

2016

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Recommended Citation

Narcis, Iglesias (2016) "Names of the Territory, Meanings of Exile: Language and Space in the Catalan Exile (1939)," *CALL: Irish Journal for Culture, Arts, Literature and Language*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 13.

doi:10.21427/D7101W

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/priamls/vol1/iss1/13>

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Names of the Territory, Meanings of Exile: Language and Space in the Catalan Exile (1939)

“Space is a square. Time is a circle. The secret is joining these two forms together: occupying the point that is left untouched, where a compass calculates these traces of light.” Philippe Forest, *L'enfant éternel*.¹

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Abstract

In 1939 a large number of Catalan and Spanish republicans left their country and sought shelter in France from the fascist army of the insurgent general Francisco Franco. The exile was a process which went through several stages: fleeing, crossing the border, settling in a new place, pondering their own and others' identities, accepting their condition of rootlessness. From diverse written sources, such as personal diaries, reports, fiction texts, interviews, etc., I will focus on the analysis of the naming of the sites and the territory in two key moments: the moment of their flight and their arrival in the new place. Due to the ferocious linguistic (military) policies of Franco, Catalan exiles pondered their individual and group identity, where language became a personal shelter, a cultural space and, at the same time, a reason for personal struggle for freedom. Some of them even began to think that their language had no land, but was only a written space built by the exiles themselves. My analysis will be grounded on the framework of the positioning theory that regards languages as a site of identity, discrimination and solidarity.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War; Catalan exile; France; language; identity

1. Introduction

Catalan exile is a square and a circle. It is a square because it is a space where language discourse emerges in a particular context: that of the flight of thousands of people. It is a circle because it is the time that embodied this experience, the Catalan exile of 1939. This article focuses on joining these two forms, the square that is the space and the circle that represents a particular period of time. Following three years of war (1936-39), around

¹ Philippe Foret, *L'enfant éternel*. France: Gallimard, 1997.

500,000 Spanish Republican exiles were forced to flee from Spain to France.² Among the Catalan exiles there were many politicians, writers, journalists and teachers: the core of the cultural and political elites crossed the border and initially settled in France.³ Franco's regime abolished Republican institutions (including the Catalan self-government and Parliament) and forbade the Catalan language in culture and administration: i.e. neither Catalan books nor Catalan journals were allowed to be published in Spain as of 1939.⁴ From that date Catalan books and journals had to be published abroad, and most of them were published in America. Exile culture could not be received in Spain and therefore Catalan culture was unable to find its natural audience. Catalan Culture in the diaspora was not widespread: a small number of the elite, mostly exiles, were the only possible audience.⁵

Catalan exiles suffered a universal trauma: the obligation to leave their own country and start a new life in another. Catalan exile can therefore offer a unique perception of the interplay between language and diaspora, which involves rootlessness and a search for a space for survival. In recent years, the subject of Catalan and Spanish exile (1939) has been studied across different fields, including literature, history and politics.⁶ This article aims to analyse what territory (villages, mountains, rivers, etc.) meant to exiles from the time they fled their country to when they arrived at their destination. I will also ask the following questions in analysing the attitudes towards language displayed by some Catalan exiles:

- Did language form an important link with their individual identity?
- Did language form an important link with their collective identity?

² María Fernanda Mancebo: *La España de los exilios*. Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2008. This article is part of the project "Las representaciones de la lengua catalana en la historia" (ref.: FFI2008-04496/FILO).

³ Daniel Díaz Esculies: *De la Guerra Civil, l'exili i el franquisme (1936-1975)*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2008.

⁴ Josep M. Benet: *L'intent franquista de genocidi cultural contra Catalunya*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1995; M. Josepa Gallofré: *L'edició catalana i la censura franquista: 1939-1951*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1991; and Albert Manent: *La literatura catalana a l'exili*. Barcelona: Curial, 1989.

⁵ Jordi Cornellà: *Literature as a Response to Cultural and Political Repression in Franco's Catalonia*. London: Tamesis, 2011; and Gallofré, L'edició catalana.

⁶ André Balent & Nicolas Marty: 'Catalans du Nord et languedociens et l'aide à la République espagnole, 1936-1946'. In: Manuel Aznar (ed.): *Actes de la journée d'études de l'association Maitron Languedoc-Roussillon*. Perpignan: Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2009; Manuel Aznar (ed.): *El exilio literario español de 1939: Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional*. Barcelona: GEXEL, 1998; Manuel Aznar (ed.): *60 años después. Las literaturas del exilio republicano de 1939*. Sant Cugat del Vallès: GEXEL, 2000; and Bernard Sicot (ed.): *La littérature espagnole et les camps français d'internement : de 1939 à nos jours: Actes du colloque international 70 años después*. Paris: Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 2010.

- What kind of identity did they have, bearing in mind Franco’s dictatorship would not allow them to receive cultural products from Catalonia?

I will analyse these issues mainly by way of several ego-documents: the memoirs of two writers in exile (Benguereel and Rovira i Virgili); an account of the war by another writer in exile (Ferran de Pol); and private letters from exile (Capdevila). Occasionally, I will refer to other sources, in order to develop specific points.

Following Wunenburger and Poirier, I will regard territory as a book that can be read, where exiles interpreted the sense of the country they traversed, and from where they contemplated their identity and otherness.⁷ In their search for the meaning of their personal and collective tragedy, they looked to the names of cities and villages they passed through. Their discourse concerning the meanings of the territory displays a wide range of viewpoints regarding their feelings and experiences. I will organise this article by relating three main stages and moments to different emerging language discourses:

| Stage/Moment | Language discourse |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Fleeing the country | Evoking the territory |
| Crossing the border | Looking for meanings |
| Settling abroad | Inquiring into identity. |

2. Flight (first stage): evoking the territory

When Catalan exiles fled from the war, they were on the move for at least a week after leaving Barcelona before settling in France, the new territory (most went into concentration camps; a few to private houses or hotels). As they were leaving their country, certain place-names evoked a range of different feelings in them: fear, loss, hope, chaos, and so on. In that sense, we could say that territory became a kind of book where the exiles read their individual state of being and their collective identity: this book, the territory, was read or interpreted in different ways. During the exiles’ flight, the territory they were leaving was seen in very different ways. How was it perceived? Let us see some of the responses.

Catalan villages and cities were seen as simple milestones on the road to the border. Rovira i Virgili wrote to Emili Vilaseca:

⁷ Jean-Jacques Wunenburger and Jacques Poirier (eds.) : *Lire l’espace*. Bruxelles: Éditions Ousia, 1996.

Vaig sortir de Barcelona, junt amb altres diputats catalans, dos dies abans de l'entrada dels feixistes. Vaig ésser a la Conreria, a Girona, a Olot, a Figueres, a Cantallops i a Agullana i no vaig entrar a França –no tenia passaport en regla– fins als darrers moments de la tragèdia. Vam venir amb tots els de casa: la muller, la filla, el fill.⁸

Some villages became the milestones of their flight, but not only villages were interpreted as part of the territory they were passing through. During the flight the anonymous mass of people became part of the countryside they were leaving. Girona, a village 60 kilometres from the border, is depicted by Rovira i Virgili as a city with more rivers than it has in reality (it has four): exiled people are seen as rivers inundating the city.

Va arribant gent i més gent als carrers de Girona i als voltants de la ciutat. Per tots els racons i tocoms hi ha farcells, maletes, flassades, matalassos i homes i dones i criatures que seuen o dormen o jeuen al damunt. Quatre rius d'aigua té Girona: el Ter, l'Onyar, el Güell i el Galligants. Ara té molts més rius de gent. Uns rius obscurs que creixen i s'inflen i remoregen com una enorme avinguda de temporal, i ho inunden tot d'una negra multitud.⁹

Each day of the flight brought them closer to the border. Any name of a border city was well received and “had a good sound”. The closer villages were to the border, the better the chances of escaping the fascist army, and therefore the more hopeful Catalan exiles were. Members of Parliament were able to spend the night in the village of Cantallops, very close to the border: “El nom de Cantallops, suggestiu, ha estat ben rebut pels companys. En les actuals circumstàncies, el nom de tots els pobles fronterers, fa bon so.”¹⁰

That village was not only a sound, but also had a meaning. Rovira i Virgili reflected on this. The etymological meaning of the name of a village (Cantallops, literally “Singing wolves”, related to fear) was given a *personal* meaning for him, who related it to hope: “Travessem Figueres sense aturar-nos. Pensem arribar a terme abans d'una altra hora. Cantallops! Aquest

⁸ I left Barcelona, with other Catalan MPs, two days before the fascists arrived. I was in la Conreria, Girona, Olot, Figueres, Cantallops and Agullana and I did not arrive in France – I didn't have a valid passport – until the very end of the tragedy. We came to France all together: my wife, my daughter and my son. ‘Letter from Rovira i Virgili to Emili Vilaseca 16/05/1939, Toulouse’. In: Maria Capdevila (ed.): *Cartes de l'exili* (1939-1949). Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2002, p. 39.

⁹ More and more people arrive on the streets of Girona and the outskirts of the city. Everywhere you look there are bundles, suitcases, blankets and mattresses with men, women and children sitting, sleeping or lying on top. Four rivers of water flow through Girona: the Ter, Onyar, Güell and Galligants. Now it has many more rivers of people; dark rivers that grow and swell like stormwater, flooding everything with a black crowd. Antoni Rovira i Virgili: *Els darrers dies de la Catalunya republicana. Memòries sobre l'èxode català*. Barcelona: Proa, 1999, p. 71. Several articles have been devoted to these memoirs - see Xavier Ferré: *Els darrers dies de la Catalunya republicana* de Rovira i Virgili. In: *Ítaca. Revista de Filologia* 1.1 (2010), p. 127-152.

¹⁰ The suggestive name of Cantallops has gone down well among the exiles. Under the current circumstances, the names of all border towns have a nice ring to them. Rovira, *Els darrers dies*, p. 86.

nom de paüra, ara ens sembla un nom d'esperança.”¹¹ The popular meaning opposes the personal interpretation of Catalan exiles: Cantallops, which was close to the border, was synonymous with hope for Rovira i Virgili.

When exiles spent one night in villages next to the border, some of them reflected on the meaning of the names of villages as if this would enable them to make sense of what was happening to them. So when Rovira i Virgili spent a night in Cantallops, he used his individual experience to interpret the meaning of that village's name. For him the name Cantallops evoked a myriad of feelings: his personal experience was a mix of what he observed and heard and what the village name suggested to him in the darkness of the night.

Travessen la meua ànima músiques de nit i de misteri. Pronuncio mentalment el nom del poble, nom que s'avé amb l'indret: Cantallops. Un nom que té similars en altres països. Hi trobo una ressonància feréstega. Ara per ací no hi deu haver gaires llops; però en temps antics, de les muntanyes veïnes devien venir sovint, amb llurs ulls fosforescents i llur udol sinistre. El foc de la llar mou la bandera de flames, vermella i groga com la de Catalunya. Penso en contes d'infants i en històries de lladres. Cantallops... Nom lent i llarg com un eco en la solitud de la nit d'hivern. M'alço i vaig cap a la porta, l'obro una mica per a guaitar al defora. No veig sinó tenebres, no sento sinó silenci. Cantallops...

Fins el llop atura

son udol allí,

com si la natura

provés de dormir

Em vénen a la memòria aquests versos de *Guerau de Liost* davant una vall del Montseny. Ara la natura dorm en la vall de Cantallops. La natura, impassible, no sap res de la tragèdia nostra.¹²

Other exiles spent a night in Mas Perxers, a house next to the border. After six days of flight from Barcelona, the greatest Catalan linguist, Pompeu Fabra, a Catalan exile, used his

¹¹ We cross Figueres without stopping. We plan to get to our target within the hour. Cantallops! This name of terror, sounds more like a name of hope to us now. Rovira, *Els darrers dies*, p. 89.

¹² Mysterious night-time music passes through my soul. I pronounce the name of the village in my head, a name that suits the place: Cantallops. A name that has its equivalent in other countries. It has an untamed resonance. There can't be too many wolves around here these days, but in ancient times they must have come often from the neighbouring mountains with their phosphorescent eyes and their sinister howling. The fireplace brandishes the flag of flames, red and yellow like that of the Catalan flag. I think of children's tales and stories of thieves. Cantallops ... a slow, long name like an echo in the solitude of the winter night. I stand up and walk towards the door, opening it a little to look outside. I see only shadows, hear only silence. Cantallops ... 'Until the wolf stops howling, it is as if nature were trying to sleep'. These verses come to mind from Guerau de Liost as he overlooked a valley of Montseny. Now nature sleeps in the valley of Cantallops, impassive and unaware of our tragedy. Rovira, *Els darrers dies*, p. 93-9.

individual experience to interpret what was around him that night and seemed to focus his thoughts on words and names, and not on the objects themselves.

A estones, refent-se d'un mal dissimulat estupor, contemplava al seu entorn les coses com si es tractés, pensava jo, no ben bé de coses, sinó de mots, dels noms que, enamorat i savi, havia pacientment inventariat i definit al seu Diccionari.¹³

While exiles continued to flee, the villages they passed through took on different meanings for them. The landscape of the country they were leaving no longer seemed to belong to them; even the landscape was pushing them away. That was the feeling expressed by Benguerel in his memoirs:

Finalment vam deixar darrere nostre la ciutat [Girona] i vam sortir a ple camp, al silenci, a la solitud, a un capvespre de llum despullada. Encara hi havia aquell arbre, una flor silvestre, un turó, una casa, un còdol, el xiscler d'un ocell nocturn, el miralleig de l'aigua del Ter a la vora... Pagava la pena de pensar-hi. Era atraient i angoixós alhora: tot semblava després, isolat en la seva pròpia existència, com negant-se a assumir el nostre drama, com si tot allò i nosaltres no pertanyéssim al mateix país. [...] Com a màxim tot allò que encara veia (la meua terra, el meu país, junt amb el que havia deixat: fills, pares, una casa, uns carrers), ingressava en una mena de tenebrós dipòsit com el d'un antiquari o a convertir-se en virus d'una malaltia per a la qual vam descobrir fa molts anys una paraula summament inefable: enyorança.¹⁴

3. The border (second stage): looking for meanings

Crossing the border implies another moment of the emergence of language discourse. What did it mean exactly for the Catalan exiles? Just escaping from the fascist army and finally finding peace? Obviously, peace was their main aim, to avoid the military persecution that had been following them since their journey to the border began. However, peace was not all they felt as they finally crossed the border. There were other experiences they felt and expressed.

¹³At times while recovering from an ill-concealed stupor, he contemplated the objects in his surroundings, as if, I felt, they were not objects but words, of the nouns that, lovingly and wisely, he had patiently listed and defined in his dictionary. Xavier Benguerel, *Memòries 1905-1940*. Barcelona: L'Avenç, 2008, p. 236.

¹⁴We eventually left our city [Girona] behind us, heading into the heart of the countryside, into the silence and the solitude, into a sunset of naked light. There was still that tree, a wild flower, a hill, a house, a pebble, the screeching of a nocturnal bird, the reflection on the water of the nearby River Ter ... It was worth contemplating. It was both attractive and unnerving: everything after seemed isolated in its own existence, as if it were refusing to take part in our drama, as if we didn't all belong to the same land. [...] At the very least, everything that I could still see (my land, my country, together with what I had left behind: children, parents, a home, streets), was being put in a kind of shadowy deposit, like the storeroom of an antique shop, or was becoming a viral illness, for which many years ago we found a perfectly ineffable word: longing. Benguerel, *Memòries*, p. 232.

When Catalan exiles crossed the border, the first French region they came into was Roussillon, a former Catalan territory that became part of France in 1659. Catalan exiles emphasized that there were no cultural or language differences between Roussillon (France) and Catalonia (Spain). Ferran de Pol realized that they were, actually, in the same country (people, language, architecture) and the only difference between Roussillon (France) and Catalonia (Spain) was peace.

Quina cosa més estranya, la frontera! Sobretot aquesta frontera. Apa, tinent, el discursset. No, Catalunya no acaba aquí, just a la ratlla fronterera. Terres endins, tot serà igual: la gent, l'idioma, l'estil de les cases... Tot el que vulguis, estimat tinent lletraferit. Sí, parla'ns una mica de la Pau dels Pirineus i de totes aquestes coses que t'exalten, pobre noi... Tot serà igual, però una cosa no serà igual: la pau. Serà igual, la gent, el paisatge, l'idioma, però aquí hi ha —a més de tot això— la pau.¹⁵

The history of Roussillon was closely linked to Catalonia until the seventeenth century, and both territories shared the same language and culture. Catalan exiles were convinced the real limits were not marked by the political border, but rather the linguistic one: the folk culture itself was proof. For the Catalans, “la ratlla de la nostra veritable frontera” (“our true border”) was not the administrative one, but “la de l'idioma” (“that of the language”), as Ferran de Pol wrote. What is more, on passing Lake Salses he recalled that “viu - si no en la realitat en la llegenda - aquell famós peix, *lo vertader català*, espècie única al món i que no pot creuar la ratlla partionera, de l'idioma, sense morir... Adéu, país!”¹⁶

The border was the last limit of what Catalan exiles had been: when they crossed it, whatever the thoughts or feelings evoked, they faced up to who they were, and who they had been. Once they crossed the border, they inquired into their identity.

4. Settling Abroad (third stage): inquiring into identity

¹⁵ It is the strangest thing! This border especially. So, Lieutenant, my little speech. No, Catalonia doesn't end here, where the line traces the border. Beyond it everything is the same: the people, the language, the houses ... Everything you see, my Lieutenant of Literature. Talk to us a little of the Peace of the Pyrenees and all those things that arouse you, poor child ... Everything would be the same, except one thing: peace. The people, the landscape, the language will all be the same, but here – as well as all that – there is peace. Lluís Ferran de Pol: *De lluny i de prop*. Barcelona: Selecta, 1972, p. 27-28.

¹⁶ “living there – if not in reality, in legend – is that famous fish, the true Catalan, a unique species in the world, and one which cannot cross the dividing line, the language, without dying ... Goodbye my land!” Ferran de Pol: *De lluny*, p. 71.

Settling in a new place implies the last moment of the emergence of language discourse. In this stage of the diaspora new thoughts and experiences related to their identity emerged. The further they went from their country, the more aware they became of their new identity, that of the fugitive. Benguerel defined that new identity:

A no sé qui se li va ocórrer de retreure que érem encara uns fugitius. Era veritat, “allò” tot just començava, obscur, imprevisible; però quan el tren arrenca, mentre anava progressant la distància entre nosaltres i el Voló, les Illes, Agullana, Figueres, Girona, Barcelona, aleshores n’estaves segur, aleshores, *sabies*. Ho sabies del cert, com si ho veiessis i ho patissis, i et desesperava molt més el passat que el futur. I era, aquesta, una de les sensacions més depriments de l’èxode.¹⁷

When reflecting on who they were, writers inevitably had to analyse their intellectual activity, especially in terms of the Catalan language. As part of this reflection, which was forced upon them by the socio-political circumstances of the time, the exiled writers assessed what it meant to continue writing in Catalan despite it being impossible for their work to be read by Catalans in Spain.

We must emphasise that exiled writers, right from the very start, believed that the future of Catalan culture depended more on them than on those who stayed within the borders of Franco’s Spain. In the immediate aftermath of the retreat, they were of the conviction that continuing to write in Catalan was a symbolic way to carry on the war. This was asserted by Rovira i Virgili in his memoirs:

L’orgull d’èsser català culmina per a un escriptor, en l’orgull d’escriure en català. Tot escrivint el meu primer llibre d’exili, veig en l’arranjament dels mots catalans la prova que han fracassat els folls opressors de Catalunya. No reduiran al silenci la nostra llengua nacional. No la trauran de la ploma dels escriptors, ni dels llavis del poble. Un llibre català que es publica a l’estranger mentre els llibres catalans són perseguits i destruïts a la nostra pàtria, significa que la guerra no s’ha acabat, que la guerra continua, que la guerra no parará fins que Catalunya no recobri tota la seva llibertat nacional: la del règim polític, la de la llengua i la de l’esperit. La nostra esperança és invencible. Catalunya i els catalans mereixen temps millors. Aquests temps vindran. Hem vist l’èxode; veurem el retorn. I jo, que he viscut i descrit els darrers dies de la caiguda, voldria escriure i descriure els primers dies del redreçament.¹⁸

¹⁷ I don’t know who thought to remind us that we were still fugitives. It was true, that it was all just beginning; everything was dark and unpredictable; but when the train set off, as the distance grew between ourselves and Voló, les Illes, Agullana, Figueres, Girona, Barcelona, then you were no longer just sure; then you knew. You knew it for sure, as if you could see it and suffer it, and the past evoked greater despair than the future. And that was one of the most depressing feelings of the exodus. Benguerel, *Memòries*, p. 250.

¹⁸ For a writer, the pride of being Catalan culminates in the pride of writing in Catalan. As I write my first book in exile, I see in the arrangement of the Catalan words the proof that the foolish oppressors of Catalonia have failed. They will not reduce our national language to silence. They will not take it from the pens of our writers,

Exiled writers even thought their fight for the Catalan language benefitted the people who stayed in Spain: given the socio-political situation under Franco's dictatorship, those who stayed would not be able to sustain Catalan culture alone. Exiles even felt that the real reason why they had fled was to serve the people that had stayed in Spain: Catalan exiles, mainly the writers, wanted to fight for the Catalan language in order to save the voice of the whole nation. Francesc Trabal, another Catalan writer, explained that purpose when he wrote to his niece:

No sabíem, no sabem, si mai podrem tornar amb tu, però sabíem, sabem, que la llengua catalana tornaria a tu, que la llengua catalana seria la teva llengua, que tu eres Catalunya i que si et deixàvem era per no deixar-te (...) Un de nosaltres s'ajupí, es posà de genolls en calma i besà la terra. No et recordaràs mai que en aquell instant la teva mà petita tocà els teus llavis, et semblà que una mena de volva dolça t'havia tocat: tots nosaltres, els que ens n'anàvem, no sabíem si per sempre, acabàvem de besar-te. Era l'adéu, era l'arveure? Perquè algun dia ho compreguessis, ens disposàvem a fer la volta al món, a seguir el camí de la més llarga marrada, si així podíem salvar-te la teva veu.¹⁹

The most detailed reflection on what losing the war meant was written by Xavier Benguerel, who in his memoirs wrote at length on what this meant to Catalans living in exile: he viewed the 1939 defeat as akin to "losing the country". We can see this in context:

Però cada dia ens escurçaven el mapa [les tropes franquistes guanyaven terreny al territori republicà]. Ja no bastava la fe en les obres de cultura, ni en la supervivència que ens era deguda, o creure que els "miracles" poden reproduir-se a voluntat. Molts moments "perdre la guerra" adquiria per a nosaltres el significat de "perdre el país". Qui sap si perquè ens giràvem d'esquena a la inexorabilitat de la història i perquè "aquesta història" no tindria sentit que es fes sense nosaltres; qui sap si per por, per egoisme, fins i tot per esgotament físic, ens esborronava la idea de perdre la petita pàtria re-inaugurada a principi de segle.²⁰

or from the lips of the people. A Catalan book that is published in a foreign country, while Catalan books are being persecuted and destroyed in our homeland, means that the war is not over, that the war goes on, that the war will not end until Catalonia recovers all of its national freedom: for its political system, its language and its spirit. Our hope is invincible. Catalonia and the Catalans deserve better times. These times will come. We have seen the exodus; we will see the return. And I, who have lived through and described the last days of the fall, would like to write and describe the first days of the new beginning. Rovira, *Darrers dies*, p. 8.

¹⁹ We didn't know, we don't know, if we can ever return to you, but we did know, we do know, that the Catalan language will return to you, that the Catalan language will be your language, that you are Catalonia and that if we left you it was in order not to leave you. [...] One of us bent down, calmly went down on his knees and kissed the ground. You'll never remember that in that instant your small hand touched your lips, and you felt as if some kind of sweet snowflake had touched you: those of us who were going – we didn't know whether it would be forever – gave you a kiss. Was it farewell? Was it we'll meet again? Because one day you'll understand, we were willing to travel around the world, to follow the longest, most winding path, if that's what was needed to save your voice. Francesc Trabal: 'Letter from Francesc Trabal to his niece'. In: Quim Torra (ed.): *El Nadal que no vam tornar a casa*. Barcelona: A Contra Vent Editors, 2009, p. 12-13.

²⁰ Every day they cut our map back further [Franco's troops were gaining land from the Republican territory]. It was no longer enough to have faith in works of culture, nor in the survival that was owed to us, or to believe that

Benguereel viewed Franco's victory as the complete loss of the Catalan culture that had been built in the decades prior to the Spanish Civil War. The feeling with which Benguereel captures this loss reveals the refugees' deep psychological upheaval. Catalan refugees had the feeling that Catalan culture would be destroyed by Franco's dictatorship. This feeling could only lead the Catalan writers to a state of great psychological trauma. When in exile, the individual concentrated all suffering in collective fate. After 1939, Catalonia remained, according to Díaz Esculies (2008, p. 108), "almost devoid of leaders", with the cultural and political elites away from their natural environment, without their own land, suspended mid-air. The sense of loss led the writers to create an imaginary space that represented their shelter. Catalan was their daily language, but it became also one of their main links to the territory fled, their absent land, their imaginary homeland: a great space on which to reflect, by writing their way through it.

5. Conclusions

The victory of General Franco forced thousands of people to flee, abandoning their towns and villages to go into exile in France. This article has analysed how Catalans experienced the flight, how they set about abandoning the territory, and what feelings it evoked in them when they were forced to abandon it. The names of towns, villages and houses they passed through led them to reflect on their situation: refugees gave personal meaning to the names of towns, villages, houses and rivers they left behind, to names that history, the etymology of toponyms and popular folklore had interpreted. The territory spoke to them and entreated them to find a personal meaning in it. It led them to view their personal experience in relation to places. All these questions were directly related to essential issues: What did it mean for those who had to live through it? And how did they find themselves immersed in the onerous experience of exile?

Due to the ferocious (military) linguistic policies imposed by Franco, Catalan exiles reflected on their individual and group identity, where language became a personal shelter, a cultural space and, at the same time, a reason for personal struggle for freedom. Some of them even began to think that their language had no land, that is, their language territory was not

"miracles" could be conjured up at will. There were many moments when "losing the war", meant the same for us as "losing the country." Who knows whether it was because we were turning our backs on the inflexibility of history and because "this history" would have no meaning without us; who knows if it was because of fear, selfishness, or even due to physical exhaustion, but we were horrified at the idea of losing the small homeland we re-established at the beginning of the century. Benguereel, *Memòries*, p. 218.

tangible or had no physical entity, —it was only a written space constructed by the exiles themselves. Rootlessness led exiles to look for a personal and an emotional link with the country they fled: with them, they brought their language, which became their space, their identity and their loyalty. Exiles reflected on the reasons for continuing to write in Catalan abroad.

The language loyalty of Catalan exiles was the expression of the need to feel humanly related to an individual and collective past and also to an individual and collective future. Their memories were not only the past, but a living and inner feeling of what they were and what they wanted to keep being in the future: living abroad meant that they actually had no country. Their language became their territory.