Truth, Lies, and Audio Files

A Conflict Across Reputational and Convivial Domains

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Abstract: Conviviality (*convivencia*), a rubric for peaceable coexistence across cultural and ethnoracial differences, has been promoted as a multifaceted educational priority in contemporary Spain, although the stakes of tolerance and civility mean quite different things for pupils of autochthonous and immigrant backgrounds. For some Moroccan youth attending school in the agricultural southeast, experiences with xenophobia and racialized exclusion have made them both fierce critics and defenders of convivial precepts. At one secondary school, questions about convivial protocols became especially pressing in the wake of accusations against several Moroccan girls for stealing sandwiches from a disabled peer. A confrontation between three of them was captured on a digital audio recorder and, in tandem with interview and observational data, suggested that convivial priorities had been pushed aside in favour of reputational attacks and disciplinary punishments. The juxtaposition of convivial ideals against reputational dynamics shows that competing logics of communicative entitlement undergirded the conflict. And in the girls' various attempts to absolve themselves, imputations about moral character and social affiliations pointed to the need for fuller consideration of conviviality as a relational concept.

Keywords: conviviality; dignity; entitlement; immigrant youth; relationality; reputation; Spain; values

Résumé : La convivialité (*convivencia*), une rubrique pour la coexistence pacifique au-delà des différences culturelles et ethno-raciales, a été promue comme une priorité éducative à multiples facettes dans l'Espagne contemporaine, bien que les enjeux de tolérance et de civilité aient des significations très différentes pour les élèves d'origine autochtone et ceux issus de l'immigration. Pour certains jeunes Marocains scolarisés dans le sud-est agricole, les expériences de xénophobie et d'exclusion racialisée ont fait d'eux,

à la fois de farouches critiques et des défenseurs des préceptes conviviaux. Dans une école secondaire, les questions relatives aux protocoles conviviaux sont devenues particulièrement pressantes, à la suite des accusations portées contre plusieurs filles marocaines pour avoir volé des sandwichs à un camarade handicapé. Une confrontation entre trois d'entre eux a été enregistrée sur un support audio numérique et, en tandem avec les données des entretiens et des observations, a suggéré que les priorités conviviales avaient été mises de côté au profit d'atteintes à la réputation et de sanctions disciplinaires. La juxtaposition des idéaux de convivialité et de la dynamique de la réputation montre que des logiques concurrentes de droit à la communication sous-tendent le conflit. Dans les diverses tentatives des filles pour se disculper, les imputations sur le caractère moral et les affiliations sociales soulignent la nécessité d'une considération plus complète de la convivialité en tant que concept relationnel.

Mots-clés : convivialité ; dignité ; droit ; jeune immigrant ; relationalité ; réputation ; Espagne ; valeurs

Introduction

This article examines the content and context of a ten-minute confrontation among three Moroccan teens living and attending school in the southeast Spanish municipality of El Ejido. Embroiled in a conflict that involved accusations about sandwiches stolen from a disabled peer, the girls' face-off was an attempt not only to absolve themselves of responsibility but also to reclaim expressive rights over the ordeal. Suspicion and ridicule had supplanted established school procedures for conflict resolution—measures, for instance as spending time in the *aula de convivencia* (conviviality room), meant to democratize problem-solving through peer mediation and empower self-direction through reflection and dialogue. Amidst these failed strategies, the girls' encounter also revealed their tenuous positioning within the relational economies of school, peer, and family life.

Convivencia has long been a major emphasis in Spanish schooling and society. Reclaimed by democratic reformers post-Franco and enshrined in the 1978 Constitution, it gathered new force around the turn of the twenty-first century. With tens of thousands of immigrants making Spain home, predominantly from North Africa, and with anxiety over Islamist extremism rising, federal legislation pushed schools in "fomenting democratic conviviality and respect for individual differences [...] and preventing discrimination" (Jefatura 2006, 1). Sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological studies have highlighted

conviviality's communicative compromise with relational detachment, attesting to "minimal" engagement and/or phaticity as central modes of non-threatening communion, especially among diverse constituencies (Blommaert and Varis 2015, 8). How, then, can we reconcile the institutional pursuit of convivial pedagogies with high-involvement, overtly evaluative school sociality? And how might we understand outright conflict at the intersection of both? These questions shape this article as I seek not to redefine conviviality but to interrogate its boundaries *in situ* (Rampton 2015, 87). I am less interested in conviviality's imbrication with conflict than I am in its projection into public life as a paramount value (see Robbins 2004, 11–13), which must coexist with other entrenched modes of relating such as reputational assessment and adjudications of trust.

I argue that at the root of my participants' ordeal lay a desire to be known such that peers, teachers, and even family members might presume their innocence. Using excerpts from an audio recording of the girls' meeting, along with interview and observational data, I show that convivial and reputational knowing were distinct but intertwined ways of dealing with others as relationally and morally proximate. The girls' face-offs with various actors throughout the conflict revealed the structuring force of convivial idealization (and relational circumspection) even as verbal derogation exacted uneven payments by censure, disentitlement, and distress.

Conviviality, Dignity, Entitlement, and Reputation

Examinations of conviviality in super-diverse contexts have framed the matter in terms of strangers living among strangers (for example, Amin 2012). Studies of urban denizens avoiding conflict through everyday civility (Wessendorf 2014) or cross-cultural accommodation (Wise and Velayutham 2014) have captured the challenges and affordances of coexistence across ethnolinguistic, religious, racialized, and gendered differences. As such, the concept of "conviviality" raises questions about how relationality unfolds in real-time interaction. On one hand, the minutiae of daily encounters seem to rescue human connection from breakdown (Blommaert and Varis 2015, 8); on the other, disjunctures of identity and inequity shape possibilities for connection, and even superficial exchanges are run through with power (for example, Heil 2019).

Still, a focus on the socially suturing functions of "unimportant language" (Rampton 2015, 83–85) is not quite apt for the case examined here. My participants' heightened discord involved interactions that were anything but

"minimal [in] quantity and degree of elaboration" (Bloomaert and Varis 2015, 6). Although conviviality through face-to-face exchange has been convincingly described as including, not excluding, moments of friction (Heil 2015b, 321–23), such approaches also run the risk of reducing the reason for misencounters to sociological identity maintenance. To address this, I link the concept of dignity to entitlement. The first captures what I see as the deeper existential threat of convivial exclusion, and the second provides a way to trace that threat through unfolding interactions and relational contestation. Conviviality stitches thin knowability from momentary engagement because it presupposes interactants' orientation to a most basic premise of shared human worth, one that in Kantian terms treats humans as ends, not means (Fukuyama 2018, 39). The right to speak and be heard within the "minimal consensus" (Heil 2015b, 322) of convivial spaces is, if anything, also an obligation to maintain the judicious distance required of civil, humanizing discourse. Entitlement, meanwhile, manifests empirically in claims to expression, registering interlocutors' ownership over experience (Sacks 1970 cited in Shuman 1993, 154) via ratification of their interpretive rights and situational authority. Recent interventions have made clear, moreover, that the subjective experience of dignity is dependent on other people's evaluations (for example, Nader 2013, 32–34). If dignity is subject to interactional bruising, then entitlement is as well, and this provides an analytic proxy for understanding how real-time dismissals accumulate into larger dignity threats.

Reputation, as a final conceptual pillar, addresses the agglutinating impacts of competition over worth. Unlike conviviality's restraint, reputation forges wholesale alliances and exclusions based on evaluations of propriety, rank, or desirability (Origgi 2019, 71). Through time-layered strata of exposure and interaction, it mediates affiliation via gossip and rumour (Mangardich and Fitneva 2019, 83–84). Negative assessments can exact acute psychosocial pain (ibid.), and censure asserts control over the social environment. Moving toward fuller analysis of the encounters that inspired the ten-minute recording, I rely in particular on Goodwin's (1990, 224) documentation of how youth "generate moral character" through contested speaking and socializing rights in response to gossip, as well as on Shuman's (1993, 145) findings on adolescent fight narratives as stages for litigating relational proximity. These studies help explain the moments of disentitlement punctuating my participants' experiences as occurring along crisscrossing scales of knowability, insider and outsider status, and moral, as well as institutional, power.

Field Site and Educational Investment in *Convivencia*

This analysis is drawn from a larger study focusing on conviviality through youth experiences and discourses of multicultural belonging in El Ejido (Almería). Almost a decade before I began fieldwork, El Ejido had been a site of racist violence. Often the first thing that participants mentioned, the "Moor hunt" (*caza al moro*) was a stretch of several days in February 2000 when Spanish mobs set fire to Moroccan businesses, trashed immigrant service agencies, and sent migrants fleeing into the surrounding hills. Damning reports of the event circulated in the international press. Teachers recalled crossing police barricades to get to school, and teens, barely five years old at the time, remembered watching from apartment windows as attackers tried to overturn busses carrying migrant workers.

Since the early 1990s, tens of thousands of migrants had come to work in the area's greenhouse agricultural complex. More than half of the 30,569 registered foreign residents living in El Ejido during my fieldwork hailed from Morocco (Instituto Nacional 2011), and roughly one-quarter of secondary school students across the municipality were first-generation Moroccan youth. Following the 2000 riots, local families' celebrated status as bootstrapping entrepreneurs suffered under scrutiny into racist labour practices. Spanish locals often commented that outsiders misrecognized the challenges of Ejidene life, however, and that media reports—reappearing on the anniversary of the attacks—downplayed their sacrifices while amplifying migrants' suffering. Moroccan youth, on the other hand, compared the place unfavourably to northern or eastern Spain, where they felt that people were more worldly. Spanish youth, in turn, expressed bitterness at their Moroccan counterparts' apparent disinterest in fitting in. The fact that the violence in 2000 had exploded in retaliation for the deaths of three locals at the hands of North African migrants framed Spanish young people's understandings of Moroccans as violent interlopers. Even after sharing classrooms for years, Spanish youth spoke of Moroccan peers in terms of whether they made an effort to integrate, seemed open-minded, or bristled at being called *moro*.

Meanwhile, school *convivencia* programming emphasized horizontal over hierarchical relations, and a recurrent dynamic of the classes I observed involved teachers' attempts to make Moroccan youth, in particular, less strange to their peers. New measures had engaged students, teachers, administrators, and parents in stemming the effects of conflictual strangerhood through helper networks. A team of peer mediators was in training to handle disputes,

and student representatives served in advisory roles on the parent-teacher council. An *aula de convivencia* (conviviality room) had been established to provide individualized attention to misbehaving students. These measures followed regional and national recommendations for expanding shared school governance but also created pathways for increased familiarity among various school constituencies.

Protocols for the *aula de convivencia* (relevant to the discussion below) established normative correlations between respectful interaction, conflict resolution, and students' relational dispositions. If sent to the conviviality room, students were to work with staff in reflecting upon behavioural problems, sharing feelings, and devising appropriate solutions. Youth were responsible in this case for using rational reflection and affective disclosure to repair their status as willing participants in the school community. As one guidebook stated, the conviviality room facilitated the transformation of "pupils into people" in that "being a person is the same as knowing how to relate" ("*ser persona es igual a 'saber relacionarse*,'" Segura, Muñoz and Gil 2011, 13). Notably, restorative dialogue with non-threatening, relatable others was a key problem for the girls at the center of the sandwich-stealing ordeal, one that escalated reputational derogation and placed the onus back on them for serial blows to their dignity and unratified claims to entitlement.

Methods and Key Participants

From my study, I wanted to learn how state *convivencia* curricula were imparted to and taken up by students in the politically charged and demographically changing municipality of El Ejido. Specifically, I examined how the progressivism that informed these curricula made room for the lives, identities, and aspirations of North African immigrant youth, who were often regarded by locals as espousing problematic traditional values informed by Islam and outdated gender norms (Taha 2017). Twelve months of fieldwork between 2009 and 2011 included participant observation at three secondary schools, which I refer to in composite as Campo de Dalías Secondary School. I conducted follow-up interviews on return visits in the summers of 2014 and 2017 and have remained in contact with several key participants through social media and periodic video chats.

During initial fieldwork, I sat in on faculty meetings, went on field trips, participated in assemblies, and attended a variety of courses, including math, religion, music, and English. I focused on civic education and *convivencia*-oriented activities, however. *Educación para la Ciudadanía* (Education for

Citizenship) had been nationally mandated for third-year students and dovetailed in content and delivery with *Cambios Sociales y Nuevas Relaciones de Género* (Social Change and New Gender Relations), a regionally mandated elective that students were required to take at least once. Throughout the 2010–2011 school year, I attended three to five hours weekly of these classes alone, audio recording discussions and building the closest relationships with a first-year Social Change and third-year Citizenship class. This was how I met the protagonists of this article: twelve-year-old Hala was a student in the first, and fourteen-year-old best friends Chahida and Zineb were students in the second. (Participant names are pseudonyms.)

I came to know Hala mainly through her comments during class discussions. She joined my study as a member of her Social Change class, but she declined to do interviews. Chahida and Zineb belonged to a Citizenship class that was taught by their homeroom teacher and included their entire *tutoría* (homeroom cohort). I became well acquainted with the group, and interviews with friend clusters from the class provided a window onto shifting social alliances and reputational contests. Chahida and Zineb granted a total of ten open-ended interviews, 30 to 60 minutes each, over the course of ten months, reflecting on school, family, fitting in, and future aspirations. I sometimes accompanied Zineb on her walks around town after school, but Chahida belonged to a stricter family and spent her after-school hours at the library or at home.

During the last two months of fieldwork, I invited two friend dyads—Chahida and Zineb, on the one hand, and two Spanish youth, on the other—to take photos and make audio recordings of moments from their everyday lives. Building on photovoice and related autoethnographic methods (see Back and Sinha 2016), the idea was to afford key participants a more agentive role in data collection and also test my understanding of where young people saw social and ideological fault lines operating. Equipped with loaned cameras and digital recorders, participants decided what to photograph and what thoughts to record, journal style, as they went about their days. We met periodically to go over what they had collected, and I arranged to make prints of their favourite photos to keep. The experiment was marginally successful; youth felt self-conscious about talking into the recorders, and the Spanish dyad lost interest and bowed out after two weeks. Chahida and Zineb's audio recordings amounted to less than one hour total, but their photos and photo commentary documented concerns with being poor, Muslim, and meeting family expectations. Being good students and good daughters constituted core

moral and reputational attachments for Moroccan girls like Chahida and Zineb and served as self-conscious counterweights to the disdain they often described feeling in a Spanish-dominant context. In fact, the ten-minute confrontation that motivates this article was part of a multifaceted attempt to correct for a string of especially damaging accusations that threatened their status on both counts. They captured it on one of the digital audio recorders that I had loaned them.

Detailed transcription of that recording, followed by discourse- and conversation-analytic attention to the girls' emotion-filled utterances, accusations, and occasional code-mixing with Moroccan Arabic provided clues to their reputational and moral concerns. I connected their oppositional stances to the interview narratives they had shared and worked to put these into context against my own observations. I present most of these data in translation but highlight select transcripts from the recording to illustrate how the girls jockeyed for reputational repair. First, I offer a précis of pivotal moments in the ordeal that portrays the tenor and types of interactions involved in this multi-party conflict.

The Ordeal

"Do you know what they said to ME?" Chahida demanded of Hala, four minutes into the girls' recorded confrontation. "That I'm a fake and a thief"—"And a liar!" Zineb interjected—"And they YELLED at me, 'You just be quiet!' and who knows what." Their voices echoed against floors and walls, perhaps those of the bathroom at the public library where they did homework after school. Chahida and Zineb had been asking Hala if she planned to attend school in the morning. They wanted her to tell the principal that she had falsely accused Chahida of taking the disabled student's sandwiches. Hala protested. She hadn't named anyone; people were gossiping. From teachers to classmates, they had accused her, told lies, and made her cry. "Well, they're going to suspend Chahida!" Zineb challenged. "And what I want to know is why they've blamed her!"

Zineb would recount in an interview how she had waited for Chahida outside the guidance counsellor's office, having convinced her friend to go plead her case directly. "I could hear everything. She was crying, and he was pounding the table, 'You're a liar!' And then the principal went in and said the same thing." I was struck when I heard this that the girls' attempts to seek a dialogic resolution had so quickly backfired.

In a later interview, Chahida shared details of her initial appeal to Lu, a popular Spanish girl who was also the homeroom peer mediator:

> I went to Lu as my mediator. I said, "Go talk to [the principal], tell her I didn't do this. I don't know what all I told her. Then she comes back to class, her face is all red, and she says, "You're going to get me in trouble!" I guess the principal yelled at her, and then you wouldn't believe the mess. The whole *tutoría* started calling me *robona* [big robber], and they'd look over at Zineb and say, "People are craaaaazy."

Zineb, indignant, had gone to Lu to find out what had happened with the principal, but Lu, surrounded by a clutch of friends leaving school that afternoon, refused to talk with her. Zineb raised her voice, another girl defended Lu, a third insulted Zineb, and a fourth—when Zineb grabbed her arm and warned, "This has nothing to do with you"—yelped and accused Zineb of hurting her. "The next day, the guidance counsellor told me that the family had filed a police complaint," Zineb told me glumly. "Those girls also told our homeroom teacher, and she's not going to believe me. Who am I to tell the truth?"

The only time I witnessed the homeroom teacher scold students outright was during this period, anger replacing her typically congenial humour. She was also the group's Citizenship teacher, after all, and enthusiastically endorsed the problem-solving power of dialogue. She had worked all term to draw students into closer connection, urging them to exercise their full speaking rights, seeing in the airing of differences—cultural and otherwise—opportunities for them to become more understanding of one another. As ostensible training for the democratic public sphere that awaited them as adults, her lessons had promoted the complementary expectations that students demonstrate mutual forbearance and, where friendship was impossible, express respect and recognition of their shared humanity.

But the sandwich-stealing accusation had shifted the group's interactional key into a highly charged reputational one. Tracking rumour and blame became the girls' priority, and judgments of trust and moral integrity framed their repair strategies. Accordingly, competing logics of communicative entitlement undergirded the conflict. One was abstract, rooted in ideologies of universal human dignity and rights (Fukuyama 2018, 41) and elaborated in *convivencia* pedagogies through a one-person-one-voice principle. The other was personalized, combative, and affect-laden, circulating through critiques and

sanctions on speech, behaviour, and social affiliation. Name-calling, assertions of authority, and injunctions against speaking were tools of reputational attack that treated allegations of bad behaviour as evidence of bad personhood—that is, willful estrangement. A swift chain of censure signalled the breakdown of aspirational-convivial dialogue and cleaved the possibilities for peaceable acquaintanceship into a field of enemies and allies.

Censuring Talking out of Turn

The offences committed and alleged during this ordeal found expression, as Shuman (1993, 145) puts it, according to "a pre-established hierarchy of vantage points based on ownership of experience." By forestalling students' rights to dialogue and full experiential ownership, school officials asserted a claim to know them by their moral fallibility. Unlike gossip, which happens behind a target's back (Goodwin 1990), shutting down talk deemed out of turn involved in-the-moment sanctions to entitlement that also maximized loss of face. Disentitlement concerned participants' moral characters as their truthfulness or reliability was judged by a relativized scale.

The first reported sanction against talking out of turn occurred when the principal refused to hear out Lu, the peer mediator. Lu subsequently refused to engage further with Chahida or Zineb, and her friends reinforced that sanction with ridicule and name-calling. But the threat of a police report drew parents, teachers, and ostensibly law enforcement into a collective evaluation of the Moroccan girls' characters. As objects, not subjects, of social knowledge, they came to occupy the alienated position of strangers (Ahmed 2000, 49), potentially even for those who knew them best. "My father believes everyone else before me," Zineb told me. "And my mother goes, 'Are you sure you didn't do this? You're capable of hitting someone.'"

Zineb had been concerned about Chahida's parents, as well, "I think her father beat her. This whole thing has destroyed her." Getting in trouble contravened what Moroccan girls frequently described as their unique role in maintaining family respectability. Although several of them also expressed irritation with traditional gender norms, which gave males more leeway, they paid attention to rumours about young women in the diasporic community who had brought shame to their families. Stories about peers who had disrespected elders or engaged in premarital sex provided cautionary tales for interviewees concerned with deflecting negative appraisals (Taha 2020).

Meanwhile, the teachers I consulted about the accusation against Chahida responded noncommittally. "She seems like a good girl," one said, "so quiet. I guess you never know." Suspicion regarding Moroccan youth fit easily into local narratives about North African unknowability. The notion that they "could be anyone," in Ahmed's (2015, 212) words—and that they posed untold dangers to Spaniards—echoed generalized panic about terrorism, ISIS recruitment, and immigrant youth disaffection. The anonymizing logic of stranger-making also dovetailed with Ejidenes' particular trauma and self-consciousness regarding the 2000 attacks.

In Social Change and Citizenship classes, Moroccan and Muslim differences provided evaluative baselines against which individual students struggled for positive individuation and regard. Zineb, a charismatic and more confident Spanish speaker than many of her Moroccan classmates, often found herself on the defensive. The Citizenship teacher queried her pointedly, was it really her choice to wear the headscarf? Were Muslims allowed to decide whether to fast during Ramadan? On the other hand, would the Spanish boys in the class consider marrying an attractive Moroccan girl like her one day—or she, them?

Part of lengthier debates about freedom, equality, and inclusion, these questions trained attention on Moroccan youth as ethnocultural anomalies and objects of racialized scrutiny (see García-Sánchez 2014). Zineb only once complained about the teacher's contrasting of Moroccan and Spanish ways of being: there were also Russian and Romanian students in the class, she pointed out. But her critique got wrapped back into the Socratic volley of classroom talk. "Let me ask, why *do* we discuss Moroccans so much?" the teacher counterposed, and Spanish students promptly opined, "Because of all the delinquency," and, "Because they cause problems!" Despite the promises of convivial pedagogies, then, the Moroccan youth found themselves regularly divested of narrative control over representations of their own lives, a fact that contextualized Chahida and Zineb's sense of entrapment during the sandwich-stealing conflict. To whom could they turn for the benefit of the doubt? Who, as they put it, might "listen to our side"?

Disentitlement and Disfluency as Suffering

Shuman (1993, 145) has written that in adolescent "fight" narratives, judgments of entitlement rest largely on claims of suffering. In arenas of reputational contest, the right to speak depends upon one's distance from first-hand experience

and knowledge of relevant events and people. Evidence of personal hardship establishes the strongest claim to speaking rights. The fact that Lu's friends closed ranks around her suggested that her account of suffering held sway with them. Their retaliatory name-calling chastised Chahida for Lu's loss of face and alleged further suffering by Zineb's actions.

Notably, during Chahida and Zineb's recorded confrontation with Hala, they enacted disentitlement strategies similar to those they had just experienced. The transcript excerpted here illustrates how Zineb, especially, intervened to this effect:

Excerpt 1. [00:44–01:57][1]

1	H:	*(To Chahida)*	
2		Mira, tú no llores	Look, don't you cry
3		tú ¿que yo?	cuz I [about] you?
4		que– ¿de ti?	cuz– about you?
5		no he dicho nada	I didn't say anything
6	Z:	*(Interjecting)*	
7		NO	NO
8	H:	xxx–	xxx–
9	Z:	TÚ has dicho todo dicen	YOU said everything, they say
10		Dicen que fuistes TÚ	They say that it was YOU
11	H:	[Ella–	[She–
12	Z:	[la que– la que dijis–	[who– who sa–
13		cállate un momento	shut up a minute
14		que fuistes TÚ	that it was YOU
15		la que dijiste	who said
16		que nos sa[caste	who got [us
17	H:	[Ya vaya–	[Oh c'mon–

18	Z:	a nosotras un problema	in trouble
19		Vamoavé, si te pones así	Look, if you're acting this way
20		es porque has mentío	it's cuz you lied
21		Mira Hala, te conozco muy bien–	Look Hala, I know you very well–
22	H:	Mira, ¿que yo?	Look, so I?
23		[la maestra] m– a mí me han–	[the teacher] th– they–
24		*(In Moroccan Arabic)*	
25		*darou lia shahrayn*	*they gave me two months*
26		sin venirme al colegio	without coming to school
27		¿Por qué? Porque yo	Why? Because I
28		[me he empezao a llorar–	[started to cry–
29	C:	[xxx–	[xxx–
30	H:	Yo me he empezao a llorar	I started to cry
31		porque yo me	because I
32		*(In Moroccan Arabic)*	
33		*ma jbatsh la nti–*	*I didn't mention you or–*
34	Z:	¡Habla en español!	Speak in Spanish!
35	H:	Yo no suponía a ti ni na–	I didn't blame you or any–
36		Yo no suponía a ti	I didn't blame you
37		[...]	[...]
38	C:	*(To Hala)*	
39		Mira– mira–	Look– look–
40		me dicen que me van a expulsar a mí	they say they're going to suspend me
41		¡¿Tú crees el– ?!	Do you believe the– ?!
42	H:	*(Sounding concerned)*	
43		¿Te han expulsao?	They suspended you?

44	Z:	*(Interjecting)*	
45		Sí	Yes
46	H:	[¿Le van a expulsar?	[Are they gonna suspend her?
47	C:	[Me van a expulsar	[They're gonna suspend me
48		¡Me van a– me van a expulsar!	They're gonna– they're gonna suspend me!
49	Z:	¡Les van a llamar a su padre y a su madre!	They're going to call her dad and her mom!

In lines 16 and 18, Zineb recycles the language Lu used to rebuff Chahida ("You're going to get me in trouble"). Her bald rebuttals (line 7) and upgraded accusations (lines 9–10, 14–15, 19–20) meet Hala's denials (lines 3–5, 33, 35–36). A command to "shut up" (line 13) and a warning that Zineb knows her "very well" (line 21)—that agitated denials are as good as confessions—recall the counsellor's berating of Chahida. The injunction in line 34, "Speak in Spanish!" acts as a unique foreclosure, constraining Hala's linguistic performance in deference to the language of institutional authority, while Zineb and Chahida's indignant intonation (lines 9–10, 41, 47–49) marks their oppositional claim to the moral high ground.

A debate over the chain of speech is entirely consistent with the evaluative and alliance-oriented politics of reputation (Shuman 1993, 148). The trio's argument had more in common with the "he-said-she-said" confrontations documented by Goodwin (1990) than with the girls' previous encounters with school personnel, parents, or rival peers. Entitlement sanctions had minimal impact here, and the exchange, while face-threatening for Hala, also developed as a collaborative negotiation of truth. Hala gamely adjusted her speech (line 35 forward), and the conversation continued for several more minutes as the girls attempted to trace pathways of accusation and hearsay.

A common thread in their competing narratives lay in how they had suffered by other people's words and deeds. Hala recounted the moment when the special education teacher approached her for the first time as especially frightening. It was a scene she had introduced early in the conversation (lines 22–28 above) but elaborated as follows: "She starts and– she said to me, she goes, 'Who's taking [her] food? Or if you don't tell me, I'm going to suspend you for

two months!'" At that, Hala noted, she started to cry, "I said, '*Maestra*, I don't–' 'Who took the food?!'" the teacher reportedly demanded.

As in Chahida's altercation with the counsellor, verbal aggression marked moves to silence young speakers and question the veracity of their statements. Still, Hala's tears, like Chahida's before, registered a most abject form of disentitlement. Speech was not only cut off but rendered impossible by sudden emotional excess. This kind of disfluency figured prominently in the girls' narratives to one another, triggered by fear in Hala's case and anger in Chahida's and Zineb's.

In the recording, Hala mentions crying five times: four in connection with her conversation with the teacher and once in prefacing a denial to Chahida (Excerpt 1, line 2). That first instance helped establish her uptake of Chahida's distress and opened the floor to a comparative recounting of offences. Punctuating her narratives with the quotatives *empieza/viene y dice* ("[s/he] starts/ comes and says"), Hala's accounts unfolded in the language of a defenceless target who, frozen in fear and surprise, merely reacted to antagonists who approached unbidden. Before the teacher threatened her with suspension, Hala noted, several girls had launched rumours that she had been insulting people (*que yo insulto toda la gente*) and had called someone else a whore (*puta*). A boy whom they all suspected of actually taking the sandwiches came and threatened to "punch [her] in the guts" if she tattled. By Hala's telling, these maximally shaming affronts connected to taboo domains of cursing, sexuality, and physical violence position her not as an actor but as acted upon (Jackson 2005, 143). She appeals to Chahida and Zineb not only as a fellow sufferer but as one whose social dignity has been so cruelly undermined as to erase or excuse any role she might have played in the ordeal. Chahida and Zineb's emotion-laden responses, by contrast, focused on injustice and outrage, distinct sources of disfluency that foreclosed communication with others not through silence but uncontrolled speech. "I already said my version, and I'm not saying any more," Zineb said, when I asked if there were someone else she might talk to about the trouble she was facing. "If I speak, I'll lose my temper, and who knows what I'll do."

Upon finishing her suspension, Chahida reflected, in turn, "When it's for something unjust, I lose my cool." Her punishment, she noted, had not been for stealing the sandwiches but, ultimately, for disrespecting the counsellor (*faltarle el respeto*). Her loss of composure (*perder los nervios*) during their meeting had only intensified the pain of disentitlement, bubbling forth in disorderly,

visceral speech. “That’s when I started blurting things out,” she said, abashed. By Zineb’s second-hand telling, Chahida’s ability to convincingly articulate her position had been sacrificed to the counsellor’s derogation, coupled with Chahida’s instinctive responses to his aggression: “He was yelling, and then she was yelling, and then she started to cry.”

Even as expanding routes of convivial restitution became available at school, these recountings suggested that formal and informal punishment for talking out of turn derailed what the girls saw as rightfully dialogic, or otherwise democratized, problem-solving possibilities. The counsellor, for instance, had sent Chahida from his office to the newly established *convivencia* room, where she was to reflect on what had happened. He gave her a worksheet to write down her thoughts and propose ways to correct the situation. Chahida instead had marched to the blackboard and declared in big chalk letters, “I’m not a liar or a fake. NO TO RACISM!” The message, a defence of moral character and counter-allegation of institutional bigotry, stands out as a particularly clear entitlement claim. The fact that it was written and not spoken—inscribed momentarily on school property—suggests Chahida’s desperation to be heard. Here, she articulated personal suffering in the language of politicized dignity, and the move was not altogether surprising. She was, after all, steeped in classroom discussions about inequity; her interviews indicated not only that she was painfully aware of her own marginalization, but also that she identified with the struggles of fellow Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East. The stories she followed with her family on satellite TV news showed protests in Tunisia and Cairo, ongoing strife in Palestine, the unfolding genocide in Syria, and the seeming indifference of Western powers. Chahida’s rebuke leveraged perhaps the last discursive move available to her as Moroccan students’ allegations of racism tended to get swift, censorious responses from school staff. It was evidently the last straw for the counsellor, and he suspended her.

Had convivial respect been a less prominent focus of school lessons and protocols, the sting of disentitlement might have borne less irony for Chahida and Zineb. “They say it’s not racism, but it is,” Zineb insisted, reflecting on Chahida’s defiance. “It’s always the same thing.” Stripped of the basic regard afforded peaceable acquaintances, the two of them sought to translate outrage into actionable critique (see Ahmed 2015, 175). Their understanding of the contradictions that beset *convivencia* at school and in society provided moral leverage in decrying patterned bias. “Because, what have they done?” Chahida pointed out toward the end of the negotiation with Hala. “They’ve gone

one-by-one through all the [Moroccan] girls, and they didn't even give [us] a chance, and they've suspended us one-by-one."

By narrating moments of disentitlement and disfluency, the girls formed a strategic alliance based on shared injuries (see Heil 2019, 9–13). But their unlikely union rested, nonetheless, on Chahida and Zineb's careful instantiations of distance, as well. Part of the trouble they were in, they insisted to Hala, had to do with the closeness that school officials had ostensibly attributed to all of them, unaware or indifferent to the webs of affiliation and avoidance that peer groups navigated.

Reputation and Relational Proximity

It is important to note that reputational politics were not the exclusive domain of adolescent interaction. Each year, area schools, like most nationwide, drew together a *Plan de Convivencia* that outlined efforts at creating an integrated and collaborative school atmosphere. Successful initiatives for addressing students' academic preparedness (for example, for Spanish language learners) and lowering suspension rates could garner accolades from the state—as, in fact, Campo de Dalías has done in recent years. Still, the school's profile as a *centro conflictivo* weighed on staff. Some feared that the outdoor schoolyard could turn into a "battlefield," a scenario they imagined in terms of racial violence among students. They struggled, too, against disdain from local families, as the value of a secondary school diploma remained opaque to youth who planned on managing their parents' greenhouses as adults. And since so many teachers took posts in El Ejido on limited contracts, their ties to the community tended to be thin, while some locals regarded the school itself with suspicion as a state-run institution.

In other words, reputational vulnerabilities appeared at all levels of local and school life. Multi-layered assessments constituted reputational narratives as relational ones (Shuman 1993, 159), delineating how and when closeness or distance might be asserted. If the counsellor, for instance, enforced hierarchical authority over the girls, then Chahida and Zineb contested the means by which he had lumped them together with sandwich stealers and troublemakers. They sought, in turn, to rebut the ascription of wrongdoing by creating a record attesting to the distance they kept from certain other youth. Their confrontation with Hala served as a kind of forensic mapping of that distance.

They had taken deliberate steps to learn that Hala was the person who implicated Chahida. They went house to house in the neighbourhood, they told her, and one girl had even named Hala in the presence of her mother—invoking parental presence as an especially potent guarantee of reliable testimony (see Tetreault 2015, 163–165). The effort required to identify Hala, together with the interrogational framing of the confrontation, suggested that the three of them were hardly friends, much less conspirators. Chahida and Zineb evidently knew Hala by reputation (note Zineb's assertion in Excerpt 1, line 21: "Look, Hala, I know you very well") but they did not socialize with her, a claim they broadcast through indignant protest, as follows:

Excerpt 2. [03:24–03:37]

1	C:	*(To Hala)*	
2		Se vanaí *todas* delante de la dir–	You're *all* gonna go to the prin–
3		Porque, ¿he sío yo?	Cuz, was it me?
4		¿Me has visto alguna vez?	When have you ever seen me?
5	Z:	ES QUE NUNCA NOS HEMOS JUNTAO CON VOSOTRAS	CUZ WE'VE NEVER HUNG OUT WITH YOU GUYS
6		¿Por qué sacáis nuestros NOMBRES?	Why are you guys BLAMING us?
7		¡QUE NO HEMOS JUNTAO CON VOSOTROS!	CUZ WE'VE NEVER HUNG OUT WITH YOU GUYS!

Chahida and Zineb's disavowals asserted distance from Hala and her friends (*vosotras*, you all) along multiple axes: temporal (lines 4–5), physical (lines 5, 7), and affective (raised voices and indignant questions, lines 3–4, 6). Their efforts to distinguish themselves as righteous agents in a field of dishonest actors included taking distance from the girl whose food had been taken, as well. The next two excerpts from the recorded confrontation suggest that, in jettisoning all but the possibility of minimal interaction, they sought to affirm social distance as acquitting evidence.

Excerpt 3. [05:03–05:12]

1	Z:	¿Por qué a [Chahida] le van a expulsar?	Why are they going to suspend [Chahida]?
2		SI NI SIQUIERA CONOCE A LA NIÑA	IF SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW THE GIRL
3		SI NI SIQUIERA VA–	IF SHE DOESN'T EVEN GO–

4		ha ío a hablar con la niña	hasn't gone to talk with the girl
5		Cuándo, ¡¿un hola, un adiós?!	When, a hello, a goodbye?!

Echoing her own earlier protests (Excerpt 2, lines 5–7), Zineb's outrage peaks here in amplified negation and rhetorical questioning. Fact-finding gives way to moral argumentation and character building. Despite the girls' persistent tracing of who-said-what-about-whom, the central accuser in the ordeal—the peer with disabilities—appears merely as "*la niña*" (the girl) in lines 2 and 4. Infantilized and unnamed, she is made relationally and socially distant. Her otherwise unspecified difference apparently constitutes grounds for minimal engagement—"*un hola, un adiós*" (line 5)—but nothing more. Zineb's insistence that Chahida does not know and has not talked with the girl suggests adherence to norms of convivial regard, and this is a point that Chahida takes up toward the end of the recording, as follows:

Excerpt 4. [09:31–09:41]

1	C:	Porque yo NUNCA hablé con ella	Because I NEVER talked to her
2		YO LA CONOZCO que es una niña que está con los demás	I KNOW HER cuz she's a girl who's with the others
3		que no tienen la capacidad de entenderse y no sé qué	who don't have the capacity to understand and who knows what
4		¡Pero que ni siquiera yo hablo con ella!	But I never even talk with her!

In word choice and prosody, Chahida ties her disavowals to Zineb's, and in that shared stance, claims moral rectitude through a fundamentally convivial orientation. Her knowledge of the other girl's cognitive difference allows for passing recognition within the shared space of the school (lines 2–3), a degree of familiarity that contrasts against the more fraught engagement of talking with the girl ("*hablar con*," lines 1 and 4). Talking with was not so much a problem of blending or blurring public identities as it was shorthand for reputational-relational vigilance. Chahida was not concerned with being taken for a member of the special education class but with calming suspicions about her own character. The irony and moral force of her defence, then, flowed from the counter-allegation that actors who did not know her well had fundamentally violated the terms of convivial detachment by framing her, silencing her, and elevating her disentitlement into formal punishment.

As minority youth attentive to the promises and contradictions of convivial precepts, the girls recognized in the chain of gossip that put Chahida at the center of the sandwich-stealing episode machinations by peers who had leveraged existing suspicion against Moroccans to deflect and reassign blame. It was, perhaps, Chahida's social isolation beyond her close connection with Zineb that had made her an ideal scapegoat. Jackson (2005, 45–46) has suggested that scapegoats emerge at a pliable border between the familiar and the alien, identified not by characteristics that predefine their otherness but by those that can be exaggerated and subsequently stigmatized as dangerous or undesirable. Chahida, for example, was teased by other youth for wearing clothes purchased from the local *mercadillo* (flea market). "Supposedly, I'm higher class," Zineb explained it to me. I had accompanied her to Chahida's home once, where we sat clustered together on the front stoop of the apartment. Uncharacteristically for Moroccan hospitality norms, Chahida and her family did not invite us in, and when her cousin opened the front door to join us outside, I caught a glimpse past the vestibule to a narrow kitchen with partially unfinished walls and ceiling. Chahida's economic precarity may, then, have played a role in her vulnerability as a scapegoat. Poverty was a primary concern for immigrant youth, after all: a situation they and their families aimed to avoid, one they had left Morocco to address, and one that youth, specifically, were tasked with remedying for future generations of their families.

If narratives of closeness and distance doubled as reputational evaluations, then exposing false lines of connection peer-to-peer did not guarantee shifts in perception among school authorities. The shameful nature of the sandwich-stealing offence deserved a response, and Moroccan youths' ascription to an already mistrusted racialized collective may have facilitated the decision to issue blanket punishments to the accused. In the end, Chahida, Zineb, and Hala—for distinct reasons related to the ordeal—were among several other Moroccan students whose threatened or temporary suspension from school served to restore institutional order.

Making Sense of a Secret Recording

For years, I was not sure I would publish these findings; it was not clear that I was meant to. Chahida and Zineb had returned the digital recorder at the end of the term without comment, and it was not until reviewing field materials two weeks later that I noticed the extra audio file. Had they hoped that I would do something with it—make sure the principal heard it, for instance? And what

was I to make of what the recording revealed: that they had summoned Hala to the meeting without telling her it was being recorded—a verbal ambush, two-against-one, while wired?

By the time I could have asked these questions, Chahida had returned to Morocco for the summer (and I have lost contact with her since), and Zineb was reluctant to talk. I was hesitant to insist as her irritation had been evident during our last conversation. "You're just hearing all of this," she challenged, "try living it." Indeed, if ethnographic participant observation is to yield understandings of the world that approximate those of cultural insiders, then the field worker's own relational proximity to participants is also a fluctuating calibration of knowledge, knowability, and entitlement (Jeganathan 2005; Meskell and Pels 2005). In an article concerned with the uneven politics of narrative ownership and interpersonal regard, my ethnographic role in bearing witness to the girls' experiences and their stealth recording merits further consideration.

Early on, I had approached the counsellor myself, worried that the girls were becoming targets of bullying; this was after hearing about Lu's failed mediation and observing the dynamics in Chahida and Zineb's homeroom. I asked the counsellor if he thought the two were in some kind of danger, but he was incredulous, "Bullying?! Hardly! They lie. You don't know these girls. They all lie!" The following day, I learned from the girls' homeroom teacher that he had approached her, annoyed, "What is Maisa doing here, again? Why is she asking about the students?"

His dismissal looped me into the expanding sequence of disentitlements that punctuated this ordeal as well as highlighted the ambiguity of my presence. My research at Campo de Dalías unfolded in interstitial activities like interviews with students during study hall, impromptu English tutoring, and joining classroom discussions. Expectations for my "disciplined affect," as Jeganathan puts it (2005, 151), of amiable or detached curiosity, flew in the face of the politically charged query I had made. In the moment, caught between speaking for my participants or deferring to the institutional authority that had facilitated my study, I chose the latter.

It was only after a close review of the secret recording, side-by-side with interviews from those weeks, that I began to appreciate the reputational labour that Chahida and Zineb had expended in trying to absolve themselves. They could speak for themselves. What they wanted was to be heard, and thereby acknowledged—known—as having suffered by slander, insult, and exclusion.

The fact that they had entrusted the recording to me pointed to the limited outlets of appeal they had available.

In a texted exchange from 2020, I asked Zineb about the argument I was developing for this article. "You can use my name if you want," she wrote back. "I've got nothing to hide." She did not recall whether the principal listened to the recording, but her resolve had not waned:

> I personally hoped, based on what you'd said about your project, that [the recording] might be an example for other adolescents who go through the same thing, feeling different, trying to fit in, leaving aside who they are to fit in and be "normal." In sum, normalize the idea of living with (*convivir con*) other people with other customs, ideas, and achieve that harmony at school. (October 30, 2020)

The recording included, then, at least two appeals linked to its exculpatory content. The first was to collaborate—not on my terms but on the girls' (Meskell and Pels 2005, 13 and 18–19)—in substantiating and lending authority to their experiences. The second was for an improved institutional ethos, suggesting that, far from disengaging or disconnecting from conviviality, Chahida and Zineb sought moral vindication through the same ideas that had failed them.

Conclusion

I have addressed the confluence of conviviality and dignity through the girls' accounts of divestment and attempted recovery of social regard. With dignity, I emphasize social rather than self-regard since even Kantian inherency implies outside recognition of one's human worth (Fukuyama 2018, 18). The girls' bids for rehabilitation doubled as narratives of suffering, drawing stark contrasts with educational ideals of convivial problem-solving. Their pursuit of validation entailed a variegated struggle over entitlement: a communicative proxy for dignity and the very thing that *convivencia* protocols presupposed but reputational attacks undermined. Beyond exposing conviviality's inevitable imbrication with conflict, the challenges the girls faced make a case for understanding conviviality as suited to prevention but not redress of cruelty or injustice.

In this case, conviviality provided a framework for multicultural equanimity and acceptance that also reified the girls' experiences of difference as ethnoracial outsiders. And where studies of interactional conviviality have focused on such

identity boundaries as meaningful, I suggest that greater attention to time and intensity of encounters will illuminate how deeper moral claims to inclusion and exclusion intervene to shape their outcomes. Within school settings, long-term exposure to evaluative discourse demystifies the roles and statuses of even marginalized actors. Ascriptions of nonconformity reinforce social knownness in terms of marked but familiar strangeness (Goodwin 2002, 723–726). By the same token, previous literature on sites beyond the West gives examples of how broadscale shifts in public morality produce unique anxieties over who is relatable to whom and under what conditions (for example, Robbins 2004, 182–197).[2] In a place like El Ejido, the embrace of conviviality through policy and pedagogy alongside rapidly expanding multiculturalism intersects with historic changes in access to formal education, possibilities for upward mobility, and a halting embrace of secularism. Such ongoing shifts in rural Andalusian life also complicate what it means to be a good person living in relation with others.

I suggest that conviviality has become, as in El Ejido, a relational value applied to contexts in which individualism remains paramount (see Robbins 2004, 11–13). School protocols first locate within, not among, individual students the forbearing disposition of progressive convivial subjects (Taha 2017). Perceived violations of this norm trigger estranging tactics of disentitlement, derogation, and even exile. Where knowability gets attached to moral assessments—and I argue that this happens in all such exchanges (see Heil 2019)—relational proximity and equanimity also fluctuate (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014). It was notable, for instance, that the counsellor claimed epistemic privilege in his charge against Chahida and Zineb's characters: "You don't know these girls." Both creative and destructive (Ahmed 2000, 49–52), the assertion objectified the girls as liars and foes while dismissing other frameworks for knowing them. Zineb's warning to Hala, "I know you very well," similarly claimed, "I know you by your dishonesty, by your moral inconsistency."

What I have approached as the unknowability of Moroccan youth might be reframed, then, as a constraining of relational possibilities within overlapping domains of school, peers, and family. For Chahida and Zineb, the shift from tolerated acquaintances to intolerable strangers carried the urgency of social repair within a longer, contradiction-filled project of integration. Indeed, I am not the first to note that marginalized actors exert special moral and discursive labour on behalf of convivial ideals because they stand to lose so much from conviviality's failure (Heil 2015a). But if this analysis has managed

to represent something of the complex humiliation of rejection across different relational spheres, then it is thanks to Chahida and Zineb's provision of the secret recording and to their persistence in articulating the often inarticulable frustration of disentitlement within an ethno-racialized pecking order.

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Notes

1 Line breaks indicate breath phrasing, **xxx** *indecipherable speech*,-*cut-off utterance*, and [*overlapping utterances*. The Spanish includes modified eye dialect to reflect speakers' nonstandard variety while preserving standard elements for reading ease.

2 For further consideration of how previous anthropologists have addressed competing moral claims around exclusion that interface with everyday social interaction, see also García-Sánchez (2014), Hillewaert (2015), and Paz (2018).

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