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Catalan Festival Culture, Identities, and Independentism

Cultura catalana de la festa, identitats i independentisme

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Abstract

Drawing on anthropological fieldwork based primarily with the giant puppetry troupe of Girona, this paper explores identities forged by and expressed in participation in this form of Catalan festival culture and links between festival culture and the ongoing independence movement in Catalonia ("the process"). To assist in the analysis, a distinction is made between identity as lived experience (the ethnographic level) and identity as analyzed anthropologically. Analytical tools introduced include the multiciplity and diversity of identities; the concept of intersectionality, borrowed from critical race theory and black feminism, which posits that multiple identities are mutually constituting; and embodiment, which points to the existential base of identities. The paper's ethnographic core considers festival culture and identity in two contexts, local and national.

Keywords: festival culture, identity; nationalism; ethnography; intersectionality; Catalonia

Resum

A partir de treball de camp antropològic basat principalment amb la colla gegantera de Girona, aquest assaig explora les identitats forjades i expressades en la participació en aquesta forma de cultura festiva, així com els vincles entre la cultura festiva i el moviment independentista en curs a Catalunya (denominat "el procés"). En l'anàlisi es fa una distinció entre la identitat com a experiència viscuda (el nivell etnogràfic) i la identitat analitzada antropològicament. Les eines analítiques introduïdes inclouen la multiplicitat i la diversitat de les identitats; el concepte d'interseccionalitat (intersectionality), pres de la teoria crítica de la raça i el feminisme negre, que postula que les identitats múltiples són mútuament constituents; i l'encarnació (embodiment), que apunta a la base existencial de les identitats. El nucli etnogràfic del treball considera cultura festiva i identitat en dos contextos, el local i el nacional.

Paraules clau: cultura festiva; identitat; nacionalisme; etnografia; interseccionalitat; Catalunya

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Prologue

Episode 1: On September 13, 2009 the first in a series of unofficial municipal plebiscites on independence from the Spanish State was held in the autonomous community of Catalonia. Though I then spoke neither Catalan nor Spanish, I traveled from the city of Girona to the small town of Arenys de Munt, where the tree-lined main street was packed with people. Warned by the new acquaintance with whom I had come not to follow along to a counter-demonstration against the Falangists, members of a Madrid-based fascist organization, I instead visited the building where ballots were being cast. Shortly after the polls closed the media reported the outcome: "96% voted 'yes' in a plebiscite in which 33% of the population participated" (*El País* 2009), with population defined in this and related municipal plebiscites as local residents 16 and older, whether or not Spanish citizens (*Vilaweb* 2009).

Episode 2: Weeks later I went early to Girona's 28th "Gathering of Giants"—*gegants* are large festival figures—on the last day of the city's major festival, celebrating the municipality's patron saint, Saint Narcissus. At the city park I tried unsuccessfully to join the line of people picking up classic Catalan fare, bread with tomato and grilled sausage, only to learn that Euros could not buy the breakfast, which was free hospitality for festival performers, not spectators, from members of Girona's puppetry troupe. Nearby along the park's colonnade was the "planting" of dozens of *gegants* that preceded the day's parade (Figure 1). As I viewed the massive and magnificent festival effigies, I noticed signs pinned to their skirts with the name of their hometown, including Thuir in the Catalan-speaking region of France. Captivated, I imagined a network created across Catalonia and neighboring "North Catalonia" by traveling giant puppetry troupes (Kammerer 2013).

In these juxtaposed episodes, Catalan independentism and festival culture are separate, as they appeared to me prior to beginning anthropological fieldwork.[1] Yet the Catalan-language and Spanish-language media, which I could not then understand, likened the day of the vote in Arenys de Munt to a festival (*El País* 2009, *Vilaweb* 2009). Indeed, linkages between festival culture and Catalan identity have long existed, as I am learning; but others are new, emerging not only in Catalonia itself but also in public projections of Catalonia abroad in the context of a vibrant independence movement that has scaled up steadily since the vote in Arenys de Munt. Called "the process" (see Clua, this issue), this movement is working to secure a vote on independence, currently scheduled for November 9, 2014.

This paper explores festival culture and its links with independentism, as well as identities implicated in both. Admittedly preliminary and partial, as I am a neophyte to both festival studies and European studies, this exploration uses the term 'semiotic' in an evocative way, as a reminder of the complex ways that meaning is created and interpreted.[2] A brief description of the research precedes explanation of the choice of the festival culture frame and a quick overview of types of Catalan festival culture discussed in subsequent ethnographic examples. Next the complex issue of identities is considered from theoretical and ethnographic perspectives. This informs the discussion that follows of the ethnographic case of festival figures, the people who animate and

[1] Catalan words except names of festival figures, people, places, and organizations are italicized; I am responsible for the translations from Catalan and the photographs.

[2] I do not use the word 'symbolic' because American symbolic anthropology of the 1970s, the years of my doctoral training, largely side-stepped the complexity of meaning-making processes, lumping everything under one heading, and in the linguistically informed, technically sophisticated field of semiotics, the term 'symbol' has a restricted meaning (Parmentier 2009).

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Figure 1. Planting, Gathering of Giants, Girona, 2013 (*gegants* of Thuir in foreground).

accompany them, and their performances, mainly in Girona, but also elsewhere in Catalonia and other "Catalan Countries," an area spanning four countries where Catalan is spoken (Andorra, France, Italy, Spain). Selected examples of Catalan festival culture are explored in relation to identities within two contexts, municipal and national, drawing on the analytical tools introduced; Catalan identity and independentism are discussed within the second context. The descriptor 'national' rather than 'regional' is used to designate the context of Catalonia because Catalans consider themselves a "nation" (*nació*). A short conclusion looks both backwards at themes addressed and forward in light of the momentum towards independence.

Research

The anthropological research on which this paper draws (summers and autumns since 2010) is based in Girona with the Fal·lera Gironina, the city´s giant puppetry troupe. My fieldwork includes not only attending performances in Girona and elsewhere, but also weekly practices and occasional meetings of the group's leadership; assisting in preparations for Girona's major festival; helping out during this festival at the group's food stall, a way this and other voluntary organizations raise money for their activities; and joining the troupe's summer working vacations. For comparative perspectives beyond those obtained through traveling with the troupe to other municipalities, I have attended a Gathering of Giants in Pollença, Mallorca and *la Patum* in Berga, Catalonia's most famous Corpus Christi celebration (henceforth "the

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Patum"), and have done five weeks of fieldwork in Reus during Corpus Christi and the city's two major festivals. In this age of virtuality, field sites include Facebook, a Google Group, and a WhatsApp group. Although the Catalan independence movement is not the central focus of research, I have attended many events related to it with and without Girona's puppetry troupe.

Catalan Festival Culture

Why Festival Culture?

What I term festival culture is often talked and written about in Catalonia—and elsewhere—as "popular culture" (e.g., Ajuntament de Girona 2014; Prats et al. 1982). This somewhat contradictory label both endorses and obscures the source(s) of culture of this type. It endorses by declaring it popular, yet this declaration inhibits precisely the sort of investigation needed into the degree to which and ways in which traditions, practices, and events called popular culture are actually popular, that is, grassroots, or not—or both grassroots and official. These issues should be examined in any given case not just once but over time, as custody and control of a festival are often contested or multiple and can change, at times rapidly, as examples discussed later demonstrate. Referring to Bakhtin's well-known book on Rabelais, Marfany (1997: 45) observes, "the Bakhtinian opposition between a 'popular' carnivalesque festival and an 'official' festival of the Corpus [Christi] type is . . . a false dichotomy." This framing rightly rejected by Marfany equates popular with transgressive or ludic and official with solemn or stately, a contrast which often does not hold. Rather than evoking unexplored contrasts in a label, social scientists should be examining the complex nature of festival culture, as well as uses of it outside a festival context.

I employ the descriptor 'festival' for a variety of reasons.[3] First, the figures and performances considered here have historical roots in festivals. In Catalan, the domain of festival figures is referred to as *faràndula*, which a respected dictionary defines as "a group of traveling comedians" (*Diccionari català-valencià-balear* n.d.). But in Spanish-language media in the United States and Latin America, *farándula* means "show business" or "entertainment," that is, the world of spectacles and celebrities rather than of street performances. Importantly, *faràndula* is an inappropriate choice ethnographically because, despite appearing in the title of a book on Girona's festival culture co-authored by two members of the city's puppetry troupe (Perpinyà i Grau 2013), the word is little used by other members. A phrase I have often heard and read, *el món geganter*, does not translate easily into English. "World" (*món*) is no problem, but the adjective *geganter* is tricky. It refers to the giants, yet the translation "the giant world" is ambiguous and conveys little.

Festival Figures and Human Towers

The earliest known reference to giant puppetry in Catalonia is an official account dating from 1424 of Barcelona's Corpus Christi procession (Grau 1996: 11). The giant described is the lone figure of Goliath. Since at least the 18th century, however, giants have typically been paired, usually a male and a female, often a king and a queen. Indeed, during the Franco dictatorship all new *gegants* represented the Catholic monarchs, and existing ones "were rebaptized" as Ferdinand and Isabella (Grau 1996:

[3] In using the word 'festival', I am importing an unexamined concept. That in English 'festival' is both an adjective and a noun affords a certain amount of play, not unlike that of the festival world itself. The concept of *festa*/festival has its own ambiguities and has been subject to scrutiny by Catalan anthropologists and others. That debate I will engage later. The fuzzy yet indispensable term 'culture' is discussed in the next section.

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24). Besides giants, festival figures include beasts, with and without "fire" in the form of firecrackers, and "bigheads," oversized full-head masks. Beasts have been documented in Catalonia since the late Middle Ages. Throughout Catalonia, the eagle is associated with the procession of Corpus Christi (Gort i Palomar 2009: 47; Tarrés 1990). Bigheads, on the other hand, are a relatively recent addition. In Girona, they "were incorporated in the festival retinue during the second half of the 19th century" (Perpinyà i Grau 2013: 126).

Historically, festival effigies were carried by paid porters, sometimes with the right to the role by contract with the municipal government. Since the transition to democracy, they are animated, with varying degrees of choreographic complexity, by unpaid members of voluntary associations. Those associations that represent a city or town, rather than a neighborhood, school, or other organization, typically get some financial support from the municipal council. Nowadays puppets run the gamut from regal figures, such as Girona's Charlemagne and his partner Anna Gironella, to transgressive figures like Rigoberta of La Bisbal d'Empordà, who sprays spectators with water from the nipple of a bared breast. In the post-Franco period, the number of troupes, puppets, and Gatherings of Giants has exploded. The Association of Giant Puppetry Troupes of Catalonia, founded in 1984 with 27 troupes, now has 360 members, most of the existing troupes, representing some 20-25,000 people and 2,000 giants (Agrupació de Colles Geganteres de Catalunya n.d.).

Castells, literally "castles," are human towers up to 10-storeys (so far) built by members of voluntary associations, usually based in a municipality. Termed "towers" locally since at least the 19th century (Palomar 2002: 22), the English translation "human towers" is used by Catalans in an ethnographic case discussed below. Catalan scholarship on the subject concurs that they evolved at some point in the 1800s in the Tarragona region from a traditional dance, "Dance of the Valencians," which concludes with the construction of human towers and is itself linked to the *moixiganga*, dubbed a "paratheatrical dance" by Palomar (2007), also involving the construction of human towers.

A voluntary association of festival figure performers or human tower builders is called a *colla* in Catalan. I do not choose to translate this term as "gang" or "group," as do various dictionaries, or as "team," as in the *Smithsonian Magazine* (Mason 2014). Instead, I use 'troupe' to capture the essential performance dimension of these spectacles.

Identities

Literally hundreds of pages of scholarly debate have been devoted to ascribed vs. achieved, essentialist vs. non-essentialist, fixed vs. shifting identities. Analytical confusions mark many of these discussions, especially the confounding of local definitions of identity with analytical ones. At times this happens because an anthropologist presents the local definition of group identity, usually ethnic or national, without explicitly identifying it as an ethnographic account. A reader can therefore mistake it for the author's scholarly position on the concept of identity. This has led to the now often repeated and, unfortunately, commonly accepted judgment that until the publication of Barth's (1969) influential *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* and the explosion of interest in identities that work precipitated in the discipline, all anthropologists considered ethnic groups as bounded, ethnic identities as fixed, and both as unchanging. But Leach's (1954) earlier book on Kachin becoming Shan and vice versa in highland Burma demonstrates that not all of our anthropological ancestors were

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as naïve as they are frequently taken to be. That said, we anthropologists have not always taken sufficient care to distinguish ethnographic reporting from cultural analysis.

At an ethnographic level, people can, for example, define their identity, in a way that an anthropologist would analytically label 'ascribed'. Others who claim the same identity might well define it in a way that social scientists would label 'achieved'. Still others might conceptualize the same identity sometimes in a way analysts call 'ascribed' and sometimes in a way analysts call 'achieved'. In fact, I would argue that in contemporary Catalonia Catalan identity, as defined by people with this identity, can be accurately characterized analytically as the co-existence of ascribed and achieved definitions. Some Catalans feel themselves Catalan based on family history; some of these might even see their identity in terms of heredity or blood, although I have not heard anyone express this view. I have heard Catalans talk about their Catalan-ness in terms of shared history or "way of being" (*manera de ser*), although language is, in my experience, the most common criterion. Yet the dominant public definition is that Catalan identity can be gained. For instance, I have been told more than once that I can be Catalan if I choose, despite the fact that I am someone readily identifiable as foreign. Conceptually, this definition of Catalan-ness as based on desire and action opened space for the many immigrants who have arrived in Catalonia, from the 1950s onwards, from other parts of Spain and elsewhere.

Another "muddle in the models," to borrow a phrase from the anthropologist David M. Schneider (1965), is to seek a fixed analytical concept of identity at all. I find defining identity as a concept as silly and impossible an exercise as defining our core concept of culture. When viewed analytically rather than ethnographically, both are, in my view, examples of what Blumer (1954:7) calls "sensitizing concepts"; in contrast to "definitive concepts," which "provide prescriptions of what to see," sensitizing concepts "merely suggest directions along which to look. . . . [T]hey rest on a general sense of what is relevant."

Social science provides analytical tools beyond this "general sense" evoked by Blumer to help us explore the lived experience of what we analytically dub 'identity'. For the purposes of this paper, I highlight three, starting with the multiplicity of identities. Thus far I have used this term mainly in the plural because each individual has many senses of self. I, for instance, am a woman, a mother, a teacher, an anthropologist, an American, and much more. A reader might well point to analytical confusion here. Some of these are what sociologists term "roles," some are individual identities, and some are what might be termed collective identities. In the ethnographic section, I tack back and forth among these, reflecting the complexities of lived experience.

This brings us to the second tool, "intersectionality,"[4] which grew from the powerful fusion of critical race theory and black feminism (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000). Originally applied to intersecting forms of discrimination, as well as oppression and violence, intersectionality has from its outset been linked to issues of identity, specifically to racial and gender identity. It provides an analytical lens for looking at the ways in which multiple senses of self, multiple identities, are linked and, in Collins's (2000: 42) words, "mutually constructing." Following from both multiplicity and intersectionality is diversity of identities. The same identity can be experienced

[4] Thanks to students in my qualitative methods seminar for introducing me to intersectionality.

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differently depending on the panoply of other identities in play and their mutual construction.[5]

Akin to the way that I invoked semiotics almost as a theoretical yellow highlighter of meaning making, now I am invoking "embodiment," the third tool, to focus attention on the way bodily actions are implicated in identities. In doing so, I borrow from Csordas (1990), who proposed "embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology," specifically with reference to religion and the self. Like Csordas (1990: 5), although in a more evocative manner, I use the concept of embodiment to get at "the existential ground of culture" and of identity.

Contextualizing Catalan Festival Culture

Context 1—Municipal Identity: "It's an absolutely local book"

With these words, Nuxu Perpinyà, a founder of Girona's current puppetry troupe, introduced the volume he co-authored on the 500-year history of the city's festival imagery at a book presentation. Indeed, that Catalan festival culture is profoundly local was clear from the start of my fieldwork. "The giants of Amer are more beautiful than those of Girona," my former downstairs neighbor, who hails from Amer, told me when first we met. Yet, despite many similarities across communities and exchange visits between them, differences exist across localities in the ways festival culture is experienced, whether as performers or as members of the public.

Here I focus on Girona, in part through comparisons with other sites. The identity with which I start is that of being a member of the troupe. Girona's troupe, like many other puppetry troupes throughout Catalonia and the Catalan Countries, is a "voluntary association" (*associació de voluntariat*). In fact, Girona's troupe is profoundly voluntary; unlike in many other localities, there are no official "members" or "partners" (*socis*) in any formal sense. When someone who is interested in possibly joining comes to a practice, a member shows the visitor the festival figures, explains a bit about the troupe's activities, and makes some personal introductions. When, after witnessing this soft-sell—almost no-sell—approach several times, I asked a long-time member about it, his emphatic response was that the person has to want to join and anyone who wants to will return.

Let me introduce the troupe and the festival figures in more detail. The Fal·lera Gironina was founded in 1997 by some of its current members and others. Its name translates as "Gironan Obsession" or "Gironan Infatuation." According to its website, "currently it is formed of some 50 people" of "different generations" who "share an obsession for the giants and bigheads of the city" (Fal·lera Gironina n.d.).[6] The four sections are musicians; *geganters*, who animate the giants; big-head wearers; and stick-dancers, who clash wooden batons (*bastons*); in addition, others, mainly family members of performers, accompany the troupe's parades. Girona as a municipality has four *gegants*, the antique pair, among Catalonia's "hundred year-old giants," and the new pair, already mentioned, Charlemagne and Anna Gironella.

The choice of Charlemagne by the designer, the Gironan artist and writer Carles Vivó, is tied to the city's mythical history. The Government of Catalonia's English-

[5] Constructions of Catalan identities are in conversation, sometimes heated, with Spanish identity as projected by the Spanish state and media and with the Spanish identities of individuals, but those "dialogues of identity" are not the focus of this paper (Kammerer 1996:320).

[6] Recognized by many as Catalonia's most professionalized troupe, the Fal·lera has supporters and detractors, with criticisms including that it travels too much, plays the wrong music, and has insufficiently traditional choreography. Such topics are grist for another paper on innovation and conservation and attendant disputes in the field of Catalan festival culture.

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language website calls Girona "the city of Charlemagne," and acknowledges the "legendary" nature of this "link," given that the Emperor likely never visited either the city or the region, although "both Girona and Barcelona surrendered to his son Louis" (Generalitat n.d.). Nonetheless, according to the Government's website, "Girona is linked to the mythical footprint left here by Charlemagne," and the Cathedral has a bell tower "popularly known as Charlemagne's Tower" and an Episcopal chair known as the "Chair of Charlemagne." The festival figure itself, if its identity is known, as it is to members of the Fal·lera and some spectators, establishes a connection between the city and Charlemagne even absent knowledge of the "legendary link."

Although I have never heard any Fal·lera member describe their affiliation with the troupe explicitly in terms of identity, a shared sense of connection is expressed in other words and, importantly, in actions. Even as there are family ties and friendships within the group and even as the sections are groups within the group, there are also bonds among all those who are, in the words of one, "part of our big family." Indeed the image of the family is recurrent in members' conversations, emails, and Facebook posts. The Fal·lera "family" includes active members, past members who are active when they can be or when they are needed for one sort of expertise or another, and other "friends," who likewise share their labor and love of the enterprise. On numerous unsolicited and unconnected occasions various members of this "family" have told me how much they value knowing people of all ages with diverse life experiences and work worlds whom they would not have known were it not for their shared voluntary commitment to the troupe.

For some, this commitment is intimately linked to the fact that the troupe performs festival culture, but for others what is central is the shared commitment rather than the particular endeavor. Once, after describing how much he valued working hard and having fun with others on a chosen shared task, a member joked that they could be "making candies" together. This focus on voluntariness and on being together links to the pressure-free manner in which members introduce the troupe and its activities to potential members. Even though, in my experience as a participant observer, members of Girona's puppetry troupe do not talk about voluntary associations and their participation in them in terms of identity—except one, who spoke in terms of a familial tradition of such participation—the many festival culture associations are a vital part of Catalan culture and social life, as are the many voluntary associations in other ambits.

For members of Girona's puppetry troupe, actions based on a shared sense of belonging include taking care of one another, the festival figures, and the troupe's space in a city-owned building. During performances those *geganters* not animating a figure commonly watch for potential problems, whether a spectator too close to a moving figure, a loose paving stone, or a low-hanging branch. The Fal·lera's *geganters* do this routinely, but so also do wearers of big-heads, musicians, and stick-dancers, all without being explicitly taught or requested to do so (Kammerer 2011). Taking care extends, for example, to making sure everyone has a ride home at the end of a long day of travel and performance. This is not to say that some members are not more likely than others to stay as long as needed to unpack the bus after a performance away or work many hours at the troupe´s food stall. What I want to underscore here, however, is the shared sense of belonging and responsibility that is voluntarily assumed and enacted.

In any parade there is interplay and play within and across the four Fal·lera sections, as well as with members of the Fal·lera family who accompany the spectacle. Yet for everyone, interactions with and reactions of spectators, particularly children, are important. Even if spectators are few, if they are engaged and entertained Fal·lera members are happy, regardless of how long the route, interminable the stops, or hot the

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day. Being a performer is thus another identity held by members of Girona's puppetry troupe, although I have rarely heard it spoken of directly.

Fal·lera members are, however, not just any performers, but performers from Girona. One musician, for instance, during each parade outside Girona regularly shouts out the troupe's name and city at the end of at least one song. On the many occasions I witnessed a spectator ask where the troupe is from, the member who fielded the question and any others in hearing distance were visibly pleased. Such inquiries signal appreciation for the performance and figures themselves; they also signal the association Catalans make between puppetry troupes and the localities they represent. Yet how representing Girona is experienced by members of the troupe is diverse: some are life-long residents, others are recent arrivals, and still others are not residents.

The most emblematic and popular of Girona's bigheads, Esquivamosques (Figure 2), has a "fly"— a *mosca* in Catalan — perched on its nose, evoking a local

Figure 2. Esquivamosques, "We Are School! Parade," Barcelona, June 14, 2014.

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legend. During an attack on the city French soldiers desecrated the patron saint's tomb, releasing a swarm of flies that vanquished the invading troops. The "flies of Saint Narcissus" are well-known to young and old in Girona. The Fal·lera's dramatic evening "dance of the plaza" that inaugurates Girona's major festival closes with two pairs of swirling giants, lit by spotlights, disappearing into City Hall amidst a storm of swirling flies, stamped on feather-light white paper and blasted from balconies on either side of the narrow plaza. Children perched on parents' shoulders eagerly grab into the air, and bigger children excitedly scurry underfoot, reaching down to the pavement to capture flies. This blizzard of flies plus the preceding dances by each of the Fal·lera's sections, the parade through the city that culminates in this performance, and the "Gathering of Giants" and associated parade that close the major festival, as well as other annual and occasional performances, are the ways Gironan festival culture is directly experienced.

What I want to emphasize is that despite the similarities in festival culture across Catalan cities and towns, there are differences in the ways that it is inscribed experientially—embodied—in the populace. In Berga, people speak of carrying the Patum in their bodies (Noyes 2003), whether or not they perform the various figures, each to its own well-known music. The line between performer and spectator is blurred, as from childhood onwards people "jump" in unison in the small square in front of City Hall. In Reus, experiences of festival effigies and their performances have sensory dimensions specific to that city. The "thunderstorm," a festival-opening sequence of explosions around the central plaza, reverberates in the bodies of everyone present; the municipal "Festival Shop" does a brisk business in small plastic models of the city's giants and famous "mule" that children bring with them to the figures' performances; and, as in Berga, diminutive replicas of various figures are danced by youth—with adult assistance and supervision—at a children's version of the festival.

That Girona's major festival and its giant figures are not inextricably linked for the city's current political leaders is evidenced by the official video announcement of the 2014 event, which begins with a bighead beckoning and includes the famous Esquivamosques, but, to the disappointment and consternation of a number of Fal·lera members, lacks any images of the giants. In Berga, a participant in the Patum is a *patumaire*, with the suffix *–aire* denoting doing something. No equivalent Gironan label for festival participants exists, and the local shorthand for the city's major festival, *Fires*, meaning "markets," does not lend itself to generating one. Even as festival culture is very local, the ways it is inscribed in local identities and whether, how, and to what degree it is openly discussed in terms of identity varies from one municipality to another.

Context 2—Catalan National Identity and Independentism: "Festival . . . constitutes the ideal framework for expressing Catalan identity in public space"

The opening quotation is from the announcement of a 2014 exhibition organized by the Government of Catalonia and other entities, titled "Popular Festival, Civic Catalan Identity," posted on Berga City Hall's website because the Patum is among the festivals included in the show's audiovisual. That festival culture is an expression of Catalan identity is stated frequently in print, whether newspaper articles or academic works, using the word *catalanitat*. Interestingly, however, this is not a word I have heard in everyday speech, although I have heard it in scholarly talks. Members of Girona's puppetry troupe do not talk explicitly about their *catalanitat*, yet their choice to travel several times each year to major festivals in North Catalonia is an expression of shared identity with Catalans in France who are not so much recuperating Catalan

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traditions as adopting those of their southern neighbors. Communities in North Catalonia that never had *gegants*, beasts with fire, or human towers now have troupes performing these, with new ones in the making, and the Fal·lera family gives them support in the form of performances.

In participating in Catalan National Day—*la Diada*—in Girona in 2009 and 2010, the Fal·lera as an organization signaled through its actions its engagement with Catalan identity. Participation in those years, however, did not unequivocally signal commitment to independentism because the movement had not yet taken off, although independentism might well have been a motivation for some members. Participation in the massive 2012 National Day demonstration in Barcelona did signal that commitment. Many Fal·lera members went, but as individuals or family units rather than as a troupe.

On December 12, 2011, Girona became the first provincial capital to join the "Association of Municipalities for Independence" (*directe!cat* 2011). On *la Diada* 2013, the giants Charlemagne and Anna Gironella and several bigheads, including Esquivamosques, musicians, and other troupe members participated in the human chain for independence, which extended from the border with North Catalonia to that with Valencia, the adjacent autonomous community to the south (Figure 3). In June, 2014,

Figure 3. Fal·lera Gironina, "The Catalan Way for Independence," National Day, 2013.

the Fal·lera danced Charlemagne, Anna Gironella, and a number of bigheads in a Barcelona demonstration to support the Catalan linguistic immersion program, which a Spanish Constitutional Court decision and a new federal education law dismantle (see Figure 2). Many troupe members participated in the 2014 National Day, which had the slogan "Now Is the Time," but no festival figures appeared for logistical reasons: each

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demonstrator had an assigned location and wore a red or yellow T-shirt to compose the stripes of an enormous Catalan national flag in the shape of a V. According to the demonstration's website, the V stands for "the 'way' [*via*] to make the 'will' [*voluntat*] explicit through the act 'to vote' [*votar*]." In Catalan this wording is nicely alliterative, as is the phrase "we want to vote our will," also used to describe the meaning of the V (*Ara és l'hora* 2014).

As the independence movement has accelerated, so too have independentist references in festival culture performances increased. I first saw giants wearing the starred national flag—*l'estelada*—which signals independentism, at a major festival outside Girona on the day of the 2012 parliamentary elections, widely considered a preliminary referendum on independence because parties were publicly either for or against separation from Spain (Figure 4). When similar displays began is unknown,[7] but

Figure 4. Giants of Serinyà , November 25, 2012.

the first Catalonia-wide news coverage was in 2013. In the protocol-breaking "surprise at the Patum of Berga,"

[7] In 2007 the newly elected mayor of Prats de Lluçanès requested that the town´s *gegant* stop wearing an *estelada* (*Racó català* 2007). Catalans then commonly associated this flag with Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, the pro-independence party to which the town's previous mayor belonged. The earliest reference I have found to a *gegant* wearing an *estelada* after the flag´s exclusive association with a single party had been broken by the surge in support for independence dates from two days before the 2012 National Day (*NacióGranallers.cat* 2012).

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> The Eagle, the most representative and solemn symbol of the festival, did its dance with a starred national flag on its neck, something that provoked a unanimous cry in favor of independence. The gesture is unique and has great value in a population that respects tradition and has made the festival one of the great bases of its identity (Vilaweb 2013).

According to a regional news source, the eagle's addition of the starred national flag did not originate from the troupe that carries it or even from other groups of Patum performers. Rather, "the majority of the members of the troupes agreed to the invitation from the ANC [Catalan National Assembly] to show sovereigntist elements during the jumps [dances]" (*Regió7* 2013). The Catalan National Assembly, officially founded in 2012, is a voluntary communitarian movement that grew out of the plebiscites begun in 2009 in Arenys de Munt. Neither a governmental organization nor a political party, the Assembly is, according to its English language website (*assemblea.cat* n.d.a.), "a popular, unified, plural and democratic organisation working towards Catalonia becoming a new European State." From 2012 onwards, it has organized the massive National Day demonstrations. In 2014 not only the eagle but also other famous Berguedan festival figures, including the beloved mules (*guites*), wore the starred flag around their necks at the Patum, in a plaza bedecked with many other signs in both Catalan and English supporting independence (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Eagle with Starred National Flag, the Patum, Berga, 2014.

In Girona, the current mayor Carles Puigdemont has publicly harnessed not the festival image of Charlemagne but the Emperor's legendary image to the independence movement. At "Catalonia, Freedom and Dignity 2014," a day-long series of events sponsored by the newspaper *El Punt Avui*, Carles Puigdemont (2014) evoked Charlemagne in his opening remarks (delivered in absentia) to the meeting of the Catalan National Assembly's initiative "World Meets Catalonia," which, like the signs

in English at the 2014 Patum, seeks support from outside Spain for Catalonia's independence—or at least its right to decide its future by democratic vote. The mayor's brief speech addressed Europe in particular:

> With these lines I would like to give you a very warm welcome to our city, Girona, and to our country, Catalonia, which across the centuries has seen different cultures and civilizations pass that in the end have formed what we are today: a welcoming society, open to the world and especially towards Europe because the history of Europe has also been written in Catalonia and in our cities. In Girona, for example, the footprint of Charlemagne is present and is inscribed in our most intimate identity. We are part of the same thing, due to the physical reality but, most importantly, to political will.

Mayor Puigdemont's remarks closed with thanks to those in attendance "for listening to us and for helping us to make our voice heard and to spread our yearnings throughout the places from which you have come." With his words, Girona's mayor not only voiced a major theme of pro-independence discourse, namely, that Catalonia is and has long been a part of Europe, but also asserted a privileged position for his city in this claim. What he evoked was meaningful to those in the audience who know the legendary and documented history of Girona's place in the Holy Roman Empire, signaled by Charlemagne's orb and scepter (see Figures 2 & 3). These locally resonant meanings were, however, likely absent for most of the non-locals in attendance, apart perhaps from the invited speakers, all from the United Kingdom or the United States with expertise on Catalonia and fluency in Catalan. From a semiotic perspective then, the remarks likely missed their foreign marks. The mayor's words of welcome are an example in which a theme evident in local festival culture, namely, Charlemagne's tie to Gironan identity, is harnessed for political purposes in a manner that involves no meaningful intersection. No members of the Fal·lera Gironina, unless I am counted as one, were in attendance; neither were the mayor's remarks reported in the local newspapers.

The next ethnographic example, which brings back the human towers introduced earlier, is a case in which Catalan festival culture troupes actively engaged in the projection of Catalonia's political hopes to the world outside Spain, specifically Europe. It also provides additional evidence of the creative ways in which the Catalan National Assembly, the voluntary association that is the engine of the independence movement, has harnessed the power of festival culture to entertain and engage.[8] On June 8, 2014 in seven European capitals and in Barcelona, soon-to-be the capital of a new state of Europe in the hopes of many in Catalonia, well-known Catalan troupes built "Human Towers for Democracy" (*assemblea.cat* n.d.b.) as part of efforts to publicize Catalonia's aspirations to vote democratically on November 9, 2014 to decide whether Catalonia should be a state and whether that state should be independent (Figure 6).[9]

Although born from festival culture and performed within it at major festivals, human towers have long existed in a non-festival context in Catalonia itself. The 25th Contest of Human Towers (*Concurs de Castells* n.d.), complete with corporate and government sponsorship and cash prizes, was held in Tarragona in October, 2014. Whether human towers are a sport or still part of the festival world is currently

[8] Òmnium Cultural, a voluntary association devoted to "the promotion and recovery of the Catalan language and culture" founded during the Franco dictatorship (*Enciclopèdia Catalana* n.d.), has joined with the Catalan National Assembly in support of "the process."

[9] Human tower troupes' engagement in "the process" towards independence has continued. At the 2014 National Day demonstration organized by the Catalan National Assembly and Òmnium, some 50 troupes constructed towers along the V-shaped human Catalan flag that filled Barcelona's boulevards.

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discussed in Catalonia. Through my choice of 'troupe' rather than 'team' to designate the groups of human tower builders, I am focusing on their festival dimensions, which are in some ways even more alive than when I first arrived in Catalonia.

Figure 6. "Catalans Want to Vote — Human Tower for Democracy," Market Square, Brussels, June 8, 2014.

Twice early in my fieldwork someone in Girona misunderstood my research topic as human towers rather than festival figures and their performances—sad testaments to the state of my Catalan! I was chided for my choice, once by an academic and once by a bus driver, and both critics gave the same reason: human towers are not a tradition here; they are a tradition of southern Catalonia. Girona does not have a human tower troupe but city government and local people alike are increasingly claiming that of the adjacent city of Salt as their own, most recently through the troupe's prominent appearance in the official video announcing the 2014 major festival. According to one

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of the founders of Salt's troupe, some 20 years ago Girona's city government declined a request to be the home base (Ramon Grau, personal communication). I have attended the "Human Tower Day" at Girona's major festival since 2009. Each year the audience has been larger, as has that at the "Climb of the Pillar of Four." In this night-time festival event, a 4-storey tower, made up of a single person at each level except the base, ascends the 90 steps of the Girona Cathedral illuminated by spotlights. Here I want to underscore two points: (1) the rapidity of cultural change in terms of both the spread of this form of festival culture throughout Catalonia and into North Catalonia and its implication in identities at local and national levels, and (2) the use of this form of festival culture to advance the independence movement.

Numerous reasons undoubtedly lie behind the choice of human towers to project Catalan independentism abroad, not least of which is their striking visual impact. Moreover, a well-known slogan associated with the endeavor is "strength, balance, courage, and good sense" (Ajuntament de Tarragona, n.d.), all values—especially the latter (*seny*)—esteemed in Catalan culture. The expression "*fer pinya*," meaning "to make a close-knit group," that describes making the solid base for a human tower, is widely used in Catalonia to refer to banding together or collaborating as a group for a shared purpose, and is evoked by politicians with reference to "the process." And in the world of human towers everyone is important from the strongest to the tiniest, from the water carrier to the small child atop the summit. In the post-Franco period, troupes are accessible to women and to immigrants, so the towers themselves visually display the "open" and "welcoming" character of Catalan society to which Girona's mayor referred. In other words, the qualities of this image of Catalonia that has been projected externally contribute to its adoption within Catalonia.

Reprise and Onward (*Endavant*)

This speculative and wide-ranging paper has illustrated diversity and multiplicity of identities associated with Catalan festival culture, their mutual construction and intersection in local and national contexts, the rapidity with which identities can change, and the political uses of festival culture by both politicians and voluntary associations with independentist aims. According to the exhibition announcement, quoted in the title of the preceding ethnographic section,

> For decades, lacking the tools of a modern state, Catalan society's civico-political activity has been expressed through various cultural elements. . . . Nowadays, popular festival is one of the few mass movements unequivocally Catalan in character that the society uses to demonstrate the civic dimension of its members (Ajuntament de Berga 2014).

As an analyst, I would amend this statement somewhat. Its phrasing implies that with the arrival of the tools of a modern state, Catalan popular festival can wither away or disappear without consequences. Quite the contrary, I would argue: Catalan festival culture, which is performed by the members of the many voluntary associations that dance festival figures or build human towers, witnessed by the public, and enjoyed by both as participants in different ways, does not simply demonstrate civic behavior—or "express" it, as is stated in the quotation at the start of the previous section. Rather, Catalan festival culture contributes to creating and recreating a civic society[10] that is at

[10] I offer due deference to Clifford Geertz´s (1973:94) famous distinction between 'model of" and 'model for'.

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once serious and ludic, cooperative and competitive, and, above all, participatory—just the base needed for an independent democratic state.

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