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The *Discursos de la Vida* in Inquisitorial Documentation Autobiography Between Orality and Memory*

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Abstract

In 1561 the General Inquisitor Fernando Valdés established a set of new instructions that systematically required defendants to depose their so-called *discurso de la vida* during their initial interrogation. Under the expression *discurso de la vida*, which was not exclusive to an Inquisitorial context, they were compelled to give an account of their own lives. This involved narrating a life story orally, which was then transcribed by scribes. While the defendants were rooted in a predominantly ‘oral culture’, clearly observable in their depositions, the scribes worked within a ‘written culture’ typical of their position in a social, legal and cultural system imposed from the top down. Thus, one confronts a singular source that has ‘fossilized’ thousands of interactions between both cultural models. The *discurso de la vida* was the most open-ended part of the interrogation, offering the accused the possibility of deploying a series of strategies based on their juridical and doctrinal knowledge, rhetorical skills of persuasion and ‘selective memory’. These demonstrate quite an unexpected degree of agency in such a coercive situation. According to symbolic interactionism, the best way to deal with this ‘collaborative life writing’ is to try to identify the role played by each participant in its composition. How did this interaction take place? To what extent is it possible to recover the ‘voices’ of narrators? How did the scribes or the inquisitors – both coercers and editors of these texts – bias these stories? What strategies did the protagonists deploy in their ‘performances’? These are some of the questions addressed in the article.

Keywords: Early Modern Autobiographies, Egodocuments, Life Narratives, Life Stories, Spanish Inquisition

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1. *Introduction*

This study deals with a kind of autobiography from a time when autobiography did not yet exist and whose protagonists never wished to write. It centers on the life stories of people persecuted as heretics, stated orally in response to a direct order from their inquisitors and written down by the scribes who attended the interrogation. These life stories have been referred to as ‘inquisitorial autobiography’ (Kagan and Dyer 2004), or ‘trazas’ (outlines) (Amelang 2011), and, with the exception of these two studies, this historical source has not received much attention from an autobiographical point of view. In procedural documentation they can be found under the name *discursos de la vida* (García 1591, 10r-10v), especially beginning in 1561 when the General Inquisitor Fernando Valdés established a set of new instructions that systematically required defendants to depose an oral account of their own lives during their initial interrogation (Valdés 1561, 29r). However, some sort of life narrative can be found among the papers of the Spanish Inquisition ever since its foundation by the Catholic monarchs in 1478, and the presence of these narratives seems to be related to the sacrament of confession.

This documentation is invaluable. First, because it gives us access to the ‘voices’ of hundreds or perhaps thousands of autobiographies of ordinary people,¹ at a time when an unusual interest in individual lives and even autobiography seemed to have been emerging (Dülmen 1997). The first objective of this article is therefore to link these self-referential sources to the ‘autobiographical culture’ of the early modern age. Second, all autobiography is conditioned by its audience. In the case of these life narratives this is even more so since we are faced by a type of personal document that, due to the way it was created, can be included under the label of ‘collaborative autobiography’ (Smith and Watson 2001, 53-56; Malena 2012). According to Kenneth Plummer (2001), the best way to approach these ‘documents of life’ is to try to analyze the role of each actor involved in the final result, that is, the text before us. In this case, these actors included the ‘story teller’, who composed, built or even made up his or her life story through a reflexive process; and the ‘coaxer, coacher or coercer’ with the power to elicit – and edit – the story. The latter can be an anthropologist, a journalist, a confessor or, why not, as in the life stories studied here, a courtroom interrogator, all of whom occupied a position of power over the former. Our second objective will thus be to understand how both inquisitors and notaries biased or conditioned these types of life narratives. However, despite the oppressive and even alienating context in which they were uttered, one of the most fascinating and surprising elements of these statements is that they reveal how some defendants subtly tried to resist, showing an unexpected agency similar to what have been called ‘the arts of resistance’ (Scott 1990). The ultimate goal of this study is to discuss this agency by exploring some of the strategies based on the selective memory of the narrators and their performance abilities.

2. *The ‘Story Tellers’: The ‘Autobiographical Culture’ of the Early Modern Age*

Michel Foucault was one of the first scholars to draw attention to a kind of source where one could find ‘lives of a few lines or a few pages, nameless misfortunes and adventures gathered into a handful of words’; ‘brief lives’ of ‘infamous people’, who have been caught in archives

¹ This article is based on 2725 processes of faith from the Court of Toledo, located in the Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid (AHN), most of them between 1561 and 1819. Of these, 1079 contained *a discurso de la vida*, the last one in 1804. See my doctoral thesis (Loriente Torres, 2023), which is expected to be published in book form (presumably in 2024) as *Los discursos de la vida. Autobiografía e Inquisición en la Edad Moderna*.

and libraries because of their ‘encounter’ or ‘collision’ with power (Foucault 1997). Although he neither referred specifically to inquisitorial documentation nor discussed its autobiographical nature, nothing seems to fit the idea more than our documents, which center on a sort of autobiography of people who were forced to tell their own story. Given this premise, it is hard to think in terms of any kind of autobiography, a genre traditionally associated with freedom or even self-assertion. The first scholar to see ‘an Inquisitorial process as a sort of autobiography’ was Adrienne S. Mandel (1980, 155). Besides Foucault’s ideas, she based her hypothesis on the concept of autobiography proposed by Philippe Lejeune: ‘Retrospective prose narrative that a real person constructs about their own existence, focusing on their individual life, particularly the story of their personality’ (1975, 14).² According to this definition, our sources cannot, strictly speaking, be considered autobiographies, basically because they do not include the features traditionally associated with the literary genre born toward the end of eighteenth century. For instance, their authors do not deal with the history of their personality. Nevertheless, when reading these texts, one feels that they are ‘some kind’ of autobiography. A quite appropriate concept to escape from this dead end would be ‘egodocument’, coined by Jacques Presser in the 1950s and described as ‘those historical sources in which the user is confronted with an “I”, or occasionally ... a “he”, continuously present in the text’ (Dekker 2002, 7). In fact, the concept has been applied to the analysis of judicial documentation (Schulze 1996). However, it also has drawbacks (von Greyerz 2010). On the other hand, in these sources there is a clear notion of ‘identity’. In particular, we should talk of ‘performative identity’ or ‘narrative identity’ (Goffman 1959; Bruss 1976; Butler 1988). But this second term might also lead us to a dead end or complicate things more than help us (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). For this reason, we prefer the more operational idea of ‘autobiographical culture’,³ by which is meant how a person in any historical context or period tells his or her life story. These life narratives share a lot with the way ordinary people used to talk about themselves in early modern Spain or elsewhere in Europe. To start with, the expression used to denote them is revealing: *discurso de la vida*, which, along with *Vida*, is the locution most frequently used to refer to what today would be understood as an autobiography. For instance, we can find it in the title of Alonso Contreras’ *Discurso de mi vida desde que salí a servir al rey, de edad de catorce años, que fue el año de 1597, hasta el fin del año 1630, por primero de octubre, que comencé esta relación*.⁴ The name is not however the only element that these narratives take from the ‘autobiographical culture’ of the period, as we shall see in a moment.

Reading these life stories, the reader is immediately struck by two powerful impressions. First, the feeling of actually listening to the ‘voices’ of defendants, which will be discussed in detail below. Second, the sensation that the main characteristic of these documentary sources is that they are ‘eclectic’. Indeed, this is one of the few features proposed to describe them (Kagan and Dyer 2004, 6; Amelang 2011, 40), which is unquestionably true, at least at first glance. But if we carry out a thorough examination, it will be seen that these sources actually follow several delimited models. A first differentiation should be made between life narratives before and after 1561. As has already been mentioned, some kind of life narrative can be found in the procedural documentation of the Spanish Inquisition from the time of its foundation by the

² Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

³ Although not with the exact same meaning it has when I encountered the expression for the first time in Amelang 1998b; for more on the closely related concept of ‘popular autobiography’, see Amelang 1998a.

⁴ Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE), Mss/7460, <<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000145513>> (accessed on 1 February 2024); on this work, see de Contreras 1983, V-LVIII; Sendón 2017).

Catholic monarchs in 1478. The first life stories are rarer and shorter than the later counterparts, and normally focused on the sins allegedly committed by their narrators or alluded to some kind of events related to their sins. For instance, this is the statement of Andrés González de Alía (Avenoz Vera 2021), prosecuted as a Judaizer in 1486:

Me acuerdo que oy [oí] dezir a mi padre, que Dios aya, que, siendo pequeño en mi niñez, que me ovo llevado un mi agüelo que se llamava Fernando García Cabeça de Oro a la Puebla del Alcoçer donde él vivía desde Guadalupe, e que estando con él me cortó un poco del capullo de mi verga, e desde esto supo mi padre que fue por my [mí], e que sobre ello ovieron muy grandes enojos, de tal manera que, aunque fallésçió el dicho mi aguello, padre de mi padre, nunca fue a su enterramiento.⁵

That changed in 1561 when a set of new instructions was established that *systematically* required defendants to depose an oral account of their own lives under the name of *discurso de la vida* (García 1591, 10r-10v; Valdés 1561, 29r). This study is based above all on these life stories. After all, what better autobiography can there be – at least, formally speaking – than when it is explicitly asked for? But not all life accounts were specifically required. The story of Francisco de la Bastida, which is presented below, is a case in point. And then there were the life narratives told by people who came before the inquisitors spontaneously of their own accord to confess to some kind of offense they had committed. In these cases, we should bear in mind that the confession itself could be part of a strategy and thus might have lacked spontaneity. Of 2725 cases investigated between 1561 and 1819 by the court of Toledo, we have transcribed 424 life stories. The shortest, consisting of thirteen words, was uttered by Alonso Sánchez; prosecuted in 1570 for claiming that fornication – which was seen as a crime of *deshonestidad* – was not a sin, he stated ‘que nasció en La Guardia y allí a estado toda su vida’.⁶ The most extensive, consisting of six thousand, five hundred and thirty-one words, was the spontaneous deposition of Antonio Rodríguez de Amezquita in 1664. In terms of number of audiences, Agustina Juana Manuela Pimentel, prosecuted as a Judaizer in 1718, declared her *discurso* over three interrogations. Having established that each audience or interrogation took three hours (de Torquemada 1630, 13v), her four thousand-word life story took about nine hours to complete. However, while variety seems to be the rule, the average length of three hundred and fifty-four words suggests that, rather than autobiographies, these texts should be referred to as micro-autobiographies. Likewise, although statistics do not confirm this point, a certain tendency for them to become longer over time can be noted. Part of the reason for this may be because the judicial process as a whole tended to become more detailed and bureaucratic over time.

Regarding structure, these life narratives appear to be loose, but in fact they are not. Their authors usually began with a first part covering information about their birth, childhood and upbringing, which includes the things they had done during that time, and/or with whom they had spent those early years, especially their parents. All this might be seen as a truism since we are talking about an autobiography. But they are also the same sorts of things that we can find in other contemporary autobiographical accounts outside the Inquisition. For instance, Teresa

⁵ AHN, Inq., leg. 253, exp. 7, 8r. (I remember that I heard my father say, may God be with him, that when I was a little boy in my childhood I was taken from Guadalupe by my grandfather, who was called Fernando García Cabeça de Oro, to Puebla del Alcoçer, where he lived, and while I was with him he cut off a bit of the bud of my penis, and since my father knew about this, he came for me and they had great argument about it, so much so that when the said grandfather, my father's father died, my father did not go to his burial).

⁶ AHN, Inq., leg. 74, exp. 27, 8r. (That he was born in La Guardia and has been there all his life).

of Ávila begins her famous *Vida* by talking about them as well (1r).⁷ Indeed, both text types have been compared in terms of topic, style and structure (Herpoel 1999). The comparison thus gives us a glimpse of the ‘autobiographical culture’ of the period, where both ancestors and origins had a preminent place. Furthermore, there is a second stage in all these stories when the protagonists left the nest and joined the outside world, usually working or studying. Sometimes they leave it in happy circumstances, such as the beginning of university studies, departure to work with a relative, often an uncle, or the beginning of a clerical life. But frequently some misfortune puts an end to this first part of the narrative, such as the death of a parent, the captivity of the declarant or some personal conflict. From this point on, the thematic and stylistic possibilities are endless, but there are two structural choices. Some declarants describe all their travels and the towns where they have been, without detailing what happened in those places, and adding that information at the end. Others do the opposite, detailing their experiences from town to town and master to master. In both cases, the narration normally flows chronologically, but many times the author flashes forwards and backwards in his or her narration. In any event, all the narratives can be described as ‘narratives in movement’, fitting perfectly with the *mozo de muchos amos* – something like ‘servant of many masters’ – structure typical of the picaresque novel (Alcalá Yáñez y Rivera 2005). In fact, these two types of texts have been compared (Gómez-Moriana 1980; Gitlitz 2000). Moreover, they also fit in well with one of the entries for *discurso* in Covarrubias’ dictionary: ‘la corrida que se haze a una parte, y a otra’ (de Covarrubias y Orozco 1611, 217v).⁸ More specifically, although some of our protagonists claimed never to have left home, many others describe a constant wandering throughout Spain, Europe or sometimes even further afield. For instance, Juan Calvo de Padilla, prosecuted in 1573 for saying in a sermon that Mary Magdalene was not a sinner,⁹ explained in detail during several hearings that he had resided in Revilla Vallejera (his birthplace) and Roa (both in Burgos), Cuéllar (Segovia), Salamanca, Barcelona, Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Chiapas (Mexico), Lisbon (Portugal), Castile (probably Valladolid, where the Court was at the time), Rome, Valladolid (again), Rome, Genoa, Alicante, Seville, Cape Verde (Africa), Lisbon (Portugal), Castile (again), Rome, Valladolid (again), Lisbon (again), Rome, Genoa, Alicante, Seville, Cape Verde (again), Portugal, Barcelona (again) and, finally, at the Court (this time in Madrid). If we calculate the time he reported spending at each place, the count will be found to be quite consistent with how old he said he was at the time of the declaration. Likewise, it is remarkable the number of masters and jobs that some declarants confess to having served or held. Martín Díaz is quite eloquent when he declares that ‘[h]a servido a tantos amos que no se le acordaría los nombres de la terçia parte’.¹⁰

Sometimes, declarants explain the reasons for their pilgrimage, ranging from the search for work, the attempt at personal improvement or simply wanderlust. Juan Borgoñón, after leaving his home in Besançon (Franche-Comté), settles with a soldier in Nancy (Lorraine) where ‘había tudescos, y a este le dio gana de ir en Alemania para aprender aquella lengua’.¹¹ Of course, he tried to avoid suspicion for traveling to a Protestant country, and it was a good excuse. Speaking of jobs, they were also very varied but sooner or later many declarants served as soldiers. Particularly

⁷ A manuscript copy can be found in Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE), Mss/2601, <<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000044170&page=1>> (accessed 14 March 2023).

⁸ (the running done from one place to another).

⁹ AHN, Inq., leg. 217, exp. 10.

¹⁰ AHN, Inq., leg. 15, n.p. (he had served so many masters that he could not remember the names of even a third of them).

¹¹ AHN, Inq., leg. 115, exp. 5, 23v. (there were Tudesques, and he wanted to go to Germany to learn the language).

intriguing was the famous Eleno or Elena de Céspedes (Kagan and Dyer 2004, 64-87), a person who claimed to be a hermaphrodite but whose life story is quite paradigmatic.¹² After leaving her or his master as a slave, she/he gets married as a woman, and has a child who died. Then she/he left his or her husband and as a man she/he enrolled in the army fighting in the Alpujarras War. After that she/he worked as a tailor and weaver for a time until she/he had a quarrel, when she/he was imprisoned and obliged to dress again as a woman. Then she/he became a surgeon and with her or his new profession, as a man again, she/he enrolled one more time in the army. Finally, she/he was denounced for bigamy when she/he was trying to settle down by marrying a woman. While the case may be unusual, the way it is told is quite ordinary compared to other ‘inquisitorial autobiographies’. Many of them finish in the current time of narration. Some even describe the moment of imprisonment or the narrator’s entrance into the very same hearing. Maybe that is why Cervantes, mocking the picaresque genre, makes Ginés de Pasamonte state, when he was asked if he had already finished the life story he claimed to be writing, ‘¿Cómo puede estar acabado –respondió él–, si aún no está acabada mi vida? Lo que está escrito es desde mi Nacimiento hasta el punto que esta última vez me han echado en galeras’ (DQ, cap. XII).¹³

As already mentioned, the other impression one gains while reading these life stories is a strong feeling of listening to the ‘voices’ of defendants. Michel Foucault called it a ‘physical impression’ (1997, 158). Carlo Ginzburg also referred to it, when he stated that while reading inquisitorial trials he often felt as if he was ‘looking over the judges’ shoulders’ (1989, 158). None of them, however, either because it was obvious or because they were concerned about other issues, related that sense of closeness to the oral origin of these sources. Not only were these testimonies declared orally but their authors were also rooted in a predominantly oral culture. As a consequence, many features of these narratives actually derive from this circumstance. According to Walter Ong, a mark of orality is to be ‘additive rather than subordinative’ (2012, 38). This translated into texts full of illative elements such as the conjunction ‘and’, which imprint these stories with a sense of action that sustains their narrative tension. The following is an extract from the autobiographical statement of Juan López, who was prosecuted as a renegade in 1580:

... y me llebaron Argel y fui esclavo del rrey de Argel, y el dicho rrey de Argel me presentó al rrey de Fez que se dezía el *Maluco*, y estando en su poder el dicho rrey maluco llamado por otro nombre, el *xarife* me llamó y me preguntó que cómo me llamaba, y a esto le rrespondí que me llamaba Juan López, y a esto el dicho rrey me dixo: hazme plazer de tornarte moro, y luego yo le dixé que era contento y así me torné moro; y me puso por nombre Pichirín y por sobre nombre Morato, y luego me mandó rretajar y me rretajaron, y me dixerón que dixere “*ley la bilala mahoma rracurala*” y así lo hice.¹⁴

Here we can also perceive another feature that makes these readings an immersive experience: the introduction of direct speech (Díez Revenga Torres and Igualada Belchí 1992; Eberenz and

¹² AHN, Inq., leg. 234, exp. 24, see the case in <<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/4580314?nm>>, accessed 1 February 2024.

¹³ (how can it be finished, when my life is not yet finished? All that is written is from my birth down to the point when they sent me to the galleys this last time).

¹⁴ AHN, leg. 195, exp. 3, 3v-4r. (And they took me to Algiers, and I was a slave to the king of Algiers, and the said king of Algiers presented me to the king of Fez who called himself the *Maluco*, and while I was in his power the said king of Algiers, called by another name the *Xarife*, called me and asked what my name was, and to this I replied that my name was Juan López, and to this the said king told me: “please me do me the favor of turning Moorish [Muslim]”, and then I told him that I was happy and so I became Moor; and he gave me the name of Pichirín and Morato as a nickname. And then he ordered me to be cut [circumcised] and they cut me, and they told me to say “*ley la bilala mahoma rracurala*” [the Shahada] and I did so).

De la Torre 2003). These statements very often reproduce pieces of conversation between the narrator and a third party, in this case, López and the king of Fez. The purpose was to create a sense of both truthfulness and veracity by trying to bring the audience to the very moment of conversation. But at the same time, reading it creates the feeling of witnessing the conversation between López and the king of Fez. Likewise, an oral style is ‘aggregative rather than analytic’ (Ong 2012, 38). This feature is associated with memory formulas used in the past, which have come down to us through folklore in the form of clichés. For instance, López declared further on that he and his family had been escorted by ‘*cuatro moros que nos abían prometido por nuestro dinero de ponernos en tierra de cristianos*’. But when they arrived at about ‘*siete leguas de melilla salieron unos moros salteadores*’.¹⁵ It would be hard to know for sure whether these figures were correct or not, but the numbers four and seven today are still widely in use – at least, in Spanish culture – in everyday expressions and folktales. For instance, nowadays we say *había cuatro gatos* meaning that there were few people; or the very well-known mythical seven-league boots of *Puss in Boots*, whose popular and oral origins are beyond doubt, is still known (Waters 2001). In any case, they are elements that make the reading more familiar.

Another characteristic of orality is its quality of being ‘redundant or “copious”’ (Ong 2012, 39). This is related to the immediacy of oral communication, which vanishes the moment it is uttered. So, to avoid losing the thread, the language must be more repetitive than in written forms of communication. Returning to López’s declaration, this mechanism can be observed when he repeatedly uses the phrase ‘y el dicho rey’,¹⁶ the frequent recurrence of which in this documentation contributes to the narrative tension. On the other hand, these kinds of expressions hail also from legal language, although the line of separation between some of these features is quite fine.

The next feature Ong lists as specific to an oral culture is its materiality or its ‘close[ness] to the human lifeworld’ (43). In other words, an oral culture is more embedded in the material world than in metaphysical or abstract reflections, which translates into greater vividness, immediacy and the impulse towards action. Accordingly, its narrators were more prone to material, temporal and visuospatial references based on visual memory than is the case today, since we are part of a written culture. That is why these statements are full of expressions such as ‘a stone’s throw away’, ‘in the war of Granada’, ‘for the year of the plague’ and with others like ‘at the Puerta de Toledo’, ‘next to the clothing store in Calle Mayor’. All those references help create a mental image of what is being read, contributing to the feeling of immersion, and they are part of what has been called ‘the language of memory’ (Franceschi 1991). Likewise, it has always been argued that one of the characteristics of autobiographical sources before the birth of autobiography as a genre in the eighteenth century was their lack of interiority, which was widely related to the rise of modern individualism (Molino 1980; Davis 1986; Burckhardt 1961; Martin 2004). Thus, it is possible that this feature had more to do with the materiality of their oral origins than anything else. Nevertheless, some of the autobiographical writings of the period, such as ‘soldiers’ lives’ and other texts very close to ours, showed their protagonists’ feelings through the actions they performed (Levisi 1984; Pérez-Villanueva 2014; Sáez 2019).

A lack of inwardness does not mean a lack of feelings. Apart from the manifestations of contrition, it is quite rare to find in the *discursos de la vida* allusions to filial or romantic love. In fact, I have only found the following examples. Juan Ramírez, prosecuted for bigamy in 1562, when

¹⁵ AHN, leg. 195, exp. 3, 3v-4r. (*four Moors who had promised us for our money to take us to Christian territory*). (*seven leagues from Melilla, some Moors came out to rob us*).

¹⁶ (and the said king).

answering the question about when he met his second wife, stated that ‘no se acuerda cuántos años era, más de que sirviendo de sacristán en el dicho lugar del Quintanar *se enamoró della*’ (my italics).¹⁷ Antonio Rodríguez de Amezquita, prosecuted as a Judaizer in 1664, referred to his helper, who had recently passed away, as someone ‘a quien llamaba tío no porque este tubiese parentesco con él, sino *por el mucho amor* que le tenía le dio en llamar sobrino’.¹⁸ These cases are truly rare because Ramírez and Amezquita are the only two such examples we have come across among all the Toledo court files. While that lack of expressed feelings could be a consequence of the oral culture of their narrators, probably it is not the only reason that explains it. This is especially likely since these life stories were designed for a specific audience and for a particular context, just like other autobiographical texts. What I mean is that these kinds of allusions, such as to romantic love, were not relevant here. On the contrary, if there is surely one type of feeling in these sources, and one that in addition contributed to the sensation of witnessing the scene, it is related to contrition. For instance, Nicolás Alemán, prosecuted for Lutheranism in 1569, after declaring his life story and being ordered to return to his cell, ‘se hincó de rodillas y se hirió los pechos muy recio llamando a dios y llorando reçiamente’.¹⁹ Not to mention the meticulously recorded torture hearings, which reproduce the screams and laments of the people subjected to the so-called ‘question of torment’. That said, the case of López, when he claimed to be *contento* – ‘glad’ – to embrace Islam, seems to contradict this idea. Nevertheless, by that he probably meant that he was doing it ‘willingly’ rather than expressing any feeling of happiness.

Finally, in these sources one can find other elements typical of an oral culture and that contributes to a certain extent to the sense of closeness, such as ‘empathy and participation’ (Kryk-Katovsky 2000, 208). Although the *discursos* would be the most ‘monologic’ part of it, this documentation is the result of a ‘dialogic’ exchange between interrogator and interrogated (Ginzburg 1989, 141-149). And that dynamics remains embedded in both its structure and in certain elements which reach us, readers of the twenty-first century, through time. For example, when the declarant asks a rhetorical question and we cannot help but feel alluded to, when a humorous element is read that makes us smile, or when reading the laments of a defendant under torture vividly transcribed by the scribe. Besides, many of these elements were needed to frame the narrative. In other words, people from an oral culture did not tell a story straight away, but they very often took a long storyline turn just to tell something apparently simple (Arnold 2001, 86; Cohen 2015, 143). This fact also contributes to make these sources almost hypnotic.

3. *The Coaxers: How Scribes and Inquisitors Biased or Framed the Life Stories*

The first bias of these life stories is that despite being narrated orally (or even if their authors belonged to an oral culture), their final form is written. That implies *per se* a series of logical changes, even today (Slembrouck 1992). However, there were other changes deriving from a procedural and written culture. As a consequence, reported speech predominates in our documentation. It was introduced by the *notarios del secreto* (inquisitorial notaries), who give us the defendants’ answers in the third person through declarative verbs in sentences such as ‘asked about the discourse of his [or her] life, s/he said that s/he was born...’. This was intended to bestow on the documentation

¹⁷ AHN, leg. 224, exp. 5, 22r. (he does not remember how old he was, but it was while serving as a sacristan in the aforementioned place of Quintanar *when he fell in love* with her) (my italics).

¹⁸ AHN, leg. 177, exp. 1, 71v. (whom he called uncle, not because he was related to him, but *out of the love* he had for him, he called him nephew) (my italics).

¹⁹ AHN, Inq., leg. 199, exp. 8, n.p. (fell to his knees and beat his chest very hard, calling out to God and weeping loudly).

a sense of impartiality, committing it exclusively to the truth of the words pronounced, not to the substance of the speech (Díez Revenga Torres and Igualada Belchí 1992). However, notaries sometimes allowed narrators to take control of their statements by reproducing a conversation between them and a third party, as in the aforementioned case of Juan López. While the narrators' purposes were to make their statements more convincing, the scribe's intention stemmed from the probative legal force of the quotation. We should moreover bear in mind that on many occasions the only possible condemnatory evidence was the defendant's own statement.

It was far from coincidental that there were several instructions regarding the literality of these proceedings. For instance, we might interpret the next instruction as calling for it: 'Y acabada la Audiencia, los Inquisidores mandará[n] al Notario q lea todo lo q ha escrito en ella, porque pueda el reo, si quisiere, añadir, ò emendar alguna cosa' (Valdés 1561, 29v).²⁰ Indeed, the expression *de verbo ad verbum* – 'word by word' – can be found throughout many inquisitorial treatises such as the *Directorium inquisitorum* (Eymerich 1587). That said, to assess the degree of literality that can be expected from the scribe's work, we should consider the contemporaneous concept of literality, which was based on meaning rather than on accuracy (Ong 2012, *passim*). As a matter of fact, the concept of literality *de verbo ad verbum* literally comes from a written culture. Considering that difference, and the necessary transition from an oral to a written form, the degree of accuracy expected in this kind of source is relatively high, although there is debate among specialists regarding this question (del Col 1984; Franceschi 1991; Eberenz 1994; Hiltunen 1996; Kryk-Katovsky 2000; Willumsen 2015). Moreover, some of these scholars affirm that the language that we can find in these sources is not real but constructed or reconstructed, as Daniel Collins has suggested (2001). In other words, it reproduces or imitates oral language with a legal purpose. In any case, the minutes were given to be read or were directly read to the declarants for confirmation, which was not a mere procedural formalism since some of them disagreed, complaining about the work performed. For instance, Joan Baptista, or Mustafa, as he called himself, a runaway slave who was caught when he was about to cross the French border in 1591, denied that he was going to his native land or even saying so, claiming instead that 'el escribano pensó tales palabras sin aberlas dicho'.²¹

Taking all this into account, the 'voice' that we seem to hear is that of the notary who lends his to the declarant. At least some of the words and micro-expressions written in the proceedings do not come from declarants but from notaries. Normally these interventions would not affect the content of the declarations, otherwise they would not have confirmed the record. To illustrate this point, let us see the life stories of Luis Méndez de Ulloa, 30 years old, prosecuted for blasphemy in 1589;²² Ana Hernández, 40 years old, prosecuted for bigamy in 1595;²³ the slave Antonia Vicencia, also 40 years old;²⁴ Lucía Hernández, prosecuted in 1596 as a *morisca*;²⁵ and finally, Miguel Flores, prosecuted for scandalous words.²⁶ All of them had different backgrounds, ages, origins. Lucía Hernández even declared, through an interpreter, another circumstance that has not yet been addressed. However, all of them have at least two things in common. First, in their statements they used the expression 'a do se

²⁰ (Following the end of the Audience, the inquisitors will order the notary to read everything that has been written, so that the defendant can add or amend anything if he wishes to do so).

²¹ AHN, Inq., leg. 194, exp. 16, n.p. (the scribe thought such words without saying them aloud).

²² AHN, Inq., leg. 41, exp. 8, 20r.

²³ AHN, Inq., leg. 26, exp. 1, 55r.

²⁴ AHN, Inq., leg. 48, exp. 24, 31r.

²⁵ AHN, Inq., leg. 193, exp. 22, n.p.

²⁶ AHN, Inq., leg. 201, exp. 41, n.p.

crio' – 'where he or she was raised' – instead of the more common 'a donde se crio' or 'donde se crio'. And second, the notary who transcribed their life stories was Francisco de Arze. So, it is highly likely the expression comes from him. Another example to support what we say involves Salomon Bergom, who offered a vividly written life account in his own hand in 1792. There, he writes in a mixture of Italian and Spanish: 'Salamon Bergom de mi primier nombre, e aora mi chiamo Carlos Bergamo ... che essendo de su nacimiento e creado in Ley del testamento Antigo e che de algunos agnos che a tenido veredero deseo de abrazare la lei de gesucRisto'.²⁷ Nevertheless, when he testified orally just some days later, his new statement – written down by a notary – does not show any hint of the Italian language; on the contrary, he speaks Spanish perfectly well. What could explain this linguistic miracle if not the intervention of the notary, who lent him his voice?

In addition, these life stories were biased by a procedural frame established in inquisitorial instructions. Everything that was supposed to happen during the first interrogation – or *Primera Audiencia* – was perfectly specified in the new instructions that Fernando Valdés implemented in 1561 (29r). According to them, defendants had to be taken out of his cell by the bailiff and brought before the tribunal, whose members asked them some questions regarding procedure. All these opening queries could prompt some kind of life narrative. For instance, the defendant was asked: 'cómo se llama, de dónde es natural, qué edad y oficio tiene, y qua[n]to ha que vino preso' (García 1591, 9r).²⁸ Indeed, sometimes the answer to these questions practically became a *discurso* in terms of size and content. Then, the prisoners were asked about their family and ancestors, the so-called *genealogía*. Here again their answers could be quite self-referential, especially when the accused knew what the charges against them were. For instance, some prosecuted for bigamy, when talking about their marriage, directly confessed their sin. The same applied to the next question: the level of education, particularly in the cases of people who had studied. After questioning defendants about their knowledge of Christian doctrine, by requiring them to recite the basic prayers, they were asked if they had left the realms (of Castille) and with whom. All these questions might not only prompt some kind of life narrative; they also very often overlapped in content. That was certainly the case of the final question: '...si sabe, presume, o sospecha la causa porque ha sido preso' (10v).²⁹ Indeed, that was the case in the trial of Francisco de la Bastida studied below. Finally, the first warning – *primera monición* – was read. As the prisoner was being returned to his cell until the next hearing, he was urged to think about the possible reason for his imprisonment. But immediately before that, defendants were asked the direct and explicit autobiographical question under the name of *discurso de la vida*, although Valdés' instructions did not specifically mention the expression. This appears for the first time in the *Orden de processar* by Pablo García the defendant: 'Preguntado por el discurso de su vida. Dixo, que nació en tal pueblo, etc. Declare dónde se ha criado, y las partes donde ha residido, y con quien ha tratado y comunicado, todo muy por estenso, y muy particularmente' (10r-10v).³⁰

²⁷ AHN, Inq., leg. 137, exp. 15, n.p. (Salamon Bergom as my first name, and now my name is Carlos Bergamo ... who being born and raised in the Law of the Old Testament and who for some years has truly desired to embrace the law of Jesus Christ).

²⁸ (what his name is, where he is from, how old he is, and what is his job, and how long it has it been since he was imprisoned).

²⁹ (if he or she knew or guessed the cause for which he or she had been imprisoned).

³⁰ (Asked for the *discurso de su vida*, he said that he was born in such a town, etc. Stated where he has been brought up, and the places where he has resided, and with whom he has dealt and communicated, everything at length, and with all particulars).

This particular instruction led Jean-Pierre Dedieu to think that defendants received some suggestions regarding how to declare their life stories. He affirmed that there was no autobiographical but only biographical information in them since they ‘were not spontaneous but answers to a standard questionnaire concerning the location, duration, and activities of the accused at different places’ (1986, 165), which implied that maybe declarants were asked these questions separately and the notaries put them together in the proceedings. If this were the case, the *discurso* would be the outcome of a questionnaire. I do not agree with Dedieu on this point. First, because if that were true, it has not left any trace in the records. Instead, what we find is a single, direct and often lengthy answer that sometimes includes all of these topics and sometimes does not. And we find it in what seems without a shadow of doubt to be the original records, with all their amendments, notes and corrections. Secondly, even being a questionnaire, defendants still had the leeway to take the statements wherever they wanted within certain limits, and they did precisely that, as we will see below. However, it is unquestionable that García’s manual matches with the model followed by these life stories. That would explain their structure. As we have seen above, their authors began by relating their date of birth, childhood and home upbringing until they left the nest, describing from this point on all the places and people with whom they stayed. In line with this, these life stories would be framed by this model. From early on inquisitorial notaries and other scribes from legal institutions throughout early modern Europe did not accept a simple ‘yes’ or ‘not’ as a reply. Instead, they encouraged declarants to develop their answers, which made the *discurso* a dialogical exchange between the inquisitor or scribe and the deponent. However, there is no trace of such encouragements in the proceedings (Eberenz and De la Torre 2003, 65; Bähr 2015). That would also explain why narrators seem to be so meticulous by adding abundant details about what they have done in such and such a place and with whom. That said, we do not know whether defendants were obliged to follow this model, or this model followed the way they normally declared their stories, because that structure also corresponds perfectly well to the way other contemporary autobiographical accounts outside this context developed, not only in terms of structure but also of content. As we have seen, one feature of oral culture was being ‘redundant or “copious” ’ (Ong 2012, 39). That would explain the verbal excess typical of these narratives, not to mention that we already find this model in procedural documentation even before García’s manual was published for the first time in 1568 (Santiago Medina 2016, 119-125). To be precise, we find it from 1561, probably following Valdés’ instructions. At the same time, García’s manual was conceived – like all treatises of its kind – as a practical tool that described the way things normally happened, as it was not the type of compulsive manual that Valdés’ would be. According to this idea, we might interpret the instructions as more descriptive than normative. In other words, the topics and structure constituted *per se* what was utterly understood to be the *discurso de la vida*, not an order of how to declare it. But the most compelling evidence is that the documentation gives an appearance of fluidity, so that under the heading ‘preguntado/a por el discurso de su vida...’ (García 1591, 10r).³¹ we find a single clear and continuous answer without any visible or explicit verbal interchange or interruption. For the moment, we cannot solve this conundrum but probably the truth lies somewhere between the two possibilities.

Another mystery regarding this practice is why it was implemented in 1561. Why did all the defendants begin to be systematically asked for their life stories at this moment? The answer

³¹ (Asked for the discourse of his or her life).

would help us determine how these life stories were biased. Apart from his claim to standardize the process of faith,³² we do not even know why Fernando Valdés specifically implemented the question of the *discurso* in the first place. It has been said that it could have been devised to make the accused feel more comfortable, or to get a first impression of him or her (Gómez-Moriana 1983, 110; González Novalín 1986, 105; Thomas 2001, 173). But also that it might have been a trap (Gitlitz 2000; Graizbord 2004, 110; Kagan 2005, 92; Amelang 2011, 37). For it certainly became a trap, especially since defendants did not know what the charges against them were, which is a teleological way of thinking about it. We think the answer is simpler. The key to understanding is the sacrament of confession, because the relation between life stories, the process of faith and the sacrament of confession is quite close.

On the one hand, the whole process was inspired by the sacrament as a means of reconciling the sinner with the community (Prosperi 1994 and 1996). Therefore, these life narratives are partially inspired by the sense of obligation imposed by the sacrament. That would explain why those first life stories were mainly focused on sins. The sacrament of confession also illuminates why we can find very similar personal narratives in other inquisitorial tribunals not belonging to the Hispanic Monarchy. For instance, Giordano Bruno, prosecuted by the Roman Inquisition in 1593, was asked in the first interrogation what his name and surname was, who his parents were or had been, what country and nation he was from, and what his profession and his father's was (Firpo 1993, 156). His answer was to declare straightforwardly, without interruption, during the next two hearings what could be considered without a doubt one of our *discursos* in terms of both characteristics and content. The same could be said of Cecilia Ferrazzi, prosecuted in Venice in 1664, who was asked directly in her second interrogation to continue 'il racconto del corso di sua vita'.³³ (Ferrazzi 1990, 28; 2001, 27). In any case, both the first life stories found in the Spanish Inquisition proceedings and those outside them are normally shorter, focused on the alleged sins, and less consistent. They are also rarer. Nonetheless, the main difference is that they were not required in a systematic way.

On the other hand, the sacrament is at the core of the contemporary autobiographical culture and beyond. From St Augustine's *Confessions* to Rousseau's sequel with the same name, the sacrament helped create an 'autobiographical conscience', a sense of inwardness that obliged penitents to engage in a dialogue with themselves (Zimmermann 1971). It has also been claimed that the concept of the sacrament of confession lies at the origin of the 'female spiritual autobiographies' labeled as 'autobiografías por mandato' (Herpoel 1999; Weber 2005).³⁴ Accordingly, in the autobiographical culture of the period people were compelled to tell their life stories in front of a higher authority. Without that, apparently there seems to be no point in telling a life story. That is the motivation alluded to by Teresa of Ávila to justify her life story: she was ordered to do so by her spiritual fathers (Weber 1990). And that could be the reason why the (in)famous Lázaro of Tormes tells his life story to his 'Lordship', as the picaresque novel would have been a subversion or a mockery of the ritual discourse produced in front of the inquisitors (Gómez-Moriana 1980). Besides, this coincides with the purpose of other autobiographical writings of the time, such as 'self-justifying memorials' (Andrés Robres 2004 and 2005).

³² '... que en todas las Inquisiciones se tenga, y guarde vn mismo estilo de proceder, y que en esto sean conformes: en algunas inquisiciones no se ha guardado, ni guarda como conuenía' (1561, 27v). (... that in all the Inquisitions, the same style of procedure be followed and kept, and to it all of them be conformed, because in some Inquisitions it has not been observed, nor is kept as it should be).

³³ (the account of her life).

³⁴ (Autobiographies on command).

In any case, an element that contributed to the creation of a conscience of inwardness was that the confessional manuals that became popular after the Lateran Council in 1215 recommended confessing once a year. A recommendation that the Council of Trent in 1551 turned into an obligation (Prosperi 1996, 258-277 and 2001). In such manuals, in order to help penitents to remember the sins they committed over such a long time, they were advised to go through ‘los lugares, tiempos, personas, negocios en q se ha ocupado desde la otra su confession’.³⁵ While all these were questions similar to those proposed by Valdés in his instructions to be asked of prisoners – ‘dónde se ha criado y con q personas, y si ha estudiado alguna facultad, y si ha salido destos reynos y en q compañías’ (1561, 29r)³⁶ –, they are remarkably identical to Pablo García’s manual on the information included in the *discurso*: ‘dónde se ha criado, y las partes donde ha residido, y con quien ha tratado y comunicado, todo muy por estenso, y muy particularmente’ (1591, 10r-10v).³⁷ This suggests that since these confessional manuals proposed a mnemotechnic methodology by which to try to remember all the sins, that would be the very same reason behind the inquisitorial request set in motion in 1561: to help defendants to remember and therefore to confess their sins. Just like the whole process of faith, whose principal objective was the same, to try to extract a confession with which to reconcile the sinner with the community (Prosperi 1994 and 1996).

4. Agency in the Life Narratives

In contrast to the specific, narrowly focused questions asked in other parts of the interrogation, for instance who the defendant’s parents were, the *discurso* was more open-ended. Therefore, when defendants were required to tell the story of their lives, they enjoyed much more ‘freedom’. After the first questions related to their upbringing, whether part of a questionnaire or not, they were ‘freer’ to declare what they wanted, and they did so. In this regard, there was a very basic first choice. While some defendants remained focused on the sins allegedly committed, or alluded to some kind of events related to them, others on the contrary spoke about everything except their sins. This choice largely depended on several reasons, such as whether they knew or guessed the charges against them, because, as is known, the entire process was secret. In any case, narrators were not – apparently – interrupted, even when what they were recounting had nothing to do with their case. In fact, sometimes it is baffling to find pages and pages of nonsense, or a testimony that is clearly of no interest to the inquisitors. Why did notaries, in these circumstances, keep writing it down with all the effort that this entailed? Nevertheless, it should not surprise us. Apart from the fact that the question was more open than others, there was a series of instructions that ordered inquisitors to allow the accused to speak freely ‘no siendo cosas impertinentes las que dixere’ (Valdés 1561, 29r),³⁸ or to declare the *discurso* ‘todo muy por estenso, y muy particularmente’ (García 1591, 10v).³⁹ According to John Arnold, ‘this kind of textual

³⁵ *Confessionario Breve Y Muy Prouehoso Con El Vita Christi Con Una Instrucción Para Los Que Nuevamente Se Convierten a Nostra Santa Fe Cathólica Hecho Por Vn Deuoto Religioso De La Orden De Los Predicadores*, 15, n.p., ÖNB Digital, <<https://onb.digital/result/1083FD51>>, accessed on 1 February 2024. On confessional manuals, see González Polvillo 2010. (Go through the places, times, people, and business in which they have been engaged since their last confession).

³⁶ (where he grew up, and with which people, and if he has studied anything, and if he has left these Kingdoms, and in the company of whom).

³⁷ (where he has been brought up, and the places where he has resided, and with whom he has dealt and communicated, everything at length, and with all particulars).

³⁸ (as long as they did not say anything impertinent).

³⁹ (extensively, and with all particulars).

“excess” is necessary to place each person within the inquisitorial narrative’ (2001, 86). Not to mention that ‘an early modern speaker with an urgent story would often render not just the tale, but, as well, its frame’ (Cohen 2015, 143), which ties in with the aforementioned oral culture.

In this scenario, one of the most fascinating elements of these stories is to observe how some defendants, taking the open opportunity when their life stories were required, subtly tried to obey without obeying, something similar to what have been called ‘the arts of resistance’ (Scott 1990). This was especially surprising when one considers the coercive situation, the fact that their lives were at stake, the improvisation provoked by the possibly unexpected requirement, and the pressure of not knowing what the charges against them were, who their whistleblower might be, or whether they were before a judge, a confessor or, even, in front of the very same Almighty (Cohen 1998, 975). Some of the general strategies defendants adopted have already been partially studied (Ginzburg 1980; Vincent 1994; Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2013). However, what has not yet been discussed is how this unexpected agency worked in a narrative sense, so to speak. In other words, how individuals said what they said, and what elements they drew on in shaping their narrative. These included their juridical and doctrinal knowledge, rhetorical skills of persuasion, and ‘selective memory’. All of them were components of authentic ‘performances’ in a broad sense of the term.

The story of Francisco de la Bastida illustrates all these characteristics.⁴⁰ He was just twenty years old when he was prosecuted in 1579 for having pretended to be an official of the Holy Office. In point of fact, he was not requested to declare the *discurso de la vida* but, after the basic questions regarding such matters as name, age, birthplace, parents and residence, the inquisitors went straight to the point and asked him the standard question that usually ended the first interrogation: ‘si sabe, presume, o sospecha la causa porque ha sido preso’ (García 1591, 10v).⁴¹ To which he answered that a year earlier, around Christmas, when he was coming from Rome with some *agnus dei* that ‘Dr. Ezquelicueta’ gave him, on his way through France five or six men came out on the road near Montpellier and, intimidating and mocking him and his religious confession, stole everything he wore, ‘en cueros vivos’ – ‘leaving him naked’ –, a very graphic expression that added some drama to the story. More was added when those men ‘made crumbs’ of the *agnus dei*, taking them away from him with a slap when he tried to retrieve the pieces from the ground, and then they urinated on them. They then threatened to kill him, but just gave him ‘más de trezientos açotes’.⁴² Finally, he saved his life by arriving in Saint-Jean-de-Védas, where he knocked on the door of an inn and ‘la guéspedes’ (the owner), seeing him naked and so badly beaten, fainted. Her husband told him later that he had probably been attacked by some German soldiers, because they had been making trouble in the area for a while. The next day he went to Narbonne ‘y allí lo remediaron con unos vestidos viejos que le dieron por amor de dios y así se vino a España’.⁴³

What can we learn from this fragment of a story? Perhaps the most striking element is the dramatic tension created by the narrator through the story of someone (himself), who was trying to save his life. Not only was he saving his life, but he was also defending his faith by trying to avoid the sacrilege on the *agnus dei*, in the context, needless to say, of the religious wars in France where the scene took place. According to the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1726, vol. 1), the *agnus dei* were circular wafers of white wax ‘amasados por el Papa’⁴⁴ with powders from the relics of saints. Thus, they had the sacred value of a relic.

⁴⁰ AHN, Inq., leg 76, exp. 6, 148r.

⁴¹ (if he knows, presumes, or suspect the cause of his imprisonment).

⁴² AHN, Inq., leg. 76, exp. 6, 148r. (more than three hundred lashes).

⁴³ *Ibid.* (where he was given some old clothes for God’s sake, and from there he returned finally to Spain).

⁴⁴ (kneaded by the Pope).

Perhaps Francisco de la Bastida thought that the inquisitors would look favorably on his courageous defense of the faith. Many of these stories were intended to somehow win both the tribunal's sympathy and pity. Moreover, as we have seen many times, these narratives showed how their protagonists had suffered for some reason. Sometimes they have had a miserable life. For instance, one of the shortest *discursos* studied is María Calzada's, prosecuted in 1592 for questioning the virginity of Mary. In her *discurso* she stated that 'naçió en Bustarviejo y allí se a criado en casa de sus padres trayendo hazes de leña y buscándose la vida con mucha miseria para sustentar a su madre, porque su padre a onze años que murió, y que nunca jamás a salido del dicho lugar'.⁴⁵ Other defendants told longer stories of misery or gave more complicated reasons, such as Francisco de la Bastida, who had suffered while defending his faith. In any case, all these stories seem to suggest or imply that their protagonists had already suffered enough in life to expiate their possible crimes, especially through the story they are telling, related to their sin.

The second element, seen thousands of times in these narratives, is the apparently casual reference to persons of higher social rank. That is why Bastida mentioned almost casually Martín de Azpilcueta, Bartolomé de Carranza's lawyer, who was living by then in Rome while attending to the case (Tellechea Idígoras 1962). We do not know if these references were intended to make the defendants seem more respectable or somehow to invoke the power of protection of these people, even if they were not in their service.

Continuing with the story, a year later 'y como aquellos alemanes le robaron e hezieron aquella afrenta este [Francisco de la Bastida] juró que se habría de vengar dellos y sacar el corazón a uno dellos y comérsele si pudiesse'.⁴⁶ To this end, he investigated if there were German people around, and learned that the Fúcar (i.e. Fugger) family had a factor named Juan Gelder 'un hombre gordo mancebo colorado vermejo' – 'fat, bachelor, and red' – about forty or fifty years old', who lived in Almagro. Hearing this news, 'Francisco decided to take his revenge on him'. When reading the document, it is easy to imagine him angrily pronouncing these words. As a matter of fact, such an emotional state could serve as an extenuating circumstance comparable to drunkenness, although it should derive from a just cause (Gacto Fernández 1992, 33-36). It is not possible to know if Francisco was aware of this, but that is exactly what he seems to be describing. On the one hand, if he knew it, he had improbable doctrinal knowledge for a twenty-year-old boy, although, on the other hand, perhaps he was simply relying on common sense. In any case, his skills as a storyteller, which combined different elements to create a convincing story, seem to me just remarkable, because it is hard to believe that humiliation would be the real motivation behind his actions. In any case, it is true that the Fugger family had a person working for them in that town. Nevertheless, when he describes him as 'fat, bachelor, and red', although maybe he just meant that he had red hair, he seems to depict him as the villain of the story. The colour had negative connotations, as did the fact that he was still a bachelor in his forties or fifties. In addition, this final piece of information seems not to be true, as it is known that at least he had offspring (García Colorado 2016).

He then continues the story by saying how 'llegado a Sigüenza compró una vara larga de alguazil y hizo un borrador de una provisión que dezía nos los Inquisidores contra la herética pravedad e apostasía, mandamos a vos Felipe de Estrada pues vais a la ciudad de

⁴⁵ AHN, Inq., leg. 200, exp. 21, n.p. (she was born in Bustarviejo and there she grew up in her parents' house, carrying bundles of firewood and making a living in great poverty to support her mother, because her father died eleven years ago, and she has never left the said place).

⁴⁶ AHN, Inq., leg. 76, exp. 6, 148r and ff. (since those Germans robbed and caused him such humiliation, he swore that he would take revenge on them and take the heart out of one of them and it eat him if he could).

Almagro y prendáis el cuerpo de Juan Gelvez y preso y a recaudo lo traygais a esta casa de la Inquisición'.⁴⁷ The charges against him now depended on the confession through which he provided the Inquisitors with what they needed. That is why these stories became an intentional or unintentional trap for the accused. However, as in this case, while acknowledging what they had done, the defendants were trying to justify their sins through a convincing and seductive story. On the other hand, if the Inquisitors had what they needed, why did they allow Francisco to keep telling such a long story?

After falsifying the document, Francisco goes on to narrate in detail how he convinced people from town to town to help him arrest Juan Gélvez. He recruits a man in Ciudad Real whose name he does not remember, but 'era de mediana estatura barbinegro y tenía un caballo blanco y este le dixo pues si le podía acompañar a prender un hombre por el santo officio y él le respondió pues sí por cierto'.⁴⁸ In the town of Daimiel, he even managed to recruit the representative of the Inquisition – or *familiar* – in the town. On arriving in Almadén, he went to the house of the *corregidor* (Mayor) and enlisted another person 'que es un hombre flaco, enfermo de los ojos de çinquenta hasta sesenta años y él le dixo como este declarante yba a prender a Juan Geldez y él se maravilló mucho y al fin dixo pues yría a acompañarle'.⁴⁹ When I find all these descriptions and other intricate details, I always wonder whether that amount of information was explicitly required. However, the exact question was not recorded. In any event, the story of how Francisco manages to recruit all those people, convincing some for money, and others thanks to the air of authority imparted by the false document – the order – he drafted (it totals some 2200 words) has all the elements of a compelling narrative. Indeed, it reminds me of some kind of scam film such as *The Sting* or *Ocean's Eleven*. Nevertheless, one of the most common elements of these stories is how the narrators manage to keep talking, trying to give the impression of collaborating, but in reality, without telling the officials anything new. Therefore, they never remember the names of accomplices, or when they did it turns out that they were all dead or far away from the reach of Inquisition, which is reminiscent of what, as already mentioned, Scott calls the 'arts of resistance. Of course, many times the situation changed when they were tortured. But until that point, they tried to resist in very subtle ways. That is why Francisco did not remember the names of any of those who helped him, except Benito Hernández, the *familiar* of the Inquisition, who accepted the mission 'si le pagaba su sueldo, que era un ducado cada día'.⁵⁰

When they – he, the aforementioned *corregidor*, the alcaide his nephew, Benito Hernández and the other man from Ciudad Real – arrived at the house of Juan Gélvez, 'este llebaba vestidos una cadena de oro y una ropa larga de damasco pardo y un sombrero',⁵¹ Gélvez asked him what letters or orders he had from Rome, and Bastida replied that 'que no tenía cartas ni otros recaudos sino los de su magestad'.⁵² And asking where the money was, they showed him a chest with more than fifty or sixty thousand ducats, and Bastida requested from them one thousand which were

⁴⁷ AHN, Inq., leg. 76, exp. 6, 184r and ff. (upon arriving Sigüenza he bought a long constable's staff and drafted a provision, that said: 'We, the inquisitors against the heretical depravity and apostasy, order you, Felipe de Estrada [he had changed his name], to seize the body of Juan Gélvez, and bring him prisoner to the Inquisition').

⁴⁸ AHN, Inq., leg. 76, exp. 6, n.p. (he was of medium height with a black beard and a white horse, and he asked him if he could accompany him to arrest a man for the Holy Office and he answered that he certainly could).

⁴⁹ AHN, Inq., leg. 76, exp. 6, n.p. (who is a skinny man, with an eye disease, fifty or sixty years old, who, finding out that they were going to arrest Juan Gélvez, was amazed but finally said he would go with them).

⁵⁰ AHN, Inq. leg. 76, exp. 6, 184r and ff. (if he was paid his salary, which was a ducat per day).

⁵¹ ANH, Inq., leg. 76, exp. 6, n.p. (he was wearing a gold chain and long brown damask clothing and a hat).

⁵² *Ibid.* (he did not bring letters or other documents except those of His Majesty).

needed to pay his expenses. Was he implying that he had been honest because he could have taken all the money? In any case, he claimed that part of that sum was to pay the salaries of the familiar and the servant he had also employed. Finally, he arrived in Madrid, where he managed to find someone who, in exchange for ‘una escritura’ (an affidavit), remained guarding the prisoner. The story continues although it becomes more and more confusing until it is interrupted with the question of what he planned to do then in the city, the answer to which is even more confusing. Lastly, we do not know how the story ends or how Bastida was discovered or even arrested because none of that information is included. However, the entire narrative is a good example of some of the more fascinating aspects of these stories, a fascination which they maintained until the end.

5. Conclusion

These sources are as fascinating as they are misleading, especially because it is hard to identify the origin of some of their elements. First, it is hard to know whether the information given was provided willingly by the narrators or whether it was required of them. Likewise, one never knows whether certain features derive from the format imposed by the interrogators, or whether the format derived from the more general autobiographical culture. Everything is intermingled in the final document. At the same time, such texts look as if they could bring us the voices of the past, and while that is partially true, one should be aware that they followed certain rules and were subject to certain limitations. However, trying to analyze them is well worth the effort. The lives of their protagonists are fascinating as well. If what Francisco de la Bastida recounted is true, how could a twenty-year-old boy do such things? How could he convince those people and kidnap one of the most powerful men in the area? And if what he said is untrue, how did he have the courage or desperation to make up a story like that in those circumstances? Such examples prove clearly that defendants were not as helpless as we might think. They also demonstrate that an opportunity appeared when they were asked to tell their life stories, and that many defendants took advantage as best they could. In so doing they put to work their legal and doctrinal knowledge, along with their narrative and persuasive powers and skills in a performance intended to seduce their audience. And precisely for this reason, we – as readers in the twenty-first century – must be careful to avoid being seduced by these captivating stories. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing whatever objective judgment we possess.

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