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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Transient marginal identities and networks in early modern Madrid: the 1614 case of the ‘Armenian’, ‘Greek’ and ‘Turkish’ counterfeiters

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Abstract

This article centres on a trial held in Madrid in 1614 involving a group identified as ‘vagrants’ of ‘Armenian’ and ‘Greek’ background. In order to tease out the ways in which the presence of foreigners challenged the institutions and citizens, this article approaches these defendants as relationally defined actors in the urban dynamic. It reveals the tactics marginal groups employed vis-à-vis strategic attempts by the municipal government to control foreigners by assigning them identities based on ethnicity. This case-study thus calls into question notions of vagrancy and identification based on ethnicity (‘Armenian’ and ‘Greek’, in particular) in Madrid under Phillip III and IV. In doing so, it shows marginality to be a key yet elusive site for cultural encounters and collaboration in early modern Europe, in which multilingual and culturally fluid social actors related to the Armenian diaspora played a central role.

Introduction

In 1614, a trial was held in Madrid involving a group identified as ‘vagrants’ of ‘Armenian’ and ‘Greek’ background apprehended in a tavern in the inner city.¹ The trial, which has hitherto not been discussed within the debate on the diversity of early modern Madrid’s transient marginals, provides new insights into the place of transient marginals in the social fabric of early modern Madrid, thus

¹The trial record can be consulted at the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (AHN), Inquisición, 76, exp. 5. References to the specific folios will be provided in the footnotes. Translations will be provided in the text, with the original transcriptions provided in the footnotes. For the transcriptions, the original spelling of the source text was maintained. K. Mierau, *Capturing the Picaro in Words. Literary and Institutional Representations of Marginal Communities in Early Madrid* (London, 2018), 91–8, provides the first in-depth presentation and discussion of this abundant source, to my knowledge, using it for the study of the referentiality of literary representations of Madrid’s criminal underground in such picaresque novels as *Guzman de Alfarache* (1599).

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contributing to the emerging debate on cultural encounters in early modern Europe.² As a case-study, it will challenge *a priori* assumptions about the historical construct of an ‘Armenian diaspora’. This article does not follow the categorizations based on ethnicity used by the Inquisition and the Madrid municipality, which identified the individuals as ‘Armenian’ or ‘Greeks’. Instead, it approaches the individuals on trial as relational actors, who were not identified in essentialist terms of ethnicity or socio-economic status, but by their practices and relationships within the urban network.³ To this end, it will contextualize the trial record at the micro-level of lived urban space.⁴ The analysis will show, first, the practices of identification that shaped the relationships of the apprehended ‘vagrants’, emphasizing in particular the distinct fluidity of these identifications. In doing so, it shows that using categories based on a supposed Armenian ethnicity or nationhood as *a priori* contexts of explanation, both in the historical context and in present-day historiography on early modern Madrid, falls short in reconstructing the lived space of the

²D. Calabi and S. Turk Christensen (eds.), *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, vol. II: *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400–1700* (Cambridge, 2013), particularly A. Cowan, ‘Nodes, networks and hinterlands’, in *ibid.*, 28–42; B. De Munck and A. Winter (eds.), *Gated Communities? Regulating Migration in Early Modern Cities* (Farnham, 2012). In studies of early modern cities and migration, there is a growing interest in migrant communities and their role in the increasingly globalizing trade of the early modern period. According to Roitman: ‘Historians have recently begun focusing on the interconnected and transnational nature of some of these merchant communities, such as the new Christians but also the Armenians, Indians, Greeks and Huguenots, among others’, V. Roitman, *Us and Them: Intercultural Trade and the Sephardim, 1595–1640* (Leiden, 2009), 66.

³The present emphasis on the relationship- and practice-based analysis of Madrid’s transient marginals is informed by B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford, 2005). This approach is further grounded in M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1984); and H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991). These key texts have informed a growing body of work on early modern cities: K. Newman, *Cultural Capitals: Early Modern London and Paris* (Princeton, 2009); and P. Griffith, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime and Control in the Capital City 1550–1660* (Cambridge, 2008), are but two of several exponents. For Madrid, too, there has been a rise in studies of urban space informed by the seminal works of H. Lefebvre and M. de Certeau, as exemplified by J. Escobar, *The Plaza Mayor and the Shaping of Baroque Madrid* (Oxford, 2003), and E.G. Santos-Tomás, *Espacio urbano y creación literaria en el Madrid de Felipe IV* (Pamplona, 2004). Yet while these and other studies often refer to fictional representations of the urban underground, they illustrate that early modern Madrid remains significantly understudied in spatial turn-inspired studies of the lived space of transient marginals outside of the realm of fiction.

⁴This study approaches the contextualization of everyday life practices of foreigners among the marginals in early modern Madrid by way of microhistory. Distinct from local history, microhistory chooses the perspective of the particular to engage in a discussion with the generalizing narratives of History. It engages macrohistorical narratives based on aggregates, statistics or the decisions of highly visible institutions and their outward representatives by juxtaposing the perspectives of individual historical actors among the populace (a baker, shoemaker, a vagabond), specific places considered too normal for the narration of a history of great events (the street corner, the tavern), supposedly banal practices (gossip, illicit trade, identity construction) or combinations thereof. For an introduction to microhistory, view the seminal C. Ginzburg, ‘Microhistory: two or three things that I know about it’, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 10–35; G. Levi, ‘On microhistory’, in P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 2001), 97–119. More recently, M. Peltonen, ‘Clues, margins and monads: the micro–macro link in historical research’, *History and Theory*, 40 (2001), 347–59; and *idem*, ‘How marginal are the margins today? On the historiographical place of the microhistory’, in B. De Haan and K. Mierau (eds.), *Microhistory and the Picaresque Novel. A First Exploration of Commensurable Perspectives* (Newcastle, 2014), have discussed the notion of the marginal in present-day historical investigation.

city. Furthermore, it will show that, in the very compartmentalization into ethnicity-based historical reconstructions, present-day historiography has reproduced attempts by the seventeenth-century Madrid municipality to divide and control foreigners in the city. Secondly, the everyday practices of transients will be interpreted as survival tactics and counter-practices in the context of attempts by the municipality and guilds to organize the presence of foreigners in the city along cultural, socio-economic or ethnic lines. Revealing the various tactical constructions of identity exhibited by the defendants will uncover the crucial role of the illicit in the construction of the syncretic and hybrid proto-cosmopolitan identity ascribed to the Armenian diaspora.

The trial was archived with the Inquisition of Toledo, under whose authority it was conducted in 1614. It took place at the tribunal of the constables of the *sala de alcaldes de la casa y corte*, the institution governing the capital city of the Spanish empire.⁵ The records consist of 70 folios in the standard legal font, documenting statements by the apprehending constable, the primary defendants and several witnesses. The dossier provides testimonies from individuals identified and/or identifying as Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Mesopotamians, Persians and Turks, as well as city dwellers identified as residents with the status of *vecinos*. The two dozen witness statements provide short biographies and references to their everyday lives. In the sheer extent of their detail, the witness statements stand out among the material left behind by the *sala de alcaldes de casa y corte*, key among which are the *Libros de Gobierno*, which provide minutes of town hall meetings and issued decrees, and the *Inventario de causas criminales*, which lists the criminal cases brought before the *sala*. The latter provide insightful overviews of general tendencies and policies; the statements in the trial, however, due to the extended testimonies, provide unique insights into the interactions among a group of transients, many of whom had spent almost two decades in the capital prior to being apprehended. As elaborate records of agent perspectives, the testimonies allow us to reflect on the backgrounds of the defendants and witnesses, the relationships among them, the frictions between different ethnic groups, and their relationships with the city administration and the general public of early modern Madrid.

⁵The *sala de alcaldes de la casa y corte* had a wide range of tasks spanning from formulating and decreeing municipal policy on everything from the pricing of food stuffs, rent prices, the organization of public events to the policing of the city. On any given day, a constable of the *sala de alcaldes de la casa y corte* would attend a trial, question suspects, decide on building practices and commercial matters in the city and spend several hours on foot patrol through the city. It was probably one of the most demanding jobs in the ranks of the municipal government, and many officials would try to avoid this career step. Key information on the *sala de alcaldes de la casa y corte* can be found in A. Alvar Ezquerro, *El nacimiento de una capital moderna. Madrid entre 1561–1606* (Madrid, 1989); Á. Alloza, *La vara quebrada de la justicia: un estudio histórico sobre la delincuencia madrileña entre los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid, 2000); C. de la Guardia Herrero, 'La sala de alcaldes de casa y corte. Un estudio social', *Investigaciones históricas. Época moderna y contemporánea*, 14 (1994), 35–64. J.L. De Las Heras Santos, *La justicia penal de los Austrias en la corona de castilla* (Salamanca, 1994), provides a general context of the justice system under the Habsburgs. Moreover, the series *Anales del Instituto de Estudios madrileños* published by the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas provides a rich compendium of source editions, which remain to be included in the current debates about cultural encounters in early modern cities. On the Inquisition, see H. Kamen *Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Bloomington, 1985).

Madrid, as I have argued extensively elsewhere, provides an instructive yet understudied context for early modern cultural encounters among transient marginals.⁶ Chosen as the site of the imperial capital in 1561, the provincial town of Madrid had roughly 15,000 inhabitants. Due to the new role, the registered population rapidly reached over 100,000 by the end of the century, in spite of several severe epidemics in the 1590s.⁷ The precipitous growth of the metropolis was the result of a continuous influx of migrants both from within the peninsula and from abroad, thus creating a node of interaction, a privileged site for encounters in the Habsburg domains and beyond. By the early seventeenth century, Madrid had become a bustling city with an official population of c. 120,000 and a considerable unregistered transient population.⁸ In this sprawling city, outskirts that were once the domain of the marginals were absorbed by the centre of the 'town and court', and thus also became the centre of attention of municipal administrators and criminal investigators. This resulted in a rise in documentation of the presence of transient marginals in the city.⁹ Yet, although Madrid is a key city and surely a point of reference for urban development throughout Europe's major cities in the early modern period, it is rather under-represented in comparative discussions of cultural encounters in early modern European cities, in what is largely an anglo-phone debate focusing on Paris and London.

The Armenian diaspora and Madrid

The Armenian and Greek backgrounds of the suspects situate the trial in the context of Hispano-Armenian relationships in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Due to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the east, an Armenian diaspora emerged in early modern European cities. It brought with it the complex relationships between Armenians, Greeks, Persians, Turks, Bulgarians and Mesopotamians to the streets of early modern Madrid, just as other diasporas brought with them their relationships and skill sets, thus challenging local police with global networks, and multilingual encounters.¹⁰ According to the trial record,

⁶Mierau, *Capturing the Pícaro in Words*, 4–8.

⁷Alvar Ezquerra, *El nacimiento*, 85–8.

⁸A first overview of the history of Madrid (in Spanish) is provided by S. Juliá *et al.* (eds.), *Madrid historia de una capital* (Madrid, 2008); and A. Fernando García (ed.), *Historia de Madrid* (Madrid, 1993). Alvar Ezquerra, *El nacimiento*, is a key source in Spanish on the urban development of early modern Madrid, featuring an extensive overview of information on demographic growth as well as influx of food stuffs and merchandise. M.F. Carbajo Isla, *La población de la villa de Madrid: desde finales del siglo XVI hasta mediados del siglo XIX* (Mexico, 1987); and M.F. Carbajo Isla, 'La inmigración a Madrid (1600–1850)', *Reis*, 32 (1985), 67–100, provide further specific and often-cited estimates for the immigration to Madrid. J.W. Sieber, 'The invention of a capital: Philip II and the first reform of Madrid', Johns Hopkins University Ph.D. thesis, 1985, uses sources from the municipal administration to provide specific information on building practices aimed at giving the newly founded capital an imperial allure.

⁹A considerable part of this material can be found in the *Anales del Instituto de Estudios Madrileños*, which provides ample source editions, as well as the key archives of the city council, the *Libros de Gobierno* and the *Inventario de causas criminales* at the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid.

¹⁰Antonio Domínguez Ortiz is one of the first scholars to discuss the presence of Armenians in Madrid in 1961. According to him, their number was limited to no more than a few dozen by the middle of the seventeenth century: A. Domínguez Ortiz, *Los extranjeros en la vida española durante el siglo XVII y otros artículos* (Seville, 1996). A key recent study on the relationships between Spain and Armenia is J.M.

in early 1614, Diego Benitez, the *alguacil de pobres de la corte* (constable of the poor of the court) went to an inn in a dead-end street close to Lavapies Square to apprehend a supposedly Armenian man by the name of Gabriel. The cover of the trial dossier states ‘Armenios (Gabriel y otros varios)’. In the eyes of the constable, Gabriel appears to have formed part of a larger group of vagabonds, many of them of supposedly Greek and Armenian background. In the tavern: ‘There lived many Armenians and Greeks and other nations that roamed this court as vagabonds and without a source of income.’¹¹ Due to an apparently suspicious reaction to the constable’s first visit to the tavern, the constable returned with several watchmen and apprehended all those present at the time, providing a snapshot of sorts of the tenants of a boarding house tending to their various businesses on what to them would have been an ordinary day.

Jessica Vance Roitman suggests that Armenians in particular had a go-between function in early modern European cities. Their nominally Christian culture was characterized by communication with, and living amongst, various communities of Greek, Persian and Turkish origin. Due to their acculturated hybrid identities they built bridges with various different cultures, religions and ethnicities throughout early modern Europe.¹² Aslanian considers the identity of Armenians abroad, in particular that of the trade networks out of New Julfa, as both ‘hybrid and syncretic’ and a forebode of a ‘trans-imperial cosmopolitanism’. In what follows, we shall see how this syncretism and cosmopolitanism played out in the tactics of everyday life on the margins.¹³ The present source allows us to explore the extent to which the opportunities and parameters of the clandestine provide an interstitial space that enabled the creation of the cosmopolitan.

The convergence of the global context of the Ottoman expansion in the east and the various diasporas and displacements that ensued, on the one hand, and the local challenges of the expanding imperial capital, on the other, characterized a considerable part of the activities and challenges faced by those of Madrid’s constables assigned to the city’s transient marginals: the *alguaciles de vagabundos*. Key historians of the city’s demographics, such as Carbajo Isla and Alvar Ezquerro, estimate the number of transients in the city to have been as high as 30 per cent of the total population. Although there are substantial studies about the presence of foreigners in the crown’s administrative bodies, as well as the presence of foreigners in diplomatic functions (as evidenced by Antonio Dominguez Ortíz, Jesús Bravo Lozano, as well as several publications in the *Anales del*

Floristán Imízcoz, ‘Las relaciones hispano-armenias en los ss. XVI–XVII’, *Mesageros*, 5 (1999), 46–64. On the specific presence of Armenians in early sixteenth-century Madrid, including references to some of the key figures in the trial studied here, see J.M. Floristán Imízcoz, ‘Armenios en la corte de Felipe III de España (1598–1621)’, *REArm*, 32 (2010), 165–99. For a general introduction on Armenians and the Armenian diaspora, see E. Herzig and M. Kurkchian (eds.), *The Armenians. Past and Present in the Making of National Identity* (London, 2005); and C.H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age: 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2010), 84–5. A key study on the Armenian network in early modernity is S.D. Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants of New Julfa* (Berkeley, 2011).

¹¹Fol. 1r: ‘pos/avan muchos armenios y gri/egos y de otras naciones que/andavan en esta corte vaga/mundos y sin modo de vivir’.

¹²Roitman, *Us and Them*.

¹³Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean*, 6.

Instituto de Estudios Madrileños), considerably less is known about foreigners on the margins of society.¹⁴ Due to the less documented nature of illicit activities, the transients subsisting on the fringes generally left considerably less of a paper trail. They were seldom born in the city, nor were they members of parishes, guilds or any other official body that would make them visible in historical records. This results in the methodological challenge of capturing the role of the clandestine, the opaque, the fake and feigned in the historical reconstruction of cosmopolitanism. Glimpses into their experience are mostly caught in records of conflicts with the law. In the historiography of Madrid, as in the case of other early modern capitals, the over-riding marker of the identity of the lower and marginalized classes becomes the identification as criminal – a problem discussed in Foucault's seminal essay *La vie des hommes infâmes*.¹⁵ Sources such as the present trial, however, reveal much more than just information about the criminal enterprises of the apprehended group, when parsed for other aspects of the defendants' daily routine.

The boarding house in which the group resided, referred to as the 'posada de paredes', was owned by a man called Jorge Cipriotta, who was identified as a Cypriot, indicating the role of already established foreign transients in providing housing for subsequent arrivals. The boarding house was located in a blind alley close to Lavapiés Square, in what up until the 1560s used to be the outskirts of the town, and due to the rapid growth of the capital had moved significantly closer to the centre. It becomes clear from several of the witness statements that the 'posada de paredes' was a place that the municipality and several neighbours considered a hangout for transient vagabonds with no known means of income. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the mayors were aware of the substantial presence of transients in the city, and that they had found places to convene in the taverns, inns and poor houses of the capital. Following Michel de Certeau's notion of urban space as a site in which strategies of control by institutions such as municipal governments determine the parameters for tactical spatial practices by city dwellers, such places were a tactical response to strategies employed by the municipal government to organize indigent foreigners along cultural and ethnic lines.¹⁶ According to Conforti and Sánchez de Madariaga: 'The relations between foreigners and their urban hosts in the capital cities of Southern Europe revolved around the foundation and sponsorship of national confraternities, hospitals, chapels and churches. These bodies organized the ethnic or national identities of outsiders around a clear institutional and spatial focus.'¹⁷

¹⁴J. Bravo Lozano, 'Autóctonos e inmigrados. El poblamiento de Madrid', in E. Roel (ed.), *Historia y documentación notarial, el Madrid del Siglo de Oro: jornadas celebradas en Madrid, 2 a 4 de junio de 1992* (Madrid, 1992), 81–8. Domínguez Ortiz, *Los extranjeros en la vida española*.

¹⁵M. Foucault, 'La vie des hommes infâmes', in *Philosophie: anthologie* (Paris, 2004), 562–87. Therefore, it is sources such as the *Inventario de causas criminales* and the records of trials staged by the Inquisition in which most traces of the lower echelons of cities' transients are found. See, among others, E. Villalba Pérez, 'Algunas notas acerca de la gestión de las cárceles madrileñas a comienzos del siglo XVII', *Boletín de la Facultad de Derecho*, 3 (1993), 311–28; E. Villalba Pérez, *La administración de la justicia penal en Castilla y en la Corte a comienzos del siglo XVII* (Madrid, 1993).

¹⁶De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93 *et passim*.

¹⁷C. Conforti and E. Sánchez de Madariaga, 'Churches and confraternities', in Calabi and Turk Christensen (eds.), *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400–1700*, 349–63, at 349.

The heterogeneous and integrated nature of Jorge Cipriotta's boarders constituted a counterforce to the attempts by the municipal authorities to separate poor relief and welfare for citizens (the *vecinos*), from that for foreigners, as well as to compartmentalize foreigners along political identities.¹⁸ According to Teresa Huguet-Termes:

A special group among the 'new' hospital institutions were those established for foreigners: San Luis de los Franceses for the French, San Andrés de los Flamencos for the Flemings, San Pedro de los Italianos (for Italians), San Antonio de los Portugueses (for the Portuguese), and Nuestra Señora de Montserrat de la Corona de Aragón (for those from the crown of Aragón) were founded in Madrid in the late sixteenth century.¹⁹

Due to the realization of several poor relief programmes inspired by the works of reformers Miguel de Giginta (1534–88) and Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera (1556–1618) as well as a more general discourse on urban poverty, vagabonds were repeatedly ordered to find shelter at the *Hospital general*, one of the various parish hospitals. This was so that they would refrain from loitering or gathering in public spaces. They were also prohibited from begging without dedicated licences.²⁰ In light of the perceived resistance of transient marginals to maintaining culturally and ethnically separated spaces, the special constables called *alguaciles de vagabundos* or *alguaciles de pícaros* mentioned earlier were assigned to keep an eye on these 'vagabonds'. This was a challenging task; the crown archives contain pleas by constables requesting resources for paying informants to provide them with information on the transients.²¹

In all cases, identification as a vagabond entailed a challenge to institutionalized charity. Such labelling had little regard for or awareness of the various backgrounds and relationships among identified individuals and within the urban network. In this specific trial case, much of the special constable's forensic activity was concerned with identifying the transients, who, in turn, seemed to be quite aware of

¹⁸See Mierau, *Capturing the Pícaro in Words*, 96 *et passim*, for how fictional representations of early modern Madrid engaged with these urban policies.

¹⁹T. Huguet-Termes, 'Madrid hospitals and welfare in the context of the Habsburg empire', in T. Huguet-Termes *et al.* (eds.), 'Health and medicine in Habsburg Spain: agents, practices, representations', *Medical History*, Supplement No. 29 (2009), 64–85, at 74.

²⁰Alvar Ezquerro, *El nacimiento*; A. Alvar Ezquerro, 'Giginta, la Corte y el arbitrio castellano del siglo XVI', in J. Queralt and J.M. Henric (eds.), *Miguel de Giginta, Canónigo de Elna* (Perpignan, 2003), 57–87; A.J. Cruz, *Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain* (London, 1999); Mierau, *Capturing the Pícaro in Words*.

²¹Traces of these representations of transient marginals can be found in the inventory of criminal cases, but also in individual pleas to the court or the municipality by involved mayors, judges and policemen which can be consulted at the archives of the *camara de castilla* at the Archivo General Simancas, which contain a vast amount of pleas submitted by city administrators and police of all ranks. In Mierau, *Capturing the Pícaro in Words*, a study of the historical referentiality of literary representations of information flows in the metropolis and the role of marginals in these information flows, I have shown that literary authors, city planners and constables alike voiced their concerns about criminal organizations forming among the city's marginals, many of them transients.

the challenge their identification posed to law enforcement and used this confusion to their advantage. In his report, the constable described the situation:

he asked the very same Gabriel, and the very same Gabriel denied his name and said that the man he was looking for was in Segovia. In order to find out who he was, he asked him who he was and he said that he spoke Persian and that he had a title from his majesty and with that he left him chuckling to himself.²²

Aware of the constable's lack of information, the man was able to claim that the real Gabriel was in Segovia at the time and that he himself was Persian. Gabriel had, in fact, held a job as translator for the Persian ambassador and at the time, considerable parts of Armenia had been incorporated into the Persian Empire.²³ It does not become apparent from the report to what extent the constable was aware of the geopolitics of the Persian and Ottoman Empires. However, the constable's first reaction was to accept the constructed identity. Most likely, Gabriel had some experience in faking identity, perhaps relying on his knowledge of the fact that the Madrid municipal police did not have structural communication channels with police forces in other Iberian cities, relying almost entirely on local witness statements from third parties for information about criminal activities outside of their jurisdiction.²⁴ The cosmopolitan connectedness of Gabriel and his associates, here, appears to have been borne of a tactical need to outsmart municipal strategies of control.

Jorge Parrao: cultural go-between

The integration of various cultural backgrounds in local networks assigned particular agency to citizens that could and were willing to translate between Spanish and other languages. Whilst at first the constable did leave the tavern; he was not satisfied with the received information and his suspicion was aroused by the chuckling Gabriel. Doubting the veracity of the man's statement: 'He went to find Jorge Parrao who spoke the languages of these nations, and he told him what had happened, and Jorge Parrao told him that he knew Gabriel and the rest of the Armenians...and that all of them were vagabonds.'²⁵ Jorge Parrao's role in the proceedings is crucial; without his statement, the investigation would most likely have ceased at this point. However, other than being able to identify Gabriel, Jorge only appears to know the group from a distance. According to his account, the group were no more than vagabonds. That is to say, Jorge Parrao's perception of Gabriel *cum suis* prior to the extended witness statements was the same as the constable's. It was informed by their appearance as vagabonds with no identifiable source of income.

²²Fol. 2r: 'y selo pregunto/a el mismo gavriel y el mismo/gavriel nego su nombre y dixo que/por el que preguntava estava en/Segobia para mas bien saber/quien era les pregunto quien era y/dixo que era lengua de persianos/y que tenia titulo de su magestad y/con esto le deajo rriendose consigo'.

²³Floristán Imízcoz, 'Armenios en la corte', 181.

²⁴De Las Heras Santos, *La justicia penal*.

²⁵Fol. 2r: 'busco/gorxe de parrao lengua destas/naciones y le conto lo que avia/pasado el dho gorxe parro le dixo como conoci al dho gavriel/y a todos demas armenios...y que todos eran/vagamundos'.

Through Jorge Parrao's interpreting, it later emerged that the appearance of destitution was a cover for an intricate fraud. The suspects were a far cry from the powerless alms beggar, on the losing end of the baroque's contrast of splendour and destitution. According to Villalba Pérez in late sixteenth-century Madrid: 'Vagabonds were entirely marginal groups which could be disposed of without any consideration if ever they should threaten the rest of the city.'²⁶ The above, however, reveals the instability of the signifier 'vagabond'. In the social space as perceived by the constable and quite probably many urban dwellers like him, the group represented vagabonds, and the underlying complex identities are not revealed until a conflict or crisis arises. The articulation of underlying identities – and the very possibility of their inclusion in historiography by way of legal documents – required a figure like the shoemaker Jorge Parrao who spoke both Spanish and Turkish, who was not a suspect and aided the constable in the apprehension of Gabriel and the other people at the inn, and subsequently acted as an interpreter during much of the hearing. In this setting, he was an enabler for the intercultural encounter at hand, a liminal figure 'betwixt and between' identities with a key role in making the transient visible in and to city institutions.

According to Andreas Höfele and Wener von Koppenfels: 'the condition of the Renaissance go-between' was that of 'A liminal figure, "forever on the periphery of the possible", forever crossing borders and thereby problematizing the notion of borders itself, the go-between inhabits a zone of double alienation, the kind of "third space" which, in Homi Bhabha's conception of the term, can be both inside and outside at the same time.'²⁷ By way of such go-betweens, everyday life in inner-city Madrid became a site of inter-related global and local conflicts for many of Madrid's lower level administrators, who, only decades before, would have had little cause for interaction with such complex and far-reaching networks. Perhaps, given the central role Jorge Parrao played in recording the many voices in the document at hand, the records of this trial identify him and early modern Madrid's cultural encounters more than anything else. He is the enabler of the historical reconstruction. In addition to Spanish, Jorge Parrao, who self-identified as Greek, spoke several languages, as in his own words: 'this witness knows this, because this witness speaks Turkish, Greek and Arabic and said Armenians speak Turkish'.²⁸

In the case of the supposedly Greek Jorge Cayla and Jorge Camarino (the latter would later deny being either Greek or Armenian) the liminal zone between the Christian subjects of the Habsburg Empire and the Turkish 'Other' becomes all the more apparent. These two were suspected of having forged begging licences and having obtained money from Castilian bishoprics under false pretences:

²⁶E. Villalba Pérez, *¿Pecadoras o delinquentes? Delito y género en la Corte (1580–1630)* (Madrid, 2004), 73, 'vagabundos eran grupos enteramente marginales de los que se podía disponer sin ninguna consideración siempre que pudieran amenazar en algún sentido al resto de la ciudad'.

²⁷A. Höfele and W. Von Koppenfels, *Renaissance Go-Betweens. Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin and New York, 2005), 6. See also V. Turner, 'Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, ritual: an essay in comparative symbiology', *Rice University Studies*, 60 (1974), 123–64; H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994).

²⁸Fol. 45r: 'y lo save este/testigo porque este testigo tiene la lengua/turquesca griega y arabigo y los dhos/armenios ablan en turquesco'.

This witness knows that said Jorge Cayla does not have any other profession nor income other than begging for alms throughout the kingdom and that this witness also knows Jorge Camarino for the three or four months in these parts having seen him in the court in the company of Pandali, his servant, and he said that he was begging for alms in order to liberate his brothers.²⁹

Similar charges were repeated by several witnesses throughout the trial. Several witnesses accused the two of using the money to liberate captured friends held hostage in Madrid. This reveals that many of the subjects were involved with the amply researched Mediterranean network of negotiators that connected such sites as Algeria, Constantinople and Malta, which thrived as hubs in the Mediterranean exchange of captives and hostages, as part of what Garcés considered the ‘undeclared war’ in the Mediterranean.³⁰

Again, the outward appearance obscures a more complex, in fact inverted, practice. When asked what the money they had gathered was used for, one of the witnesses said: ‘It is for the rescue of three friends that are in the court and to send them to Turkey.’³¹ So, rather than use the received alms to obtain the liberty of family members held hostage in Turkey, they had used the money to liberate friends held captive by the Spanish crown. For the purpose of this scam, Jorge Cayla carried with him several fake documents, which stand as testimony to his ability to establish illicit working relationships with corrupt agents in the municipality. According to one witness:

Cayla possesses a falsified document from the city of Seville saying that his wife and children are captives in Constantinople and he has been using this document to beg for alms in the bishoprics of Castile, and in each bishopric he has earned three hundred or four hundred ducats in alms and this witness thinks the document is false because if in fact Jorge Cayla’s wife and children had been captured in Constantinople, he would have brought from his homeland a statement from the knights who would have seen how he or his wife and children were captured.³²

²⁹Fol. 29r: ‘que este testigo save/que el dho jorxe cayla/no tiene otro oficio/ni manera de vivir si/no andar pidiendo/limosna por el rreino/que ansi mismo/conoce este testigo/a jorxe camarino grie/go de tres/o quatro me/ses desta parte de/averle visto andar/en esta corte en co/pania de pandali/su criado y dezia que/pedia limosna pa/ra el rrescate de sus/ermanos’.

³⁰See M.A. Garcés, *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive’s Tale* (Vanderbilt, 2002), 29–37, in particular. Garcés provides a compelling but also controversial reading of the agent-based experiences of the Mediterranean trade of captives. See also M. Noel, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (Oxford, 2015). The seminal F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, 1996), remains a key source.

³¹Fol. 19v: ‘es para rrescatar tres com/paneros que ay en la villa/y a ynbyarlos a turquia’.

³²Fol. 22r: ‘cayla ttrae en su poder/una ynformacion f/alsa en la ciudad de sevilla/acerca de que tiene cautivas/en costantinopla a su/muxer y yxo con la/qual a andado piden/do limosna po ro/los obispos de/castilla y en cada obispado a sacado tres cientos/o quatro cientos ducados/de limosna y este testigo tiene por falsos las/dichas informaciones/por que se tuviera lo/dicho xorxe cayla/a su muxer e yxos/cautivos en costanti/nopla ubiera traídos/rrecaudos de su patria/acerca de los cavalleros/que ubieran visto/cautibar a el o a sus/muxeres e yxos’.

The case of the falsified document from Seville shows that the network operated throughout the Iberian Peninsula. In doing so, it outperformed the mostly locally operating police forces, who would have had to send special envoys to other towns or cities if a suspect skipped town. In fact, an agent chasing Jorge Cayla from Seville had been in Madrid for quite some time and would not have caught up with him if it had not been for one of the witnesses in the trial. At the time, there was little interaction between the constables in Madrid and, for example, those in Seville, while it becomes increasingly apparent that criminals had connections in several cities and were well aware of each other's activities. The only police force operating throughout the peninsula, the *Santa Hermandad*, had only *ad hoc* interactions with Madrid's constables, and the relationship between the Inquisition and local constables was challenging at best.³³ Although the vagabonds may appear to have been indigent and only loosely organized from the outside, they did bring together a vast array of experiences and previous engagement. The apparent sophistication of the enterprise may be related to the fact that some of the apprehended vagabonds actually had quite high-ranking positions before ending up in the taverns and hang-outs of the metropolis' destitute. Jorge Cayla, for example, claimed he had a history in the service of the Spanish king, having been stationed in Naples helping the crown's spies get to Turkey.³⁴

Transient networks: organization from below

The inn was also a hub that established relationships between transients providing work and those seeking it. Much like charity and poor relief, offices and trades in Madrid were also organized along ethnic and cultural lines in guilds and confraternities.³⁵ This required transients to forge their own networks, and many of the tenants were engaged in some sort of working relationship with other tenants. In addition to the main defendants Gabriel, Jorge Cayla and Jorge Camarino, a number of other individuals, among them Pandali, Pamoso and Nicolas, were mentioned in the trial, several of whom had previously been dispersed throughout the peninsula begging for alms with counterfeit begging licences.³⁶ Moreover, there were witnesses such as Jorge Cipriotta who had provided housing to Gabriel, as well as most of the other Armenians and Greeks who were apprehended

³³De Las Heras Santos, *La justicia penal*; Alloza, *La vara quebrada de la justicia*.

³⁴Whether this is true or not is difficult to determine; Imízcoz's research into Armenians at the court has shown, however, that the King did reduce Cayla's sentence to banishment from the court and prohibition from ever working for the crown again. Jorge Camarino denied being Armenian or Greek and claimed that he had come to court in the service of the Count Anthony Sherley, the well-documented envoy of the Shah of Persia.' Mierau, *Capturing the Picaro in Words*, 97; Floristán Imízcoz, 'Armenios en la corte', 183.

³⁵For the organization of guilds, and the importance of kinship relationships that would naturally exclude non-Iberian foreigners, see J.C. Zofio Llorente, *Gremios y artesanos en Madrid, 1550–1650: la sociedad del trabajo en una ciudad cortesana preindustrial* (Madrid, 2005).

³⁶Fol. 19v: 'aciendo/enbusteo y juntando/dineros de los vagamun/dos por todo el rreino y an/dado en su/ compania un ombre que se llamo/pandali ansimismo un griego/que se llamo pamoso y otro/que se llama/ niculas/ansimismo grieg/os andan por mucho os/bipados echos bagamun/dos pidiendo limosna/con rre-caudos y papeles/falsos' – 'committing fraud and collecting the money of the vagabonds from throughout the kingdom with in his company a man called Pandali as well as a Greek called Pamoso and another called Nicolas as well as other Greeks wandering the bishoprics as vagabonds begging for alms with false requests and licences'.

at the inn.³⁷ The case shows that the connecting role of the Armenian diaspora also manifested itself in criminal networks. Jorge Camarino had a boy beg for him: 'There is a Greek boy begging for alms, and he is begging alms for Jorge Camarino.'³⁸ He also had a servant, who was apparently quite capable of operating independently: 'Said Jorge Camarino also went to one bishopric and sent said Pandali to another bishopric to beg for alms with the help of a document and papers he had for the occasion.'³⁹ Jorge Cayla had a Turkish slave by the name of Mostafa, a captive whom he had bought from a knight and citizen of Seville. According to Marco Antonio, another Armenian who also lived in Jorge Cipriotta's house, Mostafa and Jorge Cayla had a history together:

I say that in the city of Seville I saw that said Jorge Cayla bought a Turkish slave who was not a Christian and who was the slave of a citizen of Seville...a knight of said city for the sum of two hundred ducats more or less and said slave was called Mostafa and the same slave said that in Turkey Jorge Cayla was his neighbour and that he knew him.⁴⁰

This shows that pre-existing relationships were tactically reframed in the social space of Madrid to adapt to local law and control. The distance between the professed identity in the everyday public space and the actual background requires us to question the referentiality of representations of public spaces by way of police reports, travel narratives and the like. Outward appearance (i.e. of that of a Turkish slave) appears to have masked a much more complex reality. This calls into question statistics about the presence of foreigners in the city.

The tenants of the inn provide each other with work, and thus forged connections between several backgrounds, as well as very disparate trades and offices. The narrative of Constantin de Marnegro, a 30-year-old sailor provides an exemplary insight into the rich web of spaces and professions connected through one individual:

when asked about what he had done after he had come to the court, he said that in this court he had served some Greek nuns until they left for their

³⁷Fol. 3r: 'En la villa de madrid en el dho/dia mes y ano dho alguacil/presento por testigo a un ombre/que se dixo llamar jorxe ci/priotta de nacion griego que/dixo vivir en una calle sin/salida junto a lavapies del qual se rrezibio juramento/en forma de derecho en pre/senzia de gorxe parrao in/trepete del qual ansi mismo/se rrecibio/juramento para/que fielmente ara la yn/tepretacion de lo que dixere/el dho jorxe cipriotte' - 'In the town of Madrid in said day, month and year said constable presented a man as a witness a man who said his name was Jorge Cipriotta, of the Greek nation, who said he lived in the dead end street near Lavapies, of whom was received a statement under oath in the presence of Jorge Parrao the interpreter of whom we also received a statement under oath that he would provide a faithful interpretation of what said Jorge Cipriotta would say.'

³⁸Fol. 26v: 'anda pidiendo limosna/un moco griego el qual/pide la dha limosna/para xorxe camarino'.

³⁹Fol. 30r: 'Ansi el/dicho jorxe camarino/fue a un obispado/e ynbio al dicho/pandali a otro obis/pado a pedir limos/na en birtud de/alguna ynformación y/papeles que tenia/para este efeto.'

⁴⁰Fol. 28r: 'digo en la ciudad de/sevilla bio que el dicho/jorxe cayla conpro/un esclavo tturco/que no era cristiano/que era el esclavo de/un vecino de la ciu/dad de sevilla que/...cavallero de la dicha/ciudad en/cosa de du/cientos ducados po/co mas o menos que/pago por el y el dicho/esclavo se llamava/mostafa y el mis/mos esclavo decia/que en turquia/era su vecino el dho/jorxe cayla y conocia dho'.

country which must have been five or six months ago, and that afterwards he served Jorge Camarino for about three months, who, with some papers and licences that the bishop had made for him at the chancellery of Valladolid for begging alms, had walked various localities of the bishopric begging for alms, and the clergymen of said localities indicated persons who were supposed to beg for alms and the begging remained in the hand of these persons and clergymen, and he has not returned to these places because he was contracted by the Armenian Luis de Cruz, powder maker, to go to Truxillos to gather saltpetre in order to make gunpowder.⁴¹

Cristóbal, who identified as Bulgarian is yet another example:

And asked for his name, he said his name was Cristobal of Bulgaria, and that he is Greek, born in Bulgaria, which is the land of the great Turk, and that he was a merchant and that he travelled by ship taking wheat from Cassandria to Christian lands...and that he spent three months in the hospital general and that after he was cured he worked in the countryside bringing grass to the square and that he lived in the dead-end alley beneath Paredes' inn in Jorge Cipriotta's house.⁴²

Networking across ethnic and cultural lines thus emerges as yet another spatial tactic in the urban fabric. However, this necessity-based association did not necessarily foster a sense of community; the tenants appear to have formed a loose-knit group that covered for each other, until the pressure of the investigators bore down on them. The main accused, Gabriel and the two Jorges, also show up in material from the Simancas Archives published recently by Floristán Imízcoz, a specialist on sources referring to the Armenian diaspora in Spain. Gabriel, it appears from his pleas to the *cámara de Castilla* a decade after the trial, had according to his own account been spying on the organization that had been selling fake beggar's licences in the court.⁴³

Jorge Cayla was not only connected to other transients, but had also counted on locals for support in the decades before his arrest. He lived in the house of a tailor

⁴¹Fol. 52v: 'preguntado que a echo despues que bino a esta corte/dixo que en esta corte a servido a unas mon/xas griegas asta que se fueron a su tierra/que abra cinco o seis meses y despues/abia servido a jorxe camarino griego/obra de tres meses el qual con unos/papeles y rrecaudos que le echo el obispo/a la chancilleria de valladolid a pedir limosna/donde andubo con liziencia del obispo pidiendo/limosna por el dho obispado en algunos/lugares y los curas de los lugares non/bravan personas para que pidiesen/la dha limosna y quedando a cargo/de las personas nonbradas por los/curas y no a buelto a las dhas partes/porque abra un mes que bolbio/asta q estava concertado con luis/de la cruz armenio polvorista para yr/a truxillo a sacar selitre para hazer polvora'.

⁴²Fol. 51r: 'preguntado como se llama dixo que se lla/ma xristobal de bolgaria y es griego/y es natural de bolgaria que es tierra/del gran turco y que a sido mercader/y andava en los navios y traia trigo de/cassandria a ttierra de xpianos...y a estado/tres meses en el hospital general y que de/pues que salio de curar se a andado/travaxando en el capo trayendo yerba/a la placa y posava en en la callezuela/sin salida vajo del meson de paredes/donde le prendieron en cassa de/jorje chipriotta'.

⁴³Floristán Imízcoz, 'Armenios en la corte', 181–5.

on San Francisco Street and ‘There was...a young Castilian student with them in order to guide them to the place at which to beg for alms.’⁴⁴ These and other collaborators must have been aware of the constructed identities Jorge Cayla was performing, and this awareness must have shaped their own perception of public space and vagabonds. The group’s relationships within the urban network were not restricted to private individuals; the organization was well connected in the city administration. According to one witness:

about a month and a half ago, more or less, the aforementioned Jorge Camarino told this witness that before a fat scribe who lives in a house on the plaza de la cebada who was apparently a fat man, he had conferred a title unto the aforementioned Pandali, his servant, allowing him to beg for alms in various bishoprics in his name.⁴⁵

Begging licences, which had been obligatory since the inception of shelters for the poor, provided corrupt officials, such as Diego Velázquez de Grado, with an illicit income.⁴⁶ The extent to which these ‘vagabonds’ were capable of employing the help of municipal officials becomes clear in the first instance of fraud that is uncovered. During the investigation and the subsequent hearings of the witnesses, it turned out that the forged will Gabriel had produced was approved by a scribe called Antonio González of whom, at first, no trace can be found.⁴⁷ It turns out later that this scribe worked for another scribe, Felipe de Sierra, and that Antonio González authorized the fake will that gave Gabriel the rights to the belongings of a deceased Armenian called Saran.⁴⁸ Gabriel had also had contact with yet another scribe by the name of Diego Marín, who wrote up the will or *informacion* after Gabriel had told him that Saran had died and that he, Gabriel, had witnesses to the effect that Saran owed him money.

The backgrounds of the suspects and the many collaborators supposedly involved in the money-making schemes were not restricted to ethnicity or religion.

⁴⁴Fol. 32r: ‘tan/bien fue con ellos/un moco estudian/te castellano para/guiarlos a los lugares/donde pedir limosna’.

⁴⁵Fol. 23r: ‘abra como mes/y medio poco mas/o menos que el dho jorxe/camarino le dixo/a este testigo que ante un/escrivano gordo que/vive en una cassa de la/plaza de la cebada/que era un ombre gordo/avia otorgado un poder/al dho pandali ssu/criado para que pudie/sse pedir limos/na por algunos obis/pados en su nombre’.

⁴⁶Alvar Ezquerro, ‘Giginta, la Corte y el arbitramento castellano’; Huguet-Termes, ‘Madrid hospitals’, 64–85; fol. 23r: ‘el dho escrivano/se llama diego belazquez/de grado’.

⁴⁷Fol. 2v: ‘avello preguntto por el dho/antonio goncalvez escrivano/no le an allado ni an nuevas/del e todos dicen que es fal/sado la ynformacion’ – ‘having been asked about said Antonio González, the scribe, no one had found him, nor was there any news about him, and they all claim that the document was false’.

⁴⁸Fol. 11r: ‘Andava buscando/antonio goncales el/anciano/escrivano y que es un escrivano/que asistta en el oficio/de felipe de sierra escriba/no del numero a quien/llaman pinillo para/que le yciese una ynfor/macion de como el dho/saran se a muerto y/avia mandado que el dho/moravietta entregasse/a este confesante los/vienes y dineros que a/vian quedado en su poder/en galicia para acer bien/por su alma’ – ‘He was looking for Antonio González, the scribe, who is a scribe in the service of Felipe de Sierra, official scribe, who is called Pinillo so that he would write him up a report concerning the death of Saran, and that he had ordered that the aforementioned Moravietta should give to the confessant the goods and money that had remained in his property in Galicia in order to do good for his soul.’

The two Jorges appear to have functioned as ring leaders who were quite capable of mobilizing support not only within their own ethnic communities but also within the urban network, revealing that the ability to create fictitious identities constituted a potent form of social capital for the forging of networks in the city.

Conclusion

The trial case has shown that the strategic divisions of the city by the municipal government, as informed by various advisory bodies, resulted in tactical practices of identification and association that undermine the referentiality of a historiography based on *a priori* ethnic or socio-economic identification. The trial case suggests that the urban environment of Madrid was one where many city dwellers performed various outward identities and spoke several languages, and few used their mother tongue. What is more, the space connected life stories that transverse culture and class. The vagabond in Madrid, it turns out, could be a former spice merchant, a sailor, a slave, a priest, a farmer or a soldier, may have spoken several languages and embodied and connected several cultural spheres. In fact, he – women are not mentioned in the source – was able to adopt and adapt identities according to the particular situation. This casts fundamental doubts on the categories used to provide statistics and aggregates on the presence of marginal migrants in early modern cities such as Madrid.

Although the focus here has been on individuals identifying as Armenians, Greeks, Persians, Turks and Mesopotamians, many of the practices may also be applied by the Flemish, English, Irish, French and other nationalities (in the early modern sense of the word) that appear in the criminal cases and ego documents describing marginal spaces in the city. The many entries of apprehended gangs in other sources on crime in Madrid such as the *Inventario de causas criminales* mentioning apprehended groups consisting of *gitanos*, *moriscos*, *mulatos*, *negros*, *portugueses*, *milanesos* and *flamencos* in various combinations suggest that this heterogeneous gathering was not an isolated case. In the marginal sphere, various ethnic and socio-economic communities interacted. The prison of the town and court was an intercultural gathering and a hub for establishing intercultural relationships.⁴⁹ Moreover, the complicit agents in the municipality imply a more general trade in fake documents. Although the identity based on their background and projected onto them by neighbours and police may have been both foreign and marginal, this group was more than capable of constructing relationships based on fashioned outward identities, thus assigning a special role to cultural go-betweens such as Jorge Parrao, who acted in various communities, and mediated between them. The present case-study suggests that the heterogeneous and integrated makeup of the marginal and immigrant networks and places provided a counter-structure for the ethnicity-based approach to community applied by the municipal government. This suggests a liminal zone of cultural hybridity and an agency of liminal figures such as Jorge Parrao that has hitherto largely escaped historiography. Approaching the group arrested in the boarding house as a network, rather

⁴⁹ AHN, Consejos, Libro 2783, several entries between 1550 and 1604. See also Villalba Pérez, 'Algunas notas'; and Alvar Ezquerro, *El nacimiento*, who studies various documents relating to the court gaol. The inventories of the gaol also reveal the presence of foreigners in the gaol.

than compartmentalizing them into ethnicities beforehand and studying them as part of their respective diasporas, has allowed us to focus on the relations that were established, rather than on the differences between the various backgrounds.

Herein lies a fascinating research project: a history of interculturality in the space of marginality based on agent perspectives and ego documents by social actors living among marginals both local and transient. Such a history from below of intercultural encounters in early modern Madrid would provide a much-needed juxtaposition and complement to the body of cultural studies of early modern marginality in Spain strongly focused on the analysis of fictional representations and learned discourse on urban development.⁵⁰ Such a project would also bring perspective to census-based reconstructions of the lived space of the city. It would contextualize specific locations in the city in a narrative and diachronic perspective, revealing how the coming together of a diverse set of individuals connects various geographical zones throughout and beyond the Habsburg Empire. The project would thus establish the dynamics of social space as the starting point of analysis in distinction to an ethnicity-based research project, that often takes (at times anachronous) constructs of ethnicity and nationality as their points of departure. Because the ethnicity-based approach to urban organization has left a much more traceable paper trail, it has also produced an ethnic community-based approach to the historiography of the presence of migrants in early modern cities. This results in the *de facto* invisibilization of the many fluid identities and collaborations characterizing the lived space of the city. If we shift our focus to similar apprehended groups as represented in pleas, letters, reports and trial records, a much richer thick description of cultural encounters in marginal spaces of early modern cities will emerge.

⁵⁰G. Maiorino, *At the Margins of the Renaissance: Lazarillo de Tormes and the Picaresque Art of Survival* (University Park, 2003); Cruz, *Discourses of Poverty*.

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