

The Foreign Action of Peripheries, or the Will to Be Seen: Catalan Cultural Diplomacy in the
Interwar Period

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Much academic literature has reflected upon the powerful capacities of culture in the construction of collectivities, the crucial role of the Other in any process of identity making, and the mutually constitutive character of the national and the international.¹ All three aspects explain the fact that foreign cultural policy is often part and parcel of the consolidation of modern nations. Multiple strategies have been historically put in motion to shape the ways a given culture, and the country it represents by metonymy, is perceived abroad, such as participation in international organizations or events, the teaching of one's own language and culture, or the promotion of one's literature, art, and scientific production abroad.

Within this general framework, this paper focuses on the strategies of cultural diplomacy conducted by peripheral collectivities. Specifically, I will retrace some of the strategies of cultural diplomacy deployed in Catalonia in the interwar period. To do so, after linking my focus on peripheries to cultural diplomacy through the notion of invisibility, I will delve into two different historical projects spearheaded by Joan Estelrich: the foundation of *Oficina d'Expansió Catalana*, the first institution created to promote Catalan culture abroad, and the struggle to grant representation to Catalan culture at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, a key body in the institutionalization of international cultural relations in the interwar period.²

1. Invisibility and Foreign (Cultural) Policy: The Catalan Case as a Peripheral Example

Several scholarly disciplines and subfields have shown interest in approaching literature from a global perspective, including literary and translation history, comparative literature and the subfield of world literature, and the sociology of both literature and translation.³ The focus on the global favors an understanding of literature as a system, which stresses its relational nature and which, in turn, raises several questions related to the structure and functioning of the global literary system, reasserts the diversity of the actors involved, and underscores the need to analyze their relationships in turn. I set my focus on Catalan culture as an example of collectivity occupying a peripheral position in the literary system. Peripherality may stem from a variety of factors, be they geographical, political, cultural, economic or gender-related, to name a few. It can also manifest in different ways: through other actors of said system's perceived refusal to consider their counterparts as equal, or through a sense of disconnectedness or isolation stemming from the alleged lack of knowledge of one's own culture or, worse, a misguided knowledge of it. I argue that perceived invisibility is one of the features that peripheral collectivities share. Discussing peripherality through invisibility is thus a way to shed light on the structural factors causing or enabling it. In this contribution, I address a case of undesired peripherality and invisibility, but it should be noted that peripherality, invisibility, or disconnectedness must not be understood as intrinsically negative, nor should connectivity and movement be taken as inherently positive.

Foreign cultural action and cultural diplomacy constitute means to modify or improve one culture's image abroad and, in the case of peripheries, to counter such invisibility. One of the domains of such cultural action is literature. Today, it is common to delegate the task of promoting literature abroad to agencies with a high degree of independence from official bodies, as this autonomy makes their activities appear less propagandistic and conditions their legitimacy and success. Institutions like Norwegian Literature Abroad, the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, and the Flemish Literature Fund⁴ offer three contemporary

manifestations of cultural diplomacy's interest in translated literature.⁵ However, I argue that more research is needed to historicize peripheral cultures' efforts to achieve visibility beyond their borders and shed light on their specificities and conditions of historical emergence. Unearthing peripheral cultures' efforts in terms of cultural foreign action is a necessary step to historicizing the emergence of a transnational literary space, an ongoing process comprised of inclusions, exclusions, and the continual renegotiation of power relations.

In contemporary Catalonia, Institut Ramon Llull is the organization entrusted with the promotion of Catalan culture and language abroad. But what are its historical precedents? How has the circulation of Catalan culture been promoted in history? A few introductory words offering an overview of the history of Catalan cultural relations are in order before delving into our case study. Catalan society has a long history of international mobility, which has brought Catalan intellectuals, merchants, and travelers all over the world. Two key factors explain the establishment of cultural relations or enable its analysis and quantification: the creation of Catalan cultural centers and magazines abroad, on the one hand, and the existence of translation flows, on the other. The first Catalan entities abroad date back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when the first Catalan cultural centers started to be founded as a consequence of Catalan emigration to America.⁶ Then, the late nineteenth century and first few decades of the twentieth saw a rise of Catalan literature translated into other languages, often published in anthologies or periodicals such as magazines and newspapers. France was one of the countries where the most translations appeared, together with Italy, where linguistic proximity was probably a facilitating factor. Translations to more distant languages, such as the German,⁷ Hungarian,⁸ Polish,⁹ and Romanian,¹⁰ also saw the light during this period.

While these translations were often the result of personal affinities and contacts, the first efforts to develop organized cultural relations with other cultures date back to the early twentieth century and can be framed within the cultural and ideological movement that

dominated Catalonia at the time, Noucentisme. Aimed at building a national culture, Noucentisme comprised a series of nation-building ventures that involved collaboration between politicians and intellectuals. Among the main cultural infrastructures that emerged in the period, both material and symbolic, we may observe the foundation of the Biblioteca de Catalunya and the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (the Catalan National Library and the Academy of the Catalan Language, respectively) as well as the codification of the Catalan language thanks to the work of Pompeu Fabra.

We may glean a marked outward perspective in this historical period as well. Several factors contributed to awakening the interest of Catalan politicians and intellectuals in foreign action, especially the perception of a favorable international context. President Wilson's Fourteen Points and the inclusion of the protection of minorities in several treaties signed after the war's conclusion, were seen optimistically in Catalonia. However, the lack of international knowledge of Catalan culture, coupled with Spanish representatives' denial that minorities existed in Spain, made foreign action difficult for Catalonia. In the eyes of several Catalan actors, the time had come to intervene in the ways the Catalan question was perceived abroad¹¹. This explains the multiple attempts to introduce the Catalan question in the international political agenda from the end of the Great War into the 1920s: for example, the year 1924 saw a direct push in this direction, via the presentation of a memorandum against Primo de Rivera's dictatorship with the ultimate goal of underscoring the situation of Catalan culture in Spain. Other attempts involved participation in the Congresses of Nationalities on the one hand, and, on the other, in the international civic movement that promoted the creation of the League of Nations through national societies (a movement that later sought to influence the League's policies).

Culture offered another field of action in the attempt to influence the way Catalonia was perceived abroad, a field of action that can be considered parallel, complementary, or

alternative to the political strategy. Indeed, the cultural strategy presented several specificities: it was more discreet and cautious than explicit political activism, it offered a terrain to keep working towards a political project when political strategies fail to bear the desired fruit, and it targeted mentalities and public opinion, rather than explicitly political circles.

The careers of several cosmopolitan and polyglot figures can be linked to the representation of Catalan culture in different international organizations and institutions.¹² By participating in spaces of formal and informal sociability, they that acted as cultural mediators contributed to weaving cultural and intellectual networks that improved Catalan visibility and that facilitated the circulation of people, goods, and ideas across countries in multiple fields of activity. From academia, law, journalism, and literature, as well as diplomatic circles, and with different ideological positions, their activities sought to institutionalize the presence of Catalan culture abroad, thus overcoming the strictly cultural sphere. Among them, we may highlight Francesc Maspons i Anglasesell (1872-1966), jurist at the League of Nations and vice-president of the *Association Internationale pour l'Etude des Droits des Minorités* (International Association for the Study of Minority Rights), and Eugeni Xammar (1888-1973), Catalan correspondent to several Latin American and European journals,¹³ and translator and interpreter at the League of Nations. In the educational domain, Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer (1888-1961), who had close ties with the International Union of Academies, and Josep Maria Batista i Roca (1895-1978), promoter of Catalan Studies in England and founder of the Anglo-Catalan Society, which still exists today¹⁴, are worth noting.

To these names, we must also add writer and politician Joan Estelrich (Felanitx, Majorca, 1896-Paris, 1958), whose work to promote the visibility of Catalan culture in both national and international institutions will be developed in this paper. Joan Estelrich is a complex figure in Catalan cultural history.¹⁵ A writer and politician, over the first decades of the twentieth century, he collaborated with numerous journals and publications and occupied several posts

in some of Catalonia's main cultural institutions, as well as political positions in representation of conservative Catalanism in *Cortes republicanas* (Spain's republican congress). During the Spanish Civil War, he aligned himself with Franco and became the founder and director of the *Oficina de Propaganda i Premsa* (Propaganda and Press Office), a Francoist propaganda office that operated from Paris from 1937 to 1940. This, however, didn't shield him from several accusations during the immediate postwar period for his involvement with the Catalanist movement during the '20s and '30s. After spending a few years between Majorca, Barcelona, Paris, and Tangier, he eventually settled in Paris, where he represented Spain before the UNESCO from 1952 until his death, in 1958.

2. Taking on Foreign Action through Domestic Institutions: Oficina d'Expansió Catalana

To delve into some of the activities that Estelrich undertook during the interwar period, we must note that Catalan foreign action in the interwar period was synonymous with the conservative political party *Lliga Regionalista*. The party dominated Catalonia from the turn of the century until the 1930s, with Francesc Cambó among its main politicians. Indeed, it was he who sponsored the creation of the *Oficina d'Expansió Catalana* (Catalan Expansion Office), the first institution specifically created with the goal of promoting Catalan culture abroad. Founded in 1919, the OEC acted through an office located in Paris and relied on two main actors, director Joan Estelrich, who worked mainly from Barcelona, and secretary Alfons Maseras (Sant Jaume dels Domenys, 1884-Toulouse, 1939). Based in Paris as of the early twentieth century, Maseras was a writer, journalist, and translator who collaborated with distinguished newspapers and magazines.¹⁶ The OEC formally functioned between 1919 and 1923, when a coup d'état took place in Spain leading to Primo de Rivera's dictatorial regime, which lasted until 1930. The dictatorship had nefarious consequences for Catalan culture, as Catalan institutions were soon suppressed, and the use of Catalan language, forbidden. The

activities of *Expansió Catalana* were banned too, although its work went on clandestinely until 1928.¹⁷

In Estelrich's words, the OEC sought, "dins la modestíssima limitació dels seus recursos, de valoritzar a fora, lliurement, sense dependre de cap d'aquests organismes, la tasca de les modernes institucions catalanes (...) com també l'esforç global dels nostres artistes, escriptors i editors en català" (qtd in Gavagnin, *Classicisme*, 136) (within the profound humility of its resources, without depending on any of the following organizations, to value abroad and freely the work carried out by modern Catalan institutions [...], as well as the global efforts of our Catalan artists, writers, and editors.)

Literature and politics seem to have been the main focuses of the OEC's activities. Despite the political autonomy Estelrich claimed for the OEC, its underlying political goal was to draw sympathy and international support for the Catalanist cause and weave potential alliances with other countries and nationalist movements.

Estelrich's work to make Catalan culture known abroad materialized in different domains, including through general information and coordination services, press services, the exchange of news clippings, bibliographical exchanges, literary services, and the coordination of Catalan emigration. In each realm, he would work with different collaborators. Beyond the complicity of Catalonia-based intellectuals, *Expansió Catalana*'s work mainly hinged upon foreign Catalanophiles (journalists, editors, writers, and professors) and Catalan émigrés who were willing to raise awareness about Catalan culture in their new countries of residence. In both cases, they made the most of their social capital and multiplied the central office's capacities.

As per the OEC's activities, Estelrich and Maseras developed information and coordination services. On the one hand, they would allow their collaborators access to information on a diversity of topics (mainly overviews of the political situation and of Catalan literature and

arts). On the other, they would facilitate contact with specialists, as their collaborators often found themselves in need of information or guidance in the preparatory stages of articles and other publications as well as in the organization of cultural events. In relation to the Catalan diaspora, not only did Estelrich monitor the increasing emigration of Catalans, paying special attention to emigration to America, but he also attempted to coordinate émigrés in strategic actions. He appointed delegates and subdelegates among them, who worked as representatives and whose contacts in their respective countries proved useful to establishing formal and informal bilateral relations, either with governments or with the national media.

The press also occupied a salient place within the OEC's activities. Estelrich and Maseras frequently exchanged news clippings with collaborators, thus enabling them to grasp and monitor the international public opinion on Catalan-related topics, but they also made numerous efforts to see articles about Catalonia published in foreign media in order to influence public opinion. They often resorted to information-exchange agreements in what Corretger has described as a diplomatic exchange system,¹⁸ which was based on bidirectionality and reciprocity: while Estelrich and Maseras managed to place articles about Catalonia and translations from Catalan in publications abroad, the pair reciprocated their foreign collaborators with publications on their suggested topics in Catalan media outlets like *La Publicitat*, *La Veu de Catalunya*, and *La Revista*.

Expansió Catalana also engaged in literary services. It fostered bibliographic exchange, including of books and magazines for individual consumption, as well as books for inclusion in the collections of cultural centers and public and private libraries. At the same time, Estelrich offered the OEC's collaboration in distributing books published in foreign languages among Catalan intellectuals. Expansió Catalana also Translating Catalan literature also stood among the main goals of the Estelrich-Maseras tandem, with the two acting as literary agents of sorts through the OEC. They were involved in different stages of translation projects, either

providing advice as to which authors ought to be translated, mediating between authors and their translators or publishers in order to facilitate publication management and translation rights, helping translators to resolve linguistic queries, or finding collaborators and funds for the publication of anthologies of Catalan literature in foreign languages. The pair's involvement with the publication of works in foreign languages also included monographs on specific aspects of Catalan culture, making bibliographic material available in languages such as Spanish, English, and French.

Regarding the geopolitics of the OEC, in addition to the centrality of France, which is reflected in the geographic location of the OEC's offices, Italy held a prominent place among the countries in which the intellectuals' efforts bore fruit. Indeed, numerous translations into the Italian, whose editorial history is linked to the OEC, were published, such as a translation of Prat de la Riba¹⁹ and the publication of a volume of short stories by several Catalan authors,²⁰ not to mention the generous number of translations of short stories published in Italian newspapers and magazines.²¹ Germany and Portugal awakened notable interest too.²²

3. Seeking International Representation through the Intellectual Cooperation Organization

In addition to the efforts made at *Oficina d'Expansió Catalana*, a national institution, several attempts were made to grant representation to Catalan culture in international cultural organizations and movements. Indeed, in the strictly cultural domain, the Catalan division of the PEN Club was created as early as 1922,²³ thus introducing Catalan culture within an international cultural network. At the intersection between the cultural and the political, another strategy to confer institutional representation to Catalan culture was deployed through its attempted integration in the intellectual-cooperation institutions and projects developed under the auspices of the League of Nations.

Created after the Great War to foster mutual understanding and promote world peace, their work included fields such as education, cinema and radio, literature and translation, and the cooperation of national cultural organizations such as libraries, archives, and museums. Specifically, these institutions included the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, based in Geneva (1922-1946, ICIC from now on), its executive body, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, based in Paris (1926-1946, IIC from now on), and National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation, which coordinated between Geneva and Paris and each national field.²⁴ In the following lines, we will use the term “Intellectual Cooperation Organization” (ICO), coined in the 1930s, to refer to the various institutions that specialized in intellectual cooperation under the League of Nations’ wing.

Among the bodies that could potentially open the doors of the ICO to Catalan representation, the National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation stand out. Created spontaneously in several Eastern European countries to draft replies to an enquiry launched in 1922 on the conditions of intellectual labor, National Committees became the links between the ICIC and the IIC and each intellectual field. However, their creation soon expanded not only to other states, but to other collectivities. Such collectivities came to include the Committee of the Catholic Union of International Study (1923), the Interparliamentary Committee for Intellectual Relations (1936), the Evangelical Committee (1937), the Committee of Russian Emigrants (1921-1934) constituted by the Russian Academic Union at Prague, and the Ukrainian Academic Committee (1925-1934).²⁵ The latter collectives may be considered peripheral within the system of the League of Nations for several reasons, but especially because their composition and nature did not correspond with what would become the dominant form of international representation, that is, State representation. With this in mind, I will now focus on another peripheral Committee, one that does not represent a State either: the Catalan Committee, which was spearheaded by Joan Estelrich.

The first exchange between the institutions of intellectual cooperation under the League of Nations and Joan Estelrich available for consultation today took place in February 1927, when the latter entered into contact with Julien Luchaire, the IIC's director, to manifest his interest in its activities and enquire about their publications. That same year, in a letter to Luchaire, Estelrich mentioned that he was working on a report about intellectual labor in Catalonia and brought up the possibility of creating a National Committee in Barcelona. In justification, Estelrich mentioned that the intellectual work carried out in Barcelona was:

indépendant de celui de Madrid. Nous sommes en rapports directs avec les centres d'études de l'étranger; nous recevons les savants étrangers qui poursuivent des études chez nous ou viennent donner des cours et des conférences; c'est par notre intermédiaire aussi que des Universités étrangères (Liverpool et Glasgow, tout récemment) ont choisi, parmi nos collaborateurs, des professeurs auxiliaires. La Commission que je vous propose serait constituée avec les éléments les plus qualifiés de [nos principales institutions culturelles].²⁶

(independent from that of Madrid. We are in direct contact with academic centers abroad; we receive foreign intellectuals who conduct their studies in our city or who come to give courses and conferences. It is also through our intermediation that foreign universities (such as those in Liverpool and Glasgow, recently) have chosen their assistant professors. The Committee I am proposing would be constituted by the most qualified members of our [main cultural institutions]).

The date of their communication is relevant, especially considering that Spain set in motion the procedure to withdraw from the League of Nations in 1926, after its request to occupy a permanent seat on the League's Council was denied. A two-year notice was required before the withdrawal was made effective, and Spain ultimately remained in the League. Nevertheless, for two years, Spain did not participate in the League's activities but maintained some links in the domain of intellectual cooperation. While Spain did not cut ties with the OIC, the membership of which did not require League of Nations membership, this was a moment

of instability, if not weakness, for Spain at the international level. And Estelrich may have viewed this as an opportunity that he would not let pass.

To the letter, Luchaire responded by manifesting his inability to approve or reject Estelrich's petition, given that the national representatives themselves (in this case, Spain's representatives), and not the IICI, were tasked with creating National Committees. Then, in a descriptive tone, he mentioned that, generally, only one national Committee existed per State, with the exception of the Kingdom of the Serbians, Croats, and Slovenians, which boasted three National Committees, and added that "il est évidemment indispensable que si deux ou plusieurs Commissions se forment dans un seul Pays, ce soit à la suite d'un plan préalable. Vous savez que la Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios fait fonction de Commission nationale espagnole. Peut-être jugerez-vous opportun de vous entendre avec elle pour la constitution d'un groupement catalan"²⁷ (it is obviously indispensable that if two or more Committees were to be founded in the same country, this follow a prior plan. You are aware of the fact that the Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios functions as the Spanish National Committee. Perhaps you would find it convenient to come to an agreement with them in order to constitute a Catalan division). In April of 1927, Joan Estelrich replied by formally announcing the constitution of a Catalan Committee: "nous avons entrepris la constitution de notre Commission catalane, pour coopérer [...] aux travaux de l'Institut, si intéressants pour l'avenir de la science. Nous nous sommes mis préalablement d'accord, avant de constituer notre Commission, avec celle que fonctionne à Madrid"²⁸ (we have undertaken the constitution of our Catalan Committee to cooperate [...] with the Institute's works, [which are] so relevant for the future of science. We reached a previous agreement before constituting our Committee, with the one functioning in Madrid). In their subsequent correspondence, Estelrich requested that the Institute not use the term "national" to refer to the Catalan Commission: "Nous avons convenu verbalement avec Mr. Luchaire que nous aurions simplement le nom de Commission catalane ou 'Commission

de Barcelone' pour éviter des ennuis à celle de Madrid et aussi à l'Institut" (We have verbally agreed with Mr. Luchaire that our Committee will simply be called the "Catalan Committee" or "Committee of Barcelona" to avoid any trouble with the Madrid Committee and the Institute).

When everything seemed to be running smoothly, José Castillejo, secretary of the Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios (JAE), sent a letter dated May 9 to Joan Estelrich, with a copy to Julio Casares, the Spanish member of the ICIC, in which he denied having received any official request related to the creation of a Catalan Committee and argued that he and Estelrich had only discussed the possibility in an informal, private conversation. According to Castillejo, he "no [s]e creía autorizado para dar una opinión en nombre de la Junta; y que [su] opinión personal [de Castillejo] era que consultaran ustedes al vocal español en la Comisión de Cooperación Intelectual D. Julio Casares, a quien, dije a usted, podría ver en el Ministerio de Estado"²⁹ (he didn't think he was authorized to give an opinion in the name of the Junta [para la Ampliación de Estudios] and, in his [Castillejo's] personal opinion, it would be best to address the request to the Spanish member of the International Commission on Intellectual Cooperation, Mr. Julio Casares). José Castillejo directed a similar letter to Julien Luchaire, insisting that neither the JAE nor Casares had been consulted on this matter, adding that "personnellement, je vous avoue que je serais heureux de voir que l'enthousiasme et le poids scientifique de Catalogne reçoivent toute la considération que mérite cette province, et que celles-ci soit l'une des forces espagnoles qui contribuent le plus à la coopération internationale"³⁰ (personally, I would be happy to see that the enthusiasm and scientific weight of Catalonia receive all the consideration this province deserves and that the latter become one of the Spanish forces that contribute the most to international cooperation). As an immediate consequence, in a letter dated 27 May 1927, Luchaire pulled back on his recognition of the Catalan Committee and insisted that Spanish representatives issue their approval before the

Institute recognize any regional committee, with this letter marking the end of the history of the Catalan Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.

This episode can be read from a technical perspective, that is, as a question of procedure: Whom should Estelrich have addressed to request authorization for a Catalan committee? The JAE functioned as the de facto Spanish National Committee, and its secretary was, precisely, José Castillejo, which suggests that the procedure Estelrich followed was adequate, according to the functioning of the OIC. However, the JAE specialized in educational matters more narrowly, and, as a result, Spanish representation in the field of intellectual cooperation befell Julio Casares more than any other entity. In addition to being Spain's ICIC representative, Casares carried the weight of almost all of Spain's relations with the OIC during this period. His preeminence had further consequences still: Spain enjoyed direct and very active representation in Geneva, but its ties to the IIC, in Paris, were weaker. It must be acknowledged that, in 1927, the IIC had just been created and was taking over some of the ICIC's prerogatives, including contact with National Committees.³¹ In other words, the OIC was undergoing reorganization, which may have offered spaces of possibility, but also opened the door to misunderstandings and procedural errors.

It would be naïve to read this episode in strictly technical terms. The reluctance to grant representation to Catalan culture in this international organization needs to be understood in light of the internal political and cultural hierarchies of the Spanish State. It should also be noted that the late 1920s saw a shift in opinion regarding the potential of cultural diplomacy in Spain's international position. According to Martínez del Campo, until the 1920s, Spanish cultural diplomacy grew thanks, on the one hand, to other countries' interest in those nations that remained neutral during the Second World War, which would include Spain, and on the other hand, to other countries' interest in Latin American markets.³² This materialized in a growing interest in the Spanish language in several European countries, thus benefitting Spain

given its privileged cultural ties to both European and Latin American countries. Martínez del Campo argues that the fact that Spain's request for a permanent seat in the Council was rejected in 1926 prompted a change in the country's foreign policy, shifting from a cultural diplomacy guided by third-party interests to a more proactive stance, but also from a strategy focused on hard power to one that made plenty of room for soft power, thus pointing to the potential of language and culture as bolsters of Spain's international prestige. The immediate interruption of the Catalan attempts to obtain cultural representation in the ICO need to be read in this framework, with this case study suggesting that the development of Spanish cultural diplomacy took place in reaction not only to foreign stimuli, but also to the actions of Spain's internal peripheries. Indeed, the Catalan proposal triggered the reorganization Spain's representation before the IIC, with the Spanish National Committee on Intellectual Cooperation formally constituted via a letter dated 19 May 1928, under the presidency of Julio Casares.³³ The same letter mentioned that the Spanish Committee was studying the creation of regional sections, which never materialized.

As stated by Phillips and Reus-Smith "international institutions do not neutralize culture, they organize it."³⁴ And I would add that they do so according to specific interests and hierarchies. I argue that our understanding of the OCI would benefit from the same approach Carolyn N. Bilotft proposes for the League of Nations, that is, a focus on the latter's "meaning-making functions" instead of its "policy-making ones."³⁵ Indeed, Bilotft argues that the League functioned "as a global center for the production of symbolic capital," helping "to produce a series of representations of the world itself."³⁶ The OCI's functions can be described in the same terms. From this perspective, the refusal to grant representation to peripheries acquires further meaning and points to the ambiguities of political and cultural representation, especially in light of the metonymical relationships that tie nation-state to cultures.

3.1 Regional Literatures in an Intergovernmental Organization

Estelrich's relationship to the League of Nations did not end in 1927. Among other forms of collaboration, he attended the 16th Assembly of the League of Nations, held in September 1935, as part of the Spanish Delegation,³⁷ a venture that offers us another page to analyze in this history. In this assembly, Romanian poet Ion Pillat (1881-1945) proposed that the IIC publish a collection of regional literatures. This proposal needs to be considered against the backdrop of the activities of the IIC's Section for Literary Relations. Indeed, the latter's program of activities included the publication of collections of classics and representative works in translation. Given the success of what is known as the Ibero-American Collection, the publication of a Japanese Collection had been recently approved and the publication of a collection on Latin America ethnography and history was being discussed.³⁸ It is precisely in this framework that Pillat requested that the Institute publish "a collection of representative and classic works of European literatures written in regional languages." To Pillat, the best way of doing so was "through the medium of world languages," so that "not only large countries would thus be reached; it would be easier for the small countries themselves to become acquainted with the literature and thus to understand the spirit of their neighbors, and this cannot but help them [in gaining] a mutual understanding."³⁹ This proposal made explicit the disconnectedness and lack of mutual knowledge among European peripheral cultures and sought to facilitate their visibility through translation—using central languages as bridge languages of interperipheral exchange.

Some mentions of the collection of "regional" literatures may be found in the IIC's archives,⁴⁰ but the project never actually saw the light. Several factors might explain this: first, budgetary reasons, related both to the incapacity or disinterest of member states to actually fund the collection, and to the fact that economic shortfalls were a constant in the history of the IIC. Second, political motivations played also a part, which, in turn, points to the challenges of balancing political, intellectual, and cultural orders. Political disagreements had already

emerged around the Ibero-American and the Japanese collections, and the scope of the collection of regional literatures made it especially prone to threatening certain hierarchies and arousing distrust. Indeed, as emerged in the debates surrounding Pillat's proposal, the term "regional" was ambiguous. Other terms used to referred to the collectivity represented through this collection include "countries possessing a language of a regional character", "countries whose languages are not widely known," and "small countries", which are not necessarily one and the same. From the approvals and commentary that assembly participants received, we may glean that while this terminological ambiguity presented certain risks in the sense that one meaning or the other could determine the support or rejection of Pillat's proposal, it also opened the door to unexpected alliances between collectivities in peripheral positions within the cultural and political systems of the interwar period. As a matter of fact, Estelrich was charged with communicating the Spanish delegation's approval of Pillat's proposal. Congratulating Pillat "for encouraging the dissemination of knowledge of the masterpieces of minor literatures—minor in the linguistic and geographical sense, but possibly major due to the maturity, excellence, and genius of their productions,"⁴¹ he took up the task of advocating for cultural diversity and argued that other literatures, "apart from the four or five great European literatures," had been a "source of civilization and spiritual wealth." Stressing the need to generalize knowledge of these literatures by translating them into "the great international languages" and denying any suspicion of "local patriotism or propaganda," he concluded his intervention with a proposal to publish a collection of the main works of the great Eastern literatures. By doing so, he explicitly aligned himself with the Indian representative Siremal Bapna's request that the League engage in improving the West's knowledge of India and its contributions to human knowledge.

4. Conclusions

In an undated document in which Estelrich addressed the “el problema de l’expansió cultural de Catalunya” (the problem of the Catalan cultural expansion), which must have been penned after 1935, he mentioned the fact that the Catalan Statute and the Spanish Constitution forbade Catalonia from undertaking international activities, including in the cultural domain. To illustrate the practical implications of this legal situation, he referred to Pillat’s proposal, in which decision-making in relation to the works to be translated corresponded to National Committees and funding was assumed by States. “Ara bé: segons això Catalunya hauria de demanar a Madrid l’establiment d’aquesta llista i la subvenció de la publicació de les obres corresponents. Segons la Constitució això correspon a l’Estat; i, naturalment, no ho farà. Què podem doncs fer?”⁴² (However, according to this, Catalonia should request that Madrid establish such a list and grant the necessary funds. According to the Constitution, this is something reserved for the State, which, naturally, won’t do it. What can we do, in this case?). In this excerpt, Estelrich is addressing a broader issue, namely, the ties between cultural and political representation, and the invisibility suffered by those cultures lacking a State to bolster them.

This article offers a contribution to historicizing the (ongoing and unfinished) process of integration in the world literary space, shedding light on some of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that shape it. I have discussed peripheral cultural-foreign-action strategies through the lens of the Catalan case in the interwar period, with a focus on the hierarchical relations that mediate exchanges and contacts in the literary system and reasserting the role of governments within the latter.

The activities that Joan Estelrich conducted to further the visibility of Catalan culture can, and should, be analyzed from different scales: from a local or national perspective, these episodes can be read in relation to Catalonia and Spain’s political and cultural histories. It also points to the overlapping histories of their respective strategies of cultural diplomacy. Political

interpretations of the events addressed in this paper are purposefully left out: Estelrich's proposal in 1927 would seem to oppose a subsuming of Catalan culture within Spanish spaces of representation, but his involvement in Francoist propaganda a few years later should make us wary of any oversimplification.

This case study can also be read in terms of European construction. How has culture contributed to the construction of Europe? This paper aims to contribute to the discussion of the role of peripheries and regions in European culture, including the cultural institutions that underpin it, with an emphasis on the tricky relationships between cultural representation and autonomy on the one hand, and political representation and autonomy on the other.

The episodes analyzed here can also be read from a global scale. The focus on peripheries facilitates the analysis of structural issues that determine the (in)visibility of certain collectivities. The episodes in this contribution have been reconstructed not to argue for the exceptionality or intrinsic relevance of this specific case study but to provide examples of the mechanisms that explain or counter the invisibility of peripheral cultures. The institutions specialized in intellectual cooperation have offered the material for this case study, but using a focus on the organization of cultural (and literary) life broadens the scope of this paper by problematizing the place of peripheries in cultural institutions or organizations, including those involving literary prizes, universities, libraries, or bookshops. In this sense, this case study seeks to initiate a scholarly dialogue with other peripheries and compare answers to questions like the following: What are the institutions that have conferred international visibility to the periphery? Who facilitated or hindered such visibility? When and why? How did the cultural and intellectual pole relate with, depend on, overlap with, or counter the dynamics of the political pole?

We look at the local, the national, the regional, and the global: while acknowledging the different meanings in each term, they constitute entangled scales whose combination is necessary to developing a literary or a cultural history that takes into account and reconstructs different forms of agency and various forms of collectivity in our historical narratives.

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¹ See especially Anne-Marie Thiesse *La création des identités nationales* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

² To do so, I draw mainly from three archives: the Joan Estelrich Archive, housed at the Catalan Library, the archive of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, at UNESCO (Paris), and the archive of the League of Nations, at UN Archive (Geneva). The IIC's and the League's archive can be accessed online: <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/> and <https://archives.ungeneva.org/>

³ Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 2015); David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature* (London, New York: Verso, 2004); Diana Roig-Sanz and Neus Rotger, eds. *Global Literary Studies: Key Concepts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022).

⁴ The author purposefully mentions examples of two states and one regional government. The distinction between state, non-state, and sub-state actors has traditionally been employed to distinguish between cultural relations, cultural diplomacy, and para/protodiplomacy. I refrain from a rigid understanding of such distinctions considering, first, the regular collaboration between them, which makes this distinction problematic in analytical terms, and second, the chronology under examination. Definitions formulated for contemporary practices may not fit the practices of the interwar period, especially in relation to the institutionalization and professionalization of cultural diplomacy. Third, I aim to avoid an overly simplified political interpretation of the object being analyzed, as for example the distinction between “protodiplomacy” or “paradiplomacy” connote substate diplomacy as parallel, complementary, or opposite to State diplomacy. This aspect is purposefully left open in this paper, as I consider that we need more research that approaches cultural diplomacy in the interwar period by taking into account the specificities and differences of the political and the cultural fields. For more flexible definitions of cultural diplomacy, see Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), as well as Benjamin G. Martin and Elisabeth Marie Piller, “Cultural Diplomacy and Europe's Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: Introduction,” *Contemporary European History* 30 (2021): 149-163.

⁵ For considerations of the specific potential of translated literature as cultural diplomacy, see Luise von Flotow “Revealing the ‘soul of which nation?’ Translated literature as cultural diplomacy” in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, eds. Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007).

⁶ The magazine *Lo Català*, founded in Cuba, dates back to 1861, while the oldest Catalan cultural centers were founded in Montevideo in 1881 and Havana in 1882. On this topic, see Robert Surroca i Tallaferro, *Prensa catalana de l'exili i l'emigració (1861-1976)* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 2004); Robert Surroca i Tallaferro, “Casals Catalans Al Món,” *Revista de Catalunya*, no. 210 (2005):

3–10; Albert Manent, ed. *Diccionari dels catalans d'Amèrica. Contribució a un inventari biogràfic, toponímic i temàtic* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992).

⁷ Ferran Robles i Sabater, “Les traduccions alemanyes de literatura catalana,” *Zeitschrift Für Katalanistik* 18 (2005): 215–229.

⁸ Eloi Castelló and Kálman Faluba, “Literatura hongaresa i literatura catalana: coneixement mutu,” *Quaderns: Revista de Traducció* 11 (2004): 29–44.

⁹ Anna Sawicka, “Polacs i Polonesos. Traducció literària català-polonès i polonès-català.” *Quaderns* 11 (2004): 11–27.

¹⁰ Xavier Montoliu, “Literatura romanesa i literatura catalana : Quan el desafiament es diu traducció,” *Quaderns* 15 (2008): 103–17; Lourdes Sánchez Rodrigo, “Las relaciones literarias entre Cataluña y Rumanía,” *Revista de Lengüas y Literaturas Catalana, Gallega y Vasca* 19 (2014): 99–108.

¹¹ For a focus on the political strategy, see Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, “Catalonia and the ‘War of Nations’: Catalan Nationalism and the First World War.” *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 3 (2018): 379–98 and Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *Internacionalitzant el nacionalisme. El catalanisme polític i la qüestió de les minories nacionals a Europa (1914-1936)* (Catarroja: Afers, 2010). See also Borja de Riquer, “Joan Estelrich i Francesc Cambó: les complexes relacions entre intel·lectuals i polítics,” in *Actes de les jornades d'estudi sobre Joan Estelrich. Palma-Felanitx 17, 18 i 24 d'octubre de 2008* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Consell de Mallorca, 2010) and Borja de Riquer and Arnau Gonzàlez, “Joan Estelrich i la paradiplomàcia catalana a la Societat de Nacions” (conference, Cicle Catalunya i la Societat de Nacions, 24 May 2016).

¹² Diana Roig-Sanz and Reine Meylaerts, eds. *Literary Translation and Cultural Mediators in “Peripheral” Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹³ Xavier Pla, “D'Eugeni Xammar a Josep Pla : Testimoni de dos escriptors catalans en l'Europa d'entreguerres,” *Lauro. Revista del Museu de Granollers* 16 (1999).

¹⁴ Diana Roig-Sanz, “Dues fites en la col·laboració catalana a l'IICI, la UNESCO i el PEN Club Internacional (1927 i 1959),” in *Lectures dels anys cinquanta* (Lleida: Punctum, 2013), 155–189.

¹⁵ Several publications and conferences attest to the growing interest in this ambiguous and interesting figure. Among others, see Sílvia Coll-Vinent, “Joan Estelrich i el nou humanisme a l'Europa d'entreguerres,” *Caplletra*, 70 (2021): 111-138; the special issue “El món d'ahir de Joan Estelrich” in *L'espill* 47 (2014): 76-139; *Actes de les jornades d'estudi sobre Joan Estelrich*. See also the publication of Estelrich's personal diary: Joan Estelrich, *Dietari*, ed. Manuel Jorba (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 2012).

¹⁶ Montserrat Corretger, *Alfons Maseras: intel·lectual d'acció i literat (Biografia, obra periodística, traduccions)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1995).

¹⁷ Montserrat Corretger, “El funcionament d'Expansió Catalana (1919-1928) contra la Dictadura,” in *Escriptors, Periodistes i Crítics. El combat per la novel·la (1924-1936)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2008).

¹⁸ Montserrat Corretger, *Alfons Maseras*, 138.

¹⁹ Giovanni C. Cattini, “Joan Estelrich i l'Expansió Catalana. La traducció de Prat de la Riba i Cambó en la Itàlia feixista,” *Cercles. Revista d'Història Cultural* (2009): 75–89.

²⁰ Gabriella Gavagnin, *Classicisme i Renaixement, una idea d'Itàlia durant el Noucentisme* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2005).

²¹ Corretger, *Alfons Maseras*, 1995, 124–126.

²² Jesús Revelles Esquirol, “Humberto Peláegio y las mediaciones luso-catalanas de principios de siglo XX. Una aproximación,” *Tintas. Quaderni di letteratura iberiche e iberoamericane* 8 (2019): 65-80.

²³ Jaume Subirana Ortin, “Fem d'una mena d'ambaixadors... La projecció internacional como estrategia de las literaturas ‘menores’. El caso del PEN catalán.” *Oinehart* 25 (2010): 307–324; Joan Safont, *PEN Català. Un exemple de diplomàcia cultural* (Barcelona: Meteora, 2018).

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L'UNESCO oubliée. La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle (1919-1946)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999); Martin Grandjean, “Les réseaux de la coopération intellectuelle. La Société des Nations comme actrice des échanges scientifiques et culturels dans l'entre-deux-guerres” (doctoral thesis, Université de Lausanne, 2018).

²⁵ Renoliet, *L'UNESCO*, 282; Grandjean, *Les réseaux*, 239.

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- ²⁶ Joan Estelrich to Julien Luchaire, Barcelona, received 17 February 1927. Except when noted otherwise, all primary sources related to the creation of a Catalan Committee are extracted from folder IICI-A-III-36 of the UNESCO Archive in Paris.
- ²⁷ Julien Luchaire to Joan Estelrich, Paris, 18 February 1927.
- ²⁸ Joan Estelrich to Julien Luchaire, Barcelona, 9 April 1927.
- ²⁹ José Castillejo to Joan Estelrich, Madrid, 9 May 1927.
- ³⁰ José Castillejo to Julien Luchaire, Madrid, 11 May 1927.
- ³¹ Grandjean, *Les réseaux*, 380-397.
- ³² Luis G. Martínez del Campo, “Weak State, Powerful Culture: The Emergence of Spanish Cultural Diplomacy, 1914–1936,” *Contemporary European History* 30 (2021), 198–213.
- ³³ Julio Casares to the President of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Madrid, 19 May 1928, IICI-A-III-27.
- ³⁴ Andrew Phillips and Christian Reus-Smit, eds. *Culture and Order in World Politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 23.
- ³⁵ Carolyn N. Biltoft, *A Violent Peace. Media, Truth and Power at the League of Nations* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 13.
- ³⁶ Biltoft, *Violent*, 22.
- ³⁷ Deputy to the Spanish Republican Congress between 1931 and 1939.
- ³⁸ For the Ibero-American Collection, see Alexandra Pita, “América (Latina) en París: Mistral, Reyes y Torres Bodet en la Colección Iberoamericana, 1927-1940,” in *América Latina y el internacionalismo ginebrino de entreguerras: Implicaciones y Resonancias*, eds. Yannick Wehrli and Fabián Herrera León (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Dirección General del Acervo Histórico Diplomático, 2019). For the Japanese collection, see Lauriane Millet, “Esprit Japonais et prémices du multiculturalisme,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin* 39, no.1 (2014): 79. For the ethnographic collection, see Alexandra Pita, “La Colección de Etnografía e Historia de América y el embajador Roberto Levillier en México, 1934-1939,” *Historia Mexicana* 68, no. 4 (2019): 1697–1742.
- ³⁹ UN Archives Geneva, “International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Report of the Committee on the Work of its Eighteenth Plenary Session,” R4002-5B-25731-1976.
- ⁴⁰ UN Archives Geneva, “International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, Paris - Work Plan, 1934-1938,” R3989-5B-12644-942.
- ⁴¹ UN Archives Geneva, “League of Nations, Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly. Sixth Committee. Provisional Minutes. Sixth Meeting held on Friday, September 20th,” R5235-15-19849-19783.
- ⁴² Joan Estelrich, “El problema de l’expansió cultural de Catalunya...,” n.d., box “Expansió Catalana 1. Informes. Documentació general diversa,” Joan Estelrich Archive, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona.