‘We Are Gunslinging Girls:’ Gender and Place in Playground Clapping Games

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Abstract

This article presents a qualitative study of clapping games in the playground, a space directly conditioned by its historical and socio-cultural context. Based on qualitative interviews and observations with adults and children in Catalonia, Spain, we argue that the repressive Francisco Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) and the emergence of Spanish feminist and other critical movements in the late 1960s have shaped the nature of clapping games in school playgrounds. Through a close analysis of their lyrics, we defend the idea that the study of clapping games is important for understanding the gendered geographies and culturally-specific moments of girlhood in Catalonia, and highlight the role of playgrounds as spaces where girls negotiate their roles and identities.

Résumé

Cet article présente une étude qualitative des jeux de main sur les terrains de jeux, des lieux qui sont directement conditionnés par leur contexte historique et socioculturel. Selon des observations et des entrevues qualitatives avec des adultes et des enfants en Catalogne, une région de l’Espagne, nous faisons valoir que la dictature répressive de Francisco Franco (1939-1975) et l’émergence du féminisme espagnol et d’autres mouvements critiques à la fin des années 1960 ont façonné la nature des jeux de main qui sont joués sur les terrains de jeux scolaires. Une analyse approfondie des paroles nous permet de défendre l’idée que l’étude des jeux de main est importante pour bien comprendre la géographie des genres et les moments propres à la culture des jeunes filles de la Catalogue, et elle met en évidence le rôle des terrains de jeux comme des lieux où les filles négocient leurs rôles et leurs identités.

> In play we transform the world according to our desires, while in learning we transform ourselves better to conform to the structure of the world. (Bruner 1983:61)

One idea that has gradually gained ground in the academic discourses of the social sciences is that games provide a kind of testing ground and decisive preparation for life in society (Elkonin 1980; Thorne 1993; Blatchford 1998; Lobato 2005). Nonetheless, we agree with Pellegrini (2009), when he complains that there is still a lack of research on games and sexuality, both fundamental factors in the development of young children and adolescents. Perhaps for this reason, parents and teachers in Western society still often refer to playground games—and by extension children's songs and rhymes—as if they were innocent products transmitted vertically (from adults to children) and as if children, rather than being creative individuals with a certain critical eye, are like a great blank screen where anything adults want to project finds a place. In fact, clapping games supply a clear example of horizontal cultural transmission and social learning that occurs through messages repeated every day in school playgrounds.

Teachers and parents very often only perceive the absurdity and extravagance of some of the lyrics of clapping games and overlook the subversive value they frequently possess (Fernández Poncela 2011). The cultural practice of clapping games, usually occurring free of adult supervision, takes advantage of a presumably innocent framework—"they're just children's games"—to elude any responsibility for what is explained through their rhetoric. Themes of death, violence, murder, and sex coexist in children's games, testing the limits of social norms and offering alternatives to them. Among these different issues, the question of gender appears most often (Fernández Poncela 2006) and children's clapping games faithfully reinforce a hegemonic discourse, or transgress it, or even permit multiple discourses of gender to coexist within the same song. In fact, only by assuming that these singing games play a relevant social and cultural role can we explain their lasting presence, propagation, and survival in school playgrounds and other children's recreational areas around the world.

Clapping games are popular children's activities and, as such, are variable and adaptable to changing circumstances (Mascaró 2008). Thanks to their dynamism and lack of standardization, they display a great ability as an oral tradition to introduce and reflect emerging social changes at a particular moment in time. In other words, on the premise that society is changing, children's subcultures modify the pattern of how they live on the streets, at home, and through the media.[1] Thus, while bearing in mind the features shared by most clapping games from all over the world, the researcher should take a local approach and include an analysis of the social, political, and cultural context in the specific community and time (Geertz 1983). With this in mind, this paper provides an initial exploration of the evolution of clapping games in Spain and Catalonia, while highlighting themes that invite further research.

This article presents the findings of research carried out in a small town in Catalonia, Spain, based on adult and child experiences of clapping games as former or current participants. It is an exploratory study, covering the evolution of clapping games from the 1920s until the present day. Our goal was to analyze the evolution of this cultural product, which is generally associated with the school playground, a place where children have historically reproduced, transgressed, and/or negotiated gender identities (Tomé and Ruiz 2002). In this study, the playground is seen as a space directly conditioned by the historical and socio-cultural contexts that exist beyond its boundaries. We argue that the repression experienced under Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) and the emergence of Spanish feminist and other critical movements in the late 1960s determine—partly but clearly—the nature of clapping games in school playgrounds. Therefore, we defend the idea that the study of clapping games is important for understanding the gendered geographies and culturally-specific moments of girlhood in Catalonia, both under Franco's regime and thereafter.

Clapping Games, Music Experience, and Gender in the School Playground

Numerous studies carried out in different fields show that music plays a special role in the task of building or negotiating narratives and discourses. Stokes (1994) states that "music is clearly very much a part of modern life and our understanding of it, articulating our knowledge of other peoples, places, times and things, and ourselves in relation to them" (4). Similarly, Fernández Poncela (2006) affirms that:

> Song is a means to social enculturation in general, and this seems particularly clear in childhood, when children's minds are molded, when their socio-political culture is shaped and, among other things, the formation of politico-social ideas takes place. (3)

Others still, suggest that music helps individuals to understand and make sense of what is experienced, and to recognize themselves in the identities they conform to (Vila 1996; Viñuela and Viñuela 2008). We agree that music is dialectical and ranges from the acceptance of hegemonic discourses—and their associated power relations—to their negotiation and subversion. In fact, tradition and folklore historically play a twofold—conscious or unconscious—role of reinforcement and subversion of the establishment (Ackerley 2007; Bishop and Burn 2013). Popular culture creates moments of "chanting what cannot be said" (Ayats 2010, n.p.), or situations where, in the words of Minks (2008), "the performance frame enacts a metacommunicative message that says *this is play, it's not real*" (54), though performance does eventually have an impact on reality. Therefore, what is considered socially acceptable exists alongside what is considered socially wrong, with the latter actually being what attracts children most (Bauer and Bauer 2007).

Among those identities co-constructed from an early age, the ones associated with gender and sexuality have generated the most literature (Leal 1998; Butler 1999; Lobato 2005). Based on the idea that gender identity is not innate (Minks 2008), several authors highlight the importance of school and especially the school playground—this being a place less controlled by adults—as spaces where these identities are exhibited publicly and negotiated (Grugeon 1993; Thorne 1993; Bhana, Nzimakwe, and Nzimakwe 2011). The observation of a school playground very clearly reveals the existence of some spaces and activities more associated with boys and others more typical of girls (Bonal 1998; Willet 2013). While football and other team sports, or other activities requiring physical strength, are often the main way boys manifest their masculinity in accordance with hegemonic discourse (Swain 2000; Ridgers et al. 2011), various authors agree that singing games are crucial to the co-construction of female gender and sexuality (Opie and Opie 1985; Ackerley 2007; Minks 2008; Bhana, Nzimakwe, and Nzimakwe 2011).

One of the most popular types of singing games in playgrounds around the world is the clapping game: the term used to describe those long-established practices based on motor-skill songs where two children stand opposite each other—or in a circle if there are more than two—and clap hands together, while sometimes inter-mingling other gestures. These songs are based on a kind of choreography repeated cyclically while they are sung, and they are performed in children's recreational areas, such as the school playground. This is a complex activity in the sense that many different elements are involved and demand analysis: melody, rhythm, the body, movement, space, interpersonal relations, and so on. Like most traditional and popular activities, clapping games are usually passed on through observation and imitation, with younger children learning from older children (Grugeon 1993). On a linguistic level, there is frequent use of meaningless words and phrases (Bauer and Bauer 2007), but also of topics considered taboo or politically incorrect with regard to gender roles, sex, and explicit violence (Fernández Poncela 2005; Ackerley 2007; Bhana, Nzimakwe, and Nzimakwe 2011).

Various authors have analyzed activities similar to clapping games. Particular mention should be made of the contributions of Janice Ackerley (2007), Laurie and Winifred Bauer (2007), and Amanda Minks (2008). Ackerley's (2007) study in New Zealand, which also includes many references to studies in other countries, reveals that "children, as a relatively powerless group in society, use rhymes to comment upon and experiment with the boundaries of their life experiences" (223). She continues by affirming that "the rhymes are often subversive and their meanings are not always immediately obvious to the casual observer" (223). This is an idea other authors also draw attention to, such as Bhana, Nzimakwe, and Nzimakwe (2011). However, Ackerley (2007) goes a step further and suggests a need to investigate whether the way adults interpret these songs is consistent with the interpretations and meanings children ascribe to them. Apart from containing messages that transgress adult understandings of power and gender roles, such as those held by teachers, the police, and parents, Ackerley highlights the fact that singing games help children to understand and manage power relations. The author also mentions that they are more typical of girls than boys, especially those that touch on issues of sexuality and the life stages. She underscores that the female figure plays an increasingly active part in rhymes, with lyrics that even include explicit acts of

violence against adults. With respect to age, she points out that this recreational repertoire is most popular during middle childhood, between the ages of eight and ten. Finally, it is worth noting that she always considers children as active subjects not only in regard to the activity itself, but also in terms of creativity:

> [...] children are not only astute observers of adult social and cultural practices, but they also readily incorporate these observations into their folklore. (218)

With regard to creativity, Bauer and Bauer (2007) explain that many clapping games are the fruit of the combination of two previously existing songs or texts. They also affirm that this cultural product is constantly changing and adapting to the socio-cultural context and individual needs, with current fashions having a clear influence. Furthermore, other research, for example, by Arleo (2001), highlights the potential for dissemination of some of these songs in a wide variety of countries and languages, and ultimately, the possibility of studying the way this activity transcends the local environment (Marsh 2008). Finally, Minks (2008) analyzes two singing games and underscores the fact that the co-construction of gender identities resulting from the social interaction occurring there is very significant. Minks also states that it is important to remember that "the musical, poetic and kinetic aspects of the games make them pleasurable and memorable" (53).

Literature that refers directly to these singing games in Catalonia and Spain is scarce, possibly due to cultural tendencies that devalue oral traditions in Western cultures. We note that that this type of activity has not been classified by any of the leading twentieth-century folklorists (Riera 2013). Apart from studies by Ferré (1993) and Martín Escobar (2001), no other extensive research has been carried out on clapping games in Spain (Riera and Casals 2014). Martín Escobar (2001) situates the origin of these types of games in the context of the late 1960s, with a boom in popularity in the following decades. The same author underscores the fact that an important part of children's repertoire—among which she includes clapping games—is created or re-created by the children themselves. Ferré (1993) highlights the high participation of girls and the role of clapping games in enculturation, inculcating certain values and ideas about the world. He identifies the ages of eight to ten years as the point when they are most popular and speculates on the impact of the mass media on the creation or modification of this type of song. He also notes that the songs are always in Spanish, despite the fact that the mother tongue of many of the children in the study was Catalan and that the ban on this language in schools had been lifted over ten years earlier.[2] By way of an explanation, he suggests that an idealized format restricted to a specific space and time may be what permits this shift in linguistic register to Spanish during their performance. As mentioned above, though clapping games are an everyday schoolyard activity, they often invoke an out-of-the-ordinary space and moment in time. Clapping games only appear in some songbooks and in broader studies of folklore, oral traditions, and gender. Consequently, further discussion in Catalan and Spanish scientific literature about the relationship between these songs and the associated gender spaces and narratives can only be found in children's geographies (Baylina, Ortiz, and Prats 2006), some contributions to papers that explore the messages and discourses of children's songs generically (Fernández Poncela 2005), and some educational articles (Romero and Romero 2013).

Clapping Games down through Different Generations

With this shortfall in the study of clapping games in Spain, a preliminary study was initiated early in 2012. The research used Rice's (1987) classic ethnomusicological approach, which asks the question: historically, how has music been constructed, maintained socially, and individually experienced by human beings? Understanding music as an action or activity (Small 1998), the question can be translated to an analysis of clapping games. It also implies both diachronic and synchronic perspectives,[3] and simultaneously assumes the influence of the context (historical and social) and the importance of individual experience.

Using this general framework, a study was carried out in Cardedeu, a small town near Barcelona (17,000 inhabitants). With the aim of collecting the repertoire and the narratives of people from different generations, interviews were conducted with a stratified sample of individuals between the ages of twelve and ninety-nine who lived in the target town. The sample, which was not intended to be representative, was select-

ed on grounds of accessibility and with the aim of meeting informants of different ages. Specifically, eight people in each age group of twelve to twenty-nine, thirty to sixty-nine, and over seventy were interviewed. Group interviews (of between two and four people) were conducted with participants from the first two age cohorts, while individual interviews were preferred in the case of the oldest participants. With regard to gender, many more women than men were interviewed, the latter constituting only twenty percent of the sample. All the interviews were recorded for later in-depth analysis.

The interviews were semi-structured and always conducted by the same researcher. In these guided conversations, the interviewees were prompted to explain and discuss their experience with this type of singing game and the characteristics of the activity (location, duration, participants, movements, most popular songs, socio-cultural context, and so on.). They were also asked to sing and act out the gestures of the various clapping games they remembered and then discuss the lyrics and their interpretation of each of the songs.

The interviews by age cohort were complemented by observations made during eight school days in a pre- and primary school playground (children aged from three to twelve) in the same town. The data gathered from these observations and also a series of brief informal interviews conducted with children and teachers were logged in the researcher's field notes. As with the interviews described above, this field work was also recorded on video for later analysis.

Data analysis brought to light forty-one different clapping games, many with numerous variations. They constitute a sample of the repertoire existing in playgrounds from 1920 to 2015 (see Annex) and provide interesting data on roles, stereotypes, and gender construction. All data collected has been translated by the authors from Spanish to English. Some of the findings are described below.

Clapping Games in the Playgrounds of Catalonia

The characteristics and functions of clapping games in Catalonia—and by extension in Spain—are much the same as what was described initially about this type of singing game in other cultural contexts. However, certain aspects of the socio-cultural context do condition and set them apart. The collected testimonies provide an explanation of salient historical points leading up to their adoption as the playground game par excellence of girls.

Historical Background of Clapping Games in Catalonia and Spain

Clapping games underwent an important change in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Catalonia and Spain. We argue that the decline of Spanish nationalism and the effervescence of the feminist and progressive movements generated a social transformation and that clapping games reflected this new context. Finally, the emergence of mixed schools and the relaxation of gender roles (in the late 1970s and early 1980s) consolidated the changes in clapping games.

Twentieth-century Spain was decisively marked by the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Apart from the tragedy itself, Francisco Franco's victory marked the beginning of a fascist dictatorship that lasted almost forty years. Ideologically, the Civil War resulted in the victory of the most conservative factions (including the army, Catholic Church, and the aristocracy) over the progressive governments that had ruled during the first half of the 1930s. Among other measures, the Franco regime took great pains to impose a traditional family model in which the role of women was relegated to housework and private childcare, in contrast to the figure of the father, who was the breadwinner and moved primarily in the public sphere. This meant that women were dependent on men and had to play a subordinate role in order to be socially accepted. In this context, the feminine stereotype was placed in opposition to the masculine one. According to feminist and sociological literature (see Bosch, Ferrer, and Navarro 2006), some of the terms used to describe the women of that time were: emotional, fearful, lacking initiative or decision-making capacity, compliant, generous, and caring. This socially hegemonic discourse was justified by assumed biological differences and, consequently, any attempt to change the situation was labeled as unnatural. Then, in the late 1960s, owing to the influence of international feminist movements and a certain weakening of the dictatorship, new assertive voices and discourses demanding a change of model began to make themselves heard (Bosch, Ferrer, and Navarro 2006).

The repertoire of clapping games collected in this study indicates that this type of singing game did

not become a specific genre distinguishable from other types of playground games and songs until the 1960s, when the decline of the Franco regime was beginning. In other words, a particular song could be used interchangeably, for example, in a clapping game, while skipping or when singing in a circle, as Concepció indicates:

> 'I'm the queen of the seas; you'll soon see that; throw the handkerchief on the ground and pick it back up!' That's a song you could dance to, clap along to or do anything with. The thing about those songs is that…we would do anything to have a bit of fun! (Concepció, a woman born in 1926)

During the Franco era (1939-1975), most public and private schools were single gender and so girls and boys did not play together in the school recreational area (the playground or a central corridor, or a street or town square in other cases). As one participant recalled:

> In those days, boys and girls were separated at different schools, and even in the play areas because the boys went to a square in the village and girls to a street called 'la Avenida'; at the far end there was a grotto dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes and we used to play there. We never saw each other and I remember that a lot of the songs in the playground were religious. (Rosa, a woman born in 1927)

On the other hand, those interviewees who were educated during the Franco era and who went to mixed schools—which were usually very small state schools—claim that boys' participation in singing games was more common before the 1960s:

> It was a little school, with the girls and boys sharing just one classroom…and sometimes we used to sing songs together. (Teresa, a woman born in 1952)

The fact that girls and boys participated together does not mean there were no other socializing agents marking out gender differences or that there were no differences in the dynamics of the game:

> Did the boys use to play these singing games with you during break time?
> Yes, we did it all together. Although there were some songs that were embarrassing…for example when the crazy woman has a fig in her arse [she sings] and we used to prance about like this to make the point. Some of us used to feel embarrassed and say…look at the disgusting pig! (Dialogue between the researcher and Asun, a woman born 1944)

As a general rule, however, these songs often featured religious references or mentioned everyday activities that respected the roles marked out by the dictatorship. The narrative content of the lyrics and the descriptive movements of the body had no obscene content during this period:

> The lyrics were not generally obscene, though there was some silliness sometimes. Like in the song 'desde pequeñita' where we used to sing: 'thwack, thwack, I'm going to give you a kick'. But I remember the lyrics as being quite innocent. (Catalina, a woman born in 1930)

Some interviewees also explained how lyrics were sometimes made up to denounce a real situation where the social norms had broken down:

> There was a song about a girl who got pregnant at sixteen. At the time this was a terrible thing to happen and, of course, the whole school made up a song about her. (Asun, a woman born in 1944)

This example shows how the lyrics easily provided a way of reinforcing a particular view of young girls' sexuality. The stories they tell could then be maintained or modified by their performers.

It should be remembered that during the Franco era, playground activities, including lyrical content of songs, were strictly controlled by the teachers in most schools. Furthermore, the social context was heavily conditioned by religion and, ultimately, Catholic morality:

> The teachers used to control and keep tabs on us during break time…those were other times. And one thing for sure, we weren't allowed to tell jokes…When we finished [the break time] we used to say prayers and recite the Lord's Prayer to Our Lady of Lourdes. (Rosa, a woman born in 1927)

On the other hand, there was less control in some smaller schools:

> We didn't have a playground; the school was in an apartment. We used to go outside during break time, with nobody watching because there were so few of us. (Concepció, a woman born in 1927)

In the early 1960s, the use of many playground songs gradually became restricted to clapping games. This phenomenon was consolidated in the 1970s and, very importantly, changes in the lyrics of these songs may also be observed as compared to other types of singing games. Taboo subjects, such as death, murder, and sex, figured more often, transgressing social norms and confronting the established order. The roles given to women in the songs became more active, sometimes performing activities not considered feminine, while the male role might be indistinctly active or passive. There was more frequent use of parody, the absurd, exaggeration of situations, and hypersexualized images of some female characters (see Box 1 for an example).

Somos chicas pistoleras	**We are gunslinging girls**
Somos chicas pistoleras	We are gunslinging girls
rubias y morenas	blondes and brunettes
del noventa y tres, noventa	from ninety-three,
y tres.	ninety-three.
Usamos medias amarillas	We use yellow stockings
zapatos con hebilla	with buckled shoes
y hablamos en inglés.	and speak in English.
Somos chicas pistoleras	We are gunslinging girls
rubias y morenas,	blondes and brunettes,
de la capital,	from the capital,
llevamos poquita ropa	We wear scanty
y nos la quitamos con	clothing
facilidad.	and like to take it off.

Box 1: A version of "Somos chicas pistoleras" provided by informants born in the 1970s.

It is not by chance that this song was sung to the tune of the Can-Can, one of the symbols of the French Moulin Rouge.[4] It provides a clear example of a sexually explicit protagonist, possessing powers of decision and wanting to identify with a "modern" or "liberated" type of woman (the song dates from 1970s). We argue that hypersexuality often served as a defense against the imposition of the roles of mother and housewife. A similar phenomenon occurred in Spain with the boom in adult comics (1967-1986), where the traditional female role was challenged and increasingly replaced with the other extreme: a hypersexual, adventurous, childless, beautiful, intelligent, and erotic girl (Clúa 2008).

Moreover, speaking English and being "gunslinging girls" are allusions to the United States (USA) and, along with the aforementioned French reference, allowed the singers to identify with a foreign model of femininity. In the context in question, countries such as the USA and France were seen as advanced Western societies where women had long abandoned conservative femininity. The masculine symbol of the gun seems to suggest a female figure who was publicly active and dominant. In contrast to the sexual norms ascribed to being a mother or wife, she felt free to show off her body. However, it is worth noting that the reference to the Moulin Rouge Can-Can also suggested the idea that feminine sexual transgression served as male entertainment.

Spanish society in the 1960s and 1970s was conditioned by a changing socio-political context that ultimately resulted in its transition from a dictatorship to a democracy. This transition involved the opening up of Catalan and Spanish society to Europe and the world, as well as important changes in relation to women and family ideals (Moreno 2004). It was a time when new, free-thinking movements provided women the opportunity to occupy public space, discrediting the sexist pigeonholing they had endured and offering a challenge to the dominant patriarchal system (Bosch, Ferrer, and Navarro 2006). The proliferation of new versions of clapping games or lyrics in sympathy with this political and social upheaval was symptomatic and, as we argue, contributed to the construction of gender identity in partial response to the developments explained above.

At the end of the 1970s, mixed gender schools —and mixed gender playgrounds—became widespread (Subirats 2010). This shift to shared play areas clearly had a decisive impact on the development and significance of these games. Here is an example of the dichotomy that existed between boys' and girls' games:

> Conchita: No, no way, it was a girls' game, they [the boys] weren't interested.

> Anton: We used to play football. I don't recall any of my friends playing those games. There might have been someone…
> Conchita: Me neither, not on your life. If they did…it was in secret. They were games for girls! (Group interview: Conchita, a woman born in 1964; and Anton, a man born in 1966)

Thanks to these songs, girls could articulate publicly—or at least with boys nearby physically—their own critical discourse on gender and sexuality as well as the boundaries of their own spatial organization of gender-based play. In some ways, we see here a parallel with—or an extension of—the gender conflicts that emerged in Catalan and Spanish society with the disappearance of the heavily dichotomized private and public roles existing during Franco's dictatorship (Bosch, Ferrer, and Navarro 2006). In fact, girls who engaged in clapping games swapped the gender-monitoring not only of teachers in playgrounds, but also of Spanish society for their own predominantly in-group monitoring of gender roles in shared-gender spaces.

According to our data, clapping games took on an increasingly prominent role during the following decades, to the detriment of other types of singing games, until they become a first choice for girls in the late 1980s. This situation has remained unchanged until the present day, though with some discontinuities.

Gender and Participation in the Contemporary Context

All of the interviewees and researchers' observations confirmed that clapping games are now a predominantly female activity in school playgrounds. This means that they are often derided or caricatured by boys who do not participate:

> They [clapping songs] are really weird, I don't like them at all. Because doing like this is really freaky [he mimics the gestures, exaggerating the feminine part]. (Aitor, a boy born in 2001)

Nonetheless, the data collected in the school playground shows that there are boys who do join in and some who even take an active role in the transmission of singing games:

> In my case, a boy called Pol showed them [clapping games] to me, so we've always been good friends…Sometimes I found them hard to learn, but…he really is a very nice boy. (Berta, a girl born in 2001)

For the most part, however, we found that boys tend to participate at earlier ages (five and six years old). The reason may well lay in the fact that gender roles are not as marked as at older ages. The boys who play often adopt positions or convey messages considered by older children and adults as feminine, but they are still not experienced as such at this age. For example, as indicated in the song included in Box 2, the characters are female and the boys would have to perform actions conceptualized as effeminate—and sensual as well: brushing their imaginary long hair, when singing "so pretty!" and saucily raising and playing with their skirts.

En la calle redonda[5]	**In the round, round street**
En la calle redonda, redonda,	In the round, round street
hay una zapatería, ia , ia	there is a shoe shop, op, op,
donde van las chicas guapas,	where all the pretty girls go,
¡guapas! ¡guapas!	So pretty! So pretty!
a tomarse las medidas:	To take their size:
cuarenta y seis!	Forty-six!
Se levantan la faldilla, ¡olé!	They lift their skirts, hey,
¡olá!	wow!
un poquito más arriba, ¡olé!	Just a little bit more, hey,
¡olá!	wow!
Se les ve la pichurrilla,	You can see their willies,
¡socorro! ¡socorro!	help, help!
y el pobre zapatero,	and the poor shoemaker,
¡dinero!¡dinero!	money, money!
se ha caído de la silla.	He's fallen off his chair.
¡Ahhhhhh! pan con	Ahhhhhh! Bread and
mantequilla.	butter.

Box 2: A version of "En la calle redonda" provided by informants born in the 1960s.

The lyrics of this song suggest multiple readings, from the actions of a child abuser to the seduction of an attractive shoemaker. The first interpretation is based on the fact that the shoemaker, instead of worrying about the girls' shoe size, takes other measurements.

In this regard, it should be noted that the gestures that accompany the song at this point are very clear and indicate that forty-six refers to a body measurement. In the contrary interpretation, it is the girls who provoke the situation on their own initiative. In any case, the cobbler—as a male figure and adult—ends up being ridiculed.

Returning to the question of participation, among children over eight years old in particular, gender preferences become much more pronounced and many boys stop being players to become, at best, observers. One exception are songs sung in a circle, such as *El conejo de la suerte* and *Don Macarrón chistero*, through which boys and girls explore their likes and preferences in a group, as well as their crushes and friendships. According to a group of girls aged ten and eleven, it is all right for boys to sing these songs; however, the ones they refer to as "for clapping and that's it" are considered to be almost exclusively for girls.

Despite this differentiation between girls' and boys' activities in the playground, our findings show that there are boys who continue to participate, subject to the rules and practices established by the girls. Given this circumstance, girls adopt two attitudes. Sometimes, boys are not readily accepted; they are seen as intruders and the girls snub them, pull faces, and ignore them when picking partners. Other times, if they think a boy is showing genuine interest, they praise him and value it as a positive aspect of his personality. However, as indicated by Ridgers et al. (2011), it seems that the boy has to demonstrate certain aptitudes to be accepted into a game associated with the opposite sex. This was confirmed in one of the group interviews with nine-year-old girls:

> Why do you think the boys don't join in [in clapping games]?
> I'm not sure…maybe they don't like them.
> Ok…but if there was some boy who liked playing, I bet he would do it really well.
> And would you let him join in?
> If he did it well, yes. (Conversation between the researcher and a group of nine-year-old girls)

This relatively open approach taken by preadolescent girls to boys' participation was not corroborated by the interviews with teenagers and adults. They offer a much more dichotomized image of the participants:

> The fact is, there were two different worlds! I don't see them playing together. Do you know what I mean? The boys went straight off to play football, as a dynamic…In the playground everyone had their place…as if they had a role. Everyone did their own thing. (Núria, a girl born in 1984)

Even those who had quite recently stopped playing singing games insisted on this separation, relating it to peer pressure, the phenomena of power and marginalization, and, ultimately, socially dominant discourse:

> I wouldn't stigmatize them now, but…if you meet a boy and you find out what he did (whether he played or didn't played clapping games)…well, it's like if you aren't a crack football player and don't go out with the girls and don't have spiky hair, then you aren't worth a piece of shit… (Laia, a girl born in 1992)

The quote illustrates the way in which heteronormative masculinity features in the discourses not only of boys, but of girls as well. It indicates the deep presence of these ideas in the context under study and suggests that any modification of this discourse is an extremely challenging task.

Reproduction and Subversion of Gender Identities

Clapping games present an opportunity to create new gender alternatives and transgress canonical boundaries. To do so, they use a forceful and very effective mechanism: repetition. Time and time again, children repeat the same song, the same words and ideas about possible gender identities. But who made up these transgressive lyrics, passed down by children from one generation to the next?

When adults reflected on their own experience with clapping games as children, it is surprising to note that they perceived children to be incapable of creating songs with sexualized or violent content. The interviews show that adults did not conceptualize children as the active creators of these songs and were surprised by the brutality of some songs about violence against women, such as this one:

Don Federico	**Mr Federico**
Don Federico *mató a su mujer,* *la hizo picadillo* *y la puso en la sartén.* *La gente que pasaba* *olía a carne asada,* *era la mujer de Don Federico*	Mr Federico murdered his wife, made her into mincemeat and put her in the pan. People passing by smelled the fried meat, that was the wife of Mr Federico.

Box 3: A version of "Don Federico" provided by informants born in the 1960s.

In short, they underestimated children's capacity for analysis, transgression, and creativity; i.e. the processes of observing and integrating messages and situations from their environment into their habitual repertoire. Children, however, take advantage of this space to give voice to taboo subjects, those subjects that their elders try to hide from them because they are only considered suitable for adults: death, murder, sex, gender violence, and so on. Take, for example, this song about a parricide:

Doña Margarita	**Miss Margarita**
Doña Margarita *hija de un rey moro,* *que mató a su padre* *con cuchillo de oro.* *No era ni de plata* *ni de plata fina,* *era un cuchillito de pelar* *patatas.* *¡Ding Dong! llaman a la* *puerta* *¡Ding Dong! es la policía* *¡Ding Dong! vienen a por tí!.*	Miss Margarita daughter of a Moorish king, killed her father with a gold knife. It wasn't made of silver or fine silver, it was a potato knife! Ding Dong! A knock on the door Ding Dong! It's the police Ding Dong! They're coming for you!

Box 4: A version of "Doña Margarita" provided by informants born in the 1970s.

For many decades, some issues were hushed up in the presence of adults:

> So some were saucier?
> The thing is, the saucier ones weren't allowed, not even by the teacher. Some we played on the sly so that the teachers and parents wouldn't punish us! (Conversation between the researcher and Asun, a woman born in 1944).

And, in fact, in a conversation with primary school girls about the song *Amarillo* (Box 5), one of the participants confirmed that she knew exactly what that particular song was about.

Amarillo[6]	**Yellow**
Yo conocí a un profesor *que en matemáticas me puso* *un dos.* *En inglés me puso un tres,* *y en historia, me suspendió.* *Amarillo se puso mi papa* *cuando le enseñé* *las notas de este mes.* *Colorada me puse yo también,* *cuando me enseñó* *su nuevo cinturón.* *Me pegó, me castigó,* *me tiró por el balcón.* *Suerte que había un colchón,* *esa fue mi bendición.* *Subí por el ascensor* *me encontré al profesor,* *le pegué, le castigué* *le tiré por el balcón.* *Suerte que no había colchón.* *Esa fue su maldición.*	I had a teacher In maths he gave me a two. In English he gave me a three, and in history, he failed me. My dad went livid when I showed him my grades. And I went pale when he showed me his new belt. He thrashed me, he punished me, He threw off the balcony. Lucky there was a mattress, that saved me. I went up in the elevator I found the teacher, I thrashed him, I punished him I threw him off the balcony. Lucky there was no mattress. That finished him.

Box 5: Song with explicitly violent messages. A version of "Amarillo" provided by informants born in the 1970s.

And even though they saw it as something unreal, like an imaginary story, the young girls' comments could be this brutal:

> I think it's ok [that the teacher was thrown off the balcony] because if a teacher gives you low grades it's normal to throw him off the balcony, and what's really cool is that there was no mattress. (Maria, a girl born in 2002)

In contrast, several of the adults interviewed found songs like this disturbing and tried to rationalize or minimize them by citing the age of the participants as an excuse:

> You hear some bad language. It's a laugh—it makes you feel more grown-up and all that—but, really, you don't stop to look for the real meaning of the song. (Laia, a girl born in 1992)

> Let's see, when you're small, logically…you don't think about what you're saying. I think they are songs sung more out of routine, out of habit, and because you've heard them, you repeat them like you repeat any other story. (Montse, a woman born in 1967)

The above opinion is very illustrative because it reveals the strength of the mechanism of repetition as way of fostering the intangible transmission of cultural meanings. Much to the adults' surprise, the motivation of the game prompts the participants to repeat the songs for weeks, to the point of extenuation:

> You think they've forgotten all about it…and suddenly one day they all start up again. They all know them and they go on for weeks [playing the clapping games] without stopping. (Schoolteacher, a woman born in 1969)

This repetition establishes and maintains the rules governing identity as proclaimed by the dominant culture (Butler 1999). For this reason, it is important to remember that the subject of this study is a singing game. In all cases, this is a *language game* that would be very hard to play without the power of the *musical game*, which makes the act invisible through the adoption of collective accountability where everybody takes part and nobody is to blame. The participants found clapping games funny and inoffensive. The musical facet, in their case, provides a way of controlling the time (beginning and end) and the narrative in each piece, which also aids in their repetition:

> We often sing these songs, almost every day; we sing them anywhere in the playground and we have a lot of fun, and the time goes by really quickly. (Andrea, a girl aged 10)

On the other hand, with the benefit of hindsight, some adults discovered the spirit of subversion:

> It's fun to sing, easy, in pairs or small groups and everyone likes to be with someone! What's more, they were different from the songs in the classroom, which were more boring, and that's probably why they talk about murder and death. Being rebellious about what you were taught in a class, rebelling against the establishment…they used to teach me Christmas carols in class!

> Right, it was about doing what we liked. (Group interview, conversation between two women born in the 1960s)

An examination of the song lyrics and which ones the interviewees found more meaningful when they were children revealed that those referring to gender roles or stereotypes made up a significant part of the corpus collected during the research (63.4 percent of the clapping games). In general, these clapping games play with the meaning of gender identity, although in some cases they are also used to announce certain individual characteristics of the participants (for example, age or romantic feelings). It is also common to use the names of famous people (favorite singers, television presenters, and so on), although they are not indispensable. However, the most important point is that whether they are well known or not, the girls often identify with the characters.

Clapping games also contain mixed messages (see Box 6). The stories tend to be parodies of activities considered feminine or masculine. They may support or exaggerate the canons (gender roles and stereotypes) imposed by the dominant hegemonic culture or subvert them through caricature and by offering alternatives to established gender models. Moreover, these two techniques may feature in a single song, usually starting with the dominant norm and then transgressing it through subversion.

In the first example in Box 6, femininity is associated with "being a doll"—pretty and subject to someone's power. The second example is paradoxical; titled

Barbie—after the doll of the same name, the quintessential Western stereotype of the feminine woman as beautiful—this is a song advocating a completely contrary model of femininity (active, violent, and sexual):

> Barbie can do anything! She can drive a car, roller-skate… you can see that in the ad! [She sings the song from the advertisement and some of her classmates are heard to agree].
> I do karate [making movements from this sport] and I know much more than a lot of the boys here! [pointing to the football pitch]. (conversation between two girls aged 10)

Preservation of the canon	
Las vocales	**The vowels**
Con la a, a, biribiri ba *tengo una muñeca de cristal.* *Con la e, e, biribiri be* *tengo una muñeca de papel.* *Con la i, i, biribiri bi* *tengo una muñeca de marfil.* *Con la o, o, biribiri bo* *tengo una muñeca de cartón.* *Con la u, u, biribiri bu* *tengo una muñeca como tú*	Give me an a, a, diddly da I've got a doll made of glass Give me an e, e, diddly de I've got a doll made of crêpe Give me an i, i, diddly di I've got a doll made of ivory Give me an o, o, diddly do I've got a doll made of wood Give me a u, u, diddly du I've got a doll like you
Subversion of the canon	
Barbie	**Barbie**
En la calle veinticuatro *hay un grupo de mujeres* *que les enseñan a los hombres* *karate, boxeo y un poco de chochorreo.* *Azúcar, limón, cámaras y acción.* *Abiertas, cerradas, para los lados.* *¡Y yo me quedó así!*	On twenty-fourth street There's a bunch of women who teach men karate, boxing and a bit of hanky-panky. Sugar, lemon, cameras and action. Open, closed, from the sides. And I want to be like that!

Combination of the canon and its subversion	
Teresa quería ser	**Teresa wanted to be**
Teresa quería ser enfermera de primera, *Teresa quería ser enfermera de primera.* *Pinchazo, vacuna,* *el niño está en la cuna* *bautizado por el cura.* *El niño a la basura, ¡caradura!*	Teresa wanted to be a top nurse, Teresa wanted to be a top nurse. Jabs and vaccines, the child is in the cot baptized by the priest. The child in the trash, cheeky brat!

Box 6: Examples of songs with diverse types of messages related to the socially predominant gender stereotypes.

One of the most stereotypical ideas about women is their supposed interest in looking after other people, but not themselves. The last example in Box 6, *Teresa quería ser*, draws on the stereotype of women as care-givers, illustrated by the desire to become a nurse. The song surprises us by transgressing this social norm: "the child in the trash, cheeky brat!" Finally, it should be noted that the phrase "baptized by the priest" in this context is not accidental, but rather reinforces the idea of respecting established social rules. Thus, in this example, we are able to observe the workings of the canon and its subversion.

Conclusion

Clapping games are developed and transmitted orally from older to younger children in a recreational space specific to girls with little or no adult supervision. This trend often leads to a naturalization of the differentiation between the two genders (Bonal 1998). Girls play at mimicking the established gender roles, while testing their limits and the alternatives as a necessary step towards adulthood (Grugeon 1993). In line with authors, such as Tomé and Ruiz (2002), it should also be pointed out that the process of co-construction of gender identities takes place precisely in a space where female recreational activity has to compete with the activities and often excessive occupation of the space by boys. In this respect, we disagree with the view of some

authors, for example Bonal (1998), who describe female attitudes solely as a demonstration of passivity and conformity. Rather, we argue that the way actively participating girls, and also some boys, defend their place in the playground is analogous to defending their place in society outside the classroom context.

Additionally, the findings of this research suggest there is a relationship between the discourses of the feminist social movements of the 1960s and 1970s that sought to subvert the *status quo* (Bosch, Ferrer, and Navarro 2006) and the evolution of clapping games until they became an essential girls' game. In contrast to Martín Escobar's (2001) conclusions, the results indicate that clapping games appeared well before the 1960s, but they became gender specific and took on more relevance during that decade. This process was linked to the emergence of a series of new concerns and those related to gender identities stand out in particular. Tensions over hegemonic gender roles and stereotypes and greater freedom of expression all had and have an impact on children's lives. In the same way that the lyrics of the singing games are open to the introduction of popular personalities or TV content (Minks 2008), they also incorporate or hint at messages that subvert the established gender models. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Bauer and Bauer (2007) and Fernández Poncela (2011), these coexist alongside messages that reiterate the hegemonic discourses of dichotomous gender roles, sexuality, and indeed even the ascendency of Spanish over Catalan, the local mother tongue. While adults have already often categorized their practices, children insist on trying to develop and negotiate what is determined by adults. In this process, games, music, and the constant repetition of messages are powerful weapons passed down from one generation of girls to the next.

Annex

Table 1: List of existing repertoire according to the data provided by the informants

Informants' dates of birth and historical period	New songs collected	Songs no longer mentioned
1914-1935 Before the Spanish Civil War	Cocherito leré Desde pequeñita Anton Carolina (or Anton Calabaina) Baixant de la Font del gat Chocolate amarillo El señor Don Gato En el fondo del mar En Joan petit quan balla Platerets test test Soy la reina de los mares	
1936-1959 Spanish Civil War and early years of Francoism (repression and dictatorship)	Chincha rabiña Tarara sí, tarara no Soy la farolera El patio de mi casa Chocolate molinillo	Baixant de la Font del gat El fondo del mar El señor Don Gato En Joan petit quan balla Platerets test test El cocherito leré Chincha rabiña
1960-1976 2nd phase of Francoism (certain opening-up of the regime)	Eram Sam Sam En la calle redonda En la calle 24 Don Federico Miliquituli Santa Teresita (or Doña Margarita) Soy el chino capuchino Amarillo Conejo de la suerte Estar quijar Don Macarrón Horóscopo Los esqueletos Pato Donald Petit chéri, leré Pata palo Popeye Somos chicas pistoleras Doña Margarita Teresa quería ser Un vampiro soy Andu du plandu	Tarara sí, tarara no El patio de mi casa Chocolate molinillo Chocolate amarillo Soy la reina de los mares Anton carolina Desde pequeñita Santa Teresita
1977-1990 Democratic transition	Charleston Dr Jano Dan dan dero Choco choco la la Calipo	Estar quijar Petit chéri leré Somos chicas pistoleras Un vampiro soy Andu du plandu
1991-2006 Consolidation of democracy	Las Vocales Debajo de la mesa Barbie Colorín, colorado Lecherita	Charleston Los esqueletos Teresa quería ser Miliquituli Pata palo Popeye

Endnotes

[1] For further information on the modern-day and very interesting subject of the impact of the media on children, we recommend consulting the *Handbook of Children and the Media* (Singer and Singer 2011).

[2] Following the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Spain became a totalitarian state ruled by Francisco Franco (d. 1975) for almost forty years. During the dictatorship, Catalan became an unofficial language and it was forbidden to teach it. In the 1980s, Catalan became the co-official language of Catalonia, together with Spanish. Within this reality, it is interesting to note that, although clapping games serve as a way of rebelling against certain impositions such as gender roles, this does not occur in the language. Thus, Catalan-speaking pupils also sing songs in Spanish. This may be due to the fact that they take for granted that Spanish is the 'normal' language used in schools and, therefore, have little awareness of linguistic repression. However, we think that factors, such as the fact that the vast majority of models - even before the Franco dictatorship - were Spanish, may have had an influence. To sum up, like Ferré (1993), apart from venturing some hypotheses, we would not dare to come to any definite conclusion.

[3] Diachronic perspective refers to a historical perspective, which relates to the development of a phenomenon through time. Synchronic perspective refers to a contemporary perspective, concerned with the events of a specific period and ignoring historical antecedents.

[4] The melody comes from the end of the opera *Orpheus in Hell* (1858) by the composer Jacques Offenbach. It takes the form of the Can-Can, which is a fast dance with a scandalous reputation, where the dancers make provocative movements, such as kicking their legs high in the air and lifting their skirts.

[5] Regarding the word *pichurrilla* (willy), which rather surprisingly appears in the collected version, it should be pointed out that in other versions the word used is *pantorrilla* (calf). We believe that the original word was *pantorrilla*, but the coincidence of the two rhyming words in Spanish led to this change. It is, therefore, one of the many examples of transformations of this type of popular repertoire. This is what leads to absurd lyrics and, in this case, the appearance of even more provocative messages. Finally, "pan con mantequilla" (bread and butter) refers to the movement used to choose who goes inside the circle, apparently unrelated to the meaning and content of the song.

[6] The melody of this song is directly influenced by the Beatles song "Yellow Submarine." It is interesting to note that the appropriation of the melody has given the song its title, but the theme has absolutely nothing to do with the title.

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