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## Chanting what cannot be said. The chants of Saint Anthony in Artà, Majorca

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### Abstract

On the eve of the festival of Saint Anthony in the town of Artà (Majorca), groups of neighbours communicate with each other chanting out information that is difficult to transmit the rest of the year. During the evening around the fire, the chant enables hidden feelings to be expressed and to show attitudes, express opinions and details of social and personal life that, outside of this occasion, would seem untimely or inappropriate to be expressed in public.

Why is it that some things have to be chanted in order to express them? Which factors play a key role in this social moment? The wild night of devils, fire, food and alcohol becomes social (and therefore personal) due to, mainly, the chant. You have to chant what cannot be said: identity, social links, criticisms, discrepancies and feelings.

**Keywords:** chant, improvised text, gender, festival.

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During the festival of Saint Anthony, in some towns on the island of Majorca, groups of neighbours communicate with each other by means of chanting, giving out information that is difficult to say or communicate the rest of the year. At one moment on the night of the festival, and only around the bonfire of this night, the chant enables people to transmit hidden feelings and show attitudes, express opinions and details of social and personal life that outside that particular night would seem untimely or inappropriate to be expressed in a public space. That night, the discretion or private trust that, generally speaking, the inhabitants of the town maintain for certain items of information make way for a freer and more enunciated expression in a shared space.

Why do these things have to be chanted to be able to say them? Which factors play a key role in this social moment and make the communicative situation possible? The following pages aim to answer these questions from the observation of a specific festival: the festival of Saint Anthony in the town of Artà.

However, before analysing this festival, we need to specify the current use on the island of the *gloses* or chants of improvised text — with some references to previous generations —, and what consideration they are afforded. In the Balearic Islands[1] a majority of the inhabitants of the small towns or villages, both men and women, know how to chant *gloses* or *cançons*, which are the result of the practice on festive occasions of untiringly repeating a tune which on resumption has different verses. We can still hear them today in diverse local festivals, at the traditional pig-slaughtering ritual and during the carnival and festivals of Saint Anthony. These *gloses* or four-line verses that appear improvised but are almost never created at that very moment, and are more often than not quotes or adaptations that are produced for circumstance of the *gloses* that are most known and remembered by a large part of the population. Depending on the degree of involvement of each person present, the memory of a person may result in having between one hundred and three or four hundred texts on hand, which are immediately remembered by the more regular *cantadors*. Despite the fact that on these occasions completely new texts are rarely created, the participants are capable of constructing between them a chanted dialogue and a social interaction of quite remarkable dimensions. Our observation will be focused on the chant of these non-specialists, of these anonymous actors who, nevertheless, are the indispensables pillars of the festivals.

However, to speak of these little-known protagonists, we must briefly introduce the figures situated in the foreground of the visible chant: the *glosadors* or specialists in creating and chanting *gloses*.

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### 1. The art of the *glosador* in Majorca[2]

Until some forty years ago, the *glosador* was almost always a man and the usual place where he chanted was the café or theatre. He occupied a privileged place of “town crier” in the rural societies of Majorca and Menorca[3] when transmitting news and, above all, when contributing criticisms and reflection. The charisma and linguistic refinement gave him, along with the years and the experience, legitimacy in the public use of the word, a use that was reserved for specific moments of the main festival of the year. The *glosadors* of Majorca demonstrated this singular consideration by means of elegant attire, with a gentleman’s tie. When two or more *glosadors* met in a combat of *gloses* (the *gloses de picat*) they developed an attitude of exhibition and defiance linked directly to a specific image of masculinity, and they attacked each other with a verbal virulence that would be unforgivable outside of the ritualised framework. In Menorca, the chanting combats would not allow any feminine participation due to the language considered “inappropriate” from the mouth of a woman and, moreover, as it involved argumentations and images relating to sex. The profound social transformation in questions of gender over the last thirty years, however, has meant that gradually, on both islands, women have taken on this previously exclusively male role.

The value and importance given to this voice that is expressed before the people of the town comes from what it says, what the words say and the skill of presenting them, and not the search for an aesthetic located in the tune or the beauty of the chant, elements which, even though appreciated, take second place. In this way, the melodic structure (generally a single melody that each *glosador* has made his own, adapting it for his particular use from among the melodies of other predecessors) constitutes a merely formal framework that transforms in the correct terms all that is expressed, at the same level as do the poetic structure and the behavioural codes, of space and time. However, they must chant within the models of what the listeners feel to be suitable. A “bad interpretation” chanted will always decrease the reputation of the *glosador*.

Those attending the session legitimate the words of the *glosador* by laughing or applauding. The *cantador* shows the mastery of the expression and the knowledge of the stages that must be covered: he begins with the essential praises, excuses himself for what he will say, presents himself as clumsy and inexpert, to progressively reach the risky statements or the transgressions that everyone awaits. When he alludes to someone who is present — and he usually does so very directly —, that person cannot become angry. If he or she wants to respond to the *glosador* he or she must do it chanting with the same elegance and humour. The session of *glosar* constructs, therefore, a space for speaking in a surprisingly direct and explicit way, a space of freedom that we know dates back to at least two hundred years ago. It is not, however, a voice that only expresses a personal opinion: it is the voice of someone who calculates and weighs the words, taking into account the reactions of those present, assuming a certain representation of the opinions or feelings detected among some of those present.

At the end of the session — sometimes quite long, like in the evenings of *glosats* of Menorca, which may last a whole winter’s night — diverse agreements and disagreements have been stated in the heart of the group gathered. They share complaints and conflicts. The *glosar* is a part of the festival that constructs and makes those gathered to sense a common space. Those attending know that the *cantador* plays a role in the social construction, as if he was a catalyst. Nevertheless, his satirical songs only occupy a moment and create a verbal and sonorous space amidst the other festive spaces, where diverse activities alternate in an accepted arrangement: emblematic songs and demonstrations of power and authority, as well as the individual participation that ranges from the ball to the meals and the religious ceremonies.

The formulation of the verses follows a very defined structure, and *cantadors* possess a very extensive repertoire of texts that they remember, and can use — adapting them to the new situation, as if making a timely quote — or can transform them changing some words or verse. Until scarcely fifty years ago the majority of *cantadors* were illiterate people yet very agile when improvising verses; today they continue applying strategies such as always beginning thinking of the last verse, “that which has to charm,” to then shape the other three. To do this the *glosador* uses a certain number of automatic procedures and counts on the complicity and knowledge that those listening have of the procedures and the linguistic possibilities.

In the years of General Franco’s dictatorship many of the sessions of the *glosadors* — the most public — inevitably lost the social criticism part. From the mid-20th century, the social presence of the activity of *glosar* decreased until becoming confined to the older generation. During the years of democratic transition the interest in rediscovering an image of the collective and popular word revived these chants, but within the same context they were adapted to the new values of the culture called “traditional”: what was considered old, authentic and unique. Later on — in the last ten years — a new generation of young people have started to take up this voice again within a contemporary setting where the activity now has some notably different characteristics.

The social strength of the chants has been surpassed by a certain aesthetic of the chant and the act: in reality, today few mayors can lose their post due to the criticism of a *glosador*. In contrast, what prevails is the feeling of perpetuating a past and a cultural identity, with a thread of exoticism and nostalgia for a period that those who cultivate melancholy have hardly known. It has become common for these chants to be performed on stage with a microphone and to be recorded. In short, that which was usual and, therefore, indispensable in social life, has today become a piece of “cultural heritage” (that must be preserved precisely because it is no longer necessary or indispensable). However, in current society this living and direct discourse chanted in the square of the town or on the stage — with few mediations and speaking directly to the closest people — continues having an important social weight and is re-emerging among young people, clearly with a new distribution of roles and values. Few of the old *glosadors* are still active, but a surprising generation of young *cantadors* has emerged, joined in the form of a cultural association and who, with a good knowledge of the techniques, are deeply reviving the subjects and the language.

The social effect of the old *glosadors* of Majorca when they put together arguments to claim justice, strengthen the more hegemonic rules and values, or directly satirise a person, is reflected in this *glosa*:

'Free us, Saint Anthony,  
from the tongue of the chanter,  
who works like a painter,  
who with the same colour  
can paint a saint or a devil.

(Ginard, 1966-1975, II: 298)

On this island the *glosador* always chants without any instrumental accompaniment, and with a single melody that he has made his own (syllabic and of a recitative aspect, with some melismas, a timbre and some vocal gestures that recall the melodies of the tunes of the country). The minimum structure of versification (which the non-professionals always use) is a simple heptasyllabic four-line verse with *abba* or *abab* rhyme, but the *glosadors* immediately expand it in more verses (*abbbba*, for example), up to a dozen verses that alternate two rhymes, and sometimes they combine three. Then it can be given the name of *glosat*. They can even be transformed into narrative songs or *long songs*, like the ones called *songs of death*. In short, the *glosador* could cover any subject that was proposed to him, even the most absurd or conceptual[4].

## 2. Saying new things through words already said

In the shadow of this inventive made fertile by the more or less professional *glosadors*, people from Balearic rural society undertook an intense activity of chanting during the festive situations, as well as at work. This was very common — if we refer to the descriptions and the memory that has been recorded — in the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, with a later decrease in later decades. It was a skill shared by a large section of society and even today we can see this capacity of expressing oneself chanting *gloses* among a large number of the inhabitants of the central plain and the eastern side of the island of Majorca. Both a man and a woman, even in a conversation between friends, can answer a question with a four-line verse that they remember at that moment, with the legitimacy that the repeated oral knowledge gives it. Clearly, the capacity to evoke these *cançons* is much higher in older people, but some young people can still surprise us with a notable skill when remembering texts.

These *cançons*[5] are chanted at very specific moments of collective life: at some moment of the main festivals of each town, family festivals and celebrations (pig-slaughtering, weddings) or meetings of friends (whether annual, like carnival, or occasional, like meetings of groups of friends in a country cottage, above all in summer). They usually arise together with daring, erotic or dance songs. Moreover, at the end of a session of *glosadors*, in a corner of the room some of those attending may remain to chant *cançons* of this type.

In recent years, many of them are chanted in the *ximbombades*, the chants done to the rhythm of the *ximbomba*, the friction drum[6] which becomes a symbol of the *darrers dies*, the last days; in other words the days of carnival or the "last days" before the Lent. The *ximbombades* at carnival time are played in private spaces, in homes or garages, with friends and/or family, dressed up in fancy dress and masked, young and old, around a meal where there is never a lack of pork delights with the typical home-made *sobrassades*, a pâté made with red pepper, or the traditionally-made liquors, especially the *herbes dolces*, sweet herbs. Jokes, laughter, direct satires, chants with *ximbomba* and narrative chants of a daring and erotic nature are combined during the hours of a long winter night until the dawn.

The tunes of the *cançons* with *ximbombades* are different from when the *ximbomba* is played and notably different from the tunes of the *glosadors*: with a precise beat and with traits very similar across the island. They do not have the freedom of ornamentation or the "unmeasured" structure of the *glosador*, but rather a much simpler tune and of a tonal aspect, with certain quite characteristic ornamentations.

The other big annual moment of the *cançons*, as has been mentioned, is during the festival of Saint Anthony. Many towns on the island of Majorca have this saints' day, the 17 January, as one of the main festivals or they have him as their patron saint; or they place the festival on Saint Sebastian's Day (20 January), on days on which everything indicates that in the past the most important annual festival was going on. In fact, Saint Anthony is the most common festival in the entire area of Romance languages, with elements — fire, devils, bells and the tau symbol — very common in Italy, Corsica and Sardinia, and in all the countries of the Iberian Peninsula (as well as large parts of Latin America). This saint takes on symbols that form part of the most shared mythical foundation in the Latin cultural space of past centuries, and which originate from the Mediterranean societies in Antiquity[7].

In the north-eastern part of Majorca the towns of Sa Pobla and of Artà celebrate some of the most popular festivals of Saint Anthony. In the following pages we study the festival of Artà, a town of approximately five thousand inhabitants, making use of a recent piece of research[8].

On the eve of the saint's day, from eight in the morning, hundreds of young people and adults (up to one thousand at some moments) parade through the streets following the dance of the devils, who are accompanied by the music of the local band and, above all, by a song that everyone knows, a tune that all the participants identify with the town. The retinue would have as a main priority the collection of money or objects for the festival and for the *obreria*, the religious brotherhood that takes care of the altar and the saint. Throughout the day the band repeats the same tune without stopping — only sometimes alternating with another one —, and everyone sings hundreds and hundreds of times, until they are exhausted. The main tune

has a tonal appearance, with a characteristic polyrhythmic articulation (between 6/8 and 3/4, as can be heard on the audiovisual recordings). It can be sung in two voices in parallel thirds, but this is rarely done.

After a short break for food in the early afternoon, at 6 p.m. the retinue reforms to go to the parish church at 7 p.m. There, amid the mass of people and the uproar, crushed together and standing they hold the service of Compline, which ends with the chant dedicated to the saint, a chant that everyone chants, or rather, cries out with all their strength to close with the cries of "visques!", long live the saint and the town. At the exit, the devils — who, like the musical band, never enter the church — and the authorities once again tour a major part of the town to light the main bonfires spread about the streets, in more than fifty spots. At each bonfire they visit, the devils must once again dance the same dance as in the morning. Each bonfire is organised by a group of neighbours, friends or work colleagues, or by the centre of an association or political party. And almost everywhere there is an active core of women. At each bonfire they eat (mainly pork and food considered "traditional" or "country fare"), drink and, above all, chant without the accompaniment of any instrument. From time to time the chants start up again. Diverse possibilities of social intercourse are present in a local space where there are street bonfires. Our focus of interest will be on these bonfires, and we will not describe the high number of activities of the following day, the 17 January, with very diverse elements, such as the blessing of the livestock, the representation of the saint who is beaten by the devils, the religious service and the chanted chronicle of the whole year.

January nights are chilly — in Majorca too — and the street bonfires become centres of coexistence of each group, always in relation to the open entrance of a house or garage. Many people are tired from running around the town all day. The devils have come to dance to light the fire with the emblematic tune that, during the two days, will be repeated more than five-hundred times. First the food and the *herbes dolces* are attacked with relish, the drink having been passed round since early morning, mainly in the hands of the young people and adolescents. Some people spend the whole evening around the same bonfire; others move to two or three different bonfires to drink and eat with different groups of their social network. The intergenerational nature of the majority of bonfires should be stressed, with children and grandparents, and with the decisive participation, especially at the time of chanting, of young generations, between twenty and forty. Everything points to the fact that on that day a question of the town's identity is at stake.

They begin with the most-known *cançons*, some twenty texts that have to be sung every year and which everyone knows perfectly. During the three of four hours of the evening gathering, from time to time they are chanted again, and always with euphoria and the most extreme sonorous power. Some of the lyrics exalt the identity of the town and mock the neighbouring towns, but they also evoke stereotyped memories, episodes of the imaginary life of the saint that would have taken place in Artà, and erotic themes. All of them are highly celebrated, even those that everyone knows and which are repeated unceasingly.

Saint Anthony said it clear

preaching from his throne:

—There is no festival better

than the one they give me in Artà.

A group of men, led by the *obrers* or priors of the brotherhood, for example, intone with great enthusiasm:

Grandma said she did it

more than thirty thousand times:

and of half of the blow-jobs

Granddad had no idea!

Or another — which a group of young girls dedicate with a provocative tone to a group of young men — where the small bells of the saint's iconography become a direct metaphor of male sexual attributes:

If you want to make the bells ring

or shake the bell

place your hand flat

and I'll give you what you want!

After these *cançons* known by all, diverse group chant the texts that they prepared specifically for that year: they make a long criticism of the events of the town, of society and politics that they have generally prepared at suppers with friends ten days before the festival and which are currently nearly always written. However, some groups have rehearsed these *cançons* so that they can chant them without looking at the paper or glancing at the written verse as a prompt.

Needless to say a large number of people from the town chant with a notable expressive capacity, a skill that is already noted in the school, with a clear and precise timbre of voice, and with the ability to handle the tune with assurance. In fact, you need to know how to sing if you want to have a place within the social heterophony, and nearly everyone chants, men and women, the men with a sharp intonation of "chest voice" (called technically mechanism 1) and the women in unison with them (on rare occasions in parallel thirds).

The mayor cannot avoid turning up at several bonfires which await his visit, ready with a load of *cançons* of a totally explicit political or social content. The mayor stands surrounded by a circle of a good dozen people — standing and surrounded by a second and third circle of listeners who want to hear the inspiration and sharpness of the texts — which for more than twenty minutes recite satires and direct criticisms of the council's actions and the mayor's personal actions in an acidic and provocative tone. He has to take it all and laugh, as if the invective was for someone else. If he wants to reply, he must do it chanting a *cançó* improvised on the spot, and always with irony and good humour. The current mayor confines himself to accepting the chants laughing and repeating to the researchers that it is an authentic honour to be the centre of criticism of the local people, and that he always takes note of all the complaints and matters pointed out.

Similarly, two groups of opposing political options like to meet each other before a bonfire and address each other with the most offensive of insults, with qualifications of "whore" or "cuckold." But no-one gets angry, it is all within the foreseen and desired rhetoric, and the next day everyone comments with enthusiasm the most intense moments of the evening and of the bold impertinence of the other side.

The Church is also an object of satire, with current questions such as same-sex marriage:

The church is losing its patience,

breathing fire through its nose:

they won't accept divorce

and now two the same can marry!

Some of these *cançons* may be remembered in the following years, but are then quoted in a spontaneous way and without the previous effort of research and preparation. One of the groups has explained to us that some years ago someone recorded them when they chanted, and the next year that outsider began chanting, whether they were appropriate or not, the *cançons* that he had "studied" from the recording. The group reacted immediately, chanting to this "intruder," confronting him with a well-known *cançó*:

Idiot, buffoon, bollock-face,

sparrow-brain, twat, fucker,

you'll have to wash with soap

that filthy mouth of yours.

When they have finished the prepared *cançons*, they return to the more popular and identity ones. There is, however, a long repertoire remaining. Then those who usually intone *cançons* begin to evoke the texts linked to the memory of chanting beside the bonfires. And those unwritten texts, or recovered from the memory of those written years before, enable a surprising social game to be built that is not clearly visible to the outsider. To be able to participate you must know the potential repertoire very well and the possibilities of referring to or adapting the texts; there must be important personal complicity, also regarding the language in its local expressions, and above all knowing the specific circumstances of those standing around the bonfire on the evening of Saint Anthony.

At that moment of the chant there is no textual creation in the full sense, but there is creation from referring to that which is already known. To sum up, it is a much more common creative procedure. It is the skill of the appropriate quote, of knowing at which moment one can adapt the historic memory of similar situations with useful texts for a specific circumstance. It is sustained invention within convenient recycling. In fact, it is the only "invention" or "improvisation" possible, the usual one, and a long way from the romantic idealisation of a divine, complete creation, *ex novo*.

The participants, then, evoke with great refinement the texts they already know, sometimes chanting them literally how they remember them; other times, changing just a word or, at most, a verse. They thus manage to say something new through quoting something already said. In some way, is this not a skill very similar to that in any literary or musical creation? It is the fundamental principle of any creation (artisanal or artistic) and, outside of that, we can only create developing this recycling with enlargements, with more time, with more reflection or with the help of writing.

In this evocation/recycling the management of time is very important: everything is done in a few seconds, in which the decision, the theatrical attitude and the act of standing in the forefront before your colleagues must be assumed. You must be quick and socially adept, lucid in understanding what those forming the circle are feeling (at least some of them!) and, at the same time, bold and surprising. We have before us a very dense communicative situation, where the corporality and economy of space have a very decisive role — with movements of those present that resemble the dance gestures of the devils, but above all with a lot of bodily contact, with hugs and chanting holding each other, and also with intensification from the gestures of that which communicates the chanted text. They quickly deploy tactics and resources that deserve a detailed analysis in the manner of "arts de faire" observed by Michel de Certeau (1980). One element that is continually repeated is a singular movement that many *cantadors* do to emphasise the accents of the *cançons*: with the right hand closed, they make a gesture as if they were banging in the direction of the ground, the back a little curved, thus showing an emphatic ratification of what they are chanting (you can see this on the audiovisual recording). This movement attributes all the strength of assertion and "dramatic truth" to what is being said, however exaggerated or daring it may be. And it is precisely within this rhetoric that it approaches the limits of daring and maximum conviction, that the chanted discourse is built. You are

surrounded by the identity of the people represented at the extreme level, and the personal daring also undertaken to the extreme of what is acceptable due to the complicity.

The *cançons* quoted at the appropriate moment provide another decisive virtue: in themselves they transmit the legitimacy of what has been already accepted and ratified in a similar situation, in a situation recalled as excellent, and which now remains in the memory and in the mouths of the majority of those present. In brief, the assertive gesture of the hand also recalls this "undoubted" legitimacy, and the movement of balancing the bodies that form the circle, the faces of joy and acceptance and, moreover, the repetition that everyone chants of the verses that the soloist proposes at that moment, ends up giving the *cançó* all the shared authority. It is the principle of authority that acquires the formalised word through the social codes of the ritual and the chant. And this authority, sustained by a certain notion of "collective creation," protects the intoner as if it were a talisman. In some ways, it frees from any responsibility whoever has dared to say or suggest delicate or bold words.

In an instant, this enables a space to be opened that leads to new meanings through words already spoken, already known. Each person present imagines how, with inventive and boldness, they can link the nuance they have just discovered with other textual arguments they have at their disposal. Then one of them dares to start a *cançó* to respond to the subject proposed (or to lead it into other terrains). If the proposal is considered "good" (surprising, appropriate, witty, or other socially acceptable possibilities), it will be repeated enthusiastically by everyone, accompanied by laughter and gestures of complicity and enlargement. Everyone reacts with fascination and emphasises the capacity that the *cantador* has shown when evoking and imagining. And this makes the chain reaction possible between two or more people of a very open chanted dialogue, of a play of metaphors in multiple directions (notably polysemic) or of metonyms that are built by simply remembering texts that the participants have in their memory.

It is a situation that is difficult to be observed, where sound (verbal and "musical" and, therefore, corporal) has no meaning outside of the complexity of the circumstances of the present interaction, of the *hic et nunc*. However, it is precisely these situations that leave a persistent trace in the memory of the actors: everyone remembers and replays the game, perhaps a year later. We believe that this is a privileged framework for the pragmatic analysis of the construction of social doing and social imagination that is sustained in the action, as shown in, among others, the proposals of Erving Goffman (1974).

### 3. Chanting what cannot be said: the devils that untie the tongues

The situation therefore becomes favourable for saying unheard things. The festival has been long and everyone has followed it and had a wild and tiring day. The two devils have toured the town and have hit many people with their long and light sticks, pretending to kidnap the children and pester the women (above all the young women!). After the collective howls in the church in honour of the saint and the identity of the town, the devils have lit the bonfires and have danced one hundred times around all the *foguerons* that form the singular nocturnal geography of this day of celebration. At this moment, the theatre of a special time is ready. The delicious fatty food — with inevitable allusions chanted to the bacon that the saint ate, a saint that in the iconography is always accompanied by the black piglet — and the omnipresent alcohol act along the same lines. The saint is first in loving the festival and the pretty women, as the *cançons* also recall, and he also likes the card games that he uses to defeat the devil:

Saint Anthony and the devil

played thirty-one:

the devil made thirty,

Saint Anthony thirty-one.

As can be seen, this is a very human saint and very close to the pleasures and temptations that have turned him into an emblem. Saint Anthony's Day is the festival of the farmers and their beasts, of fertility for the animals and the fruits that we hope the saint will give us — the chapel is covered in a decoration of winter fruits made by the heads of the *obreria* or brotherhood — and, consequently, of human fertility. This festival opens the period of weeks that will end with the *darrers dies*, the last days, in other words the weeks of the long carnival in Majorca (which Frederic Chopin and George Sand discovered and experienced, as described in *A Winter in Majorca*). The saint, however, does not appear during the whole evening. He will not take physical form until the next day, his day, under the figure of the masked man and dressed as a hermit who will resist the temptations and aggressions of the two devils (in former times there was only one devil) in the streets of the town, and to finish the victor in his chapel in the church, from where he will hear the main mass.

All the details remind us of the typical features of the carnival: the devils take on the role of wild spirits or animals of the forest who kidnap young women to fertilise them (within a well-known symbolism of the fertilisation of nature and animals), the food in plenty of pork and the alcoholic drinks; the regenerating fire announcing the beginning of a new seasonal cycle (and to make it happen the young men jump over the flames); the continuous references to sex and corporality, and the interruption of daily life to enter into a special and unique time that includes the critical freedom of speech. Up to this point everything corresponds to the grand winter festival that affects the order of things to end up reconstructing it. Is this, however, a simple dramatization, with a shared stage, which is repeated every year? Or does everyone who takes part, to a certain extent, become transformed in their persona?

It is in this individual transformation where the chanted word plays a major role. Shortly before midnight the old *cançons* are remembered to introduce new situations, to show new events that have transformed relationships during the year and, perhaps, new possibilities of constructing the circle of personal

relationships. In the circles beside the fire that slowly goes out, the most daring begin to address *cançons* to a precise interlocutor from the gathered group, directing their invectives to them about their behaviour, or their appearance or their non-explicit intentions. Sexual allusions are also made, increasingly clearer and more direct, helped — perhaps — by the drink: *ses grosseres son flor de darrera hora* (the vulgarities are the flower of the last hour). Then the small “kings” and “queens” of the group shape up. They are the ones who wish to show leadership and opinion. And the expressions become direct in a society where throughout the year tactfulness dominates in saying things gently and not hurting the interlocutor, with the use above all of indirect references. So the verbal battles between the two sexes are built with a violent tone and with enthusiasm by both sides. And a woman chants pointing her finger at another who attacked her harshly:

You already have hanging tits

and your face is all wrinkles,

and to hide your spare tyres

you have to wear two corsets.

Everyone joins in, and the woman attacked, instead of getting angry, now prepares a response as hurtful as the other, if not more so. And over the old texts there are increasingly more winks and nods and references to the here and now of those present. And each one is allowed to imagine, one day in the year, personal possibilities that are probably concealed; they are allowed to play a role impossible to maintain the rest of the year; they are allowed to dramatize attitudes and expressions usually prohibited. It is the emergence of a new social space which on this night one has the freedom to imagine. Nevertheless, the next day, the saint's day festival, it will be forgotten (except if someone has chosen to change their life completely!).

In this space of nocturnal “freedom” also demonstrated, and with notable force, are the women's opinions before the men. Even though generally speaking one considers that women have had, at least for the last couple of centuries, a visible social role in the debates on questions that concern the people of Majorca, it must not be forgotten that it is a society traditionally governed and controlled by men. That is why it is surprising that around the bonfires the weight of the women's voice is so evident (compared to the masculinity of the *glosadors* and of the vast majority of chants with improvised text from the Mediterranean). Also surprising is how common are the satires chanted by groups of women: in the prior preparation of the texts a clear leadership of the women can be seen in the mixed groups, and also the existence of women-only groups (in contrast, we have not been able to find any exclusively male group, even though in other moments of social life in the area all-male groups are quite usual).

Among the events of the evening it is not unusual to discover, for example, that on this night couples have been formed. During the chants a mother can go directly up to a young man (who she particularly likes) telling him that her daughter is very pretty, and that she would need a friend... A group of married women, aged over forty, shout out chanting to the young lads of twenty that now is the time to leave the sensible (and boring) girls alone and try the unique experience of a “forty-year-old woman.” And a girl who is not yet thirty is interested in the night-time commitments of the handsome cameraman who is recording the festival, and tells him clearly in the presence of her husband, who stands beside her laughing. In fact, on this night one can dream up diverse amorous possibilities, as well as social and political ones, and chanting all the time chanting, sounding people out, making emotional declarations, or new acquaintances, sharing opinions and declaring positions that, the rest of the year, are stated in a much more discrete way, or simply remain concealed.

We are a group of thirty-somethings

who like to chant a lot,

we like drinking and eating

and fucking we like the best.

The freedom on this night to speak about sex is equivalent, again, to the freedoms of carnival. On the island of Sardinia, in the past, children of an unknown father were called “children of Saint Anthony”: did the saint of fertility take them in? Or was it rather to do with the supposed sexual freedoms around the fires, which also occur that night in Sardinia?

On the other hand, as occurs in the carnival balls, there are *cançons* where everyone says they are cuckolded, others talk about touching with a sexual intention, and tolerance is even more evident when someone starts to chant, and everyone joins in:

Husband, don't be jealous

of a fruit that is not been bitten:

nothing will happen if another tries it,

as long as there's enough for you.

The *obreria* or brotherhood always has among its three priors a priest from the town, who presides over the religious acts in honour of the saint, such as blessing the animals. On this night, the priest, who is 75 years old, blushed from the *cançons* that a group of women dedicate to him: they chant that with the money from his retirement as a priest and, moreover, the nice house that he has inherited in the town, he has become a very good catch for a forty-something woman. He, following the ritual, responds immediately improvising a *cançó* where he thanks them for their interest, but states that now he is too old to learn to live with another person.

We have also been able to observe in the neighbouring town of Sa Colònia de Sant Pere, during the same festival of Saint Anthony, how the forty or fifty-year-old women use already-known *cançons* to ask the priest about his sexual capacities. After four or five invectives, the priest indicates that he wishes to intervene chanting: he states that men are always men, and that if any of the women feel the need to try it, he is always willing to demonstrate that what he says is true... And the social game continues amidst laughter, conceived ambiguities and small surprises in the flickering light of the fire.

On this night, with everything chanted, one can find out quite a few things about the neighbours, about the political intrigues of the town, about opinions more or less shared by local people, about imaginary or potential love. And statements are chanted much more daring than one can imagine. After midnight only the embers remain, and tomorrow morning the horses will gallop daringly over the ashes. Everyone must now dress up for the grand festival in the clothing that has become the typical image of Majorca farmers. And they will form the large retinue of the blessing of the farmers and the livestock, with the town's musical band, within an already reconstructed social order, despite the bothersome yet amusing presence of the two devils with their long sticks.

The chanted word of the Artà night opens up yet impedes the possibilities of action. It is a special time, open and virtual, a unique parenthesis in the annual calendar that offers a ritualised scene with one, as we understand, main function: to allow people to communicate whatever each one of them wants or dares to say; it allows them to express their concealed imaginings. During the night a large number of the inhabitants of the town move around and mix according to links involving activity, family or personal, to construct the group chanting and also to construct a specific image of the I. In some ways, it is about an annual construction of the "we" to contrast with "the outsiders," with the surrounding towns and those further away. They chant, above all, about the difference in relation to the neighbouring town of Capdepera, to which throughout the day they devote the *cançons* which mark the distinction (even though the current priest of Artà, originally from Capdepera, is very well thought of). There are many *cançons* that praise the identity of the town, and which are listened to and repeated with satisfaction and emotion, especially by the youngest (those who through the festival are "learning" almost physically to "be of the town").

It is about, to be precise, an internal rhetoric of adhesion to the town, unfolded once a year by a very large part of the population. In reality, the "foreigners" are rarely present at the festival, despite some local tourist publicity that has been undertaken in recent years. The colony of Germans and the few non-European immigrants, if they wish to take part, are practically obliged to take on a role of full integration (and be linguistically strong) into the groups of the town, in the same way as occurs for the toddlers and young children. Otherwise, they are confined to the bonfires they make for their socially separate group, bonfires where they try to adapt to the festive night, but following an order of perceptively different values.

The people who are not from Artà, who have come from other towns or from outside the island, do not have direct access to the groups: they move around the outside, mandatory observers of an activity that excludes the spectacle. Now and then some lost "visitor" asks what there is to see, without getting much answer from the locals. The grand theatre is made by and for the actors. The "others" remain excluded or find themselves integrated by force. This is the case of an attractive journalist and a cameraman from a Majorca television channel who, in a moment of live broadcasting at the beginning of the retinue towards the church, were carried off by the mass of young people, who shook them, touched them and "handled" them over the heads of the crowd: it was the price that the intruders with a camera had to pay for wanting to get in the middle of the people to "show the festival."

There cannot be spectators or spectacle, as the mayor states without the slightest shadow of doubt. The chant is practically obligatory, and even in the role of researcher-observer, you must be prepared to chant to the organisers of a bonfire the *cançons* of gratitude and praise common in this situation. The festival belongs to "us" only, and the outsider must be rebutted or must be incorporated symbolically into the imagery of the town. The chanted word gives life to the connections and the desires, and often a person who comes from the town, but is absent all year (in Palma, Barcelona or further) feels the pressing obligation to return to the town for the two days of the festival to chant with their friends, sometimes abandoning work obligations. It is the promise of belonging to the town, the unquestionable annual occasion. It is the only way to make the imagined community of the town exist — in the quite distinct imagination of each member —, and that would not be possible without the established framework of the *cançons*; the *cançons* that enable the nuances of the debate of social construction to be communicated and, above all, to make each individual feel the experience of the physical and emotional participation.

Other towns represent this theatre of collective existence during an annual festival where the central activity comes closer to a stage performance or choreography, as if it were a simple formalised ratification of the desire of being. In the night of Artà, in contrast, individuals are called upon to take part in a perceptively different way: here the chant allows for personal risk of a new spoken word, and obliges the adversary to respond to that word, of a specific and present individual. The *cançons* supply the material and rules of a game about, basically, on the one hand the shared identity with a unifying voice, and on the other hand the dramatization of conflict and personal disagreement. The direct attack and pertinent response reveal a spoken word that is impracticable in other circumstances (and more within the social codes of not dealing with delicate matters, a very common behavioural pattern in this Mediterranean society). And this so very particular dialogue contributes to "adjusting" and contrasting the attitudes and sensitivities of those taking part. It enables elements of the social fabric to be reconstructed in a more refined and nuanced way. If the feelings and opinions were not chanted beside the bonfire, perhaps they would never be expressed, possibly it would have been impossible to say them on another day. And these same words spoken between two people, but outside of the ritual and shared space, would have neither the same force nor the same impact.

The wild night of the devils, the fire, the food and the drink, becomes social (and, therefore, personal) above all due to the chant. You can chant what you cannot say: the identity, on one side; the social links, criticisms, disagreements and feelings, on the other. And after the chanted combat — based on the legitimacy that the evocation of the already known verses brings — order returns or, at least, the balance of a new order, which is seen ratified by the blessing and the collective chants the following day, the saint's day. That day they chant again all the more identity and now consolidated *cançons*, but the critical, satiric and exploratory side will be kept out until the next year.

In Artà, on the eve of the 17 January everyone is very, very tired indeed, and goes home to sleep with their head still full of the tune that has sounded uninterruptedly for two successive days.

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#### Notes

The Balearic Islands, in their strictest meaning, are Majorca and Menorca. Even though the autonomous community of *Illes Balears* also includes Ibiza and Formentera, in reality these two islands form the *Illes Pitiüses*, quite distinct from the Balearics in certain cultural characteristics, despite the fact that all the islands form part of the Catalan-speaking area.

In this section we show some of the information dealt with in the book by Ayats, 2007, pages 64-66 and 72-75.

In this article we do not deal with the singular characteristics of the "vetlades de glosat," the verse evenings, of Menorca, with a slower chant and always accompanied by at least a guitar.

Some creators of *gloses* were not capable of doing them directly before the public, but they did prepare and memorise them: they are the *glosadors de posat* or *camilla*, "at the table," less appreciated but who have left behind memorable verses (Munar, 2001:28).

Normally, the name *gloses* is used above all for the improvisation of the *glosador* and, in contrast, the name *cançó* to describe the chants of the non-professionals.

Lamb or goatskin drum. The skin is tightened over a clay recipient with a fine reed attached to the skin by means of a very simple device. With the instrument always in a horizontal position, the player rubs, usually seated, the reed with the right hand wet. The instrument emits a very particular deep sound, which is often compared to snoring. In the *cançons*, the gesture of playing this instrument easily becomes a metaphor of male masturbation or, simply, sexual activity. In the past, it was played above all by men, but today women also play it. They are of very diverse sizes, with very large examples that make a very deep sound, which are highly appreciated. In Majorca the instrument is kept in a small cellar or cool place in the house beside the fresh food and meat. They are only brought out to accompany the chants, above all at carnival time.

With surprising links between the attributes of Saint Anthony and the ancient Egyptian god Horus; or the details of an oral narrative in which the saint has the attributes of Prometheus, the bringer of fire, as we have been able to record still recently in Sardinia.

A piece of research into the festival of Saint Anthony, directed by Jaume Ayats and undertaken by himself, Francesc Vicens and Antònia M. Sureda, which has received support from the Department of Culture and Heritage of the Consell de Mallorca. The results of the work have also been supplied in the form of a DVD: *Sant Antoni d'Artà*, number 3 of the collection titles "Les musiques de Mallorca", issued by the Consell de Mallorca, December 2008.

[Subir >](#)



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