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Silencing the Voices: Finding Conversas in the Inquisitorial Records

Abstract: The past decades have generated much discussion by archivists and historians surrounding the claim that archives and written documents on women's lives cannot be examined separately since archives play crucial roles within the conceptual framework of women's history. By researching women's experiences preserved in archives, it has been demonstrated that their voices were frequently obscured within archival data. In order to reconstruct the lives of women in history, this paper will attempt to address quantitative, qualitative and methodological challenges that arise when power silences the voices of Judeo-Conversas (Christian women of Jewish origin) from the early modern crowns of Castile and Aragon. By unearthing Conversas' religious experiences from written sources, mainly inquisitorial dossiers, and by applying theoretical framework defined by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the author suggests that Conversas' voices were silenced at four stages: first, when the sources were written; second, when these documents were assembled; third, when narratives were created; and finally, when history was written by historians.

Key words: Judeo-Conversas, Early Modern Period, Iberian Peninsula, women's history, social memory

Introduction

The notion of archives as neutral repositories of facts was abandoned decades ago. Since then, scholars have argued that those in positions of power established archives to preserve and maintain their roles within society (Manoff 2004). This was the manner in which value was attributed and how it was determined who should be prioritized and favored, and who should be marginalized and silenced. By controlling who is remembered and how, power was dictated within archives. In addition, archives were places where data were redefined, reshaped and reinterpreted, which consequently impacted historical accuracy (Schartz and Cook 2002). This explains why there was much suspicion about archives and many questions about their neutrality throughout history, and particularly in women's history. In recent decades, scholars have argued that writ-

ten documents and archives cannot be examined separately since archives play a crucial role within the conceptual framework of women's history. Thus, by researching women's lives and experiences preserved in archives, we can discover how women's voices were obscured within primary sources (Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry 2010, xiii). This study will address the quantitative, qualitative and methodological challenges that arise when voices of *Judeo-Conversas* (Christian women of Jewish origin) from late medieval crowns of Castile and Aragon were silenced within archives and archival records.

The 15th century brought to a close the era of the Sephardim. In its final hundred years, Iberian Jews and Jewish women had faced recurrent persecutions, violent massacres, religious segregations, restrictive legislation that led to mass conversions, campaigns of the *limpieza de sangre*, the establishment of the inquisition, and finally the expulsion from Castile and Arago in 1492 of the Jews who refused to convert (Baer 1966). Consequently, these series of events mark the history of Jews who inhabited the crowns of Castile and Aragon. These violent episodes and draconian measures had tremendously changed the face of Jewish communities; first by notably decreasing their size and subsequently by destroying them entirely. Those who chose to stay were converted to Christianity. The idea behind this act was to assimilate the former Jewish community within the dominant social group as an outcome of the acculturation process, thereby diminishing its identity at both the individual and group level. However, what manifested was rather different from the expected result. Whereas there had been Jews and Catholics before the conversions, after the conversions, there were Jews, Catholics and converts. Subsequently, after the issuing of the Edict of Expulsion, there were Catholics and converts. By 1499, the community of Christian converts of Jewish origin had further expanded: descendants of those violently as well as of those voluntary baptized in 1391, Jews converted to Christianity who stayed in the crowns of Castile and Aragon after the expulsion, and finally former Jews baptized abroad or at the frontier who were, seven years after the issuing of the Edict, permitted to return home (Meyerson 1992, 133). Therefore, the intended acculturation process was inadvertently creating a socio-religious group known as *Judeo-Convertos*, or simply *Convertos*, referring to the descendants of Jews converted to Catholicism. The group's female members, whose religious role was crucial in preserving the heritage of their Jewish ancestors, were known as *Judeo-Conversas*, i.e. *Conversas*. However, due to their shifting and contested identities, these women were frequently suspected of secret adherence to the religion of their ancestors. Such acts were considered heretical by the Church; therefore, *Conversas* were regularly persecuted for their religious beliefs since they were treated as baptized Catholics and not Jewesses.

In recent decades, scholars have acknowledged that Conversos were a group without a uniform identity (Gitlitz 1996; Starr-LeBeau 2003; Yovel 2009). The key factors that led to the group's internal diversity include living in the Diaspora for centuries in multicultural environments among Muslims and Christians, conversion – either voluntary or coerced, lack of formal education in the Christian doctrine, prohibition of Jewish religious and educational institutions and sacred writings, and mostly orally preservation of traditions. All of this inevitably led to ritual changes and cultural hybridizations, which ultimately influenced the identities of Conversos. Therefore, examining the sociocultural system of Conversos has revealed that this group was divided into a plethora of subgroups with varying beliefs, attitudes and religious practices, ranging from those persistent in preserving their former religion, to those assimilated into Christian society. In addition, research has established that the Conversos', and especially the Conversas' religiosity was influenced by the fact that after the Christian authorities prohibited the formal mechanisms for transmitting Judaism, the only place where it remained intact was in the house (Melammed 1999a, 11–12). At home, which was traditionally women's domain, the Conversas' role became central to preserving religious observances. Within this ostensibly safe space, Conversas observed and practiced Judaism clandestinely. The changes in gender roles had a significant impact on women's status within the religious sphere, and additionally were mostly reflected in Conversas' roles in religious education. Via observational and didactic methods Conversas taught their children how to follow rites of passage, celebrate festivals and holidays in accordance with the Jewish laws, as well as transmitting attitudes toward Christianity that had a powerful influence over their children's socio-religious behavior.

Conversas shifted their behavior away from traditional role expectations and adopted formerly male-dominated religious roles. These women filled the knowledge gap produced by the absence of religious teachers and institutions by converting the domestic space into a place of resistance or even, although seldom, of assimilation to mainstream society. By normative Judaism, unlike boys, girls were not educated in formal religious systems. While the sons' education depended on their fathers, girls were taught at home by their mothers and grandmothers (mostly in purity and culinary laws, and Sabbath instructions) (Grossman 2004, 123–133, 170–172). In addition, while male education resources were generated in written form, female education was passed down orally (Melammed 1999b, 198). However, after the series of restrictive measures were implemented against Judaism, and especially after the issuing of the Edict, pedagogical methods that women applied before these events were still applied, albeit secretly. By contrast, those applied by men and within public spaces were no longer practiced. Furthermore, Conversas at the time educated not only girls and women, but they also extended their teachings to boys

and men who frequently were not even family members (Zozaya Montes 2012, 364–367). As a result, even after the issuing of the Edict, the oral teachings of Conversas were fundamental to preserving crypto-Judaism. By contrast, Conversos found it more difficult to adapt to the new religious settings. When religious and educational institutions disappeared, Conversos were not as flexible as their female counterparts, and thus, did not find successful ways to transfer religious knowledge to their offspring (Melammed 1986, 93–94).

Scholars have argued that Jewish women's and later Conversas' level of education in late medieval Castilian and Aragonese societies was limited (Blasco Martínez 1997; Klein 2006; Nalle 2016). Given that most of these women were illiterate, and hence, unable to leave written testimonies of their experiences, the ways in which their beliefs, religious practices and attitudes were perceived by others, either by their coreligionists or by hostile observers, is an indicator of their visibility within documentary evidence. Thus, how Conversas were seen by others is fundamental to their discovery in written sources of archival data.

This paper will apply an approach inspired by Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, in order to explain how the written history of Judeo-Conversas, or simply Conversas, was produced. Trouillot argued that silences are created at four central moments:

...the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives) and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance). (Trouillot 1995, 26)

This paper will thus be divided into four parts. By examining Conversas' silences within the framework of Trouillot's four stages of historical production, I will first demonstrate that these women's religious experiences and their voices were silenced by creators of the written sources, second by those who assembled records, subsequently by those who constructed narratives, and in the final stage by historians who created gaps in the gender data and caused the invisibility of Conversas in history.

Challenges in Conducting Research on Conversas: The Making of Sources

Inquisitorial records represent the most used non-Hebrew sources when recovering Conversas' voices. These dossiers provide rich information regarding cultural, religious and social spheres of the late medieval and early modern Hispanic world from the 15th until the 19th century. Inquisitorial documents are indispensable for scholars since they describe lives of common people regardless of their social background, ethnicity, race and gender.

The challenge for this study is to collate a representative corpus for analysis of Conversos from the gender perspective. Thus, in order to undertake a comparison of religious characteristics of Conversas across Spain, the cases against Beatriz Núñez and her stepson Manuel González (both burned at the stake in 1485 in Guadalupe), Angelina Vilella (absolved in Barcelona in 1497), Blanca Maians and her husband Jaume de Casafranca, treasurer-general of Catalonia (both burned at the stake in Barcelona in 1505) will be thoroughly analyzed. These cases are representative of a time when prosecution of Conversos by the inquisition was at its peak. Although these trials constitute case studies rich in details for examining the development of Conversos' religious practices in pre and post expulsion Spain, they also provide significant insight into qualitative limitations of inquisitorial dossiers. Hence, issues that need to be addressed regarding these records include missing depositions and trial evidence, mediation, intertwined discourses, differences in wordings from a gender perspective and narrativity.

The epistemological questions regarding dossiers made by the notaries of the Holy Office are exasperating. To start with, inquisitorial evidence omits numerous statements and evidence which leads to great difficulty in revealing of (un)truthfulness of defendants, possibilities of false denunciations, witnesses' ulterior motives, and testimonies extracted under torture. Within the most representative legal document produced by the inquisition, *El Proceso de Fe*, or *Causa de Fe* (The Cause of Faith), rare evidence of silenced witnesses' hidden agendas can be found. This is a significant finding since inquisitorial cases were veiled in secrecy. For instance, in the case against both Blanca and her husband Jaume, eyewitnesses' testimonies were completely omitted from official documents. Furthermore, evidence such as the lists containing sequestration of properties could not be found within documents of *Causa De Fe*, since the inventory of confiscated goods was composed by the notary of sequestration. This file was preserved as a certified copy used explicitly if needed during the trial. Otherwise, this document was not attached within the trial data (Panizo Santos 2014, 259–260). Therefore, without access to these records, the possibility of sequestration motives could not be discovered, which in turn could not reveal ulterior motives of neither the denunciators nor the prosecutors.

Inquisitorial texts silenced testimonies and confessions, especially those extracted under torture. For instance, while conducting the case against Angelina Vilella, inquisitor Pariente followed the manual *Directorium Inquisitorum*, which led to his selection of canonical purgation as the proceeding process. According to Eymerich's manual, canonical purgation was applied if the accused was not convicted by her own or witnesses' confessions, evidence of fact or any other form of proof, except infamy (Hill 2019, 118). Given that evidence against Angelina was by no means decisive, the accusation was based on her

mala fama (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLIV). Angelina was hence subjected to canonical purgation; which involved maintaining her innocence by taking an oath and providing eyewitnesses (compurgators) who would prove her innocence (Du Cange 1678, 472). Given that the inquisitor followed the instructions prescribed in the *Directorium Inquisitorum* during this trial, the question of whether torture was used arises, as this was one of the recommended methods for defendants prosecuted for infamy (Hill 2019, 118–121). For instance, in closing of her solemn oath, Angelina Vilella denied all the allegations, especially those for which she was accused. Hence, even if she was tortured, she did not admit observing Judaism (Real Cancillería registros. 3684 CLVI). Moreover, as in trial proceedings held against Blanca and Jaume, none of which contain any eyewitness depositions, no evidence supports the claim that torture was utilized. While Jaume was consistent in his defense almost entirely, wavering only once when he changed his deposition regarding his visit to Vijola's celebration, Blanca, by contrast, provided different statements regarding the same question on several accounts (Bofarull y de Sartorio 1865, 176). If torture was applied, and Jaume still resisted changing his deposition, it is possible that he, unlike his wife, withstood the torture meted out to him. Regarding this issue, it would be interesting to know the exact dates of the defendant's and witnesses' examinations as well as pretrial proceedings. Therefore, it would be possible to reveal how these two trials affected one another, especially since Blanca admitted that she was instructed by her husband on how to confess to inquisitors, and that she and Jaume had exchanged messages while detained in jail (Bofarull y de Sartorio 1865, 206–207). However, without access to this data, it is impossible to discern whether these people were tortured, the order in which they provided depositions, as well as the parallels, similarities and differences between these statements. This prompts the question of motives behind the changes in depositions and ultimately the reliability of the depositions.

Contrary to the case of Jaume Casafranca, who did not confess during the grace period, the plaintiff held stronger evidence against Blanca Maians, mostly because of her two confessions which were given at the time when inquisitors provided indulgences for those who come forward to repent for their crimes (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXXXVII'). Although depositions given during a grace period should not have been accepted as evidence against the accused (Eymerich 1821, 90–91), the tribunal did not consider them complete since she did not reveal the names of those who influenced her to Judaize. They hence decided to use them, which demonstrates the practical abuse of the inquisitorial process. However, the written transcript of these testimonies was not attached to trial records. Blanca's voice and her depositions given during the times of grace, due to the distinct features of medieval inquisitorial procedure, were therefore mediated and heard only through the voices of the inquisitors (Kessler

2005, 1207). They were subsequently rewritten by the notary into third-person narrative and changed into different tense. Since mediation has its own agency, her confessions reinterpreted by the inquisitors and the notary cannot be considered as authentic.

Derogatory ideas about women expressed through the selection of words used by the inquisitors, as well as the qualitative differences in words used from the accusation transcripts, emphasize gender differentiation between Conversas and Conversos. For instance, even though Blanca confessed that her husband was the one who instructed her on which offenses to confess during the term of grace (Real Cancillería registros. 3684 CLXXXIX), she was named nineteen times *rea criminosa* and as the one most responsible for Judaizing, while he was not named malignly within the manuscript (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXXXVII'-CXI). Moreover, although Jaume was also charged with more heretical accounts than Blanca, she was more strongly inculpated of active performances of Jewish rites. For instance, Jaume was at times represented as the one who passively allowed Blanca to observe Jewish practices, while by the end of the proceeding, she was represented as the one who manipulated or even forced him to observe (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXXXVIII). Via such anti-women discourses, prosecutors expressed resentment towards Blanca, whose subversive activities were viewed as a threat to Christian teachings. This is not an isolated case; Conversas were more likely inculpated of active performances of Jewish rites. Prosecutors expressed resentment towards these women whose subversive activities were perceived as a significant threat to Christian teachings (Levine Melammed 1999a, 12).

The having knowledge of exact dates of confessions, the juxtapositions of depositions and use of torture reveal much about socio-cultural practices and defense tactics applied by Conversos and Conversas as well as Conversas' vulnerability in the private sphere. This is demonstrated well in the case of Beatriz Núñez. Although Beatriz confessed during the term of grace in 1485 in Guadalupe, specifying her Judaizing activities in detail most probably in hope that doing so would set her free, her fate was decided when her son Gonzalo de Madrid and stepson Manuel González denounced her on a charge of Judaizing. At first glance, Beatriz's story is that of a devious Conversa who obstinately continued to teach Judaism to her son and stepson. However, on closer observation and analysis, it can be concluded that Beatriz and her son synchronized their confessions during the term of grace by admitting that Beatriz instructed and encouraged Gonzalo to observe Judaism clandestinely (fols. 2r, 6r. legajo 169, n. 600. Inquisición de Toledo. Archivo general central de Alcalá de Henares). As for her stepson, although he had not even mentioned Beatriz during the term of grace, he reported her Judaizing practices during examination under torture by admitting that Beatriz participated in observing Jewish death customs, an

offence that Beatriz's lawyer later denied since this statement allowed the prosecutor to create an accusation seeking that the accused be sentenced to death on the ground that she had omitted the important details from her confession (fol. 6r. legajo 169, n. 600. Inquisición de Toledo. Archivo general central de Alcalá de Henares).

Inquisitors led the trials and asked formulaic questions. They determined what to ask, what information was important, and what was significant enough to be later documented within inquisitorial records. Given that defendants were less forthcoming regarding particular topics, depositions often resulted in ostensibly hasty confessions within limited contexts (Perry 2005, 178). Even though inquisitorial trials were mostly repetitive and monologic, proof of dialogic cases exists, where distinct, intertwined and conflicting voices could be distinguished from the testimonies (Ginzburg 1989, 160). These were not only voices of the inquisitorial authorities and the accused, but also the different voices of the defendants who spoke within the inquisitorial discourse of dogma, heresy and crime, as well as the different subject-positions the accused held. Conversas depositions thus resulted in multiple, if not competing discourses, making their voices difficult to disentangle (Arnold 1998, 383–384). Blanca, for instance, spoke from the discourse of a penitent when she repented twice for her sins and confessed that she had thought that Jewish laws did not contradict Christian doctrine. She hence tried to demonstrate that her acts were free from any heretical motivation by constructing a convincing recount based on her alleged profound ignorance of the Christian doctrine (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXXXVI'). However, her voice of the penitent subject could only be heard via the voices of inquisitors who entangled it with the voice of a heretic who admitted her offenses not only during the term of grace, but also while detained in prison. Within the discourse of heresy, Blanca spoke as a relapsed heretic who admitted celebrating calendrical Jewish festivals, rites of passage, observing Jewish dietary laws, engaging in socializing interactions with Jews and members of Converso community, helping them and giving charity to those in need in accordance with Jewish customs (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXXXVI-CLXXXIX). In the same manner, Beatriz admitted celebrating Sabbath, Passover and other Jewish rituals in accordance to these festivals, such as wearing clean clothes in honor of Sabbath, lighting Shabbat candles, eating *pan çençeño* for the Passover, and excusing herself from work on Saturdays as much as she could; as well as observing Jewish dietary laws, such as fasting entire days during the Yom Kippur, abstaining from eating pork and fish without scales and removing the fat from meat (fol. 2r, legajo 169, n. 600. Inquisición de Toledo. Archivo general central de Alcalá de Henares), all of which were typical markers of Converso identity. However, when both Blanca and Beatriz described their long-lasting resistance to assimilation, their conflicting voices

resounded. Blanca, for instance, admitted that she fasted the entire day of Yom Kippur and even deceived her maid to separate two eggs for her dinner which she later threw in the garden of archbishop of Tarragona (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXIII^o). Beatriz also admitted that she would have lived like a full-time Jewish woman if she had not been afraid of being found out by her husband and her maids (fol. 2r, Legajo 169, n. 600. Inquisición de Toledo. Archivo general central de Alcalá de Henares). While opposing Christian authorities and letting their voices to resound, Conversas negotiated gender roles and their own religiosity in order to defend their multiple identities in the context of everyday life by developing strategies of resistance. However, these trials also demonstrate Conversas' vulnerability within the private arena since ritual observances that these women practiced were almost entirely domestic and hence prone to denunciation made by servants and family members.

Conversas occupied different subject positions when applying defense strategies during the trials. For instance, Blanca spoke from a position of a loyal wife and obedient daughter when she was coerced to reveal the identity of those who influenced and instructed her to observe. She thus defended her husband who was prosecuted at the time by transferring guilt to her deceased mother who was posthumously sentenced for Judaizing (Real Cancillería registros. 3684, CLXXXVII). It is worth noting that she also did not mention or involve any other members of her husband's side of the family, as a way to protect them it can be assumed. If Jaume was found guilty, his property, his children's inheritance (their daughter Violant's for example) would have been confiscated and the entire family would have been shamed (Eymerich 1821, 60–61). Accordingly, Beatriz spoke from the position of a loyal wife when she confessed that her husband Fernando Gonzáles scolded her for observing Judaism (fol. 2r, legajo 169, n. 600. Inquisición de Toledo. Archivo general central de Alcalá de Henares), while trying to demonstrate that her spouse, who was also being prosecuted at the time, lived as a sincere Christian. She shifted the blame on already convicted and deceased people from Ciudad Real and her relatives and friends who were beyond the reach of the inquisitors (fol. 2r, legajo 169, n. 600. Inquisición de Toledo. Archivo general central de Alcalá de Henares). Beatriz also spoke from the position of a concerned mother when she synchronized the depositions with her son Gonzalo. She admitted the responsibility for his heretical offenses. Therefore, the significant challenges in discourse analysis of these texts are posed by the numerous intertwined voices of the Conversas. Furthermore, the voices of Conversas are difficult to isolate and analyze not only from each other, but also from inquisitorial intertwining and mediation.

What is certain from analyzing these cases is the inquisition was in full control of text creation, reinterpretation and finally legitimation through the process of gradual change from the original in each of these phases. Thus, not only did

inquisitorial dossiers not reflect Conversas' own voices, but also the selective nature of the information recorded meant that some aspects of their lives were better preserved than others. This renders it difficult for historians to uncover Conversas' experiences outside limited, and in this case negative, or even deviant contexts. Moreover, these texts are by no means neutral; they each contain a hidden code to be broken. Hence, in order to reconstruct the histories of women, who rarely left written records of their experiences, and to reveal the voices of Conversas via silences, there is no other option but to use the available sources, albeit, use them critically and attempt to contrast them with other sources where possible.

Source Assembly

The following challenges, unlike those discussed in the previous section, which relate to the agendas of the authors of sources, encompass particular issues of Conversas' silences that were difficult to avoid, such as distortions provoked by wars, changes in government structures and natural disasters, but also those that were under the control of archivists when maintaining, cataloging and digitizing archives.

Women are generally underrepresented or even excluded from primary sources of archival data due to their secondary status in history. Thus, suspicion of archives' neutrality and objectivity is strong within gender studies, and especially women's history. To address the question of the archives' neutrality and the place of Conversas within documentary evidence, the process of archival institutionalization must be examined, i.e. the purpose of the archives' creation. When investigating the religious lives of Conversas, for instance, the most significant sources present hostile accounts created by inquisitorial authorities that were stored in the tribunal's archives. The inquisition was a bureaucratic and paper-based organization that kept documents in maximum secrecy. These data were not publicly disseminated, nor intended for public scrutiny by the offenders or their families. Rather, their purpose was explicitly for the use of the inquisitors. Hence, until the suspension of the inquisition in the 19th century, these data were preserved in the secret archives of the tribunal that processed each case. In recent decades, scholars have abandoned the idea that these documents were assembled and preserved for the purposes of religious propaganda used to spread misinformation about Converso communities since it is difficult to believe that for centuries inquisitors would participate in conspiracies of spreading lies for the perusal of their colleagues, who collaborated in these same schemes (Yerushalmi 1971, 23–24; Soyer 2012, 13; Tartakoff 2010, 8). However, this should not diminish the fact that inquisitorial records were shaped by bias at two

stages; first by those writing them; and afterwards, although to a minor extent, by those who were assembling them, which ultimately led to distorted views of Converso communities in the inquisitorial archives.

When tackling these irregularities within Spanish archives in order to form a conceptual framework of women's history, and in particular Conversas history, the next challenge becomes the quantitative archival 'data bank'. Distortion of data on a physical level, provoked by political implications, wars, natural disasters and poor record management inevitably led to archival silences. Since the inquisitor general resided in Madrid, from where he sent correspondence and managed tribunals all over the Spanish Empire, the documents of inquisitorial practices were preserved in the Archive of General Council. However, during the French occupation of Spain and after the suspension of the inquisition at the beginning of the 19th century, these records were partly destroyed and frequently moved (Henningsen 1986, 55–56). Consequently, wars and continuous transfer of the documents inevitably led to the loss and destruction of some of these archives, such as the archives of the Andalusian tribunals in Córdoba, Seville and Jerez (Dedieu 2011, 62) as well as those of Valladolid and Logroño (Panizo Santos 2014, 256). Furthermore, a large number of documents from the inquisitorial court of Navarre was also destroyed during the Napoleonic Wars (Panizo Santos 2013). Yet data from other archives, such as those of the Tribunal of Toledo and Tribunal of Valencia, as well as the records once kept in the General Archive of Simancas (Galende Díaz 2020, 272–275), the archive in Alcalá, the Archivo General de Palacio, the National Library of Madrid and the Archivo del Reino de Valencia (Galende Díaz 2020, 267) found their way to the main Spanish repository of inquisitorial sources in the National Historical Archive (AHN) in Madrid under the section *Ramo de Inquisición*. This section contains a digitized collection of 1345 volumes (*libros*) and 3621 files (*legajos*). These data are kept in the same format as at the time of their creation, representing the masterwork of inquisitorial archival sciences (Galende Díaz 2020, 265).

The archival silences in inquisitorial data were created not only by wars, but were also caused by natural disasters and poor record management. For instance, earthquakes and fires, as well as problems with poor record-keeping and poor archival consciousness deepened the silences in the lives of women within the municipal and diocesan archives of Tarazona, The Dominican convent of Barcelona, Santa Caterina, the Diocesan Archive of Valencia, the Capitular Archive of Tarazona, and the Diocesan Archive of Tarragona (Tartakoff 2010, 9). Furthermore, the ensuing dictatorship in the more recent history of Spain once again resulted in archival silences. Therefore, in the mid-1970s, after the transition to a more open regime, the formerly closed Spanish archives reopened. This milestone, consequently, triggered the historiographical revision process when enthusiastic scholars aimed to set aside ideological prejudices

to rewrite the history of the Inquisition (Pérez Villanueva and Escandell Bonet 1984–2000; Contreras 1982; Beinart 1977; Dedieu 1989; García Cárcel 1980; Pinto Crespo 1983; Angel Alcalá 1987; Nirenberg 2014). Spain's inquisitorial study was upgraded, which formed the basis for the future Converso scholarship (Contreras Contreras 1992; Gil 2000–2003; Pastore 2003, 2004; Ingram 2009, 2015, 2021).

In the last few decades, historical and public archives of Spain made an important move to the digital, significantly reducing archival silences in this respect. Projects that are now conducted in archives, libraries, and universities allow access to a variety of medieval texts and manuscripts on Converso communities to a large number of national and international scholars. Digitization projects in Spain comprehend the portals of autonomous communities of Spain and Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES) which gathers state funds. However, scholars argue the need for further improvement of the Spanish portals to make them more accessible to any type of user by simplifying and homogenizing their inventories (Perpinyà Morera, and Cid-Leal 2018). As it stands, even specialists investigating the microhistory of ordinary people, especially women, encounter challenges with digitization of sources. For instance, documents which contain the experiences of medieval Jewish women and Conversas, such as royal and episcopal texts, inquisitorial legal documents, correspondences and trial records are challenging sources to access due to the quality of writing, and frequently its illegibility. Furthermore, these digital copies at times do not display the original text precisely enough and thus are lacking fragments, titles, notes and marginalia. In addition, these texts, due to exclusive authorization rights, such as those from PARES, contain watermarks of the Spanish government departments. The watermarks, regardless of archivists' efforts, do not contribute to the legibility of the texts. These issues often lead scholars to visit Spanish archives physically and consult the original sources. Therefore, regardless of the accessibility of online databases, researchers who seek to reveal voices of medieval women, and especially of repressed and marginalized women, have to apply in their research not only the combination of intelligence and creativity, but also an abundance of time, i.e. travel, in order to conduct thorough and quality research on Conversas.

The Council of the Supreme and General Inquisition's system of documenting was a masterpiece of archival science. However, from the 19th century onwards, these funds sustained a loss in several phases, some that could not, and others that could have been prevented. Despite their quantitative scarcity, the remaining records are still crucial sources for scholars. Moreover, the commitment of institutions to catalog and digitize these data are essential, especially today, due to potential further lockdowns of archives caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Making of Narratives

Even since the 1970s, scholars who examined the inquisitorial documents in order to reconstruct the lives of non-elites have been aware of the controversies concerning their use and reliability (Dedieu 1986, 168–169; López Belinchón 2013; García Cárcel 2003; Arnold 1998, 379–386). Historians and anthropologists disagree over whether these records are so heavily biased that they cannot serve as credible sources for the cultural history of medieval society and its ordinary people (Rosaldo 1986; Ginzburg 1989, 156–164). Many objected that these testimonies do not reflect direct voices, since they were often coerced and not written by the defendants. Scholars have thus emphasized the mediated nature of the archival ‘voice’ and integrated poststructuralist ideas regarding discourse, language and power (Given 1997; Goodich 2006), arguing that the ‘reality’ of these deponents is in fact a fiction created as a distorted narrative of the prosecutors, which unveiled more about the ‘operation of power’ than about the voices of the subalterns (Arnold 2001). However, legal documents, such as inquisitorial court records and notarial registers, are valuable material evidence for revealing the lives of non-elites, and women specifically, when seeking to answer questions regarding gender differences and power relations. The reason lies within medieval legal differentiation among men and women, which consequently affirms gender as a crucial marker of status and identity (Bennett and Karras 2013, 8).

Despite the methodological preoccupations that had confronted scholars regarding use and reliability of trial dossiers in examining lives of ordinary people before the Holy Office, the first generation of researchers who applied a gender approach within Castilian and Aragonese Converso studies had used mainly inquisitorial and related trial documents. These first investigations were descriptive, with an aim of defining and depicting the Conversas as a social phenomenon. Additionally, they involved qualitative research, specifically case studies, which ranged from the study of individual experiences, to studies of Converso families, and more broadly Converso groups and communities. As Trouillot pointed out: “the production of alternative narratives begins with the joint creation of facts and sources” (Trouillot 1995, 29). Given his idea the first researchers in Converso history build their narratives on facts retrieved exclusively from inquisitorial documents, by relying more often on inimical and one-sided accounts, specifically *Las Causas de Fe*, i.e. the primary sources when investigating processes conducted by the inquisition. When making narratives on Conversas, the narrativity actually started within court records since scribes who documented these proceedings often intended to control the representation of the ideas, voices and emotions of the accused and eyewitnesses. This opens a much broader question regarding scholars’ naive treatment of inquisitorial power, by

arguing that while considering the trial data as a direct channel to microhistory, the mediating impact of the inquisition had been neglected (Vollendorf 2005). Therefore, uncritical reading of these records could cause a serious methodological error; however, by applying source-critical approach women's voices can be recovered via recorded confessions and testimonies made by notaries. To prevent this, this data thus must be read "against the grain", since by applying this strategy the experiences of marginalized Conversas can be included within the textual discourse (García-Arenal 2021). Additionally, when investigating the Conversas voices, their charges should be traced across more than one trial, if possible, since this approach overlooks a significant quantitative challenge, that is the paucity of the inquisitorial data and *causas de fe* and thus, the strong possibility of the existence of only a single document. Finally, in order to prevent silences that spread within these records' vast contextual knowledge in terms of the social, political and economic impacts when analyzing texts must be applied (Starr-LeBeau 2003; Perry 2005, 2008).

Inquisitorial documents are the most retrieved sources by historians when researching the religious sphere of Conversas. By selecting inquisitorial sources, narrators silenced Conversas. Due to the abundance of archival sources they had to make choices, selections and valuations. Therefore, in order to paint a broader picture that transcends the limitations of each type of source regardless of conflicting viewpoints, additional data has to be considered when examining the Conversas phenomenon. However, no record that is hostile to female agency, and in particular those produced by a male-dominated institution such as the Tribunal of the Holy Office, can avoid narrativity within its structure (Munslow 2007) Thus, better methodological treatment of these records, which questions their reliability and the 'reality' surrounding heretical cases enwrapped in the power discourse dictated by fear of inquisitors, would unveil silences and voices hidden under the layers of prosecutors' imposed narratives and thus, restore the authenticity of details and traces within Conversas' socio-religious culture.

Conversas: A Brief Historiography

At the final stage – the moment of history making – historians also contributed to silencing Conversas. To begin with, too much of the extant literature on the Conversos has been limited to an androcentric approach, as the norm was based on the assumption that what generally applies to Conversos also applies to Conversas. However, unlike Conversos, the Conversas played distinct roles in Christianized Hispanic society and experienced it differently.

The first historiographical works about the Jews who inhabited the crowns of Castile and Aragon have rarely included Jewish women, let alone Conversas.

Examples of the male-centered approach are prevalent in the pioneering historical works within the field. Cecil Roth, for instance, provided few examples of religious experiences of Conversas, although he acknowledged—when comparing them to Conversos—their important role in observing their former religion (Roth 1959, 175). Next, two schools emerged that understood socio-religious features of Conversos rather contrarily. The first one was led by Yitzhak Baer (1966) and continued by his student Haim Beinart (1981), and the second was led by Benzion Netanyahu (1995, 1999). When these scholars depicted Conversos, however, they provided relatively little information regarding Conversas' mentalities and religious experiences. Moreover, when they did mention Conversas, they did so tangentially and in a simply quantitative manner next to their male coreligionists, without further intention to provide broader conceptualization of women's roles within coerced Christian society. Thus, academics from both of these schools made the same mistakes when approaching the Conversos phenomenon. To begin with, they emphasized a monochromatic portrait of Conversos by representing them, on the one hand, as scapegoats to ecclesiastical and royal authorities, and on the other, as traitors who, by assimilating within the mainstream religious group and identifying with their aggressors, acted malignly towards their former coreligionists. The following error, fundamental to this study, was the approach they applied by neglecting the concrete and episodic transformations of the spiritual metamorphosis of Conversas, despite the quantitative significance of these women within archival sources. Conversas' exclusion from the history created within these investigations thus made their silences and absences normative. As a result of applying a male-centered approach or painting a one-dimensional portrait, Conversas' status within the moment of retrospective significance was hence neglected by the historians.

In recent decades, however, scholars have used gender lenses to explore female roles within Converso communities and particularly of Jewish descendants. Ironically, Conversas' centrality within crypto-Judaism was thus recognized by the researchers, as it once was by the inquisitors. Combining anthropological and historical methods, scholars first analyzed Conversas' religious sphere in relation to male-dominated Catholic institutions, such as the Holy Office (Melammed 1994, 1996, 2000). Next, they examined Conversas' agency and the strategies of resistance the Conversas employed to safeguard their linguistic heritage, religious practices, ritual life-cycle events, holy days, religious and dietary laws, as well as the defense mechanisms they created to reaffirm their former religion by maintaining rebellious acts against Christian doctrine (Marín Padilla 1981, 1983; Melammed 1986, 1989, 1991, 1999a, 2001). Finally, a certain number of significant comparative studies examined the relationship between Conversas with other minorities of Converso origin, notably the Moriscos (Christian women of Muslim origin) (Melammed 2010; García-Arenal 2015).

In conversion historiography, however, scholars have argued that the dichotomy between the individual, i.e., the inner and subjective experiences of converts, and the collective, i.e., the socio-cultural, institutional or religious aspects of conversion, should be replaced by more nuanced approaches. Hence the religious roles these people played within society and their lives and experiences should be historically contextualized (Szpiech 2012, 24–25). Given that Conversas were converted women who culturally did not effectively assimilate within mainstream society, the study on Conversas should be extended to consider the barriers to acculturation that they encountered. Therefore, in order to provide a contextualized view of the Converso communities and the ways in which these women were silenced, a closer examination is needed of their acculturation strategies, their outcomes, and their perception by the Catholic Church, which are pivotal to locating Conversas in the sources. Moreover, a three-dimensional view of Conversas' experiences should be adopted, which will result in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the shifting and contested identities imposed on these women who, while caught between two worlds, sought to establish their own identity. Thus, in order to discern nuances in the history of the Conversas, ranging from those persistent in preserving their former religion to those assimilated into Christian society, who left small traces in historical records, barriers to acculturation should be examined. This should include acculturation's social constructs, such as social influence, social cognition, social dominance and social stigma, which influenced Conversas' visibility firstly in archival sources, and consequently in history.

Conclusion

By applying Trouillot's approach of revealing silences in archives that are inherent to the production of history, I have demonstrated that those who suffer discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and religion, as the Conversas did, consequently suffered from silences in history. However, by affirming this trope, I observed that a crucial moment in silencing Conversas began when the sources were created, since these women were not the authors of their own histories. Rather, the sources that consist of texts for, about or against Conversas were created by men and for male readers. Thus, documents such as inquisitorial dossiers, which are most often used when examining Conversas history do not reflect the Conversas' voices since are highly prejudicial, but also due to the scarcity of evidence are frequently only documents which preserved the micro-history of these women.

Due to the first moment when silences were made, the further creation of silences was inevitable, since not only were texts about Conversas biased, but

also because these documents suffered significant quantitative loss. However, regardless of the reliability and use of inquisitorial data as sources, these texts also reveal, albeit inadvertently, that Conversas were influential within the religious sphere of their families and communities, as well as multi-layered levels of power that Conversas encountered within homogenized Christian society. Despite the limitations of these second-hand accounts, scholars still rely upon these records, since if these data were neglected, then much of the premodern history of women could never have been written, given that women were not the authors of their own histories. Therefore, inquisition trials still inspire historians to use these available sources, albeit with certain precautions and critical spirit, but the opposing suggestion to nullify any proof that is not first-hand or that comes from external voices is untenable. Finally, the scholarship on the Conversas should be redressed in order to re-examine the limitations of inquisitorial records and expand the scope of research to include the acculturation context in an effort to rewrite women's history by recovering their voices and silences that still permeate the Spanish archives.

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Utišani glasovi: traženje preverenica u izvorima

Proteklih decenija dovedena je u pitanje ideja o arhivima kao neutralnim repozitorijumima istorijskih činjenica. U skladu sa tim aktuelna je diskusija o subjektivnosti arhiva, gde su se donosile odluke o čuvanju i prikupljanju određenih dokumenata koji su zatim postajali istorijski značajni. Primećeno je takođe, da se arhivi i pisani dokumenti koji svedoče kulturu sećanja ne mogu izučavati zasebno, s obzirom n ato da arhivi igraju fundamentalnu ulogu u rekontekstualizaciji istorije. Istražujući iskustva žena dokumentovanih u primarnim izvorima

arhivske građe uočeno je da su njihovi glasovi često bili utišani i zanemareni. Kako bi se rekonstruisali životi žena u istoriji, ovaj rad će se osvrnuti na kvantitativne, kvalitativne i metodološke izazove koji nastaju kada moć utiša glasove judeo-preverenica (nasilno pokrštenih hrišćanki jevrejskog porekla, koje su nastanjivale Iberijsko poluostrvo ranog novog veka). Cilj rada je da analizom rukopisne građe krucijalne za istoriju rodnih odnosa ranog novog veka moderne istorije Mediterana i primenom teorijskog okvira koji je definisao Mišel-Rolf Trujo dokaže da su glasovi preverenica utišavani u četiri faze: najpre, kada su izvori stvarani i pisani; zatim, kada su dokumenti sakupljeni i čuvani; treće, prilikom stvaranja narativa; i konačno, u poslednjoj fazi kada su istoričari pisali istoriju.

Ključne reči: Judeo-preverenice, rani novi vek, Pirinejsko poluostrvo, ženska istorija, socijalna memorija

Voix étouffées: à la recherche des Conversas dans les sources

Au cours des dernières décennies, l'idée des archives en tant que dépôts neutres de faits historiques a été remise en question. En conséquence, il existe une discussion actuelle sur la subjectivité des archives dans lesquelles ont été prises des décisions sur la préservation et la collecte de certains documents qui sont devenus plus tard historiquement significatifs. Il a également été noté que les archives et les documents écrits qui témoignent de la culture de la mémoire ne peuvent pas être étudiés séparément étant donné que les archives jouent un rôle fondamental dans la recontextualisation de l'histoire. En examinant les expériences des femmes documentées dans les sources primaires de documents d'archives, il a été observé que leurs voix étaient souvent étouffées et négligées. Afin de reconstruire les vies des femmes dans l'histoire, cet article visera à observer des défis quantitatifs, qualitatifs et méthodologiques qui surgissent lorsque le pouvoir fait taire les voix des Judéo-Converts (les chrétiennes d'origine juive baptisées de force qui habitaient la Péninsule ibérique au début du siècle moderne). L'objectif du travail est de prouver que les voix des Converts étaient étouffées en quatre phases: d'abord, lorsque les sources étaient créées et écrites; puis, lorsque les documents étaient collectés et stockés; ensuite, pendant la création d'un récit; enfin, dans la dernière phase où les historiens écrivaient l'histoire. Pour ce faire, nous analyserons le matériel manuscrit qui est crucial pour l'histoire des rapports de genre au début du siècle moderne de l'histoire moderne de la Méditerranée et nous appliquerons le cadre théorique défini par Michel-Rolph Trouillot.

Mots clés: Judéo-Converts, Époque moderne, Ibérie, histoire des femmes, mémoire sociale

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