I don't have to identify as Catalan, I'm not sure I could put up with the pressure.