

## PLAYING WITH FIRE COLLECTIVELY: CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL RITES AS DEVISERS AND OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS

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Popular festivities and traditional events are important moments in which symbolic content, deep emotions, and community solidarity are developed. However, there has been little research on the relationship between such events and their social networks and the power relations within these networks. This article explores the ability of community events and networks to reflect and strengthen social context. Rather than observing the capacity of the event to generate a network, we focus on identifying how the event network is constructed, and how it creates relationships between the different groups, or nodes, within broader social networks. The case analyzed is the *Correfoc de la Mercè*, a traditional firework event in Barcelona involving the *Colles de diables*, or Catalan popular fire culture groups. Our findings show that there is a bidirectional link or a mutual dependence between the groups (or nodes) and the event, which also support the development of shared social and symbolic capital.

**Key words: Fire; Community; Event; Network; Culture traditions**

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### Introduction

In the contemporary information and communication society there is a drift towards individualization (Bauman, 2001; Castells, 2000; Garcés, 2009) and the diversification of social relations, whether on- or offline. However, offline relations are closer and more supportive, as Mesch and Talmud (2006) observed in teenage friendships. We consider that social processes and structures such as platforms, albeit with specific sectorial purposes (cultural,

educational, or sports, among others), could override the trend towards individualization and induce remarkable social and relational effects. Clubs, associations, nongovernmental institutions, societies, events, festivals, and networks are examples of platforms able to induce social effects, such as increasing cultural, symbolic, and economic capital.

In recent years, a proliferation of cultural events and festivals in Europe has been stimulated by several factors, including urban management

remodeling, sociostructural changes, and the use of culture as a means of economic development and identity formation (Quinn, 2006). The traditional role of festivals as part of sacred and religious celebrations has been complemented by the development of festivals with a clear commercial goal. Cultural festivals, rituals, and traditional celebrations become community identity markers whereby participants feel part of their community, sharing values, language, religion, politics, and literature.

Many festivals and cultural celebrations, understood as elements of contemporary popular culture, are also linked to established social structures that reinforce their functions or even change or reinterpret them. Therefore, many group-driven activities reflect and link processes existing in the community, such as, for example, La Patum in the city of Berga (Catalonia), or the Alardes in Irun and Hondarribia (Basque Country). In the case of La Patum, one of Catalonia's oldest rituals, the *comparsas* (acting groups) are closed structures that act as nodes in social networks and are interrelated with each other, reflecting the bonds and existing social structures and hierarchies of the city (Colombo & Cantó-Milà, 2019). In the case of Alardes, as Bullen and Egido (2003) have observed, the gender inequality of the established social context is reflected in the festivities, which gives rise to feminist protests.

Consequently, from a broad perspective, these events may be considered as reflective of the rhythm of social processes (Bullen & Egido, 2003) because they reflect group characteristics, social structures, and relationships. Therefore, festivals and celebrations perform a vital role in contemporary life, being actors in social processes where individuals and communities participate, offering a potentially beneficial experience, as well as mirroring social realities. In other words, festivals and cultural celebrations can be viewed both as social markers and catalysts for social action. Hence, this article's interest in a detailed observation of the bidirectional relationship between the event and the social groups (*colles*) that act within it, rather than observing the links between individual participants and the event. This gives us the possibility to analyze the role of the different groups (*colles*), understood as nodes in the event network, as well as the construction of these nodes, which are strongly

linked with the social reality of the neighborhoods in the city.

In this ethnographic study, the focus of our interest was Barcelona's *Correfoc*, a major firework festivity performed by city-wide groups known as the *colles de diables* (devil groups). Each represents a small community with strong group cohesion, nourished by its own particular identity and neighborhood characteristics, which is enacted in public space during the festivities. The *Correfoc* is the only event in which all city groups participate, in a network that is constructed in a bottom-up fashion. Our analysis of the *Correfoc* is based on an in-depth study of two devil groups, using quantitative, qualitative, and ethnographic methods.

## Literature Review

### *Networks and Social Processes Into Festivities*

The analysis of event networks has attracted increasing interest from academics and industry, employing a wide range of analytical perspectives and methodological approaches (Jarman et al., 2014; Mackellar, 2006). We conceive of networks as universes in which diverse nodes are connected in different ways and with varying intensities. In the first place, then, the nodes should be identified; and secondly, their interrelations should be observed.

A number of recent publications have highlighted the process of social network creation through festivals, some of them applying social network analysis (SNA) (Jarman, 2018; Jarman et al., 2014; Scott & Carrington, 2017). SNA is a process that allies mathematics with substantive social theory to be able to analyze social structures using networks and graph theory, often visualized through sociograms. Within the framework of festival studies, Jarman (2018) used SNA to analyze relationships among festival organizers, observing how these relationships worked and how they were reflected in the festival's organizational structure.

Early attempts to apply SNA to social research paid particular attention to sociometric analysis, using anthropological research methods to observe interpersonal relations and thus discern the structure and form of networks based on social relations (Scott, 2011). In a comparable vein, there is a well-established domain of literature attesting to

the significant benefits generated by festivals and events, focusing on the sociocultural domains of social interaction, bonding, and sense of belonging (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Quinn, 2006). Some studies have also observed how this social interaction develops, and which specific processes are responsible for generating bonding or a sense of belonging through events or festival participation. A good example is Costa's (2002) study of a traditional fire carnival (*Las Fallas de Valencia*), which illustrates the importance of sociability in the creation of collective solid identity within the framework of an event articulated by different groups and agents. These social groups can be understood as nodes in an event network, which have similar but diverse characteristics and an equitable relationship to each other.

From the perspective of analyzing networks in events that link people, locations, and organizations, Richards and Colombo (2017) argued that events are now part of a globalized flow within a network of stakeholders. Their analysis of the Sónar Festival in Barcelona emphasized the power relations in the event's global stakeholder network, with Barcelona acting as a hub, or the central point through which resources and knowledge flow. In this case, the Sónar network (which comprises all the different Sónar events around the world) is part of the value that this event generates through structuring relationships between people, locations, and organizations. This underlines the value of a network and the power relations that develop through the network.

However, a specific festival space is a blend of tangible elements and an intangible atmosphere associated with an experience. Therefore, a popular event may also be considered an amalgam of different festive communities (Costa, 2002) and diverse elements coming together to generate a certain atmosphere. Many sociocultural analyses of festive rituals (Delgado, 2004; Segalen, 2005) emphasize the importance of identity in this process. A communitarian identity is typically constructed on the basis of a certain idea of tradition, which establishes links with the past at the same time as the festivities reproduce the contemporary social order. Research into these traditions is extremely interesting, because it allows us to understand the society that celebrates them (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Accordingly, events linked to traditional and popular culture are important platforms for social interaction, and networks appear within a framework of sociability, identity, and sense of belonging to the festive community as well as to the wider geographical community of a specific area. Puigdevall et al. (2019) stressed that Catalan popular culture activities may provide platforms and spaces for social interaction, language learning, and identity practices, and support for militant Catalan activism, as Saurí and Rovira (2012) pointed out, through bottom-up associationism and cultural practices. Therefore, it could be argued that these festivities are social and cultural manifestations of symbolic content, which reflect social dynamics in a highly condensed way and which can be used to bring about change.

From the beginnings of modern social studies, rituals and festivities have been the subject of research and interest. According to Durkheim's theory of social structure, festive rituals are seen as interludes in everyday life when the profane becomes sacred, a time for celebration, in which the social order is inverted, and laws and norms are suspended (Bullen & Egidio, 2003). Moreover, as Picard (2016) stressed, the term "festive" has diverse interpretations linked to social construction, from the embodiment of *communitas* through participation as suggested by Turner (1982), and the understanding of the reproductive capacity of events to establish forms of social order, to seeing festivities as a new form of reinterpretation, innovation, and social creativity. Therefore, events may be used as platforms for change, revindication, innovation, and even unrest or disputes. In this respect, we consider that social structures and relationships are constantly changing, and more so in traditional and popular culture activities in which voluntary participation is essential for their development and continuity. We understand that power relations within a network can be diverse, depending on their structural organization, and that some networks also exist to organize and structure the processes. For this reason, we decided to return to the beginnings of SNA and take our inspiration from the anthropologists who tried to identify and analyze the informal and interpersonal relational structures that exist among the different members of a community. We analyze these relationships

along two major dimensions: the relationships that can generate collective identity, and the relational elements linked to a specific territory or geographical area.

### *Devil Festivities in Barcelona*

Throughout Catalonia, devils are ancestral figures portrayed in theatrical representations of struggles between good and evil, personified as archangels, demons, and mythological beasts. The origin of the *colles de diables* or devil groups (*colla* meaning “group” as well as “group of friends”) is uncertain, as little documentation exists. However, it is generally accepted that they derive from medieval street theater performances or “spoken dances” that were part of royal wedding festivities (Amades, 1982), and subsequently associated with Corpus Christi processions. These groups experienced different historical trajectories, depending on the locality and whether or not they survived the Franco dictatorship. These representations were part of the Corpus Christi processions documented in Tarragona in 1460 and in Sitges in 1853. In Barcelona, demons versus angels also existed in Corpus Christi processions between the 15th and 18th centuries, but in the 19th century all demon-related activity disappeared. During that period, those traditions were preserved in other municipalities. In Barcelona, they disappeared for a long time. However, during the years of the transition to democracy, the *colles de diables* were revived and supported the restoration of Catalan popular and participative cultural life. Nowadays the *colles* are considered a representation of traditional Catalan culture, but this tradition was for the most part reinvented and reinterpreted with the aim of reclaiming a specific cultural inheritance, which is continually adapting to new times and needs. In addition to the identity component and tradition, the festivity is, above all, polysemic in nature (Ariño & García, 2012).

In Barcelona, each *colla de diables* has its own calendar of festivities for the year, which is closely linked to its neighborhood celebrations. However, the main activity for most of the city’s groups is a collective performance in Barcelona, known as the *Correfoc*. This is a unique act, which has no precedent. It is much more than a traditional and popular culture event characterized by its relationship with

fire and pyrotechnics. It represents the emergence of a much-needed social reaction, at a particular moment in time, to reclaim Catalan traditions and, above all, reconquer the streets and restore freedom of popular expression after the repression of the dictatorship. The occupation of the streets by demons and dragons, and the active participation of citizens who interact with these mythological figures, dancing and playing to the rhythm of drums beneath a rain of fire sparks, is the transformation of public space in a collective catharsis that reflects the relationships and ties as well as the differences and tensions between socially and culturally different groups.

The *Correfoc* appeared spontaneously in Barcelona in 1979, as a result of a combination of the city council’s efforts to reincorporate traditional Catalan activities into Barcelona’s main festivities, and the social explosion resulting from the democratization of culture after the death of Franco. That year, the City Council supported an initiative to revive the city’s main festival, the *Festa Major de la Mercè*. The rebuilding of the festival was complex, because during the dictatorship it had been dominated by a propagandist discourse. Therefore, the new proposal was quite the opposite: to look for cultural references hidden beneath the shame of illegality. Different kinds of Catalan popular traditions were considered, such as the *gegants i capgrossos* (giants and big heads), the *castellers*, the *sardanistes*, and the *colles de diables*. The latter played an important part in the redesign of the event, especially in 1979, when a theater group known as *Els Comendians* was commissioned to organize an original and traditional parade. They arranged a parade of dragons and beasts of fire from all over Catalonia, accompanied by devils’ groups from Panadès, L’Arboç, and Vilanova i la Geltrú. The idea was to develop a ceremonial firework parade along the lines of festive parades in several localities in Catalonia, but Barcelona provided a surprise when, at the junction between Calle Ferran and Las Ramblas, the ceremony developed a strong interaction between the public and the devils and beasts. As B. Moya (who was a member of the advisory board, which in 1979 reinvented *La Mercè*, speaking in an in-depth interview in 2018) explained, “a group of people, strangely, seeing the figures of dragons and devils, did not move away to watch the show as they

normally do, but interacted with the fire, dancing and jumping around beneath the shower of sparks and firecrackers.” This reaction generated certain discomfort and concern on the part of the event’s organizers, security forces, and practitioners. The experience was unique and inimitable, and would lay the foundations for what was later recognized as the *Correfoc* (Masana, 2015). Thus, the *Correfoc* was a new event model, taking dragons and *colles* as its references, with a strong characteristic component of audience interaction as members of the public became coprotagonists of the event.

From the 1980s onwards, the *Correfoc* became better known, and several groups of devils, dragons, and other figures emerged in Barcelona. The event became a required activity and a space in which everyone involved in those groups should take part in some way. At the end of the 1980s, Barcelona had 20 groups; in 2019, more than 45 groups were documented. Today each *colla* is divided into different divisions: the devils, who dance and jump to the rhythm of the drums under the fire sparks and pyrotechnics; the accompanying music groups; and the beasts or fire figures. They are organized by different institutions such as the *Federació de Colles de Diables de Barcelona* (Barcelona Federation of Devil Groups) and the *Coordinadora de Colles Diables i Bèsties Foc de Barcelona* (Barcelona Association of Devil Groups and Fire Beasts), which coordinate tasks between all the different groups in the city and act as a network of nodes defending the interests, goals, and activities of their members. It is also worthy of mention that not all the Barcelona groups are represented within these institutions, as some of them consider themselves independent. The *Correfoc* is currently organized and coordinated by the City Fire Council, comprised of an administrative board, network representatives, independent *colles*, and some representation of the groups of fire figures.

If we consider popular festive acts, such as *Correfoc*, as performances in which culture in action is demonstrated (Turner, 1982), they are also spaces in which new meanings are adopted: in which there is consumption of cultural goods (Guilló, 2016), effects related to experience and maintenance of traditions appear, and reasons for change emerge (Cruces & Díaz de Rada, 1992). The *Correfoc* is an event created not only to adapt, but also to provoke

change and revindication. The process of ritual creation has acquired the reputation of being traditional, even when it is a good example of “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) within an event, an aspect of festivals and events that has attracted increasing attention (Angé, 2016; Laing & Frost, 2014). These festivities are interesting for their potential capacity to create community; and in turn, these communities, groups, and even networks are of vital importance for the development and maintenance of these collective rituals.

### Methodology

As stated above, the *Correfoc* is an interesting place to observe community interaction and power relations in the social networks of a festive event. In this case, we opted for a qualitative, ethnographic study, believing this would enable us to access diverse aspects of the *Correfoc*, address how the participants understand and make sense of the event, and observe the relationships that emerge and are strengthened by it. In a previous study of the Barcelona *colles* in 2017 and 2018, a survey of 292 respondents provided an initial profile of members and their participation in the *Correfoc*. Following this survey, we conducted 15 semistructured interviews with members of eight *colles*. This enabled us to select a number of groups to focus on, following two criteria of language and accessibility in all group activities. Of the eight groups initially identified, six were ruled out due to difficulty of access. Each of the groups studied allowed us to participate in all activities organized within the framework of the *Correfoc*, enabling us to observe and conduct innumerable informal conversations with many of its members. As researchers, this allowed us to be part of the collective, part of the ritual, during the event, enabling us to combine the insider and outsider views, alternating as ethnographers between observation and participation (Ghasarian, 2008). In order to understand public rituals as community activities, we decided to develop an ethnography, as Frost (2016) suggested, with the emphasis “on phenomenological, or at least experiential forms of analysis” (p. 507). A multidisciplinary team then employed classical ethnography methods, such as informal conversations and participant observation during the 2018 event, enabling us to access rich

ethnographic stories (Matheson & Tinsley, 2016) about the *Correfoc*. We refer participant observation to: “participant observation consists mainly of two activities: to observe systematically and in a controlled manner everything that happens around the researcher, and to participate in one or several of the activities of the population” (Guber, 2011, p. 52). Thus, we wished to follow the long social sciences tradition of studying the festive phenomenon and its associated rituals. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, during the first half of the 20th century, this field was chiefly studied by means of folklorist compilations and, from the 1960s, anthropological and sociological texts by authors such as Julio Caro Baroja, Isidoro Moreno, Josefina Roma, Jose Ignacio Homobono, Joan Prat, Jesús Contreras, or Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, among many others cited in Homobono’s (2004) compilation. Therefore, we follow a long tradition of studies that use ethnographic methods to place the researcher at the event, as part of the experience of the festivities. As noted by various authors such as Ali-Knight, Robertson et al. (2008), Derrett (2008), Getz (2010), and Symons (2016), we believe that qualitative studies with a sociocultural perspective are necessary in festival research. We also share Frost’s (2016) opinion that it is essential for anthropology to contribute both theoretical and methodological insights to the study of festivals.

As Roca (2017) pointed out, “direct, participant, continuous contact with social actors, sharing their experiences and incorporating their perspectives into the analysis – ‘being with people’ (in however many and varied ways)—remains the fundamental and indispensable condition to obtaining an important type of knowledge about them” (p. 79). Ethnographic fieldwork has evolved from the foundational work of Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski, for whom ethnography was the study of a specific and territorially bounded community as the observation unit (Jirón & Imilan, 2016; Roca, 2010). Their fieldwork necessarily required long-term field work in the community and individual research authorship. Harris (2001) indicated that ethnography was not introduced “abruptly” by these two anthropologists, but has evolved gradually since researchers such as Morgan, Haddon, or Rivers began to promote techniques to increase the quality of the data collected. In the 1930s, the

sociology department of the University of Chicago applied this methodology to urban studies, in which the communities studied were neighborhoods or territorial spaces bounded in the city. From the 1960s, some aspects of this approach began to be questioned and thematically oriented ethnographies opened up the possibility of anthropological study in the researcher’s own society. Communities per se ceased to be the object of ethnographic study and became an observation unit that delimits the spatial place in which a specific subject is studied. Our study of social practices in *Correfoc* and the nodes that this event generates is based on ethnographic research conducted with a thematically oriented approach and a collective ethnography. According to Jirón and Imilan (2016), “Collective ethnography differs from mere teamwork, usually organized vertically and with compartmentalized information tasks, to the extent that fundamental research questions and answers are resolved in a horizontal dialogue, through the exchange of ethnographic experiences” (pp. 55–56). Our fieldwork was carried out by a multidisciplinary team of four researchers (a cultural sociologist, a sociolinguist, and two anthropologists) during an intensive period, because the *Correfoc* event only takes place once a year. The researchers’ cultural backgrounds are apparently similar, but diverse in terms of studying this particular event. The principal researcher was born in Barcelona and therefore was familiar with the social and cultural context as well as the event itself and its evolution. Two more researchers were from other Catalan towns, Tarragona and Girona. Tarragona has a great tradition of devil celebrations, though they have not evolved in the same way, while in Girona this type of event appeared only after the rebirth and consolidation of the event in Barcelona. The fourth researcher lives in the Basque Country where there are no such celebrations.

Prior to conducting the fieldwork, we prepared an observation script to ensure that each of us would observe the same aspects of the groups. We also had some previous coordination and preparation meetings, and we collectively analyzed the data collected.

In our fieldwork, we took as a basis ethnographic approaches that require the presence of the researcher in the field studied (Ferrándiz, 2011). The

fieldwork was performed during a long day of more than 12 hr. The first stage of the fieldwork considered the preparation of all the logistical and security elements visible and not visible to spectators of the festival, among which were the instruments for burning, drums, costumes, etc. Afterwards, we met to discuss and review the observations, and then we met again in the *Tamborrada*, the activity that precedes the *Correfoc*. Although the music of the drums livened up the city streets, the researchers observed the interaction between group members, between group members and spectators, and the ways in which intergroup relations were manifested. As the drums began to quieten down, two researchers went to Via Laietana, the street that is the setting for the *Correfoc*, and participated in the *Correfoc Infantil* (Children's *Correfoc*), in which the main actors were children, normally of parents who participated in one group or other.

As night fell, we headed to the culmination of the festivities, the main *Correfoc* event. To follow each *colla* from the inside, each of us adopted a position within the performance. One followed the drums and the others the devils, reproducing the group's structure. This group observation enabled us to participate in several ritual activities and be part of the collective feeling of the group, allowing us to understand how networks are about solidarity, personal relations, bonds with neighborhoods and other groups, and being a part of something extraordinary.

#### Nodes and Networks of Devils: The Construction of an Event

Our observation revealed that a network among nodes is created in the *Correfoc*. Each node has its own strong group identity and generates a group feeling of shared belonging, a kind of collective body acting at the same rhythm during a single festive event. Without such a network, events like this would not be possible.

As mentioned above, studies of events such as the Edinburgh Festival (Jarman et al., 2014) or the Sónar festival in Barcelona (Richards & Colombo, 2017) were an interesting starting point for our research on the *Correfoc*, though with an important difference: our work was located in a festive context much more closely related to the celebrations that

take place in neighborhoods, villages, and cities, one of popular expression in which symbolic content is demonstrated by means of expressing profound emotions, embodying the sense of belonging or essence of being of a specific community. Each *colla* is a small independent community (node) in itself, with a strong group identity, which is nourished by its own peculiar neighborhood identity at the same time as it is nourished by the festive enactment in the public space.

However, not all popular festive events are the same when it comes to creating networks. In many festivities, the groups or nodes only occupy the public space once a year, generating and participating in the event; they are nodes created and formed for that single event. Prior to the day of the event, the participants in each group meet to prepare and rehearse; however, apart from on that specific day, the group as such rarely participates in any other festivity. This is the case for festivities such as the *Tamborrada* in Donostia in the Basque Country (Moral, 2014) or La Patum in Berga, Catalonia (Colombo & Cantó-Milà, 2019). However, the *Correfoc* is an event featuring autonomous nodes, which are entities with a strong group identity, and which participate in other festivities during the year. Therefore, the groups are not created specifically for the *Correfoc*, but generally take part in their district's own festivities and also, frequently, in those of other districts or localities in Catalonia.

Therefore, the *Correfoc* is not the only event that gives meaning to the existence of the Barcelona *colles*, but it is the most important event in the calendar for all of them. It can be considered a high point and significant moment for the nodes which after that continue to function independently during the rest of the year. It is the only day of the year on which all the districts are represented through their *colles*, a unique festivity in which a single network of nodes symbolizes the city.

The importance of the *Correfoc* in the annual dynamics of the groups is reflected in how the group participation is prepared. An example of this is found in the words of Eduard, a participant in charge of one of the *colles* studied, who pointed out to us that they were busy ensuring that all the material to be used during the event was in good order, because this meant "beginning the year on the right foot." Something similar also occurs with

other participants who experience the *Correfoc* as something very special. Many of them describe it as an exceptional event, as in addition to the networks among groups, an internal network among individual group members also exists, reinforcing and intensifying the sense of belonging to the *colles*. The involvement and emotion are extremely strong and this is reflected in different testimonies collected for our research: Gina, a young woman born outside Catalonia who has been participating for 5 years, told us, “*Correfoc* is the thing I like the most in the whole year.” She also explained that at the beginning of the afternoon she was so moved that she almost cried. Another participant, Marco, commented, “It’s my day.” Emotions like these are expressed, transmitted, and shared between participants, bonding people and making them feel like wanting to be part of that network. Daniel, a young man born outside Barcelona who has been living there for a short time, told us that he decided to be part of the group when he saw the *Correfoc* for the first time, as he was captivated by the festival. Quotations come from informal conversations conducted during the participant observation made by the four researchers at the *Correfoc 2018*, and to maintain the participants’ anonymity, so the names used do not correspond to real names and we have limited descriptions in order not to give specific details.

Therefore, the relationship between the event and the nodes (*colles*) is bidirectional. The *Correfoc* signifies a central and very important event for the nodes and its network, but at the same time the network is essential for the construction and existence of the *Correfoc*. Therefore, to understand the importance of this bidirectional relation, it is essential to comprehend personal and collective motivations of being part of this network, of the nodes and of the event: (1) the form of participation related with Barcelona districts, (2) reasons why people want to be part of a specific group and the social capital implied by such participation, and (3) how group identity is demonstrated in the *Correfoc*.

#### *Form of Participation in Relation to Districts of Barcelona*

To begin with, the strong relationship between the *colles* and the different city districts should be emphasized. Each group has its own specific

characteristics and the identification of the group with the district is also evidenced by several distinctive elements and symbols carried by group members during the festive activities.

Both the flag and the emblem they use is the same or very similar to that of the district, and the group’s activities are also closely linked to different neighborhood festivities. Most of the group members wear a label with the name of their district. It is significant that the premises used to store the necessary material for their activities usually belong to neighborhood civic centers, public buildings shared by different cultural and social associations. This link to the neighborhood is obvious, but the people participating in the group do not have to be residents of the district. Nevertheless, the mirroring effect of the social structures of each neighborhood or district with the devil groups is surprisingly transparent, while most of the participants work together to help to identify the group as a representation of the neighborhood.

#### *Participation and Social Capital*

There is a strong sense of group belonging in the *colles de diables*. The bonds uniting participants are extremely strong, despite there being a number of different ways of participating and engaging in the group tasks involved. In the cases studied, flexibility is a priority for those participating, although this complicates the logistics of the group. In the words of one veteran group leader, Marc, priority is given to flexibility and convenience for the group members.

With respect to the reasons for participating in the *colles*, besides the usual motivation of enjoyment or encouraging enjoyment through popular and traditional culture, we were also able to observe the importance of these groups in cultivating friendship networks. Many of the testimonies gathered speak of a feeling of belonging, of friendship networks, and family-type relationships. This is the case for Neus, a young woman who told us that, despite having grown up in Barcelona, she had studied at university in another Catalan city; on returning to Barcelona, she joined a devil group in order to reestablish friendship networks. Devil groups can also be a way of creating friendship networks for people from other places. We observed this among people from different European countries, one case



being Tomás, a young man who arrived in Barcelona because of an illness that could only be treated in the Catalan capital and who defined the group of devils saying, “The group is my new family.” The preparations for the street performances entail cohesion from the group, and this causes a mutual care network to form, one that sometimes transcends the group’s cultural activity. Tomás explained that members of the group are always there for him when anything happens, concerned for his health.

#### *Expression of Group Identity During the Correfoc*

All these elements of cohesion and feelings of belonging, both to the neighborhood and to the group, are reflected intensely during the *Correfoc*. Yet each group can show its peculiar group identity in various ways. Therefore, there is a kind of symbiosis between common elements of identity and others that allow each group to have a specific and differentiated presence. The colors used in the costume are one of the common elements, for example. Each group is identified by its devil outfits, but fire-related colors predominate: red, black, orange, brown, and yellow. The beasts and mythological figures of each group are a source of group pride and neighborhood identity, and the street performance also varies from one group to another, but always within the guidelines of the joint event. These variations that make up the identity expressed by each group are more evident in the groups of *tabalers* (musical groups), in which the subjects addressed or the choreography allows for greater variety.

Thus, the identity of each group is reflected in different ways in the *Correfoc*, and each group tries to stand out in some way within the overall event. Some distinguish themselves through the antiquity of the group, others with the rhythms and singular choreographies of the *tabalers*, and still others with their beasts. Yet rivalry among groups is not common, as Marta, a young and dynamic percussionist, points out: “We don’t come to compete, we come to have a good time, to make a festivity.”

#### The Collective Event and the Network

The network is perceived in the feeling and emotion involved in participating in a common act, the unique and inimitable *Correfoc de la Mercè*. This

emotion has its climax at the beginning of the event. The groups of devils prepare for the collective burning ritual that takes place at the starting point of the route: the Gate of Hell, the liminal space of the ritual, where darkness becomes fire and demons are personified. Thunder, noise, and fireworks emerge from the gate. Suddenly, the door lights up with fire and, with the last firecracker, everything becomes dark. The first group then passes through the door and the drums start beating. At that moment, the identity of each group is reflected symbolically within the large network created in the *Correfoc* by means of the ritual element, which is responsible for generating cohesion and group sentiment. At the beginning of the route, the devils set fire to their maces at the same time, then raise them, and remain together at the same point, forming a compact group. At the end of the route, the choreography is repeated until suddenly one of the demons screams “Who are the best?” and the others respond, “The devils from our neighborhood!”

Thirty groups took part in the *Correfoc 2018*, crossed through the Gate of Hell, and proceeded down the Via Laietana two by two, taking up the whole street, in a parallel act. The groups do not mingle; each maintains its own well-defined space throughout the entire route. But they all act in the same space and at the same time, creating the unified choreography of a unique event in a public space, which also becomes a fundamental element in the network. The festivity crosses streets and squares of great symbolic importance in Barcelona (Plaça del Mercat del Born, Via Laietana, and the Barri Gòtic) and the nodes become representatives of their neighborhoods through the enactment of that joint network in the symbolic heart of the city.

The festivity “explodes” along the length of Via Laietana with a feeling of chaos, freedom, and anarchy. However, the creation of this network among different communities does not occur spontaneously. It is a festivity that requires careful organization and coordination. On the day of the event and the days leading up to it, coordination meetings bring together group leaders, organizational technicians, and City Council members to review the final details before the celebration, to ensure the event flows and safety regulations are met.

Finally, another very important element accompanies this network of nodes in a special way: the

audience. As noted previously, the *Correfoc* in Barcelona was created by the public, who in its first edition made human barricades against the traditional devil groups from other Catalan localities. This interaction between the public and the devils would become ritualized as part of the event and is what makes it unique. However, nowadays many of the people attending are tourists. Cameras and mobile phones abound and selfies are taken with the devils in the background. Most are not prepared to get under the fire; they have no understanding of the ritual and the “codes” of participation, and therefore do not take part in the same way as the original audience. Probably, this growing tourist presence makes participation in the *colles* a strengthening of sense of local identity and participation in a symbolic network closely linked to the city of Barcelona. In fact, one group member, masked in devil costume prior to the onset of the festivities, jokingly commented, “Today we are going to burn, to burn tourists!” This “war cry” illustrates a strong will to belong, the reclaiming of a united community from “others” who are ignorant and disrespectful of the “codes,” outsiders who do not fully understand the festivity, nor the culture of the society they are visiting. This cry highlights the feeling of “us,” the devils, against “them,” the others.

Notwithstanding, the evident collectivity of the *colles* is reinforced by the joint enactment of all the groups on Via Laietana, and increases with the active interaction of the spectators that move under the fire. Bodies in contact, bodies jumping and dancing, bodies in movement, and above all, the feeling of individual bodies converted into a collective body that forms a single whole. Bodies playing with fire and managing risk collectively in a public space dominated by smoke, darkness, and uncertainty, bodies playing together with the feeling of danger.

### Conclusions

The aim of this article was to analyze a traditional and popular culture event in Barcelona, observing the behavior of the different units (or nodes) that formed part of a broader network. We observed the relationship between the event and the nodes, as well as between the nodes themselves, identifying whether social dynamics were in any way reflected in the groups and how they are related to the event.

These relationships were illustrated through ethnographic observation of the *Correfoc de la Mercè* ritual, a specific and unique event in Barcelona.

For the *Correfoc*, the interdependency between nodes and event is essential for the celebration of the event. Firstly, though each node is independent, with its own year-round activities, rituals, identity, rhythms, and characteristics, a network exists with respect to coordination, exchange, and common interests. It is this network that generates the event; in other words, without this network the event would not exist. During the celebration of the *Correfoc*, participants engage in a shared ritual, through their personal relationships, the nodes build a power dependency and coordination, which creates this unique event, therefore thanks to the nodes and their interrelationships it is generate the power of the event.

Secondly, another essential element for the event to occur as a whole is the representability and collective performativity of the groups during the event. As we have seen, the network is created by strong emotional and experience-based feelings derived from playing with danger collectively, in the face of uncertainty or fear. The network also establishes ways to differentiate between those that are part of it and those that are not, in its reclaiming of the city and its culture, and in the pride of belonging to the network.

In conclusion, our comparison of two *colles* throughout their experience with the *Correfoc* allowed us to identify and observe common elements of the social and relational dynamics of the nodes' collective identities, and to analyze their interdependencies with the network. Therefore, we focused our attention on an event with special characteristics, which allowed us to observe the construction of an extensive network that is the cause and effect of the event itself, which contains a strong symbolic element and an abundance of representability linked to popular and traditional local culture. In our study we have underlined the importance of the bidirectional power relations within the network, as well as how the existence of the network may be essential for the event to take place. Along the same line, we can conclude that an event may also be constructed when social bonding is generated by independent nodes that are strongly related to each other by the same goal, in this case, enacting a devil and playing with danger collectively.

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