

Mental Affliction, Deviance and Culpability in Sixteenth-Century Spain: Beyond Binary Categories

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It has been argued that the label “madness” has been used as a way of stigmatizing and controlling social deviants (Szasz 1961; 1970; Scheff 1999). If we were to look at madness from the point of view of deviance theory, we would probably focus on historical cases of incarceration (or unwilling confinement to institutions) and other penalties received by people who were labelled “mad,” such as the loss of social or moral status. However, it can also be argued that “madness” is an ambiguous label, which refers to a wide range of mental afflictions and unusual behaviours, and that there is historical evidence of people losing their social and moral status as a consequence of the actions of “mad” individuals. We find this, for instance, in the series of events that took place in the Discalced Carmelite convent of Seville between December 1575 and December 1580. The convent had been set up in May 1575 by the sixty-year-old mystic, writer, and spiritual reformer Teresa of Avila (known in Spanish as Teresa de Jesús). She had come to Seville with six other nuns from two of her Castilian convents, obeying the orders of the twenty-nine-year-old Discalced Carmelite reformer, Jerónimo Gracián, despite the fact that she had no authorization from the Carmelite general to found convents outside Castile. The first woman from Seville who joined the convent, the illiterate thirty-seven-year-old Beatriz de la Madre de Dios, did not adhere to its strict rules and, in 1578, denounced the prioress María de San José, who was ten years her junior, for mistreating her. She also accused her and Gracián of gross sexual misconduct, and this led to both of them being deposed from office and incarcerated. When retracting her accusations in December 1580, Beatriz did not seek to be forgiven by claiming insanity. Instead, she claimed that she was stupid:

Dije que mirasen lo que escribían, que yo era una tonta que no sabía lo que me decía. Díjome el P. Cárdenas que por qué me tenía por tonta. Le dije que así me lo daban a entender en casa, y llegaba a tanto que hartas veces llevaba disciplinas por ello. (Beatriz de la Madre de Dios, in Llamas, 209)¹

(I asked them to pay attention to what they wrote, since I was a stupid woman and did not know what I said. Father Cárdenas asked me why I thought I was stupid. I told him that this is what they made me believe in the convent; so much so that sometimes I was flogged for it.)

The first part of this statement raises a number of questions related to sixteenth-century conceptualizations of the mind, which in turn relate to the issue of trustworthiness and credibility. Is someone retracting an earlier declaration credible, when arguing that she had previously lacked the ability to understand? Does the label “tonta” (stupid) refer to an innate disability? Or does it denote a state of mind which can be improved? If so, is there any guarantee that the retraction contains an accurate version of the facts?

As regards the second part of Beatriz’s statement, it is not clear why she mentions that she had been flogged. How can the flogging be evidence of the extent of her stupidity, as her

¹ The retractions and declarations made by the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Seville in December 1580 are transcribed as an appendix in Llamas Martínez (203-219). I cite his transcription because I have not yet been able to locate the original papers; the source he gives (AHN leg. 1063) is not correct; it is not in the “Inquisición” or “Clero” sections under that number. Whenever I cite from the appendix, I include the nuns’ names for clarity and shorten his name to “Llamas.” I do not change his punctuation.

words seem to imply? Was it a punishment for saying things which were not true? Was she seen as “culpable” for her “deviance” in making false accusations against her superiors?

In this article, I will revisit the notions of “deviance” and “culpability” in the light of the extant evidence related to the accusations allegedly made by the Discalced Carmelite nun Beatriz de la Madre de Dios in 1578 and the claims made against her in 1580. I will use the term “deviance” in its broadest sense, though I will also consider the perspective of deviance-conformity theory, more narrowly focused on institutionalized expectations and sanctions, in analyzing the disciplinary measures prescribed in the Discalced Carmelite *Constituciones* (*Constitutions*) approved in 1568.² I will also use this analysis and the historical evidence related to Beatriz’s case to test one of the most insightful points made by theorists of deviance in the 1960s: that the punishment of legal offences through rituals of exclusion has usually had the effect of defining the boundaries of the normative order of a community and strengthening its social bonds (Erikson).

I will then examine the views propounded in 1573 by Teresa of Avila (the foundress of the convent in which Beatriz professed) on the limited culpability of those who were deemed to have little control over their actions, and the extent to which fashionable labels such as “melancholy” could be used to justify their behaviour. I will also discuss the particular measures proposed in dealing with Beatriz, which included forgiveness, compassion, and the use of repressive methods intended to limit the damaging impact of her distorted perceptions. This, as I will argue, can be understood in the light of current debates on the recent emphasis on treating as “sickness” what used to be judged as “badness” (Conrad and Schneider), which can benefit from being placed in a wider historical perspective.

Deviance

There is no extant record of Beatriz’s accusations against the prioress María de San José and the Discalced Carmelite prelate Jerónimo Gracián, but what transpires from the statements made by other nuns from the Seville convent in December 1580 is that they were the product of a deviant mind.³ For instance, one nun claimed that Beatriz was “de mala cabeza (not right in her head)” (Leonor de San Gabriel, in Llamas, 211), perhaps implying that she was lacking in understanding or memory. The wording chosen by another nun, “tiene mal la cabeza (she is not well in her head)” (Isabel de San Francisco, in Llamas, 212), was more ambivalent, since it could denote both a transient condition, from which she might recover, and a permanent state. Beatriz was also reported to have complained that the prioress suggested that she was mad: “la tuviesen por loca (they should see her as a madwoman)” (María de San José, in Llamas, 216). The term “loca,” however, could have been meant as an excuse for her non-conformist behaviour, rather than as an insult.

The ambiguity of the term “loco” is reflected in the dictionary published by Covarrubias in 1611, which specifies that it referred both to the insane –“hombre que ha perdido el juicio (a man who has lost his wits)”– and to the exceedingly loquacious: “el hombre que está en su juicio, si es muy hablador (a man of sound mind, if he speaks too much)” (Covarrubias Horozco, 1210).⁴ The dictionary also notes that even though the terms “loco” and “tonto” were often interchanged, they related to two different kinds of afflictions (“enfermedades”), with clearly differentiated medical causes: the “loco” (mad) was thought to have too much burnt

² Deviance has been defined in broad terms as “a breach of a socially acceptable standard” (Anderson). For a classic proponent of the deviance-conformity approach, see Cohen.

³ Rather than simply emphasizing how Beatriz’s behaviour departed from the norm (the focus of the deviance-conformity debates which prevailed in the 1950s), the nuns’ declarations located her “badness” in her head.

⁴ For an overview of the term “loco” and related terms commonly used in early modern Spain, see Carrera (2010a, 11-15).

yellow bile in his body, while the “tonto” was believed to have too much phlegm (210). The label “tonto,” furthermore, did not denote unrestrained rage –“no es furioso como el que llamamos loco (he is not the violent type we call mad)”– but lack of mental ability: “el simple, y sin entendimiento ni razón (the simpleton, lacking in intelligence and devoid of the capacity to reason)” (1476).

Despite such theoretical distinctions, different labels could be applied to the same people to refer to different aspects of their mental function.⁵ For instance, Beatriz de la Madre de Dios, who defended herself in her retraction as a “tonta,” might have also been considered a “loca,” based on her way of speaking. Besides her claim that she did not know what she said (Llamas, 209, above), we also have a nun’s testimony that she talked too much nonsense:

Siempre, todo el tiempo que la conocí, nunca entendí de ella ir con la llaneza y sencillez que las demás hermanas iban.

Todas las cosas que nos decían eran de mil maneras, y todo revueltas y marañas que nos traía como tontas. (Mariana de los Santos, in Llamas, 218)

(In all the time I have known her, I never ever saw in her any of the frankness and simplicity I saw in the other sisters.

Everything they told us was really complicated, so mixed up and tangled that we were all confused.)

It is clear that such statements were intended to demonstrate that the accusations which Beatriz had made against her Discalced superiors were false. By emphasizing that Beatriz’s mental ability deviated from the norm, the nuns were seeking to discredit her, since their references to her mental state were also implicit claims about her moral status: she was not trustworthy.

Theories of “deviance” have tended to make clear-cut distinctions between a dominant social group, which is seen as the custodian of moral values, and the deviant group or individual, who is physically and symbolically separated from the rest of the community by being marked as an “outsider” (Garfield, 424). In practice, however, such distinctions become blurred, as we can see when looking at the social context of the Discalced Carmelites of Seville in 1575-1578. For instance, Beatriz appears to have been flogged because she was “tonta” (stupid, a deviant of sorts), despite the fact that she was part of a dominant group.⁶ Socially, she was better positioned in Seville than her newly-arrived superiors, Jerónimo Gracián and María de San José.⁷ She rose to prominence within the convent, and even became prioress when María de San José was incarcerated, in late 1578, partly as a result of her (false) accusations, though she was forced to step down a few months later. If she was flogged, as she suggested in her declaration, this could be interpreted, from the perspective of deviance theory, as a ritual of exclusion, though it first needs to be understood in the context of disciplinary practices that regulated convent life.

⁵ This can be put in the wider context of the so-called “reactivist” approaches to deviance, which began to develop in the 1960s and 1970s. If we are prepared to consider the claims that “deviance” is a socially-imposed label (Erikson; Becker) and that “mental illness” is “foremost a social definition” (Perez), we also need to take into account the specific purposes of the often co-existing social interactions in which such labels are used.

⁶ Beatriz’s mother, Juana Gómez, who also joined the convent immediately after becoming a widow in December 1576, had supported the convent financially by acting as a guarantor for a quarter of the loan used to pay for the house to which the convent was relocated in June 1576 (Efrén and Steggink, 589), at the time when Beatriz was still a novice and was unsure whether she should become a nun (Teresa de Jesús, 770-771).

⁷ María de San José was well connected in Castile, having been brought up in the palace of the influential aristocrat Doña Luisa de la Cerda in Toledo (Manero Sorolla; Schlauf; Weber 1996). Gracián had contacts at the court in Madrid because his brother was secretary to Philip II. However, none of their social connections seemed to be of any help in Seville (Ros Carballar).

Deviations from the norm

The Discalced Carmelite convent of Seville was governed by a clear set of rules outlined in the *Constituciones* that had been approved in 1568 by the Carmelite general for the small communities of Discalced nuns which Teresa was encouraged to found in Castile.⁸ This text gives us invaluable information about convent routines: the nuns were expected to spend two thirds of their eighteen-hour day alone, engaging in prayer, devotional reading, or manual labour, and only saw the other nuns during the Divine Office, the chapter of faults, meals, and the periods of recreation after meals (Weber 2000, 132); at the discretion of the prioress, they might be allowed to talk to one another while doing their manual work (Teresa de Jesús, 829). The *Constituciones* also includes six sections dealing with the “chapter of faults,” containing a series of penalties intended to ensure that the nuns kept to the strict convent routine of prayer and work, that they were punctual, and that they were deterred from behaviours that affected the wellbeing of the other nuns, such as fighting, swearing, gossiping, or insulting, cursing or hurting another nun.

The “chapter of faults” was a weekly meeting dealing with potential disciplinary matters, run by the nuns without the intervention of confessors or male prelates. During the meeting, the nuns would come forward in pairs and, if they had broken any convent rule, they were expected to tell the others. They could also accuse another nun, though they would be penalized if their accusations were false or simply based on conjecture:

Que no acuse a otra de sola sospecha que de ella tenga, lo cual si alguna lo hiciere llevará la mesma pena del crimen que les acusó. [...] Sea ansimesmo castigada aquella que dijere alguna cosa falsamente de otra, y sea ansimesmo obligada a restituir la fama de la infamada, en cuanto pudiere. (Teresa de Jesús, 834)

(no sister may accuse another sister simply based on suspicion. If any sister did this, she should receive the punishment due for the crime of which she accused the other sister. [...] Additionally, any sister who falsely accused another sister should be punished, and should also be obliged to restore her damaged reputation.)

A nun who was found guilty of a minor fault would have to recite one or more prayers, do some of the less pleasant chores, have an extra period of silence, or be deprived of part of a meal (836). A slightly more serious fault would be penalized with one lash, which should not be given by the accusing nun, a more junior nun or a novice (836). For more serious offences, nuns who accused themselves, asking for forgiveness, would receive two lashes and spend two days on bread and water, eating on the floor next to the refectory table; if they had been accused by another nun, they would receive an extra lash and spend an extra day on bread and water.

A nun who created trouble in the convent, hurt or secretly cursed other nuns, boasted of speaking to visitors without permission, or was disrespectful towards her superiors should be

⁸ If “social rules are the creation of specific social groups” (Becker 15), the *Constituciones* did precisely that: they defined the Discalced Carmelite nuns as a social group which had outgrown the first small convent, founded in Avila in 1562, and, by 1580, had expanded with new foundations in twelve other locations: in Medina del Campo (1567), Malagón (1568), Valladolid (1568), Toledo (1569), Pastrana (1569), closed down in 1574), Salamanca (1570), Alba de Tormes (1571), Segovia (1574), Beas de Segura (1575), Sevilla (1575), Caravaca de la Cruz (1576), Villanueva de la Jara (1580), and Palencia (1580). However, even though the formal rules which governed the lives of the Discalced Carmelite nuns differed from those thought appropriate by most people, it is clear that the Discalced Carmelite community was not created by its rules, but by the inspiration which the women who joined it derived from meeting their foundress, Teresa of Avila, or from her written advice on how to pray and how to live with one another. What united the Discalced Carmelite nuns was the spiritual purpose of the convent routines outlined in the *Constituciones*, rather than the rules themselves.

flogged on her bare back as many times as the prioress deemed appropriate, and should be confined to a designated cell, isolated from the rest of the nuns, and denied communion. She should be deprived of voice in the chapter and, if she held an office, she should be deposed. During meals, she should sit on the bare floor in the middle of the refectory, and be given bread and water, unless the prioress decided, out of compassion, that she could be given some food; if she showed humility, the prioress was expected to be compassionate with her.

For a nun who stood up against the authority of the prioress or that of her superiors, or who was accused of sexual misconduct with her male superiors, or of imagining such misconduct, the punishment (bread and water on the refectory floor, and confinement) should last forty days (837-838). When there was evidence that a nun had made a false accusation or was guilty of slander, the punishment, besides imprisonment, involved eating bread and water on the floor, in the middle of the refectory, wearing a scapular with two red and white tongues sown on it, on front and back (838-839). This kind of scapular was similar to the yellow *sanbenito* which those condemned by the Inquisition were made to wear, as a shaming punishment and as a mark of their supposed reconciliation with the church. We can see how the understandings of disorder and reconciliation which underpinned the *Consituciones* of 1568 drew on the symbolic rites which prevailed in the wider social context of early modern Spain. The main difference perhaps was that, in the convent, flogging could be given to any nun, independent of her former social status. This principle contributed to the construction of the Discalced Carmelite convents as spaces of social equalization.

From a modern point of view, humiliating practices such as being made to eat on the floor, watched by the other nuns, cannot be understood as anything other than repressive. However, the Discalced Carmelites were encouraged to see them as meaningful ways of cultivating humility, and demonstrating their love for God and their obedience to their confessors and superiors. Gracián, for instance, reports that after Teresa chose him as her superior, in Beas in 1574, he would instruct her to practise humility by walking into the refectory carrying crosses on her back or with ashes on her head, kissing the nuns' feet, and being insulted by them ("que la afrentasen"); apparently, he had read that these were longstanding practices of mortification in the Carmelite order (Gracián, 392).

Gracián had been appointed reformer (apostolic visitor) of the Andalusian Carmel by the pope's nuncio, Niccolò Ormanetto, in September 1574, though his ideas about the importance of restoring the primitive Carmelite Rule of poverty, asceticism, work and silent prayer were not shared by the Carmelites of Seville, who rebelled against his numerous attempts to change their lifestyle. In January 1576, after he completed his visit of the Andalusian monasteries, he wrote a report containing forty-four reform measures. What we have here is one set of norms, the primitive Carmelite Rule, clashing with what was normative behaviour in the sixteenth-century Carmelite houses, which followed the mitigated Rule. It also clashed with the interests of friars who had not joined the order expecting to spend their day working, meditating, and mortifying themselves. As a result of this clash of interests, Gracián was persecuted and became the target of calumnies, some of which related to his dealings with the Discalced nuns in Seville.

Some of these calumnies seem to have originated in the convent, or at least to have been corroborated by Beatriz and by the Sevillian lay sister Margarita de la Concepción (who had made her profession in January 1577, four months after her). Judging from Margarita's retraction, she and Beatriz had accused Gracián of sleeping and having meals in the convent, embracing and kissing the nuns, changing his clothes and dancing around naked in front of them, and engaging in illicit sexual conduct with the prioress and the foundress (Margarita de la Concepción, in Llamas, 203-205). We cannot know to what extent such accusations were the product of Beatriz's imagination, but we can examine the more detailed evidence we have of complaints she reportedly made to her confessor Garcíálvarez and to some Jesuit priests, which

made her appear as the victim of deviant practices orchestrated by the prioress. Some of these complaints had turned into formal accusations, made to the Carmelite provincial for Andalusia, Diego Cárdenas, during his investigation of the convent in November-December 1578.

For instance, Margarita retracted that (two years earlier) she had falsely declared that Beatriz had been stripped of her clothes by the other nuns, who stared at her, commenting on the colour of her skin and on how fat she was (205). Judging from the prioress's account, Margarita could not have witnessed any of this because she was in Paterna at the time when Beatriz had reported such alleged deviations from the convent's norms to the Jesuit Diego de Acosta:

Dijo la misma Beatriz a Margarita que cuando ella estaba en Paterna la había yo hecho desnudar en cueros, y que contándolo a Acosta había escupido y decía que aun pasar por la puerta no quería, de que se acordaba de tales bellaquerías; y con razón les ponía este nombre, porque esta desventuradilla también le decía que cuando estaba desnuda la estábamos mirando todas cómo era, blanca o gorda. (María de San José, in Llamas, 214) (Beatriz herself told Margarita that, when she was in Paterna, I had made her take off all her clothes, and that, when she told Acosta, she spat and said that she did not even want to go through the door because she remembered all those wicked things; and she was right to call them wicked, because the poor woman also told him that, when she was naked, we all looked at her, to see how white or how fat she was.)

If Beatriz actually acted in this way, her display of fear must have persuaded the Jesuit that the prioress was indeed responsible for such alleged acts of deviance.

The prioress added that Beatriz had also told her confessor and the Jesuit Gaspar de Hoyos that the Castilian nuns were rebelling against her authority and even assaulted her physically:

Delante de Margarita dijo al P. Garcíálvarez y al P. Hoyos que la tomábamos las de Castilla y la apretábamos con las manos y nos poníamos como unos gallos contra ella y no la queríamos obedecer. (215) (In front of Margarita she told Garcíálvarez and Father Hoyos that we, the ones from Castille, sometimes grabbed her and clutched her with our hands and that we were all turned against her, and refused to obey her.)

Beatriz had apparently manipulated Margarita because she needed her to support the accusations she was making to the provincial in 1578: "andábale persuadiendo que fuese al P. Provincial y le dijese cuan mal la tratábamos, porque a ella no la quería creer (she tried time and again to persuade her to go to the Provincial and tell him how badly we treated her, because he would not believe her)" (215). According to the testimony of a young Sevillian nun, Beatriz had pretended to be very sad so as to convince Margarita to testify against the Castilian nuns, even if she had not witnessed anything:

Y diciéndole la hermana que no lo veía ella, que cómo lo había de decir, le decía con tales semblantes de afligida que lo dijese y la creyese a ella, que no le había de decir mentira, que a solas la tomábamos y la aporreábamos. (Isabel de San Francisco, in Llamas, 212)

(and when the sister replied that she could not tell about something she had not really seen, she replied, making very sad faces, that she should tell about it, that she should believe her because she would not lie: that when we were on our own, we would grab her and beat her up.)

Even though Beatriz is portrayed in these declarations as manipulative, there is a distinct possibility that she believed her own distorting perceptions of what was going on around her. At the time, Beatriz was displaying some very odd behaviours, sometimes based on seemingly innocent misinterpretations of her superiors' instructions. According to the prioress, on one occasion, she went to the extreme of dressing in rags and asking an illiterate novice to lead her into the refectory and to insult her. At face value, this was simply her way of interpreting the prioress's suggestion that she should do some penance for disobeying:

Una vez la [sic] dije que hiciese una mortificación por penitencia de una desobediencia que había hecho, y fuese a una novicia freila y díjole que la sacase a refectorio con muchos andrajos y la deshonrase. Reprendiendo yo a la novicia, porque se metía en aquello, dijo que la hermana le había dicho que yo lo mandaba, quedándose así esto, no entendiendo que esto hacía con malicia. (María de San José, in Llamas, 216)
(Once I told her to do a mortification as a penance for having disobeyed, and she went to a lay novice and told her to make her go into the refectory wearing drags and to insult her. When I reprimanded the novice for doing things she was not authorized to do, she said that the sister had told her that these were my orders. We left it at that because I did not realise that she did this out of malice.)

The problem, from the prioress's point of view, was that Beatriz used this episode as evidence that she was not doing her job properly: "supe después que se había quejado al confesor y a una hermana de la crueldad con que la había entregado en manos de una novicia, para que la tratase muy mal (I found out later that she had complained to her confessor and to a sister about the cruelty I had shown in handing her over to a novice so that she would insult her)" (216). Being punished by a novice was not only humiliating, but also against the *Constituciones*, as we saw earlier.

We may wonder to what extent Beatriz's complaints about humiliations inflicted on her were based on her distorting perceptions of actual convent practices, and to what extent such practices made her anxious, and thus more prone to misunderstanding them. For instance, according to the prioress's testimony, she had accused her of humiliating her during the chapters of faults: "decía que en el Capítulo la trataba yo muy mal y que la deshonraba con su linaje y decía a todas la tuviesen por loca (she said that in the chapter I treated her very badly and that I insulted her by referring to her lineage and that I told everyone that they should see her as a madwoman)" (216). On the one hand, she might have felt (or been made to feel) that she was at disadvantage because she had not had the privileged education which the prioress had enjoyed.⁹ On the other hand, it is conceivable that she was actually insulted during the chapters of faults, and that this was done as a penance, intended to help her to practise humility, just as Teresa had been insulted by the other nuns in the refectory during the ritual mortifications organized by Gracián.

It is also possible, however, that the prioress's use of the term "loca" in the chapter of faults was not meant as an insulting or stigmatizing remark about Beatriz's impaired mental ability, but that it was rather an excuse for her behaviour, which clearly deviated in several ways from the convent's norms. According to the prioress's testimony, she had always failed to follow the convent routine: "y hasta hoy en día no hay remedio que rece cuando las otras rezan, ni duerma cuando todas, sino siempre es al revés (all this time we have not found a way of ensuring that she prays when the others pray, or sleeps at the same time as the others, but

⁹ María de San José had received a refined education in classical culture, Latin and French (Manero Sorolla, 120), whereas Beatriz was illiterate.

she always does things the other way round)” (216). Despite the clear guidance provided in the *Constituciones* about the punishments that should be given to nuns who were not punctual or who failed to turn up for work or prayer, the prioress had allowed Beatriz to go unpunished for a long time, as she acknowledged:

Y en otro tiempo, cuando entendía que todo era simple y sin malicia, siempre lo excusaba; unas veces que no tenía memoria, otras que no había tenido lenguaje de perfección, ni se había criado entre gente de semejantes ejercicios, y así parecía en lo exterior peor de lo que entendía. (216-17)

(and in the past, when I thought that she was a simple woman, who had no malice, I always excused her behaviour; sometimes it seemed that her memory was very poor, other times that she had no experience of the language, or that such practices were not usual among the people who brought her up, and therefore it always looked as if she did not understand as much as she actually did.)

It is possible that allowances were made for Beatriz because the convent was dependent on the rental income which she and her mother provided.¹⁰ But all the prioress could do in her declaration was to exculpate herself for not having handled her better. The claim that Beatriz had no experience of living according to a schedule was consistent with Teresa’s account in the *Libro de fundaciones* (*The Book of Foundations*) that, for the two decades before she entered the convent, she had led a comfortable life –“estando en su casa tan regalada (being so pampered at home)”– and had had the freedom to go out as often as she pleased, to give her parents’ money to the poor (Teresa de Jesús, 669-770). But the argument that she appeared to lack the necessary mental ability to understand or to remember what she was expected to do suggests that she was suspected of being dishonest. As it turned out, suspending the convent’s rules about punishments did not prove helpful for Beatriz or for the other nuns in the longer term.

By December 1580, the prioress had realized that, since Beatriz was not as innocent as she seemed, she needed to be treated more strictly, so that she would change her ways:

Y digo por el deseo que tengo de que esta alma sea corregida y enmendada, cuanto ha que la conozco, nunca la he visto obedecer ni decir verdad, lo cual siempre las hermanas me decían, cómo era en todo singular y apartada, y las marañas y embustes que en todo decía. (María de San José, in Llamas, 216)

(And moved by the desire to see her behaviour amended and improved, I declare that in the time I have known her, I have never seen her obey or tell the truth, and that this is what the sisters always told me, that she was always doing things her own way, separate from the others, and they told me about her ruses and her constant lies.)

Beatriz’s failure to follow convent rules about times for prayer and for sleeping could be interpreted as evidence of her rebelliousness.¹¹ But it was not a straightforward case of non-conformity as deviance. If her unpunctuality, her eccentric behaviour and her failure to obey the rules were not penalized, it was perhaps less because the convent relied on her dowry, than because she gave the other nuns the impression that she was suffering. For instance, Mariana declared that: “algunas veces le oía suspirar por casa, diciendo: ¡Señor, cuándo se ha de acabar esto! (sometimes she heard her going round the convent, sighing and saying: O Lord, when

¹⁰ The dowries which Beatriz and her mother brought to the convent provided an annual income of more than 24,000 *maravedís* (Efrén and Stegink, 566).

¹¹ See Weber’s discussion of Beatriz as one of Teresa’s “rebel daughters” (1990, 150-156).

will this end?)” (Mariana de los Santos, in Llamas, 217). The prioress also reported that one of the nuns had overheard her asking God for the destruction of the convent:

Una hermana me ha dicho que la veía puesta en su celda en oración, las manos levantadas y haciendo muchas exclamaciones, pidiendo que bajase fuego del cielo y otras cosas así; pidiendo a Dios justicia y remedio para tan grandes males. (María de San José, in Llamas, 214)

(A sister told me that she sometimes saw her praying in her cell with her hands raised and shouting, asking for fire to come down from heaven and many other things like that; asking God for justice and for a solution for such great evils.)

Beatriz’s shouting and her curses were clearly the kind of inappropriate non-normative behaviour for which the *Constituciones*, as we saw earlier, prescribed flogging. But they also seemed a clear indication that there was something wrong with her. Did she seem too unhappy with what was going on in the convent, too desperate to be punished?¹²

As the prioress noted, she and the other nuns had all been feeling sorry for Beatriz because they had believed her stories about her parents’ cruelty. Nonetheless, the point came when they began to suspect that these were fabrications:

Porque con tales semblantes decía las cosas que nos traía encantadas. De tal suerte nos ha pintado a sus padres, que todas habíamos creído eran unos tiranos crueles, según nos ha dicho que la atormentaban, porque quería ser buena. (María de San José, in Llamas, 217)

(Because she made such faces when she talked that we were all tricked, as if under a spell. She has painted her parents in such a light that we all thought they were cruel tyrants, since she told us that they tortured her because she wanted to be good.)

Beatriz’s sad faces had been so persuasive that all the nuns had believed her, as if they had been “under a spell” (“encantadas”). For the prioress, the spell was broken when she realized that this nun was a compulsive liar who could not be trusted. As she put it, Beatriz’s lies (“mentiras”), tricks (“trapazas”) and ruses (“marañas”) were too many and too complicated (215-216), and this proved very taxing: “que es una de las mayores penas en que estoy, ver que en todas cuantas cosas trata no se halla decir verdad (the saddest thing for me is to see that there is no truth in anything she says)” (216). We can see that, by emphasizing that she had no evidence of Beatriz ever telling the truth, the prioress was also defending herself against any accusations the nun might have made against her. The question was whether there was any way of correcting and improving her behaviour, as the prioress allegedly hoped (216).

Badness or sickness?

In helping Beatriz to adapt better to convent life, the prioress had two main options: to persuade her to recognize her errors, and seek forgiveness and amendment with God’s grace (the Christian approach), or to look at the possible causes of her errors and delusion (the medical approach). These two approaches were not mutually exclusive.

The difficulty, however, was that Beatriz did not think that the problem lied within her. For instance, Margarita reported that she had told her that she had always found the behaviour of the Discalced Carmelite priests and friars shocking:

¹² This would be the kind of situation in which more than one set of rules would apply, a scenario not taken into consideration by the proponents of the deviance-conformity theory. On the limitations of the deviance-conformity theory, see Becker.

De donde entiendo que nacieron algunas cosas y desabrimientos y dichos, fue que nuestra hermana Beatriz de la Madre de Dios me dijo un día que desde que tomó el hábito siempre la enfadaba todo lo que hacían los padres y hermanos de la Orden se escandalizaba de ello. (Margarita de la Concepción, in Llamas, 205)

(I understand that the reason for some of the bad moods, and things that were said and happened was that our sister Beatriz de la Madre de Dios told me one day that from the moment she took the veil she was displeased with everything the fathers and friars of the Order did, and she was shocked.)

While Beatriz's claims, and her extreme displeasure, had persuaded Margarita that the friars were doing something wrong, they could also be interpreted as signs that she was melancholic. After all, affective disturbances and false apprehensions or delusions were the two main symptoms of melancholy, noted in the influential *Lilio de medicina* (Gordonio 507).¹³ They were still commonly associated with melancholy in late sixteenth-century Spain, as we can see from Pedro de Mercado's account in his *Dialogos de philosophia natural y moral*: "unos la llaman solicitud sin causa, otros corrupción de la imaginación, el vulgo la llama desmedro y descontento (some call it unfounded anxiety, others a disorder of the imagination; the common people call it weakness and unhappiness)" (149v).¹⁴

Even if Beatriz's extreme displeasure could be explained by her contemporaries as the result of her deranged imagination, other factors might have contributed to alleviating or aggravating it. We know, for instance, that, for a period of four months, she spent whole days with her confessor Garciálvarez.¹⁵ It was around that time when, according to Margarita's retraction, she had begun to be particularly anxious. Every time she talked to this priest, her mood was altered as a result. Sometimes she seemed distressed, but other times she was happy, trusting that he was going to help them put an end to their wrong beliefs and practices:

Comenzó a comunicarse con la hermana Beatriz de la Madre de Dios en particular, con quien hablaba muchas veces, y de su conversación y comunicación se comenzó a inquietar la dicha hermana: unas veces salía triste, otras alegre y decía: "bendito sea Dios que tanto bien nos ha hecho que tenemos quien nos desengañe y saque de errores." (Margarita de la Concepción, in Llamas, 203)

(He started to communicate with sister Beatriz de la Madre de Dios more than with the others. He spoke to her many times, and she began to be very restless after her conversations and exchanges with him. Sometimes she would be very sad, and other times she was happy and said: "blessed be God who has helped us so much in giving us someone who can tell us the truth and free us from our errors.")

Beatriz displayed the kind of mood swings described by Mercado in the *Diálogos*: "ya se consuelan y animan, ya se recelan y entristecen, ya se condenan, ya se absuelven, ya en discordia se remiten a sus confesores y predicadores (they are now comforted and encouraged, now suspicious and sad; they now feel condemned, now feel absolved; in their turmoil they consult their confessors and preachers)" (Mercado, 150r). From the point of view of theologians, represented in the *Diálogos* by the character Basilio (named after one of the

¹³ Bernard de Gordon's *Lilium medicinae*, written in 1305, was available in at least two Spanish editions (from 1495 and 1513). On melancholy in early modern Spain, see Bartra; Gambin; Carrera (2010b).

¹⁴ Mercado's natural-philosophical treatise, published in Spanish in 1558 and 1574, devoted a whole chapter to the discussion of melancholy. See also Oña's study in her recent edition of this work.

¹⁵ María de San José (2002, 153). For details of Beatriz's relationship with Garciálvarez, see Llamas (149-150) and Weber (2000, 141-142).

Church Fathers, known for his exorcisms), one of the social effects of melancholy was that it often confused confessors who, after hearing time and again about the things that their melancholic penitents imagined, came to imagine these things themselves:

Que no cesan de importunarnos ni creen cosa de las que les aconsejamos, y repiten tanto sus imaginaciones que muchas veces nos las imprimen. Y muchos confesores han venido a imaginar las mismas imaginaciones que les fueron referidas en confesión, y por esto, me excuse de ellos todo lo que puedo. (149v-150r)

(They hassle us constantly and never believe anything we advise them. They tell us so many times about the things they imagine, that often they imprint them on our minds. And many confessors have come to imagine the things they were told in confession, and this is why I exculpate them as much as I can.)

Garcíálvarez would indeed appear to be one of the scrupulous confessors who believed what they heard in confession. But we cannot simply assume that he was the victim of Beatriz's delusions, since he continued to speak to her for many hours each day, against the wishes of the prioress, as she would later note.¹⁶

Can the mentally afflicted be exculpated?

In the *Fundaciones*, Teresa devoted a whole chapter to giving advice for prioresses on how to deal with melancholy, in which she warned that melancholics, whose reason was weakened, could be more difficult than "locos" (the utterly mad), who were completely deprived of reason (700).¹⁷ She explained that one of the main effects of melancholic humour was that it hindered people's ability to reason, and therefore to control their passions: "como lo que más este humor hace es sujetar la razón, ésta obscura, ¿qué no harán nuestras pasiones? (since this humour mostly impedes reason by darkening it, what will our passions not do?)" (700). This was why melancholics would often be completely uninhibited in doing whatever they pleased, speaking about anything they fancied, and blaming everybody else:

Y así, si lo miramos, en lo que más dan es en salir con lo que quieren y decir todo lo que se les viene a la boca y mirar faltas en los otros con que encubrir las suyas, y holgarse en lo que les da gusto; en fin, como quien no tiene en sí quien la resista. (700)

(And thus we can see that they tend to do what they like and say whatever comes to their head and find faults in other people to hide their own, and to take pleasure in the things they enjoy; in sum, nothing within themselves can stop this.)

Beatriz's failure to follow the convent rules, her constant complaints about what she thought was wrong, and her insistence on blaming the prioress could be seen as signs of rebelliousness. Nonetheless, if such behaviours were interpreted by people around her as effects of an excess of melancholic humour which prevented her from controlling herself, she could not be fully blamed.

In discussing to what extent melancholic people were culpable, Teresa had noted that at times the bad humour might hinder their reason completely, and that therefore they should not be blamed, just as mad people were not culpable for the foolish things ("desatinos") they might do or say. But she also suggested that melancholics could be deemed to be partly responsible

¹⁶ María de San José (2002, 153-54).

¹⁷ For Teresa's views on melancholy, see López Ibor; Balltandre; Radden (2000, 107-117 and 2004).

for their actions because they were not completely deprived of reason, and because their affliction was usually intermittent:

Es cosa peligrosa, que, como es a tiempos el apretar este humor tanto que sujete la razón (y entonces no será culpa, como no lo es a los locos, por desatinos que hagan; mas a los que no lo están, sino enferma la razón, todavía hay alguna, y otros tiempos están buenos). (700)

(The problem is that, at times, the humour presses so hard that it hinders completely the ability to reason (and then there will be no culpability, as there is none with the mad, however many crazy things they do. But if their ability to reason is weakened by their sickness, but they are not mad, they have some culpability because they are sometimes well.)

She insisted that it was important to differentiate between those who could not be held responsible for their actions because they were mad, and those whose condition was curable, and therefore needed to be tamed because otherwise they would become so accustomed to being uninhibited that they would still be unable to control themselves after recovering (701).

In Teresa's experience, "melancholy" had become such a fashionable label that it was often used to justify all cases of disobedience and lack of self-control (701-702). She defended the view that the bad behaviour of melancholics could not be simply explained as the effect of their black bile because it was worse in those who, being rebellious and proud by nature, had not learned to control themselves. As she pointed out, the fact that some melancholic nuns were able to control themselves in the presence of people they feared should be seen as evidence that people's behaviour was not completely determined by the humours (701).

Despite such warnings, Teresa also discouraged her readers from seeing all afflictions, phantasies, and scruples as demonic temptations. She even suggested that many people would feel much better if they realised that these were simply symptoms of their melancholic illness, and stopped worrying about them (702). This, however, is what Teresa saw as relevant advice when she wrote the first part of the *Fundaciones*, in 1573, well before she heard about the afflictions, imaginations and scruples of Beatriz de la Madre de Dios, and the damaging effect they had on other people's reputations.

Delusion and its consequences: beyond binary categories

Beatriz was one of the two Discalced Carmelite nuns from Seville who claimed to have visions in 1576.¹⁸ She had apparently begun to have supernatural experiences twenty-six years earlier, at the age of twelve.¹⁹ But now that she belonged to a community of nuns, it was not up to her to claim that her experiences were divinely inspired. Her superiors were responsible for ascertaining whether they were genuine mystical visions, demonic delusions, or the product of her imagination.

In chapter four of the *Fundaciones*, Teresa had warned against a form of melancholic delusion which had led some nuns and other people to believe that they were experiencing mystical raptures inspired by God: "Y así han venido a mí personas, así hombres como mujeres, muchas, junto con las monjas de estas casas, adonde claramente he conocido que muchas veces se engañan a sí mismas sin querer (and so many people, both men and women, as well as the nuns in our convents have come to me, and I have seen clearly that often they deceive themselves unwillingly)" (686). Rather than seeing such people as demonically possessed, she

¹⁸ The other was Isabel de San Jerónimo; see Weber (1992, 182-184).

¹⁹ See the brief account of Beatriz's life in the *Fundaciones* (Teresa de Jesús, 768),

explained that their raptures were produced by the imagination and by humoral imbalances: “creo no hace tanto mal [el demonio] como nuestra imaginación y malos humores, en especial si hay melancolía; porque el natural de las mujeres es flaco (I believe that [the devil] causes less damage than our imagination and our bad humours, melancholy in particular, because women’s bodies are weak)” (686).

In line with such advice, Beatriz’s visions had at first been interpreted as the effect of bodily and mental weakness produced by excessive meditation and by fasting. Thus, on 23 October 1576, Teresa wrote to Gracián, suggesting that Beatriz should eat more regularly (1025) and that the prioress (María de San José) should stop her and Isabel de San Jerónimo from meditating so much, and should keep them occupied (1025). A few months later, on 1-2 March 1577, Teresa wrote to María, urging her to discourage Beatriz from talking about her unusual experiences during prayer (1093). On 28 March 1578, she strongly suggested to María that she should not allow Isabel and Beatriz to write about their prayer because the writing would not only be a waste of time, but would also set off their imagination, and give the devil an opportunity to inspire them (1145).²⁰ What Teresa did not mention explicitly is that their written accounts of visions and extraordinary experiences could become incriminating evidence, if they fell into the hands of inquisitors.²¹

The problem for the prioress is that she could not control what Beatriz talked about, or what Garcíálvarez put in writing based on her extended and obsessive confessions. He was using his role as confessor to undermine María’s authority as prioress, and when she banned him from the convent, he started a campaign to discredit her and was reinstated as convent confessor by the Carmelite provincial, Cárdenas.²² Together with Beatriz and Margarita, he compiled a number of reports for the Inquisition, accusing María, Teresa and Gracián. He gave them to Cárdenas, who deposed María and appointed the illiterate Beatriz interim prioress. Garcíálvarez also coerced two young Sevillian nuns into signing declarations for Cárdenas during the scrutiny which took place in November-December 1578.²³ According to Teresa’s letter of 31 January 1579 to the prior of the Carthusian monastery in Seville, Hernando de Pantoja, the nuns were interrogated for six hours at a time (Teresa de Jesús, 1200). In the *Recreaciones*, María de San José also reported that the provincial had threatened the nuns with papal excommunication, if they did not collaborate, and warned them that their names would be posted on the doors of the local churches (2002, 153).

Following this coercive investigation, Gracián was condemned by the papal nuncio, Segá, on 20 December 1578. He was stripped of his powers as reformer of the Carmelites and confined to the Discalced Carmelite monastery of Alcalá. The Seville prioress, María, was incarcerated, deprived of authority and voice, and prevented from speaking to any of the nuns and from communicating with anyone from outside the convent.²⁴ These were the kind of penalties prescribed in the *Constituciones* for the most serious offences, which included sexual misconduct.

The fate of the Seville convent and the reform movement led by Teresa began to change for the better with the appointment of Angel de Salazar as vicar general for the Discalced Carmelite friars and nuns on 1 April 1579. Within a month, Beatriz was deposed and Isabel de

²⁰ The idea that the devil used melancholic humour as an instrument had been put forward by St Jerome, who had seen black bile as the “devil’s bath”. Johann Weyer had elaborated on this idea in *De praestigiiis daemonum* (*Of Deceiving demons*), published in 1563, warning that melancholic humour was well suited for the devil’s deceptions (Weyer, 104) and that the devil could “agitate and corrupt the thoughts and the imagination” of melancholic people until they came to “believe whatever he puts into their minds” (97).

²¹ See Weber (1992, 183).

²² María de San José (2002, 153-54).

²³ See the testimonies of Leonor de San Gabriel and Isabel de San Francisco, in Llamas (210 and 212).

²⁴ She recounts her ordeals in her autobiographical account, *Ramillete de mirra*; for a summary with quotations in English, see Perry (86).

San Jerónimo chosen as the new interim prioress. María de San José was released from her incarceration and, by June, reinstated as prioress. In a letter to María and Isabel from 3 May 1579, Teresa argued that Beatriz was not malevolent, but deluded: “no porque yo la tenía por mala, sino por engañada y persona de flaca imaginación (not that I thought that she was a bad person; I just thought that she was deluded and her imagination was disordered)” (Teresa de Jesús, 1211). Moreover, in explaining that Beatriz should be seen as a victim of the devil, who would usually take advantage of people of unbalanced temperament and little intelligence (1211), she recommended that, instead of blaming her so much, the nuns should feel sorry for her, because she was not sufficiently sane to be deemed responsible for her actions: “yo la considero como una persona fuera de sí, en parte (I believe that she is partly deranged)” (1213).

While emphasizing that Beatriz was somewhat deranged, Teresa also argued that the devil must have helped her since she lacked the necessary intelligence to have invented so many accusations (1213). Nonetheless, even though she encouraged the nuns to interpret Beatriz’s accusations as the devil’s plot, aimed at destroying the convent, she also compared her situation to that of madmen who could not control their delusions: “quizá ella no tiene tanta culpa como pensamos (ansí como no la tiene un loco), que verdaderamente, si se le pone en la imaginación que es Dios Padre, no se lo quitará nadie (perhaps she is not as much to blame as we all think, just as a madman is not to blame, because, if she imagines that she is inspired by God the Father, no one will be able to persuade her otherwise)” (1213). What Beatriz and her confessor Garcíálvarez took to be revelations, Teresa saw as the product of her uncontrollable imagination.

In the *Fundaciones*, Teresa had argued that the best way of helping melancholic nuns was by controlling their uninhibited behaviour, either through persuasion, or, if this did not work, through punishments:

Torno a decir –como quien ha visto y tratado muchas personas de este mal– que no hay otro remedio para él, si no es sujetarlas por todas las vías y maneras que pudieren. Si no bastaren palabras, sean castigos; si no bastaren pequeños, sean grandes; si no bastare un mes de tenerlas encarceladas, sean cuatro: que no pueden hacer mayor bien a sus almas. (700-701)

(I insist, having seen and dealt with many such sick people, that there is no other cure than to control them in every possible way. If words do not work, try punishments; if light punishments do not work, try heavy ones; if keeping them in the prison cell for a month does not work, try four months; this is the best you can do for their souls.)

We see how, even though Teresa recommended harsh methods, she made it clear that they should not be the first course of action. In fact, when giving epistolary advice to the ex-prioress María de San José and the new interim prioress Isabel de San Jerónimo on how to deal with Beatriz on 3 May 1579, she did not urge them to use punishments or incarceration, but suggested instead that all the nuns should pray for Beatriz (so that she might wake up from her demonic delusion) and that they should forget the accusations and be compassionate with her and with Margarita, treating them as they would like to be treated in their situation (1213). She even gave practical advice on how the nuns could cultivate compassion for Beatriz, if it did not come naturally to them: by thinking about the mental suffering she must be going through, even if she was not aware of it (1213), and by trying to understand her point of view. They should consider the possibility that she was led by the devil to believe that what she did was for the benefit of her soul and in God’s service (1214).

Teresa further emphasized that the nuns should think of Beatriz’s wellbeing, rather than of what she had done; they should be careful not to cause Beatriz to lose her mind completely (1213-1214). She even warned the ex-prioress and the interim prioress that she would get really

annoyed with them if they ignored the recommendations of the Jesuits: that they should be very kind with Beatriz and Margarita so as not to encourage new demonic delusions about being hated and mistreated (1214).

Judging from the letter Teresa wrote to María de San José on 4 July 1580, after reading a new report, it seems as if by then everyone in the Seville convent was satisfied with Beatriz's account, which shifted the blame onto her confessor Garcíálvarez. Teresa, by contrast, was convinced that they were wrong, and that Beatriz should not be believed (1279). In her view, if the priest had lost his judgment, it was Beatriz's fault: "y creer hía yo poco lo que me dijese de él, porque le tengo por de buena conciencia y siempre he creído que ella le traía tonto (I would not trust what she says about him because I am convinced that he is conscientious; I have always believed that she was confusing him)" (1279). The argument Teresa used in this letter to exculpate Garcíálvarez was consistent with the observation made in Mercado's *Diálogos* that it was not uncommon for confessors to come to believe the imaginary things they heard time and again from their melancholic penitents.

Teresa was trying to persuade the prioress that Beatriz was more culpable than she was prepared to acknowledge: "por tal [milagro] ternía yo el de esa pobrecita, si fuese tan de veras su conocimiento como vuestra reverencia dice (I would think it a miracle if that poor woman had really acknowledged as much as your reverence suggests)" (1279). As someone who cared deeply about the wellbeing of all the nuns in her convents, and of her reform, Teresa was clearly concerned:

Yo he estado bien penada –después que vi los papeles– cómo la dejaban comulgar. Yo le digo, madre, que no es razón se queden sin castigo cosas semejantes, y que la cárcel perpetua que ella dice que estaba ya determinado por acá, que era bien que no saliese de ella. (1279-1280)

(Having read the reports, I am concerned to see that they allowed her to take communion. I tell you, Mother, that it is not right for such things to go unpunished, and that she should not have been released from the perpetual incarceration that, according to her, was already been decided by us.)

As we saw earlier, being denied communion and being imprisoned for life were indeed the penalties set out in the *Constituciones* for the most serious faults. By showing concern about Beatriz's release from the prison cell and her being allowed to take communion, Teresa was emphasizing her view that the nun was responsible for the scandal which had brought discredit to the Seville convent.

Teresa no longer saw Beatriz as a sufferer who needed to be treated with compassion so that she would not fall prey to new delusions, probably because, by now, it was clear that she had declared not only against the prioress, but also against Gracián, who was still incarcerated in Alcalá. Even though the content of her declaration was secret, Teresa feared that it could be very damaging for the whole Discalced Carmelite reform: "si ésa ha levantado cosas que en algún tiempo puedan hacer daño (if she said anything which might one day be harmful)" (1280). Teresa therefore urged the prioress in this letter to contact the Jesuit (and inquisitorial consultant) Rodrigo Álvarez for advice on how Beatriz could retract her declaration.²⁵

Four months later, on 25 October 1580, after hearing that the prioress María de San José had new incriminating evidence, which she had destroyed, Teresa insisted: "no es bien que se quede sin castigo (it is not a good idea to let her go unpunished)" (1291). Beatriz deserved to be punished because she had done something wrong, with potentially very serious

²⁵ Álvarez was one of the two inquisitorial consultants who had examined Teresa's accounts of her prayer in January 1576, after she had been denounced to the Inquisition.

consequences. The problem, as Teresa pointed out, was that they would not be able to take such measures while they were still under the jurisdiction of the Calced (1291); they had to wait until they were a separate province, which happened in February 1581, thanks to the intervention of Philip II.

Gracián also had to wait to be released from his incarceration, though, after his name was (temporarily) cleared, he was appointed provincial of the new, independent, Discalced Carmelite order in March 1581 (only three months after Beatriz retracted the false accusations which had contributed to his downfall). The king's help was certainly more significant in restoring the good name of the Discalced than the retraction of the illiterate Beatriz. However, in December 1580, Beatriz was still expected to retract her false allegations against María de San José, Gracián, and Teresa, because their reputations were at stake.

There is no extant evidence suggesting that Beatriz received any of the repressive punishments—i.e., eating bread and water on the floor, in the middle of the refectory, or wearing a garment similar to the inquisitorial *sanbenito*—stipulated in the *Constituciones* for those guilty of slander. But based on what she reportedly claimed during her retraction, we can assume that she had been flogged repeatedly. Had this been a punishment, or a way of making her retract?

There were probably a number of reasons for the flogging, since it was not only a common disciplinary method, prescribed in the *Constituciones*, but was also recommended by Teresa in the *Fundaciones* (along with temporary incarceration) as an appropriate way of dealing with uncontrollable melancholics who did not respond to verbal methods of persuasion. The flogging might have been effective in persuading her to retract, though, judging from her claim that she was flogged because she was stupid (Beatriz de la Madre de Dios, in Llamas, 209; see above), it seems that it did not persuade her to acknowledge that she had done anything wrong.

What was perhaps most effective in persuading Beatriz to acknowledge that she had acted wrongly in making (false) accusations against her superiors was the fear of eternal damnation. According to María's report in the *Recreaciones*, in 1585 she was "blind with weeping" and this was seen as evidence that she would not be condemned to hell (María de San José 2002, 154). Even if Beatriz could not be fully blamed for her words and actions because she was thought to be mad ("loca"), somewhat deranged ("fuera de sí, en parte"), stupid ("tonta"), or simple-minded ("simplicilla"), we can see that she was still expected to follow the same rules as every other Christian in showing repentance in order to obtain forgiveness.

The flogging and the tears are best understood within the religious context of post-Tridentine Spain, when eternal salvation was thought to be dependent not only on divine grace, but also on personal effort, shown through practices such as prayer and penance. Just as those who received the sacrament of confession would be absolved of the sins they confessed, but still needed to perform the penance set for the forgiveness of sins to be effective, the nuns who acknowledged their faults in front of the rest of the community (during the chapter of faults) would be forgiven but would still receive a penalty.

It is also likely that the flogging received by Beatriz had some practical benefits for her community, such as deterring other nuns from turning against their superiors, and that it served to reinforce the convent's rules (outlined in the *Constituciones*) about the need to prevent slander and scandal. In this respect, it can be seen as one of the ritual forms of punishment which, according to Erikson's theory of deviance, have traditionally helped to define the normative boundaries of a community and to strengthen its social bonds.

Nonetheless, it can also be argued that the social bonds of communities such as the Discalced Carmelite nuns were less strengthened by punitive rituals than by what the nuns told each other and what they were told about themselves. For instance, despite Teresa's arguments in her private letter to María de San José about Beatriz's culpability and Garcíálvarez's innocence, María told her own version of this episode. In 1585 (three years after Teresa's

death), when she was prioress of the Discalced Carmelite convent in Lisbon, and was facing scandals which undermined again her position of authority within the order, she wrote about Beatriz and her confessor Garcíálvarez in the *Recreaciones*, without mentioning their names, suggesting that the nun was a “simplicilla” (a simpleton), and that the confessor manipulated her (María de San José 2002, 154).²⁶ This brief account of what had happened in Seville five years earlier emphasized the idea that Beatriz was not the deviant one, and that she had not been excluded from the community. Despite being seen as stupid, deluded, and mad, and despite having appeared as an emotionally unstable compulsive liar, Beatriz became a respected member of the Discalced Carmelite community, and remained in the order for another 44 years, until she died at the age of 86.

Thus, rather than seeing the flogging inflicted on Beatriz as a ritual of social exclusion marking the distance between her as a deviant and the rest of the community, we can consider its function in enforcing values such as honesty, humility and obedience, to which all the members of her community were expected to adhere. Such values underpinned the weekly chapters of faults, and helped to regulate the often difficult interactions between the women who joined the Discalced Carmelite convents from a range of social backgrounds. In that context, disciplinary practices such the chapter of faults, penalties such as flogging, and responses such as tears of repentance might be understood as rituals of social incorporation, rather than of social exclusion.

Yet, one of the conclusions that can be drawn from the fragmentary historical evidence available on Beatriz de la Madre de Dios, an illiterate nun living in a small convent in southern Spain who was first exculpated and protected, and then restrained to protect others, is that binary categories such as deviance/conformity, culpability/innocence, or exclusion/inclusion have limited validity. As we have seen, Beatriz was not alone against the community of nuns which had been founded without the authorization of the Carmelite general; she had the support of local priests, of one of the lay sisters, and of the Calced Carmelites who saw the Discalced reform as a deviation from their norms. Her “deviance” can be understood as the manifestation of social conflict, or of clashes of interests and cultural values.

The evidence I have discussed also suggests that Conrad and Schneider’s observations about “badness” being treated as “sickness” reflect an age-old tension between pathologization and culpabilization that was never fully resolved. Even though some of Beatriz’s contemporaries used the label “melancholy” to account for seemingly unfounded anxiety and suspicion, her superiors might have been encouraged by Teresa’s advice in the *Fundaciones* to avoid the simplistic exculpations usually associated with such labelling to prevent others from using it to justify all forms of lack of self-control.

Ultimately, the story of the first five years of Beatriz’s life in the Discalced Carmelite of Seville that can be reconstructed from her fellow nuns’ declarations in 1580 also shows how, even if states such as extreme anxiety and suspicion can be explained away as symptoms of a mental affliction located within the individual’s head, they cannot be separated from their social context. Beatriz’s anxiety is best understood as part of the culture of blame and suspicion which prevailed in late sixteenth-century Spain, when people would report one another to their confessors and to the Inquisition in an attempt to protect their own reputation, and to protect themselves from their seemingly all-pervasive fear of eternal damnation.

²⁶ While this part of the account omitted names, María mentioned Garcíálvarez later, showing appreciation for his generosity to the convent (María de San José 2002, 160). This is an indication of the extent to which communities such as the Discalced Carmelite convents were dependent on the financial support of benefactors.

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