Beyond normalization: globalizing Catalan culture

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I wish to reflect on how Catalan sociolinguistics has participated in what I call the ideology of "normalization" and how contemporary social changes, including the rise of independentism, puts this ideology in crisis. "Normalization" in the Catalan context, conjures up the inherently disturbing condition of minoritization. It epitomizes the desire for modernity as projected onto language, culture, democracy and the economy. The term is tributary to the ideas of "normality" inscribed in the capitalist nation-state from procedures of standardization to the deployment of disciplinary regimes that defined models for the body, culture, and the rational subject. What is of interest in the Catalan context is the dissociation between state and civil society, whereby the latter develops independent infrastructures of capitalist production, scientific development, urban culture, education and welfare. The label "Catalan sociolinguistics" points to a discipline born precisely in the context of political resistance, from which policy models were developed that drew on European nation-state models.

As Fernàndez (2008) observed, normalization is by definition a source of discomfort as it aims at models that problematize and exclude hybridity while sanctioning sanitized practices that do not have the means to establish their hegemony in the public sphere. Debates on normalization abound with metaphors of deformities: e.g. an anorexic culture, a large body with small head. Now the ideology of "normalization" is being undermined by globalization and the post-modern commodification of cultures and lifestyles, on the one hand, and the recent drive for an independent Catalonia, which forces Catalans to picture themselves as piloting a state apparatus. I will examine these contradictions as they emerge in two specific debates: immigration and the linguistic regime of the Catalan republic. The debates introduce new divisions in the Catalanist camp that lay bare the ideological underpinnings of disciplines like sociolinguistics, linguistics, history and literary history.

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