

# Branding like a State: Establishing Catalan Singularity at the Frankfurt Book Fair

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Kathryn A. Woolard, *University of California, San Diego*

## ABSTRACT

The designation of Catalan culture as guest of honor at the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair raised controversy over whether Catalan culture is expressed in one language or two. This was an opportunity for elites to promote Catalan industry internationally but also to compete over visions of Catalonia for domestic political purposes. An analysis of media texts from the controversy shows that national branding emerged as a key trope in the official defense of emphasizing Catalan over Castilian-medium literature. As a discourse sanctioned in the global political economy, branding was strategically revoiced by Catalan officials to parry Castilian critics' free-marketeer accusations of illiberal essentialist protectionism. This analysis uses Silverstein's concept of indexical order to argue that branding functioned not only as a sign of Catalonia's distinctiveness in the global marketplace but also at a higher order as a brand in itself to index the Catalan administration's cosmopolitan, contemporary, and rationalist character.

In 2006, a fragile coalition of left-of-center parties formed a new parliamentary government of the autonomous community of Catalonia in Spain, under the presidency of a longtime Catalan Socialist Party politician, José Montilla. An immigrant to Catalonia from southern Spain of working-class origin, Montilla was also the former minister of industry and tourism in the Spanish government and was known as a colorless organization man with a rationalist,

Contact Kathryn A. Woolard at Social Sciences Building Room 290, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA, 92093-0532 (kwoolard@ucsd.edu).

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managerial approach to governance. His governing coalition was dubbed the *Entesa* ‘Accord’ and depended crucially on a Catalanist, independence-oriented party, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) ‘Republican Left of Catalonia.’ Nonetheless, the administration sought to downplay traditional Catalan nationalism and identity politics as well as to avoid the political drama that had plagued the previous administration under a charismatic Catalan Socialist president. Playing on the Spanish term for “Incorporated/Inc.,” *Sociedad Anónima*/S.A. ‘Anonymous society,’ the Catalan newspaper columnist Toni Soler wryly suggested the degree to which this new government embodied the values of corporate managerial culture and eschewed identity politics: “The government . . . opts for management alone. It has decided . . . to convert us all into members of the board of directors of Catalonia S.A. (‘A’ for anonymous, because anonymity is the ideal of those who are against identities)” (Soler 2006).<sup>1</sup> Soler’s remark suggests that although it is a stateless nation, twenty-first century Catalonia participates in the modality of neoliberal statecraft often described as characteristic in the contemporary globalized economy, in which the state engages in the practices and takes on the values of corporate culture (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Graan 2013). However, the quote also suggests something slightly askew in the Catalan case. Soler depicted a Catalonia, Inc. that is “against identities,” in apparent contrast to the increasingly familiar model of “Ethnicity, Inc.” in which entrepreneurial states commodify identity for the globalized market (Urry 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009), a process often seen in the commodification of ethnolinguistic authenticity in peripheralized political territories (see, e.g., Heller and Duchêne 2012, 10–12).<sup>2</sup> This suggestion of a contrast between the models of Catalonia, S.A., and Ethnicity, Inc., stimulates the exploration in this article.

Catalonia, S.A. put its wares (and thus itself) on display at the Frankfurter Buchmesse ‘Book Fair,’ where Catalan culture was featured as the invited guest of honor in 2007. The annual Buchmesse is the largest publishing trade fair “on the planet,” as a leading Barcelona newspaper put it (La Vanguardia 2007). Although publishing may seem a quaint industry in the late modern era of

1. “El Govern . . . apuesta por la gestión a secas, y ha decidido . . . convertirnos a todos en miembros del consejo de administración de Catalunya S.A. (‘A’ de anónima, porque el anonimato es el ideal de los que están en contra de las identidades).”

2. This process has been explored by sociolinguists and most notably Monica Heller in a number of influential studies. See, among others, Heller 1999, 2010, 2013; Pietikäinen 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Jaffe and Oliva 2013; McLaughlin 2013; Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2013.

digital communication, the Frankfurt Book Fair is a principal international venue where publishers and agents spot rising cultural trends and negotiate commercial relations, licensing, and translation rights in the global industry, increasingly not only for print but also for digital “content” across the “creative industries,” as the fair’s website stresses.<sup>3</sup>

The Frankfurt Book Fair of 2007 was not only an opportunity to promote Catalan industry internationally, it was also an opportunity to project and legitimate a vision of Catalonia for domestic audiences. It provided a public arena for competing political and cultural elites to contend over the nature and status of Catalan language, culture, and identity. Specifically, competing visions of the place of the Catalan and Castilian languages in Catalan society were publicly pitted against each other in the media and in cultural policy circles throughout nearly three years of preparations for the Frankfurt Fair.

In its guise of Catalonia, S.A., the Catalan government took up explicit discourses of marketing and nation branding for Frankfurt. These allowed the coalition government to respond to Castilianist criticism and to frame itself and its cultural project not as retrograde nationalists waging a tiresome, exclusionary battle over identity and authenticity but rather as corporate leadership doing the approved work of contemporary state actors moving in a global market by capitalizing on distinctiveness. As Constantine Nakassis has observed, “the brand concept increasingly functions as the measure of the state, its ‘value’ and its legitimacy, its ability to ‘participate’ in the global economy and ‘develop’ itself” (Nakassis 2013, 119). As Andrew Graan (2013) has further suggested, nation branding ostensibly targeted to an audience of foreign capital also opens up space for new forms of politics directed to internal audiences and toward the management of internal challenges to authority. For a stateless nation striving for recognition despite its political subordination in a centralized state system—as in the case of Catalonia—such a corporate standard of legitimacy, value, and participation could be a welcome innovation. The internationally recognized discursive currency of nation branding lent the Catalan government legitimacy as it attempted to emphasize the Catalan linguistic profile while detaching it from a traditional authorizing framework of ethnolinguistic authenticity that had become increasingly constraining politically and socially.

In this article, I draw on a corpus of over 200 media articles from the nearly three years of preparations for the Frankfurt Book Fair exposition to analyze

3. See <http://www.buchmesse.de/en/company/>.

the public debate over the representation of language(s) at that event.<sup>4</sup> Through this analysis, I show the development of a strategic discourse of marketing and branding in place of more traditional essentialist themes of authenticity and identity in Catalan language politics and policies. Drawing on Michael Silverstein's conceptualization of the "indexical order" as dynamic (Silverstein 1995), I argue that in this case, the branding strategy was mobilized and shifted to a higher order of indexicality to serve as a brand in itself for the Catalan administration. The tropes of global marketing were leveraged by political actors to escape the traditional confines of chronic Catalan-Castilian struggles over cultural politics and representation.

### The Frankfurt Book Fair 2007: A Narrative Account

In March 2005 the Frankfurt Book Fair's administration designated Catalan culture as the guest of honor for 2007, immediately raising a long controversial question: is Catalan culture expressed in one language or two? Barcelona is the major base of the publishing industry in Spain, not only in the Catalan language but also in Castilian, addressed to a Latin American as well as Iberian market. In the period before the fair, the Catalan industry accounted for 55 percent of Spanish publishing (Cuadrado 2007b) and over 43 percent of publication exports (Avui 2007). Many of the most prestigious authors from Barcelona write in Castilian. Were they "Catalan authors," and were their books part of "Catalan literature" and "Catalan culture"?

After the announcement, Catalanist organizations and writers quickly demanded that official representation at Frankfurt be limited to Catalan-medium writers. The Catalan administration replied that "Catalan writers are as much those who write in Catalan as those who write in Castilian" (*Escriptores catalanes son tanto aquellos que escriben en catalán como los que escriben en castellano*) but that there would be *discriminació positiva* 'affirmative action' in favor of Catalan (ABC 2005; J. B. 2005). The Catalan Parliament passed a motion to give Catalan-medium literature priority at Frankfurt (Bassets 2005) but a stronger motion to exclusively invite "writers in the Catalan language" (*escriptors en llengua catalana*) failed to pass (Hevia 2006). Castilianist opponents did not find an appreciable distinction in these motions. Indignant commentary in the Castilian-medium press objected to any effort to prioritize

4. News articles and commentaries were gathered from the print media during fieldwork in 2006–7; from two digital dossiers on the topic assembled by the Centre de Documentació of the Generalitat de Catalunya, which cover the political spectrum of print periodical newspapers in both languages distributed in Catalonia during the period 2005–7; and from supplemental online searches carried out in April 2014.

Catalan-medium works as “hyperprotectionist nationalism” (*nacionalismo hiperprotector*; see Ferran and Fernández 2005) and a “scandalous,” “intolerable,” “absolute provincialism” (*escandaloso, intolerable, absoluto provincianismo*; see Güell 2005) that demonstrated the obstinately “excluding nature” (*el carácter excluyente*) of the Catalan government (*El Mundo* 2005).

In 2006, a compromise was announced: only authors who wrote in Catalan would be sponsored directly by the Catalan government, but the government would subsidize Catalan publishing houses’ expenses to bring Castilian-medium Catalan authors to Frankfurt. This compromise did little to mollify either side and was revised in March 2007. The official delegation would now include Castilian-medium authors, the administration’s representative announced, because “a good part of the strength of our culture is fruit of this dialogue [between Catalan and Castilian literature in Catalonia], of this creative and creating *convivència* [coexistence].”<sup>5</sup> “Catalan writers in the Castilian language” (*escriptors en llengua catalana*) would be able “to speak to us about their relation with the Catalan language” (*nos hablen de su relación con la lengua catalana*; Bassets 2007). This was seen by partisans on one side as a deferential bow to the hegemony of Spanish culture (Branchadell 2007), and on the other as a personal insult to the Castilian authors invited, all of whom declined to attend (Fernández 2007). A conservative Spanish legislator blamed their absence on the Catalan government and termed it “the greatest instance of exclusion, sectionalism, and abuse” (*el mayor episodio de exclusión, de sectarismo y de atropello*; Alsedo 2007).

Ultimately, the artistic central exhibit bore testimony to thousands of Catalan authors and artists over the centuries, Castilian-medium as well as Catalan. In video recordings, authors from a variety of linguistic backgrounds spoke of their relation to Catalan culture (Morán 2007a). Castilian-medium (flamenco), Catalan, and hybrid music was performed. Reports even in some conservative Spanish newspapers characterized the actual exposition of Catalan culture at the fair as “open and inclined to dialogue” (*abierto y dialogante*), a successful representation of cultural *convivència* as had been claimed by the Catalan administration (Morán 2007a).

Our interest is in the role that the discourse of the market and specifically of nation branding for the global market played in the development and resolution of this controversy and its departure from traditional Catalanist dis-

5. “Buena parte de la fuerza de nuestra cultura es fruto de este diálogo, de esta convivencia creativa y creadora.”

courses of identity and linguistic/cultural authenticity. At least since the time of the 1979 Statute of Autonomy that reestablished Catalonia as a political entity, the legal and moral defense of Catalan had revolved around its conceptualization as Catalonia's *llengua pròpia* 'proper language' in the sense of proper name in English, best if awkwardly glossed as 'own language.' This status was institutionalized juridically in the Statute of Autonomy and in language legislation in later years. It provided the rationale to increase use of Catalan throughout the society in what was construed as a restoration of the language to its rightful status as the originary and essential, true language of Catalonia. Yet the concept soon became a point of vulnerability, especially given that owing to a history of mass immigration, first-language speakers of Castilian form the majority in contemporary Catalonia. In addition to the constraining implications of the localness of a language (Silverstein 1998), the concept of *llengua pròpia* itself was criticized as an illiberal violation of the principle of the supremacy of individual over group rights. Anti-Catalanist cultural elites and political leaders embraced the slogan, "Territories don't speak, people do" (*els territoris no parlen, ho fan les persones*; *Avui* 2006). Only individuals have a *llengua pròpia*, they asserted, and in this sense the *llengua pròpia* of more than half of the population was Castilian. Given the demographic realities, as Catalonia's autonomy came to be established, by the turn of the millennium the moral authority and persuasive force of the *llengua pròpia* concept had been vitiated. A striking aspect of the evolution of the Frankfurt controversy was that arguments based in authenticity generally and the central traditional trope of *llengua pròpia* specifically were rarely used by administration policymakers and organizers in over two and a half years of public debate and preparations, right up to the formal opening of the exposition in Frankfurt. Instead, the market emerged as the central motif in the rhetorical war of position. In the next sections we will look closer at the way the debate took shape.

### The Castilianist Perspective

Castilian advocates did not generally frame the debate over the presence of Castilian-medium authors in the Frankfurt exposition as one of competing claims to authentic Catalan identity. Instead, most of them rejected the ideology of authenticity entirely, in favor of liberal virtues and unfettered free-marketism that cast government favoritism toward Catalan as illiberal, discriminatory, and retrograde protectionism. Andrés Sorel, head of the Asociación Colegial de Escritores de España (Collegial Association of Writers of Spain) was

quoted as saying that literature “is above nationalisms and does not have frontiers” (*por encima de nacionalismos y no tiene fronteras*; Fernández 2005). “To deny someone the right to be part of Catalan culture for not writing in Catalan is an act of intellectual cruelty,”<sup>6</sup> wrote two Catalan Socialist politicians early in the controversy (Ferran and Fernández 2005).

The Castilian-medium author Félix de Azúa made repeated vehement calls for the inclusion of authors like himself, yet he disdained Catalan identity. Reporting that he loved Barcelona and despised the nationalist government that had been led for decades by Jordi Pujol, he announced with pride, “I didn’t know anything about Catalonia until Pujol showed it to me, and I still don’t understand what there is beyond the city.”<sup>7</sup> Azúa compared Catalan nationalism to Spanish fascism and rejected the concept of nations as “invented by Napoleon, a bourgeois counterrevolutionary invention” (*El Mundo* 2007a).<sup>8</sup> When the Catalan minister of culture announced the plan to take both Catalan and Castilian-medium authors to Frankfurt, but under different auspices, another leading critic of Catalanism, Xavier Pericay, appealed to market principles to indict this as the protectionist nationalism that makes a second class of the (Castilian) literature that “is ruled by the law of supply and demand . . . and is the only one with any real weight in the world” (Pericay 2006).<sup>9</sup>

### What Is Catalan Literature? The Market and Commodification

The Catalan administration and allies of its perspective invoked the linguistic medium as the criterion used by librarians, literary historians, and the commercial marketplace in defining what constitutes a literature. Booksellers’ and librarians’ conventions were alleged to give an obvious answer to a cut-and-dried classificatory question. An editorial director of a major publishing house complained dismissively: “To say that Catalan literature is that which is written in Catalan is like saying two plus two equals four” (Fernández 2005).<sup>10</sup> “This is a librarian’s debate, about bookshelves,” said one well-known journalist (J. B. 2007).<sup>11</sup> Even more to the point here, another placed the judgment

6. “Que se le niegue a alguien el formar parte de la cultura catalana por no escribir en catalán deviene un acto de crueldad intelectual.”

7. “No supe de Cataluña hasta que me la descubrió Pujol y todavía no entiendo lo que hay más allá de la ciudad.”

8. “Las naciones las inventó Napoleón, que son una invención de la burguesía contrarrevolucionaria.”

9. “Regida por la ley de la oferta y la demanda . . . es el único con algún peso en el mundo.”

10. “Decir que la literatura catalana es la que se escribe en catalán es como decir que dos y dos son cuatro.”

11. “És un debat bibliotecari, sobre prestatgeries” (quote from Vicenç Villatoro).

squarely in the marketplace when he asserted “The head of the bookstore at El Corte Inglés [Spain’s leading department store chain] has it straight: Catalan literature is that which is written in Catalan, and for that there are specific display cases”<sup>12</sup> (Cuyàs 2007).

Like his colleague Pericay, Felix de Azúa, the critic of Catalan nationalism quoted earlier, embraced market principles: “there are things that defend themselves . . . it’s not necessary to defend Catalan literature, because it defends itself” in the marketplace.<sup>13</sup> However, he rejected the supposedly established linguistic criterion of the marketplace as an archaic “nineteenth-century idea”: “In the twenty-first century, everyone knows the difference between university manuals and reality, which says that literature doesn’t belong to a nation or a language, but to publishers, marketing and markets . . . a culture is a market” (*El Mundo* 2007b).<sup>14</sup> And, “more than nations, there are markets” (*más que naciones hay mercados*; *El Mundo* 2007a).

In this debate, then, the definition of Catalan literature was framed from various sides as an issue resolved in the marketplace, which was accepted as its proper purview. The objects in question were not languages but books, which should be seen unproblematically as commodities to be located on library shelves and display cases to appeal to market segments of potential consumers. This market motif further dominated the public discussion. As one publisher wrote, “every language and every literature has to do everything possible to widen its market” (Broch 2005).<sup>15</sup> A business columnist wrote with irony: “We’ve decided that the label *made in Spain* doesn’t sell anymore, and everybody has gone into business for themselves” (Echart 2007).<sup>16</sup> A Catalan author put it in even more cynical terms: “We have to sell ourselves the way the prostitutes in Amsterdam do: displaying ourselves. We put ourselves in the shop window and whoever wants to can buy us” (Piquer 2005).<sup>17</sup>

12. “L’encarregat de la llibreria d’El Corte Inglés ho té clar. Literatura catalana és la que es fa en català, i per això té uns expositors especialment dedicats.”

13. “Hay cosas que se defienden por si mismas . . . no es necesario defender la literatura catalana porque se defiende sola.”

14. “Un orden político arcaico . . . con ideas del siglo XIX . . . en el XXI todo el mundo diferencia entre manuales universitarios y realidad, que dice que la literatura no pertenece ni a una nación ni a una lengua, sino que pertenece a los editores, al mercadeo y al mercado . . . una cultura . . . es un mercado.” See King (2006) for a related critique of the linguistic definition of Catalan literature.

15. “Tota llengua i tota literatura han de fer el possible per eixamplar el seu mercat d’ús.”

16. “Hemos decidido que la marca *made in Spain* ya no vende y cada uno ha puesto un negocio por su cuenta.”

17. “Ens hem de vendre com fan les putes a Amsterdam: mostrant-nos. Ens posem a l’aparador i qui ens vulgui, que ens compri.”



The rhetoric of markets and commodities is obviously strong here. If we are tempted to see this as an example of what Jacqueline Urla characterized with skepticism as “the inevitable colonization of the field of language politics by neoliberal rationalities” (Urla 2012, 74), Urla’s is a useful perspective on Catalonia as well as on the Basque case that she studied. Rather than the rationalities of the market colonizing language, here there were accusations from the publishing industry that a well-established commercial arena was being colonized by politicians and language politics. “This is an event for publishers, not the Olympics,”<sup>18</sup> grumbled one (Fernández 2005). As the most important book market in the world and a “global display window,” the Frankfurt Fair was deemed by publishers to be too important an event to be left in the hands of “cultural functionaries” (*funcionaris culturals*) and “the politicians on duty” (*polítics de torn*) (Cònsul 2005). “If ideology imposes itself on industry, when the matter is one for industry, it is never good news,” opined a Castilian-medium author (San Agustín 2007).<sup>19</sup>

Publishers’ indignation over being displaced from a central role in the Frankfurt event reminds us of Benedict Anderson’s thesis of the origins of nationalism and of standard languages themselves: that it was print capitalism, and specifically printers, that first made the linguistic objects that only later would be brought under political aegis (Anderson 1991). Anderson’s thesis may exaggerate the role of printers in the complex historical emergence of both standard languages and nationalism, but his emphasis on the early capitalist commodification of books provides a long view on the modern Frankfurt Book Fair. In the Catalan controversy, publishers claimed that this was rightly their purview, and critics of the government’s actions argued that politicization was contaminating the rational—the market—with the irrational—nationalism. One wrote that publishers knew very well how to sell Catalan culture to the directors of the Frankfurt Fair, but when management was transferred to a government institution, “what was a market matter was transmuted into patriotic essences; commercial rationality was replaced by nationalist irrationality” (Pontón 2007).<sup>20</sup> If only the manager of El Corte Inglés, the giant department store chain, had been put in charge of the Frankfurt Fair, continued Manuel Cuyàs, quoted earlier on this theme, none of this controversy would have arisen. “Government has to have ideas as clear as those of a salesman,” and “the government has to

18. “Es una cita para editores, no unas Olimpiadas.”

19. “Que la ideologia s’imposi a la indústria, quan la cosa va d’indústria, no és mai una bona notícia.”

20. “Lo que era material de mercado se transmutó en esencias patrias. Al ser sustituida la razón comercial por la irracionalidad nacionalista.”

take [to the Fair] the books that the manager of El Corte Inglés would take” (Cuyàs 2007).<sup>21</sup>

From a more jaundiced perspective, some hinted that it was precisely marketing imperatives that created an artificial linguistic controversy. There was indeed some evidence that in choosing the annual guest of honor (e.g., India the year before, which generated a similar controversy about English) the Frankfurt Fair sought or manufactured conflictive cases to stir interest (Geli 2007; Knapp 2007; Weidhaas 2007).

### What Is Catalan Culture? Authenticity and Pluralism

“Culture” does not have the same bounded reification in the marketplace that literature does, so the problem of defining Catalan culture could not be resolved so flatly as that of literature. Nonetheless, there was a general conclusion that one Catalan author asserted (no doubt overly optimistically) was “accepted by all,” that “Catalan literature is unified by virtue of its language, while all of us who operate from this reality belong to Catalan culture without distinction based on linguistic or artistic medium of expression” (Bru de Sala 2007).<sup>22</sup>

Nationalist discourses of language are usually characterized by sociolinguists as monolingualist and essentialist; they are seen to be based in and to reinforce the equation of one language, one culture, one nation (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). In the transition to democracy after Franco, official Catalan nationalism took ambivalent stances on this question. On the one hand, from the earliest stages of autonomy in 1980, Catalonia was characterized by political leaders as one community that expresses itself in two languages. On the other hand, official policies privileged the authenticating role of Catalan as Catalonia’s *llengua pròpia*, as discussed earlier.

Both the general sociolinguistic wisdom and earlier official Catalan policies suggest that the tropes of *llengua pròpia* and authenticity would have a central role in giving Catalan priority at Frankfurt. Yet the discourse of authenticity was notably muted in governing Catalan politicians’ and allied cultural leaders’ public justifications of their positions throughout the years of preparations for the Frankfurt Fair from 2005 through 2007. The market and branding took its place as the central theme of public relations.

21. “Un govern ha de tenir les idees tan clares com un venedor . . . el govern hi ha de portar els llibres que l’encarregat d’El Corte Inglés hi portaria.”

22. “Una especie de conclusión general, un distingo por todos aceptado, según el cual la literatura catalana es una por razón de lengua, mientras que todos los que operamos desde esta realidad pertenecemos a la cultura catalana sin diferencia de medio de expresión artístico o lingüístico.”

The *Entesa* government made an anti-Whorfian stance official: a single culture can be multilingual, expressed in more than one language. The minister of culture, Joan Manuel Tresserras, repeatedly defended the position that “Catalan culture is that which is produced by anyone who lives in Catalonia” (Branchedell 2007).<sup>23</sup> This had not been expected from a culture department run by the Catalanist, independentist party in the coalition government, the ERC. Surprised journalists ringing the changes of neoliberalism approvingly described this minister of culture as advocating “the degovernmentalization of culture,” and as endorsing an “open and inclusive” vision of Catalan culture that eschewed “victimism” in favor of “economic rationality and modernization” (Moix and Massot 2006).<sup>24</sup> The Catalan commissioner of the main Frankfurt exhibit joined Tresserras in stressing its cultural pluralism, highlighting the “plurality of voices, languages and artistic idioms” of the “multicultural and pluri-religious” representation, which showed Catalonia to be an “open and cosmopolitan society” and belied the prejudiced view of Catalan as a “regional and folkloric culture and a closed nationalism.” “The concept of Catalan identity itself has come to be declined in the plural,”<sup>25</sup> he asserted (Alós 2007).

### **Alternative Modes of Privileging Catalan: Market Weakness, Market Strength**

If “Catalan culture” was the invited guest of honor at Frankfurt, and if Castilian-medium authors were indubitably producers of Catalan culture, on what grounds did the Catalan political leaders and organizers for the fair (the lead organizers being appointees of the Catalanist ERC) justify the focus on Catalan-medium authors and belated, minimal overture to Castilian-medium authors? The Catalan priority rested on two points, both hinging on the commercial market. (It is useful to recall that ultimately the target market was not directly readership in Catalan; it was to promote Catalan work in translation, which would of course in turn help sustain the market in Catalan.) The first and more controversial rationale was correction of Catalan-medium products’ weak position in a market depicted as inefficient or irrationally constrained, in a kind of market failure. The second took the opposite tack, arguing that Catalan’s distinctiveness would enhance Catalonia’s position in the publishing and

23. “Cultura catalana és la que fa qui viu a Catalunya.”

24. “desgubernamentalización de la cultura”; “una visión amplia, inclusive y abierta de la cultura catalana”; “por acabar con la política del victimismo, en favor del realismo, la racionalidad económica y la modernización.”

25. “la pluralitat de veus, generacions, llengües i llenguatges artístics de la Catalunya d’avui”; “multicultural i multireligiosa”; “una societat oberta i cosmopolita”; “del prejudici que la catalana és una cultura folklòrica i regional”; “El concepte mateix de catalanitat o d’identitat ha passat a declinar-se en plural.”

cultural markets; unlike the first, this construction drew little or no direct criticism. It is this second rationale that is our principal concern for the topic of this special issue, but we will briefly review the first.

#### Weak Position in the Market: Affirmative Action

The first justification given for the focus on Catalan-medium literary production was as *discriminació positiva* ‘affirmative action’ for commercial reasons, mixing social justice and market discourses of language rights and resources. As in contemporary diversity discourses in the United States, the argument was advanced that affirmative action is good for business and society in general, not just for its direct beneficiaries. It is supposedly meant to correct a market failure and to open the blocked flow of ideas and cultural products to interested consumers, and the flow of economic returns on those talents back to industries within the nation/state. Similar redressive representation in the market was deemed by the administration to be patently unnecessary for authors already made visible through the enormous global Spanish-language market (Morán 2007b). Everyone—producers, sellers, consumers—would be better off with such an unfettered flow. The inequity was supposedly located in a kind of failure of the European and global market imposed by arbitrary historical and demographic linguistic constraints in the Westphalian system, but the rhetoric of injustice was drawn from the conflict within Spain, raising hackles.

#### Strong Position in the Market: The Catalan Brand

The second official rationale for prioritizing Catalan at Frankfurt was apparently more effective, in that it was more widely repeated and circulated, and rarely criticized. It cast the language as a strength rather than a weakness within the marketing frame: Catalan would bring brand distinction in the marketplace. “We want to show the distinctive aspect,”<sup>26</sup> said a government spokesperson (Fernández-Santos 2005). This marketing motif was simultaneously developed by political leaders in other venues beyond the Frankfurt controversy. For example, the ERC candidate for mayor of Barcelona drew on this theme in meeting with business leaders during his campaign in spring 2007:

I argued that a sovereigntist focus on our language and our culture, with a strong projection of Barcelona as capital of Catalonia, is a good product to sell. The Catalan language is a unique product that differentiates us,

26. “Nosotros queremos mostrar el aspecto distintivo.”

that personalizes us. And instead of seeing this as an obstacle, this has to be seen as an advantage.<sup>27</sup> (Baulenas 2007)

The term that encoded this position in planning for the Frankfurt Fair was *singular*. Rather than Catalan's originary status as Catalonia's *llengua pròpia*, its singularity was repeatedly stressed by the team that brought the Frankfurt event to completion. The promotional slogan for the exposition of Catalan culture and literature at the fair was "Singular and Universal."

*Singular* signified both "unitary and unique," according to Josep Bargalló, the director of the Institut Ramon Llull (IRL), a governmental consortium in charge of the organization of the Frankfurt program (Ràfols 2007). *Singular* covers some of the same semantic terrain in Catalan as *pròpia*, signifying that a property distinguishes an individual or entity from others. However, it is significantly different in that *singular* does not implicate the essentialism or naturalism that *pròpia* does. The second edition of the *Dictionary of the Institute of Catalan Studies (DIEC2)* defines *propi/pròpia* as: "of one person or thing to the exclusion of all others; belonging to oneself and not to another; not borrowed, not artificial; especially fitting to the nature, quality, etc. of someone."<sup>28</sup> In contrast, *singular* in the *DIEC2* definition, beyond its grammatical use, means simply, "distinguished by something unusual; the only one to possess certain qualities."<sup>29</sup> Unlike *pròpia*, *singular* carries no further qualifications regarding origin, lack of artifice, or intrinsic nature. It simply means 'unique.'

Singularity was adopted quite systematically in official communications about the Frankfurt plan, and the term *pròpia* basically disappeared until the fair itself. For example, in March 2007, Josep Bargalló, the ERC-appointed director of the consortium in charge of the exposition, the IRL, announced that he would invite Castilian-medium authors to speak at Frankfurt, reversing the earlier decision. Bargalló asserted that their presence would be articulated in relation to "our singularity within a plurilingual culture, the Catalan language and literature" (*nuestra singularidad dentro de una cultura plurilingüe, la lengua i la literatura catalana; La Gaceta de los Negocios* 2007). He further elaborated, "We want to explain our reality the way it is and singularize what makes us different. We are plurilingual, certainly, but what makes us different from other

27. "Vaig defensar que un enfocament sobiranista de la nostra llengua i la nostra cultura, amb la projecció forta d'una Barcelona capital de Catalunya, era un bon producte per vendre. La llengua catalana és un producte únic, que ens diferencia, que ens personalitza. i això, en comptes de veure's com un entrebanc, s'ha de veure com un avantatge."

28. "Que és d'una persona o d'una cosa amb exclusió de tota altra; D'un mateix i no d'altri; No manllevat, no postis; "convé d'una manera especial a la naturalesa, la qualitat, etc., d'algú" (<http://dlc.iec.cat>).

29. "Que es distingeix per alguna cosa inusitada. Únic a posseir determinades qualitats."

plurilingualisms is Catalan. Without the Catalan language, Catalan culture would not have been invited to Frankfurt” (Barranco 2007).<sup>30</sup>

Speaking critically in response to Bargalló’s presentation of this strategy, a parliamentary representative from a (putatively) anti-nationalist opposition party complained, “He has wrapped up this cultural exclusion perfectly so that it is not noticeable”<sup>31</sup> (*La Gaceta de los Negocios* 2007). His chagrin confirms that the term *singular* did not carry the same obvious essentialism that made *pròpia* a controversial term. (In fact, in the current controversy over the Catalan independence movement, Jacobin Spanish politicians who reject Catalan sovereignty and its claim on nationhood are willing to talk about changing the Spanish Constitution to “singularize” Catalonia or to recognize its “singularity.”) In light of this, it is important to observe that in the Catalan Law of Linguistic Policy of 1998, in a section subtitled “*La llengua pròpia*,” three significant terms were explicitly linked: “Catalan is the *llengua pròpia* of Catalonia and singularizes it as a people.”<sup>32</sup> For those aware of and attuned to it, the terms “singularize/singularity” would index this collocation and its firm grounding in the ideology of linguistic authenticity that defines a people by an original language.

The distinct nuances of the two dictionary definitions provide a suggestion of the subtle nudging of linguistic exclusiveness out of the frame of traditional authenticity, to which *pròpia* pertains, to the frame of cosmopolitan market branding. More important than the differential lexical semantics was that, pragmatically, “singular” did not have the ideological radioactivity from long-standing political and juridical use that *pròpia* did. Also important is the way that singularity was packaged with concepts of modernity and pluralism in an explicit discourse of branding, which we will look at below.

The theme of the singularity of Catalan remained consistent for the rest of the preparatory campaign under the direction of ERC appointees. *Logos* was cast as logo, and Catalan was offered as a trademark for distinctively identifying a market brand more than as a national essence, more akin to a Nike swoosh than a Romantic soul. Bargalló explained in an interview with a Catalanist newspaper that all cultures are “singular,” and “what we want to say is that ours too

30. “Queremos explicar nuestra realidad tal como es y singularizar lo que nos hace diferentes. Somos plurilingües, cierto, pero lo que nos hace diferentes de otros plurilingüismos es el catalán. Sin la lengua catalana, la cultura catalana no habría sido invitada a Frankfurt.”

31. “Ha envuelto perfectamente la exclusión cultural sin que se note.”

32. “El català és la llengua pròpia de Catalunya i la singularitza com a poble.”

is a distinctive, identifying, and consequently singular culture, like the rest”<sup>33</sup> (Ràfols 2007).

There is an obvious irony in the fact that what Catalan leaders wanted was for Catalonia to be recognized as unique—like all the rest. To be one of a set of equally distinct and recognizable national entities was to be normal, and normalization has long been the explicit goal of Catalan linguistic and cultural policy (cf. Handler 1988 on Quebec). In this sense, Catalonia’s leaders did not in fact want it to be different from other countries, and/but by distinguishing itself Catalonia could become the same. The opportunity to use the discourse of market branding to be outstanding in a global market venue was an opportunity to be normal.

The administration’s choice of singularity as its rhetorical key was successful in that it was never challenged publicly in the way that *llengua pròpia* had long been, perhaps because it fit disarmingly well in the market discourse we have seen embraced by opponents of Catalanism. The director of the leading center-right, Castilian-medium newspaper *La Vanguardia*, who in other debates insisted on the Catalan-Castilian bilingual character of Catalonia, wrote approvingly of the final exhibition as highlighting Catalan “singularity” without confronting anyone (Antich 2007). From a much more Catalanist position yoked to an authenticating historicity, the writer Xavier Bru de Sala used the same term, noting that the invitation of honor owed to the publishing strength of Barcelona but also to the “singularity and antiquity of our culture” (*la singularidad y antigüedad de nuestra cultura*; Bru de Sala 2007).

To be sure, the abandonment of traditional authenticity rationales generally and the *llengua pròpia* motif in particular was not whole-hearted among the organizational team. Tension around the shift was sometimes apparent. Within the marketing framework, as director of the consortium that organized the exposition for the fair, Josep Bargalló more often used the terms “essential” and “*pròpia*” in discussing, for example, the publishing industry, than did his bosses in the government administration. One observer wrote that Bargalló appeared to be trying to undo the position that the ERC leadership, specifically the vice president and the culture minister, had staked out publicly (Branchadell 2007). Importantly, the motif of the *llengua pròpia* popped back up when the Frankfurt event became a *fait accompli*. At the opening of the exposition at Frankfurt in

33. “El que volem dir és que la nostra també és una cultura distintiva, identificadora, i en conseqüència singular com la resta. Volem remarcar que la cultura universal hi perdria sense les cultures singular, i també la catalana. La llengua és element essencial d’aquesta identificació.”

October 2007, President Montilla declared in an otherwise entirely anodyne speech that “Catalan is the *llengua pròpia* of our country,”<sup>34</sup> and that term was featured in the headline in a disapproving Spanish newspaper (*Cuadrado* 2007a). Montilla’s declaration suggested that despite the vulnerabilities of the *pròpia* trope, it was still viewed as an essential touchstone for some political sectors of the precariously balanced alliance. Nonetheless, on the long, winding political road to the fair, this discourse of authenticity was largely relegated to the margins not only by the Castilianist opposition but also by the coalition of political and cultural forces in the Catalan government.

Singularity was paired with pluralism in a promotional strategy explicitly framed by political leaders and media commentators as branding. (The Catalan and Spanish term *marca*, which is used to discuss such strategies, covers the overlapping terrain of “brand” and “trademark.”) Bargalló reportedly sought to project an image of dialogue (between languages and between authors) as “the brand of Catalan culture” (*marca de la cultura catalana*; Barranco 2007). This, too, echoed positively in the press. An editorial in the largest center-left newspaper quoted approvingly an organizer’s claim that the exhibition at Frankfurt represented “the plurality of voices, generations, languages and artistic idioms of Catalonia today.” The editorial concluded that as “a diverse and integrative country, the Catalonia of the twenty-first century has in the Catalan language its distinctive brand” and yet still “embraces, day to day, cultural phenomena in Castilian with the most complete normalcy”<sup>35</sup> (*El Periódico* 2007).

Catalonia’s twenty-first-century cultural modernity, even vanguardism, was another key element of this branding activity at Frankfurt. The kind of folkloric images seen in the commodification of national authenticity in other settings (and indeed in earlier Catalan cultural policies) were avoided, despite causing some hurt feelings. The signature image for the exposition featured none of the traditional Catalan cultural emblems. Instead, the internationally known Mallorquin artist Miquel Barceló represented the “singular and universal Catalan culture” in an expressionist sketch of a ballerina in a tutu hoisting a barbell above her head. The whimsical image suggested an apparently fragile culture lifting well above its weight class. Across the exposition, there was less of the traditional Catalan peasant cap than of vanguardist Catalan molecular cuisine and contemporary design in the Catalonia depicted at Frankfurt. A cultural

34. “El catalán es la lengua propia de nuestro país.”

35. “la pluralitat de veus, generacions, llengües i llenguatges artístics de la Catalunya d’avui . . . La Catalunya del segle XXI, que té en el català la seva marca distintiva, i que acull, dia a dia, les manifestacions culturals en castellà amb la més absoluta normalitat.”



reporter who followed the event closely praised several features in the exposition that “sold a fresh aesthetic, a contemporary ‘look’ [English in original] . . . that makes up one of the most exportable elements of current Catalan culture.” (An oft-quoted joke of the 1980s about this characteristic element was that in Barcelona the old pickup line of “Do you study or work?” had become “Do you study or design?”) These exhibitions at Frankfurt, which the journalist characterized as “vanguard,” emphasized Catalonia’s reputation for contemporary design, “which is precisely what marks its difference, especially if we compare it with the stale aesthetic or kitsch that some invited countries featured in past years” (Vila-Sanjuán 2007).<sup>36</sup> In a most striking example of this branding rhetoric that made linguistic pluralism the very criterion of modernity and left behind the aggrieved history of linguistic domination, IRL director Bargalló was quoted as characterizing Catalan as “‘the most modern medium-sized language of Europe,’ because ‘there is no monolingual zone in Catalonia’” (Vives 2007).<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion: Catalan Branding in the Indexical Order

In government administrators’ and media representations of the Catalan exposition at the Frankfurt Book Fair, there was a move away from the discourse of authenticity and toward the supposed anonymity of the market, whose invisible hand picks among commodities that paradoxically must be ever more personified. An ideological alternative to the traditional authenticity complex from which the administration could speak authoritatively on language developed only with some difficulty. Ultimately, a Catalanist position capitalizing (so to speak) on the wide acceptance of the motif of national branding emerged. This discursive position rejected the linkage between language and culture as the essence of a people and instead emphasized the practical benefits of distinctiveness in the market. We see in this controversy the commodifying frame of reference so characteristic of our late modern period, but the unabashed language of sales is not so surprising in the context of an industrial fair. More unexpected is that in the marketing discourse that prevailed in this promotion of Catalan, unlike in many other cases of minoritized languages that have been studied, the commodity was not costumed in the garb of folkloric Catalan culture, but instead wore contemporary design. Nor was the linguistic commodity promoted as an emblematic icon of authentic heritage, emptied of

36. “Venden una estética fresca, un look contemporáneo que compone uno de los núcleos más . . . exportables de la cultura catalana actual.” “En ocasiones como ésta el diseño es precisamente lo que marca la diferencia, sobre todo si lo comparamos con la estética rancia o kitsch que algunos países invitados aportaron en años anteriores.”

37. “‘La llengua mitjana d’Europa més moderna’ perquè ‘no hi ha cap zona monolingüe a Catalunya.’”

referential content and repackaged for audiences hungry for a lost sense of authenticity. In fact, the goal of the turn of honor at the fair was to get Catalan-medium texts recognized as sophisticated and fully communicative to international audiences, albeit in translation.<sup>38</sup>

In her analysis of Basque language activists' adoption of the neoliberal management techniques of Total Quality Management, Jacqueline Urla posited social and political actors as strategically motivated and active participants in the reconfiguration of discourses about language, bending circulating discourses and managerial tropes to their own purposes (Urla 2012). Similarly in the Catalan case, although national cultural motifs were used to compete in an international market, the potent significance of the branding process was inverted. A national identity was not just exploited to reach an international economic market, as in the "Ethnicity, Inc." model; arguably, global market discourses were exploited in this case for domestic political ends. The forum of an international industry fair was used by some to contest and by others to defend a Catalanist vision of the national project in a long-standing internal struggle for legitimacy within Catalonia and Spain.

Michael Silverstein's (1995) dynamic model of the spiraling of new pragmatic meanings across indexical orders allows us to capture an important dimension of the nation-branding process in the case of Catalonia at the Frankfurt Book Fair. In this process, branding itself becomes a kind of brand. Traditional Romantic ideologies of language reify and typify languages as indexical icons of a community imagined as a nation. This linguistic ideological relationship already occurs at an  $n + 1$  order of indexicality in Silverstein's schema, because it is itself built on the prior noticing of a correlation between a linguistic form and geographically/socially situated speakers. But for the sake of simplicity, if we understand the language-nation link as occurring at a first (or  $n$ th) order, we can understand nation branding generally as mobilizing that indexicality at a second ( $n + 1$ ) order. The nation branding process turns a typified language variety together with its first order meaning of particular community into a second-order index of authenticating value that is endowed by that first-

38. A reviewer sensibly asked how audiences would recognize this distinctive Catalan linguistic brand once it was translated, a question that was never raised that I know of in the controversy. This is in part precisely the task of marketing, and one can imagine various ways to retain the mark, some as simple as "translated from the Catalan." (Consider the success of Swedish noir novels as a recognizably distinct genre, albeit in translation.) Probably more to the point, the target audience for the marketing strategy at this stage were professionals at the fair, not the ultimate reading audience. Catching the eye of the industry and those who could create a buzz for Catalan literary products in the mad rush of the fair was the goal. It seems likely that such industry agents already had strong impressions of Spanish-medium literature, and these may have been primarily influenced by Latin American works, at that, so the argument for distinguishing the brand linguistically was not ill founded.

order relation. In nation branding, this authenticated value/value of authenticity attaches to a national commodity or even to nation as commodity.<sup>39</sup>

If nation branding in general is a form of second-order ( $n + 1$ ) indexicality, then nation branding as used by the Catalan administration in the Frankfurt controversy operated at a third (or  $n + 2$ ) order of indexicality. The act of nation branding in itself was mobilized as a sign of the managerial character of the Catalan administration, its contemporaneity and engagement with (late) modernity. By carrying out expected practices of nation branding, the administration strategically branded itself as a state actor of the current and forward-looking type. The political and cultural leaders represented themselves as neither 19th century nationalists nor even just twentieth-century free-marketeers, but rather as twenty-first-century tacticians of the global market; Catalonia, S.A., indeed. In and through the very act of engaging in branding like a state, just the way that other contemporary nations from Argentina to Switzerland do, Catalan leaders attempted to performatively brand their policy and their leadership not as stale nationalism but as the 'best practices' of normal polities. Whether we should see this stress on the discourse of resources and commodities in place of linguistic essence, social justice, and aggrieved rights as a genuinely held view, such as Urla discerned among Basque activists, or simply *realpolitik* cannot be determined from the kind of textual evidence considered here, though as politics it surely responded to a mix of motives.

As a discourse positively sanctioned in the contemporary global political economy, national branding was advantageous to Catalanist officials for parrying the charges of the perennial critics (on both the Castilianist and Catalanist sides). Depicting Catalan as a tool of rational marketing allowed the Catalan governing coalition to eschew arguments about linguistic essence and authenticity that had become a political liability in a democracy with an electorate based in two different linguistic heritages. The Catalan linguistic brand functioned not only as a sign of Catalonia's distinctiveness but also at another order as a sign of the Catalan political leadership's character as the kind of cosmopolitan and forward-looking administration that deals in brand. Linguistic branding was a useful tool taken up and addressed by strategic actors to domestic rivals to give them new legitimacy in a war of political and cultural position, as much as it was addressed to an international market to establish Catalonia as a distinctive nation in the global set of distinctive nations. As with Basque language activists, in this Catalan case political and cultural agents

39. See Johnstone (2009) for a related but slightly different calculation of the orders of indexicality involved in the commodification of a localized speech variety.

embraced a discourse circulating globally and revoiced it strategically to legitimate a politically fragile project.

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