



## **Remembrances of the Warao: the Miraculous Statue of Siparia, Trinidad<sup>1</sup>**

**Michele Goldwasser**

### **Introduction**

On Holy Thursday thousands of Hindu pilgrims flock to a Catholic church in the southern town of Siparia, Trinidad, which was once the site of a Warao mission.<sup>2</sup> While the Catholic priest performs Holy Thursday Mass in the large chapel, and his parishioners sing to La Divina Pastora -- the Good Shepherdess, the Virgin Mary -- these East Indian pilgrims wind their way through the mass of beggars in the church's school yard, filing into the school hall to have their private

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<sup>2</sup>I use the term "Warao" throughout this article, though I retain the original terms in the citations. In Trinidad, however, the Warao are called "Warrahoons" or "Guaranos," and various spellings are given for each of these words.

moment with a miraculous statue. Hindus call her Suparee Ke Mai -- Suparee Mai, the Mother of Siparia. Throughout the night and well into Good Friday, East Indians, both Hindus and Moslems, continue to come, as they have since the days of indentureship. This seemingly inanimate statue, standing only two-and-a-half feet high, with shiny black hair, a dark complexion and piercing eyes, listens as people approach. They either tell her their problems or give her their thanks for help previously received, and make bountiful offerings of oil, money, rice, and jewelry of gold and silver. As I first stepped into the school hall on Holy Thursday night in 1993, my friend from Siparia whispered, "See how she weeps, hearing their problems. On her feast day she'll look so happy".

Her Catholic feast day occurs three weeks after Easter. During the service of the Mass, the priest leads as parishioners carry the miraculous statue into the streets. Outside of the chapel people line the route as La Divina Pastora,<sup>3</sup> the same statue, rides atop the parish priest's car in procession around the streets of Siparia. All those attending the Mass follow, singing Marian hymns in celebration of the Good Shepherdess. The numerous worshipers include not only Catholics, but also Spiritual Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and those from the smaller churches.<sup>4</sup> As my friend told me, on this one day "all are Catholic."

<sup>1</sup> This same statue plays an important role in the worship of three other religious groups on the island. In the Yoruba-based rituals of Orisha Worship,<sup>5</sup> La Divina Pastora manifests through possession as one of the deities to be honored during ritual feasts. Additionally, the people of Siparia still remember the days when the Chinese went on pilgrimage to the town to participate in the Catholic celebrations of her feast day. They called her Kwon Yin, the Buddhist Goddess of Fortune and Mercy, and brought her offerings of tapestries, vases and lamps. At the turn of the century, she sat in the ornate throne donated by the Chinese community.

Moreover, from the inception of the mission of Siparia in the eighteenth century, La Divina Pastora has been considered the "special protector" of the Amerindians from across the sea in the Orinoco Delta of Venezuela. The Aragonese Capuchin missionaries established the Siparia mission in 1759<sup>6</sup> in order to Christianize these Amerindians,

<sup>3</sup> Catholics often refer to the miraculous statue simply as "La Divina" or "La Divine".

<sup>4</sup> "Smaller churches" refers to the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, such as the Open Bible, the Seventh Day Adventist, and the Jehovah Witness.

<sup>5</sup> Both scholars and Trinidadians also call this Yoruba-based religion Shango. Since the 1980s, however, worshipers call their religion Orisha Worship.

<sup>6</sup> The actual date varies from source to source. Noel states the mission was established between 1756 and 1758 (Noel 1986, n. pag.).



PLATE 1  
THE MIRACULOUS STATUE OF  
"LA DIVINA PASTORA"

the Warao, who regularly traveled to Trinidad. The Warao crossed the sea by canoe not only to trade for tobacco to be used to summon their own gods, but also to pilgrimage to Naparima Hill, the northernmost point on earth in their cosmological world and the abode of their own cultural hero, Haburi. They often stopped in Siparia to make offerings "in their own way" to La Divina Pastora. Many from Siparia today adamantly insist that the Spanish usurped the statue as their own, naming her La Divina Pastora. They assert that the statue is Warao.

### **The oral history of her origin**

Mystery shrouds her origins, though each narrative reflects different moments in Trinidad's history as well as different aspects of Trinidadian life. The diverse cultural groups within Trinidad envision her within their own systems of belief, often creating origins or retelling origin narratives for the miraculous statue reflecting their own mythologies. Her origin narratives, to some degree, fall into patterns reflecting these different groups. Some Catholics tell that she was brought to Siparia by Capuchins, while Hindus sometimes say she came from the sands of Siparia. Yet cultural boundaries fail to account for the many differences in the range of narratives. A Capuchin monk fled persecution in Venezuela and brought the statue to Trinidad, declaring that it saved his life. A boat carrying Capuchin missionaries wrecked while passing through the channel. The lone survivor was saved by clinging to the bow of the ship. When he was washed ashore at Quinam Bay, seven miles south of Siparia, he saw that the figurehead on the bow was the statue of La Divina Pastora. Or, a Spanish<sup>7</sup> woman, while weeding her land, accidentally chipped a doll that lay hidden in the sand. The doll bled and the statue turned into a young woman. By evening, the young woman grew old. Some say a child was seen wandering among the wild flowers in the early morning. By noon, she was a young woman. By evening, she was an old woman. She grew with the day. Plantation owners tried to capture the mysterious lady, forcing her to disappear. Still others insist she was a real woman who would help all who came to her, then return to the forest. A man followed her. When La Divina Pastora saw him, she disappeared leaving the statue in her place.

Many other narratives, however, describe her being washed up on the shore at Quinam Beach, found along the banks of Quinam River, or found hidden in the nearby forest. The Warao often landed at Quinam Beach when coming to Siparia, and made their way along the river

<sup>7</sup>"Spanish" refers to persons of mixed Venezuelan, Amerindian, and sometimes African blood who immigrated to this area.

through the forest to the town. Siparians tell that the Warao, fleeing persecution from a warrior tribe, brought the statue to Trinidad, hiding her in the forest. The warrior tribe pursued them, searching endlessly for the statue. They finally gave up and returned to Venezuela. The statue was later recovered and brought to the Capuchin missionaries. Others say she was the bow of a Warao canoe. She appears in apparition on the road to Quinam or on the beach itself, along Quinam river, at Martinique to the west of Siparia, an isolated area with a number of springs, and at the "Dark Hole" spring along Coora Road. The Warao, too, could be seen washing at these springs. Often, La Divina sits upon specific rocks. One rock, on the road to Quinam Beach, grows in size. Another in the ocean disappears with the tide. Tractors once pushed it far out to sea, but it returned. Some say she's a mermaid and can be seen sitting on this rock. One day sailors found a statue on the rock in her place. The miraculous statue represents a remembrance of her.

As I listened to these many narratives, I noticed patterns in their telling. People with close knowledge of the Warao, direct descendants of the Warao or those whose families had lived in the Siparia area for generations, emphasized that she was a real person. They sometimes stated that La Divina was one of two sisters. Most often today, the other sister is identified as Santa Rosa, another Black Virgin statue in Arima, Trinidad. Sometimes people identified La Divina as one of "three sisters" on the island, referring to both Santa Rosa and a third Black Virgin statue in Tortuga, Trinidad, and conjuring memories of the three peaks Columbus spied naming the land itself.<sup>8</sup> The "old heads" with Warao familial connections, however, spoke of only two sisters, adding that the other sister lives in Venezuela.

Ethnicity played only a partial role in denoting these differences. Rather, Trinidadian perceptions of the Warao marked the distinctions. Most of the "old heads" I spoke to in Siparia remember seeing the Warao coming into town, virtually naked and painted with red roucou. Frequently, when Siparians discussed the history of La Divina Pastora, they began telling me about the Warao. Often there was no direct link, but the regularity with which people linked the Warao and the miraculous statue implied a latent connection. At other times, they stated the link outright. The miraculous statue is Warao.

### **Mysterious power**

Researching the history of this miraculous statue cannot be complete without investigating the Warao's presence on the island. In Trinidad, both are imbued with mystery. La Divina, as she is called by

<sup>8</sup> Columbus spied three peaks and called the land Trinidad. Trinidadians sometimes refer to these three peaks as "the three sisters".

Siparians, has the power to heal the sick, grant wealth to the needy and allow barren women to give birth. It is said that three men came from Venezuela to take her back to their country, but were unable to lift her, that she was taken to larger churches but always returned on her own to Siparia, and that she can appear to those who are most devoted. As I sat listening to stories during my first visit to Siparia in 1993, a friend turned to me and said, "Be careful not to ask for anything." He explained that this would require me to pilgrimage annually to Siparia to give proper thanks to the statue else I would gain her disfavor. One Siparian told me that the proper way to pray to La Divina was to promise her something, and to always keep my promise. Elsewhere in Trinidad I met a few people who, though growing up near Siparia, never went to see La Divina. They had heard too many stories of what she does to those who have ill in their hearts, or fail to thank her for wishes granted. The mysterious statue has miraculous power, yet she requires an exchange. Her gifts of love and miracles require gifts of love, thanks and promises fulfilled in return. Balances must be maintained.<sup>9</sup>

Beliefs about the Warao, likewise, express miraculous power. On that same visit, our conversations drifted to the Warao. My friend knew that the Warao still today travel to Trinidad, as he said, "in regular boats, not in their small canoes." Yet later in that same conversation, he quite seriously told me that the "Warao can fly". Another Siparian with us immediately agreed. My friend tried to explain, "You can be out in a field, and they are suddenly there. There's no boats, either". Others told me that they remembered the Warao as children, but were always afraid of them. As one woman from La Divina Pastora Catholic church told me, "I was afraid of them, you know. They used to come in Quinam. And I was living on Coora Road. And they used to pass me. And when you see them coming you have to hide every piece of clothes you have". Another woman said she used to hide from them as a child because the Warao would try to steal her. The Warao had supernatural power, and such power should sometimes be avoided.

Belief in the supernatural attributes of the Warao began shortly after European contact. Early history shows the Warao as bearers of secret knowledge, knowledge of the path to El Dorado.<sup>10</sup> The Spanish Crown considered Trinidad an appendage to the Orinoco River, and be-

<sup>9</sup>This may be related to the need for balance throughout Warao traditions. Wilbert writes, "Warao oral literature is replete with instances of retribution for violations of the natural world order. The severity of punishments for interfering with its harmony reveals the value Warao society places on freedom from fear-inspiring disorder" (W. Wilbert 1992, 74).

<sup>10</sup>Trinidadians popularized legends of El Dorado throughout its history. Fr. Massé recorded the following tale in 1880 from an "old Spaniard who lives on the edge of the Guapo coast" in Erin, 12 miles south of Siparia, an area where the Warao still come today. The old Spaniard offered to take Fr. Massé "to visit the Indians on the banks of the Orinoco," implying

lieved the Orinoco led to the fabled city. The earliest inhabitants of Trinidad were explorers who failed in their quest to find the city of gold (Newson 1976:120-121). Moreover, the Warao remained independent in the early colonial era. Humboldt writes:

Their excellent qualities as seamen, their perfect knowledge of the mouths and inosculation of the magnificent stream, and their great number, give them a certain degree of political importance. They run with great address on marshy ground, where the whites, the negroes, or other Indian tribes, will not venture; and this circumstance has given rise to the idea of their being specifically lighter than the rest of the natives (Humboldt 1836:119).

The Warao's ability to traverse the land, to appear and disappear, and to remain distinctly Indian in the face of colonialism surrounded them in a cloak of mystery. As the original inhabitants of the Siparia mission, and, to some, the original inhabitants of the land itself, the Warao's mystique enveloped La Divina and enhanced her power. The Warao's history in Trinidad, the Warao's association with the Capuchin missions, the Warao's voluntary involvement with Christianity, and the Warao's own system of belief hold the keys to unlocking the mystery of Siparia's La Divina Pastora, as well as understanding the Warao today.

### **The early missions**

In the earliest efforts to establish missions in Trinidad, the Warao became identified as revolutionaries. Catalan Capuchins first attempted to convert the Amerindians of Trinidad and Guyana between 1687 to 1708. They chose mission sites according to Amerindian populations, fresh water supplies, agricultural potential and access to the sea. In Trinidad, they established four missions,

that he had knowledge of the Warao. the "Spanish" in Trinidad refer to persons of mixed Spanish and Amerindian ancestry who immigrated from Venezuela. The Spanish most often intermarried with the Warao. This "old Spaniard" living in a remote coastal area may well have had Warao blood. Therefore, the less romanticized version of the legend of El Dorado reveals not only the majesty of the city of gold, but the control by outsiders.

Two young Spaniards in quest of adventures and more so of fortunes were crossing a virgin forest in Venezuela. All of a sudden in the middle of a wood they found a town of which the houses were made of gold nuggets. The ground was covered with them. The Capuchins were masters of this town. From time to time they were sent mules loaded with eatables and these mules returned with their load of gold. Secrecy was exacted from the mule drivers and if anyone betrayed it the monks poisoned him and made any indiscreet persons who had dared to penetrate to them suffer the same fate. They however were merciful to the two young people on condition that they would let their eyes be bandaged and be led in that way during a certain time. Instead of being poisoned the young people accepted. When after two or three days of walking their eyes were uncovered they no longer knew where they were. They had lost the trace of El Dorado (Massé 1988, 2:177-178).

Savana Grande,<sup>11</sup> Naparima,<sup>12</sup> Santa Ana de Savaneta, and Montserate. Records show that between the years 1687 and 1694, 2,000 Amerindians lived in the four missions. Of these, 1,636 Amerindians were baptized while 250 died. Over one-half of the mission Amerindians died by the year 1707 (Newson 1976:166). Desertions also increased dramatically because of revolts within the missions. Additionally, Amerindians from the mainland attacked the missions, including the mission of Naparima, also called Guayria. "The mission of Guayria in particular suffered considerable losses amongst indians and missionaries from attacks by Guaranos indians from the Orinoco" (Newson 1976:166). The Warao (the Guaranos) reportedly attacked missions at Mayaro, Moruga, Guayaguayare and Naparima, most often cited as retribution for enslavement raids by the Spanish.<sup>13</sup> They conducted similar raids against the Caribs still living in Trinidad. As Newson writes, "For a short period during the early eighteenth century Guaranos indians from the Orinoco carried out enslaving raids on indian villages in Trinidad, but Carib attacks diminished and, after 1720, Trinidad coasts became relatively safe for settlement" (1976:172).

A 1694 letter from the priest at the Naparima mission describes the danger and isolation of mission life. Amerindians hiding in the forests and mountains, aided by the Warao, attacked them.

Sir: among the mass of infidels there are many who hate the missions; not knowing the good, they are hidden in the mountains, and these are obstacles for those who now live in the missions, and with their bad counsel they corrupt the missionized who return to the mountains, who lose respect for the missionary priests, and, in order to force us to leave them, they do many opprobriums and injuries to us. Many times some rebels have tried to kill us: God Our Father has defended us until now. Some of the evil natives summoned the carib nation to kill us: God wanted the caribs not to do it. Others summoned the guaraono nation and they came to the mission of San José, leaving two missionary priests for dead: one with five deadly wounds, the other with two; God did not want them to die then but they have been left for little for having their heads injured from the blows of the macanas (Carrocera 1979, 1:141).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Known today as Princes Town.

<sup>12</sup> Also known as Guayria.

<sup>13</sup> Newson states that Borde reports that the Warao devastated missions at Mayaro and Moruga, "though he may have mistaken the mission of San Francisco Careiro at Guayaguayare for that at Moruga" (Newson 1976, 165; Borde 1982, 2:47). Ottley (1971) reports both Moruga and Guayaguayare as sites of Warao attacks.

<sup>14</sup> My translation. The Spanish text reads:

Señor: entre tanta muchedumbre de infieles hay muchos que aborrecen las misiones; no



In 1693 D. Francisco de Meneses was sent to investigate rioting in the four missions in Trinidad, and, in particular, the mission at Naparima, as he had done previously. He reported that he "pacified the mission indians somewhat", finding that the riots were "caused by numerous of the guaraono nation, who arrived to that mission, and fought a battle" (Carrocera 1979, 1:138).<sup>15</sup> From very early, the Warao were recognized as defenders of Amerindian freedom. Moreover, their ability to escape into the forests and across the sea to the Orinoco enhanced perceptions of their power.

The most famous of mission revolts occurred in 1699 at San Francisco de los Arenales, on the banks of the Arena River. The "massacre" at Arena continues to live today in the memories of Trinidadians, its facts entwined in legend. The mission Indians revolted, killing all the missionaries and then killing the governor. In 1703 Zaragoza, a missionary in Trinidad, wrote that upon removing the bodies "from the foundations, where the indians had thrown them," in order to give them a Christian burial, they found that the bodies "were not only without decomposition, but also the blood began to flow so alive from the wounds as if they just died, preserving without the least corruption nor bad odor nine days that the funeral rites lasted" (Carrocera 1979, 1:160-161).<sup>16</sup> Borde adds that after the revolt, the rebellious indians "then retired to a mountain not far away, probably the mountain of the Tamanaques, where they held a council and decided to take to the coast, no doubt in the hope of being able to escape to the Guaraunos of the delta of the Orinoco" (Borde 1876, 2:62). The Warao symbolized a site of freedom and safety against colonial power.

Naipaul calls the revolt at the Arena mission "the last Indian rebellion, the last sign of Indian life. It gave Trinidad its first Christian mar-

conociendo el bien, se están a los montes escondidos, y éstos son tropiezo para los que ya viven en las misiones, y con sus malos consejos malean a los reducidos a que se vuelvan a los montes, que pierden el respeto a los Padres misioneros, y, para obligarnos a que los dejemos, nos hacen muchos oprobios e injurias. Muchas veces algunos revoltosos nos han amenazado de matarnos: Dios nuestro Señor nos ha defendido hasta ahora. Unos de mal natural llamaron a la nación caribe para matarnos: quiso Dios que los caribes no lo quisieron hacer. Otros llamaron a los de nación guaraúna y vinieron a la misión del Señor San José, dejando a los dos Padres misioneros por muertos: el uno con cinco heridas mortales, el otro con dos; quiso Dios no muriesen entonces pero han quedado para poco por tener sus cabezas maltradas de los golpes de las macanas. . . . (Carrocera 1979, 139:141)

<sup>15</sup> My translation. The Spanish text reads:

Y, habiendo apaciguado algo los indios y reconocido el alboroto y sublevación, hallé haber sido en la misión de Cariero, causado del gentío de la nació guaraúna, que a aquella misión habían llegado, y batallado de una batalla quedaron los dos religiosos que en dicha misión asistían, muy mal heridos y a peligro de perder la vida (Carrocera 1979, 139:138).

<sup>16</sup> My translation. The Spanish text reads:

. . . al sacarlos de la zanja, donde los habían arrojado los indios, . . . no sólo estaban sin corromperse, sino que comenzaron a verter la sangre tan viva por las heridas como si acabaran de expirar, conservándose sin la menor corrupción ni mal olor nueve días que duraron los funerales exequias . . . (Carrocera 1979, 1:160-161).

tyrs and its first miracle" (Naipaul 1969:98). Fr. Cothonay, a French Dominican missionary, searched for the site of the Arena mission nearly two centuries later. He claims to have discovered it in 1885, based on the findings of broken glass and bottles, and "oral tradition among the Amerindians who reported extraordinary occurrences there on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, especially the sound of a priest celebrating Mass and the people answering their prayers aloud" (Harricharan 1975, 24). Sounds on Holy Thursday and Good Friday marked remembrance of the most famous revolt within an Amerindian mission. Though this mission was not located near Siparia, Trinidadians rarely discuss the history of the missions without telling this tale. One Orisha priest told me that only two places exist in all Trinidad that possess a strong spiritual power, the location believed to be the mission at Arenas and the home of La Divina Pastora in Siparia. Moreover, on Holy Thursday the past comes alive through sounds and prayers, both at Arenas and in the Hindu pilgrimages to Suparee Mai. The association of these two locations within oral tradition empowers each.

Disease, revolt and desertions continued to reduce the mission population. Additionally, relations between the planters and the missionaries deteriorated. The planters requested the release of the Indians to work on their plantations. The missionaries failed to comply. In 1708 the King of Spain ordered the missionaries to leave the twenty-four missionary sites and continue their work on the mainland. The Church retained spiritual authority, but *corregidos* or magistrates were appointed to administer the missions. Only ten priests remained in Trinidad.

Trinidad suffered a cocoa crop failure in 1725 and a smallpox epidemic in 1739 which further decimated the island's population. The next wave of missionaries, the Aragonese Capuchins, came to Trinidad during these disastrous economic times. Between 1756 and 1758 missionaries from the province of Aragon arrived in Trinidad through Cumaná, Venezuela. They took charge of the earlier missionary sites at Caura, Tacarigua and Arouca in the north, and Naparima, Savaneta, Savana Grande and Montserrat in the south. They also founded six new missions including Arima, dedicated to St. Rosa de Lima, and Siparia, dedicated to the Holy Virgin under the title of La Divina Pastora (Harricharan 1975:25; Marie-Therese 1976:XX).<sup>17</sup>

### **The Siparia Mission**

Why did the Warao leave the Orinoco Delta to settle in a Catholic mission in Trinidad in the eighteenth century? Positive relations be-

<sup>17</sup>The other mission sites were established at Toco, dedicated to the Blessed Mary of the Assumption, and the missionary sites on the east coast, Mathura, Pt. Cumana and Salybia. The latter three survived only a short time (Harricharan 1975, 25).

tween the Trinidadian government and the Warao began in the early seventeenth century when an unusual alliance developed. Fernando de Berrío, who succeeded his father as governor of Trinidad, also followed his father in seeking the gold of El Dorado. After a futile expedition in search of the City of Gold, he returned home

...to find that in his absence the Illustrious Cabildo had constituted itself in San Josef and had formed an offensive alliance with the Tibitibi Indians (Warraus) of the Orinoco delta. To their aid had been sent a party of twenty Spaniards under Captain Pedro de Beltranilla, whose purpose it was to punish the Caribs who continually harassed the colony (Carmichael 1961:26).

This early alliance between the Spanish government of Trinidad and the Warao may well have paved the way for the future relations between Trinidadians and the Warao, and eventually the establishment of the Siparia mission.

Aragon Capuchin missionaries founded the mission dedicated to La Divina Pastora in 1759 in order to Christianize the Warao. No records exist to suggest that, like other missions, multiple Amerindian groups composed the early mission population. Additionally, no reports of trouble in either establishing or maintaining the Siparia mission exist. Early reports do document the work of Fr. Francisco de Ateca, a priest of the mission. Fr. Ateca was first assigned to the Cumaná, Venezuela, Amerindian missions in 1783. Siparia was a satellite to the Cumaná missions, and from 1786 to 1795 he served as missionary priest in Siparia.<sup>18</sup> Reports of his success in the reduction of the Warao reached his superiors in Cumaná. Carrocero writes, "For these same years and perhaps even earlier, 1784-1785, another reduction was carried out. . . . Siparia" (Carrocera 1968, 1:372).<sup>19</sup> Carrocera notes that by November, 1788, the Siparia mission was already established, suggesting incorrectly that Ateca founded the mission.

Between the years 1777 and 1797 the Amerindian population within the mission system dropped from 1824 to 1082 (Newson 1976:219). Smallpox epidemics as well as desertion played major roles in this decrease. Siparia's population, however, remained stable, attesting to Fr. Ateca's leadership. The population of Siparia in 1797, the

<sup>18</sup> Venezuelan sources state that Fr. de Ateca founded the mission in Siparia in 1786, citing the work of Carrocera. Carrocera only hypothesizes that Fr. de Ateca founded the mission. He writes that "Father Francisco de Ateca, who must be who actually founded it / el Padre Francisco de Ateca, que debió ser quien efectivamente la fundó" (Carrocera 1968, 1:372).

<sup>19</sup> My translation. The Spanish text reads: "Por esos mismos años y quizás aun antes, 1784-1785, se venía realizando otra reducción ...Siparia".

year the British gained control of the island, included one white (presumably the missionary) and 139 Amerindians (Newson 1976:190).

During this time the Amerindians in the mission of Siparia, like those in the other missions throughout Trinidad, were kept isolated. The practice of separating ethnic groups, which continued throughout the years of slavery and indentureship, had begun. In Siparia, however, that did not always occur.

Although it was intended that the Amerindians of the missions should be kept apart from their fellows, this did not happen at Siparia. Guarahoon Indians from the Spanish Main, landing on Quinam beach constantly found their way to Siparia, in fact laying the course of what is now the Siparia-Quinam Road (Anthony 1988:300).

The Warao traversed colonial mandates to travel freely between the Orinoco Delta and Trinidad, finding refuge at the Siparia mission of La Divina Pastora. Even though they lived within a Catholic mission, perceptions of the Warao as "free" continued.

The Warao stayed in the Siparia mission through the end of the eighteenth century. Spanish cession of the island in 1802 brought drastic changes to Siparia, as it did for all of Trinidad. British control of the island, at times thought to have been minimal throughout the early part of the century, was immediately felt in Siparia.<sup>20</sup> Oral tradition explains how this political upheaval prompted the Warao's exodus from the Siparia mission.

An old native, a descendant of the aboriginal inhabitants, told a traveler that at the end of the eighteenth century a large Amerindian population lived in Siparia, cultivating cassava and couche-couche extensively, under the disciplinary government of the local padre. But they were told that, with the cession of Trinidad to Britain in 1802, they would be mistreated; when the British arrived in the district, the natives took to the woods to the south of Siparia and set off in corials or canoes to the Orinoco Delta, where they still lived in 1883 (Brereton 1979:131).

The Warao continued to frequent the Siparia area and live in the neighboring forests until the middle of the twentieth century.

The remaining pure-blooded Amerindian population throughout Trinidad quickly vanished in the nineteenth century. Along the north coast the government established the mission of Cumana (Toco) for all surviving Amerindians in the area. In 1854 a devastating cholera epi-

<sup>20</sup> A number of histories of Trinidad write that Britain did not take an active interest in the island until the 1840s. The numerous mention of Protestants by Fr. Poirier and the "profusion of erroneous bibles" in this isolated area suggests that religiously Britain moved into Trinidad quickly.

demic hit and "apparently exterminated nearly all the north coast Indians" (Brereton 1979:130). The same epidemic decimated the Amerindian population living in the hills around the old Arima mission. Brereton writes:

In 1840 there were only about three hundred Indians of pure descent in the old mission, mostly aged. Occasionally surviving members of a group of Chayma Indians used to come down from the heights beyond Arima to the Farfan estate, to barter wild meats for small household goods. But after 1854 they were seen no more: cholera had extinguished the Chaymas. Indeed, by 1850 there were said to be no more than four hundred Indians of pure descent in the whole island; by 1875 only a handful survived (Brereton 1979:130-131).

The continued presence of the Warao, pure-blooded Amerindians distinctly identifiable by their lack of European dress, could well have seemed miraculous to many in Trinidad. In their ethnographic study of religion in Toco, Melville and Frances Herskovits described diviners with "sight". They wrote:

To these may be added the "bucks" or "Warahun," inhabitants of the Venezuelan shore, who are said to be exceedingly small of stature, appearing for their "work" in loin-cloths, harpoon in hand. They are reputed to be among the most powerful workers of magic, and a lore has sprung up about their cures (Herskovits and Herskovits 1976:224-225).

Unfortunately, the Herskovits do not relate the lore, but they do show that in an area where so many Amerindians "disappeared," the Warao remained and were deemed "powerful".

### **Nineteenth Century reports from the field**

Three priests assigned to Trinidad provide the most valuable extant documentation on life in Siparia, the devotions to La Divina Pastora, and the presence of the Warao in the early nineteenth century. Two brothers, Frs. André and René-Charles Poirier, served on the island in the 1830s and 1840s. Their letters provide evidence of the Warao presence in the area and their relationship with the Catholic church. The third priest, Fr. Armand Massé, left an invaluable diary of his missionary experience in Trinidad during the 1870s and 1880s, including his assignment as priest of Siparia. Fr. André Poirier also served as the missionary in Siparia, replacing Fr. Pedro Quiros as priest in Siparia in the late 1830s. Having been assigned to Siparia from 1818 to 1835, Fr. Quiros had contact with the Warao. In fact, he wrote a letter granting the Warao authorization to trade in Siparia with his parishioners.

When Fr. André Poirier took over as the local priest, he wrote that the Warao "had stopped for some time coming to my small town of Siparia, because someone had told them that all the Spaniards had died of smallpox; they came last June in order to make sure. It is then that I renewed my acquaintance with them" (A. Poirier 1840:49). Though no longer living in the mission itself, the Warao continued coming from the Orinoco Delta and living in the surrounding forests. The situation seemed unchanged in the late 1870s when Fr. Massé became the priest assigned to Siparia. He writes:

Only a few years ago the carib indians, or waraoons (as they are called by these different names) lived in the woods of Siparia. They disappeared little by little as the Spanish population increased. They crossed the strait and settled on the banks of the Orinoco in Venezuela. They did not however forget Siparia. Very often recrossing the strait in their correals they traverse anew the woods which separate Siparia from the sea and reappear on the hills where the houses are built and in the middle of which stands the chapel containing the miraculous Virgin (Massé 1988, 2:33).<sup>21</sup>

When two Warao appeared in the doorway of his church "completely nude wearing nothing but a little belt" Fr. Massé wrote, "The two who appeared made no impression on my parishioners" (Massé 1988, 2:45). While the two Warao caught Fr. Massé's attention, his parishioners saw nothing unusual happening. They were obviously used to the Warao's presence in the area.

<sup>21</sup> Fr. Massé describes the Warao in number of entries, including the following: After my lunch I went to San Francisco [Erin] where I found the band of savages from whom the two whom I had seen during Mass had detached themselves. There were more than thirty, men, women, young men, young girls, children. Several of these women had little babies at the breast whom they had not been afraid to bring with them on the sea in their couriale. All wore belts, nothing more. The chief to whom the others were blindly submissive wore for distinction a shirt which he put on as rarely as possible. When I was in the middle of them, as no doubt his shirt was worrying him, he put it aside without ceremony. His wife was ill and was sleeping in a hammock. They had hammocks hung everywhere in a big shed and several of them were swinging in them. Some had painted their eyebrows and lips red. I had a certain number of little images which I distributed among them. One of these savages had a flute made from a bone, from which he extracted some sounds. I asked for it by signs. He gave it to me. It is a bone from which one of the ends had been cut and which had been hollowed out at the same end in the shape of a crescent. The knot which formed the opposing end had been pierced to let the air out. There are three holes on the bone at equal distance one from the other. It is from these that the sound comes out. It is a real curiosity which I hope to bring back to Europe. I went to the edge of the sea to see their couriale. It is more than fifty feet long, twelve to fifteen feet wide. A tree trunk hollowed out makes the bottom. The sides are formed from boards attached to each other with benches. The small spaces between are caulked with grasses. Some pieces of wood, round and rough, serve as seats and must tear what we sit upon

In a later diary entry Fr. Massé writes, "A band of Indians, Waraoons, have just appeared in the quarter. They went to Siparia where they only left the woods a few years ago. They also went to Siparia to go to pay their homage to the Blessed Virgin in their way" (Massé 1988, 4:124). Some of the "old heads" in Siparia remember the Warao attending the processional feast for La Divina Pastora. Occasionally, they would enter the church to perform their prayers "in their own way" and in their own language in front of La Divina Pastora.

Most, however, remember the Warao as traders. Fr. Poirier reports that they would come into Siparia to sell baskets and hammocks which they made, particularly on the "days of the feasts, except when small-pox prevails, an illness that they dread a lot: when some of their own get it, their compatriots kill them". Fr. Poirier considered them to be the "remains of the ancient Caribs who populated these islands previously", who acted rebellious by not wanting "to resemble the current possessors" of the island (A. Poirier 1840:49).

The Warao still do not "resemble the current possessors". Everyone I spoke with in Siparia who had seen the Warao in the past immediately mentioned their dress, or lack of dress. As one woman put it, "they were naked, naked, naked," with red roucou covering their bodies. In the nineteenth century, they obtained the dye often in trade.

When they come here, they bring some quinkos and the wax that one finds in abundance in the woods. In exchange they get rum, tobacco, and yellow and red rocou<sup>22</sup> which serves them in order to dye the body (A. Poirier 1840:49).

Kingsley further describes the roucou:

In England and Holland, it is used merely, I believe, to colour cheeses; but in the Spanish Main, to colour human beings. The Indian of the Orinoco prefers paint to clothes; and when he has 'roucoued' himself from head to foot, considers himself in full dress, whether for war or dancing. Doubtless he knows his own business best from long experience. Indeed, as we stood broiling on the shore, we began somewhat to regret that European manners and customs prevented our adopting the Guaraon and Arawak fashion (Kingsley 1885:179).

especially when that has not got the least bit of cloth to protect itself. These savages do not appear bad and are not bad. Erin is only separated from their country by thirty to forty hours of crossing. A certain number of my parishioners have visited their homes and I have a definite wish to do the same if the occasion presents itself (Massé 1988, 4:122-124).

<sup>22</sup> Roucou comes from the pulp which coats the seed of the shrub *Bixa Orellana*, the source of Arnotto dye.

In practical terms, red rocou serves as an "antidote to sunburn, and also a protection against mosquito and sandfly bites" (Young and Helweg-Larsen 1965:49). It also served to differentiate the Warao from the Europeans, a distinction colonialists wanted to erase.

### **Religious conversions**

The Poirier brothers attempted to duplicate the evangelizing work of the early Capuchin missionaries, an effort prompted by the Warao coming to the brothers seeking to reestablish the traditions of their ancestors. In 1841 Fr. René-Charles Poirier was sent to the Siparia mission to meet with the Warao and convince them to convert to Christianity. Four Warao met him in Oropouche, by now the more populated area of the expansive Siparia mission, to guide him to Siparia. The chief, who lived in the area for twenty years, "spoke so well that it embarrasses the Spanish, the English and the Creole" (R.-C. Poirier 1842:434). Before the journey began, Fr. Poirier

...distributed some ginga shirts to the four Indians, and a beautiful red shirt to their chief; and they immediately put them on, walked and admired them with an incredible expression of contentment, like some children who have just received some presents would make; then, taking it off, they folded them carefully so they could show them to their compatriots in a good state (R.-C. Poirier 1842:433).

The choice of presents immediately illustrated the desire of the priest to convert the Warao to European ways. The Warao revealed their desires, also, to use European dress only for certain occasions. The gifts almost proved disastrous, though, when they reached Siparia.

After four or five hours of marching, we entered the small town of Siparia. Immediately many men, women and children surrounded us; all considered us with amazement; several came to kiss our hand.<sup>23</sup> Among these last we noticed an old man of seventy years, that the respectful crowd seemed to venerate like a father; he was the big chief of the nation. A Spaniard, who served us as interpreter, warned us then that the Indians were very astonished that we had given our guides some beautiful presents, while we didn't give anything to the leader of their tribe. But what could we do? We had no more red shirts to offer (R.-C. Poirier 1842:435).

<sup>23</sup> A common greeting for priests, suggesting Warao knowledge of the tradition.



Traditions often collide in first encounters. Fr. Poirier fortunately remembered that he had a dressing gown in his bag,

Indian white bottom with big flowers; and quickly, with the help of Fr. Le Cailtel, we pared it, hemmed it, stitched it, and added to it a yellow belt. We made a kind of tunic with the biggest effect, without a doubt. The work ended in very necessary secrecy. We went solemnly to the dwelling of the big chief, and helped him to dress in the new costume that we had made, to the great satisfaction of all who helped (R.-C. Poirier 1842:432).

In exchange, the Warao chief gave the priest a "beautiful *ouaïbalka* (a canoe made from a single tree trunk)," and to his brother, "several *ha* (hammocks made with the filaments of moriche palm)" (R-C. Poirier 1842:436).

The Catholic priests probably never knew that they, too, had been "converted" through this exchange of gifts, enveloped in the religious belief of the Warao. Both the canoe and the moriche palm play major roles in the mythology of the Warao. Each gift represents the work of artisans and provides the Warao with a means to eternal life. Apprentice canoe-makers, a strictly male occupation, learn not just the craft of building a canoe but also the rituals honoring their patroness, Dauarani, the Mother of the Forest. They only become a true *moyotu*, a master canoe builder, after an initiatory trance pilgrimage to the house of Dauarani. With each canoe he carves, the master canoe builder (*moyotu*) hopes to please his patroness and "knows that only utmost dedication will please the Mother of the Forest" and "guarantee him a place on the sacred mountain with this patroness of the boat builder and his fellow artisans" (Wilbert 1993:99).

As Wilbert describes, each canoe represents a daughter of Dauarani, the Mother of the Forest. And each ritualized carving of a canoe from a single tree represents having intercourse with her daughter. Permission must be obtained from Dauarani to build each canoe, and repeated each time the Warao step into a canoe and again enters the body of the daughter of the Mother of the Forest. In the delta waters of the Orinoco, the canoe gives life. Warao may sleep and eat in the canoe. After death they are wrapped inside a canoe, spending eternity truly as their name signifies, "the canoe people".

The moriche palm represents the "tree of life" to the Warao. Each part of the tree serves the Warao, including providing them with sago, their staple food. The moriche palm represents at once their homes and their food. Hammock makers (*uasi*), a strictly female occupation, dedicate their lives to their patroness, the Mother of the Moriche who lives in the northeast. "She makes the palms fertile each year, thus provid-

ing an abundance of fruit and moriche flour for the people" (Wilbert 1993:100-101). Upon her death, an *uasi* travels to the sacred mountain of the Mother of Moriche. With both gifts, the canoe and the hammock, the Warao have made profound statements to the two priests in Siparia.

The Europeans, on the other hand, exchanged items of clothing, including an impromptu dressing gown. Historically, descriptions of the early encounters among the various cultures in Trinidad emphasize depictions of dress. Willingness to accept European dress paralleled acceptance of European customs, and conversion to Christianity. Furthermore, dress signified status and importance to many throughout the history of Trinidad. Refusal to wear European dress displayed an unwillingness to assimilate. The Warao accepted the clothing, but chose only to wear European dress at their discretion.

The Warao asked to be baptized like their ancestors before them during this visit to Fr. André Poirier. Their chief presented the children of his group for baptismal. Fr. Poirier stipulated:

we confer this sacrament to the smallest four; but for those who were older, we wanted to instruct them before admitting them to the rank of our neophytes; we asked the crowd if they didn't also want baptism: "Yes, Yes" they answered us in one unanimous voice. Already, one of the chiefs who counts a hundred Indians under his leadership, has declared to me that he hoped in a short while to present me all his group, reconciled like him to kiss the faith of the Christians (A. Poirier 1842:438).

Fr. Poirier performed Mass on the Sunday of his visit, attended by most of the Spanish in the area. The Warao remained "attentive spectators at the door, with the exception of José Luis and of Cyriaco, the two baptized Warons chiefs, who took their place in the sanctuary" (R.-C. Poirier 1842:437). After the Mass, Fr. Poirier baptized the four smallest children.

At the moment when the scripture says "Receive the dress without stain," I gave each of them a pretty white shirt that I had brought, and, after the ceremony, I placed around their necks a medal of immaculate Mary, recommending to their families to keep this precious souvenir, and to bring them back one day for their instruction as they had promised (R.-C. Poirier 1842:438).

Again, clothing signified Christian conversion. The medal of Mary, a popular item distributed throughout the nineteenth century, reflected the necklaces placed around the neck of the miraculous statue. More-

over, Fr. Poirier placed all the Warao "under the special protection of Mary, the Divine Shepherdess, head of the Church and of the Mission of Siparia" (R.-C. Poirier 1842:437).

Fr. Poirier officially concluded his first meeting with the Warao by formally writing an agreement between the Warao and the missionary priests ensuring the Warao's return to Siparia.<sup>24</sup> The missionaries also brought Fr. Quiros's letter with them to this meeting, granting the Warao permission to trade with the parishioners in Siparia. Fr. Poirier concluded his meeting formally with the return of this letter to the chief, placing it in the case of a small book. By becoming baptized the Warao gained the ability to trade on the now "Christian" ground.

While Fr. Poirier writes that he spoke with the Warao about their own religion, he only furnishes a single word as evidence, the term for their Supreme Being, *Illamo*, the equivalent of the Warao term *idamo* used today for an elder. Fr. Poirier does, however, provide some insight into Warao religion by describing healing rituals indigenous to the Warao. He encountered the *wisiratu*, the ritual priest of the Warao, in the home of the corregidor<sup>25</sup> of Siparia, though he does not comment on why the *wisiratu* was in the house. Oral tradition today tells of the Warao often staying in the homes of Siparia residents, speaking of their close relationships they once maintained. Furthermore, Trinidadians know well the efficacy of Warao rites. Fr. Poirier writes:

We entered in the dwelling of Capitan or Corregidor of Siparia, Basilio Tabarez: there we found the *Ouësilatou*, that is, the doctor, wizard or impostor of the nation, an important character, probably, but one who seems to me more feared than respected. He approached us to kiss our hand. I don't like his

<sup>24</sup>The agreement read:

We, the undersigned, declare that the place of Siparia, situated toward the southerly part of this island, is visited frequently by the Warons, uncivilized people, who live on the edges of the Mariusia river, one of the branches of the Orinoco; that on December 27, 1840, one of their chiefs came, in the name of his compatriots, to Oropuch, and asked us to go to Siparia in order to baptize some children, like the Spanish priests did in an era a little remote. In arriving we found a large detachment of this nation, with three or four of his chiefs, and in accordance with us concluded the following articles in the interest of the tribe.

1. Cyriaco, first chief, and José Luis, second chief, agree voluntarily to this that all their nation is instructed in the Catholic, apostolic and Roman Religion.

2. They choose and recognize the Padre of Siparia for their Padre and Missionary.

3. They will come two or three time every year, if they can, all Warons to this place of Siparia, in order to receive the instructions of the Padre.

Upon their arrival, the first chief or his substitute will present to the Padre the present document and the rosary that we give to him in confirmation of the agreement enacted between us, this 3 January 1841 (R.-C. Poirier 1842, 440).

<sup>25</sup>The magistrate in charge of the Amerindians.

false and mean appearance. The Spanish told us that it was by fear he treated his patients: he always proceeds at night. After he is shut in with the sick person in the deepest darkness, he floods it with tobacco smoke, makes a thousand contortions, and makes what is described as a thousand gleaming circles, making some mournful screaming, and finally in a state of excitation allows what must lead to a good or bad crisis (R.-C. Poirier 1842:437).

The Warao continue to perform healing rituals today. The *wisiratu*, literally the Master of Pain, cures patients inflicted with *hebu* spirits, illnesses marked by the sensation of burning, the presence of fire. He obtains both tobacco and the components used to create his sacred rattle in pilgrimage to Trinidad.<sup>26</sup> The tobacco smoke feeds the deities while providing the means for the shaman, the *wisiratu*, to pilgrimage to the abode of the gods.

The gleaming circles, made by the repetitive movement of the shaman's rattle, summons the gods. The *wisiratu* cuts four narrow slits in the calabash forming the head of the rattle, called its mouths. Inside the rattle are quartz crystals, "embodiments of the spirit-helpers of the shaman as he seeks to divine the origin of *hebu* sickness and effects a cure" (Wilbert 1993:137). The *wisiratu* must pilgrimage to find the quartz pebbles, a journey that takes him to either Naparima Hill or Karoshimo, the southernmost point of their cosmological world. Shaking the rattle in rotations forces the pebbles inside the rattle to "shave off fine meal from the highly combustible wood of the central shaft. These particles ignite in the heat generated by the whirling crystals and fly out as glowing sparks through the rattle's four mouths" (Wilbert 1993:137). The ritual described by Fr. Poirier, when mere words are endowed with meaning, produces healing not fear. The power to heal, however, required traveling abroad, which often meant journeying to Trinidad.

### **Warao Pilgrimage**

The Warao went on pilgrimage to Naparima Hill well into the twentieth century. Few in Trinidad knew the religious significance of their journey. Most often, Trinidadians considered Warao journeys to Naparima Hill in the town of San Fernando merely trading ventures. Brereton writes that once a year the Warao, some of whom "were the descendants of Indians who had earlier left Trinidad for the mainland,

<sup>26</sup>Fr. Massé learned quickly that the Warao "love tobacco a lot and that is the thing which can exchange most advantageously for what they bring" (Massé 1988, 4:129).

like the Siparia aboriginals" came, vanishing into the forests using tracks only they knew. They traded parrots, hunting dogs and hammocks for household goods, then returned to the Orinoco Delta. She continues:

Some of these visitors were virtually untouched by European ways, and caused the townsfolk of San Fernando some disquiet because of their semi-nudity. But a party of "Warahoons" in 1875 were "far more accustomed to town life and manners than their fellows of by-gone times were wont to be. There is a marked improvement in their dress, and their intercourse in trading has lost a great deal of that timidity and suspicion which acted as a barrier to their bartering with our people" (Brereton 1979:131).<sup>27</sup>

Kingsley, writing in 1885, also describes the Warao coming to San Fernando.

For once a year till of late -- I know not whether the thing may be seen still -- a strange phantom used to appear at San Fernando, twenty miles to the north. Canoes of Indians came mysteriously across the Gulf of Paria from the vast swamps of the Orinoco; and the naked folk landed, and went up through the town, after the Naparima ladies (so runs the tale) had sent down to the shore garments for the women, which were worn only through the streets, and laid by again as soon as they entered the forest (Kingsley 1885:192).

Romanticism shaped the nineteenth century perceptions of the Warao, envisioning them as the original ancestors of the island or as witnesses to the events of earliest Trinidad. They carried the knowledge of the land, knowing invisible paths through the forests of Trinidad. Most importantly, the Warao continued to refuse to acquire European attire and accept European ways. Rarely are the Warao mentioned, whether in history books or in talk of traditions today, without descriptions of their dress. And while most stories tell of the Warao donning European apparel for their trading expeditions to San Fernando, the same stories relate the Warao removing those clothes prior to returning to the Orinoco Delta. In the romanticism of the nineteenth century, the Warao were free, free to travel across the sea and free to travel through the forests of Trinidad.

<sup>27</sup> See also Cothonay 1893, 118-9, 180-2; Kingsley 1885, 157; Gamble 1866, 28-9.

## The path of Haburi

In their pilgrimages to Naparima Hill, the Warao retraced the path of their culture hero, Haburi, to the northernmost point on earth of their cosmological world. Within Warao mythology, two petrified world trees assumed the form of mountains and "serve as abodes of two directional earth-gods" (Wilbert 1979:138). Karoshimo, or "Red-Neck," lies just south of the Rio Grande in Venezuela.<sup>28</sup> Nabarima, or "Father of the Waves," is located to the north in Trinidad. Both abodes of earth-gods, these mountains are low in height and stand isolated on plains, clearly visible from afar. Moreover, they "are aligned along a north-south axis with a deviation of only 9 minutes or 12 kilometers" (Wilbert 1993:13), with the Warao homelands lying at the center. For centuries the Warao have pilgrimaged to Naparima Hill in Trinidad, not only the abode of the northern earth-god but also the sanctuary of their progenitor, Haburi.

The Haburi myth, known in variation throughout the Orinoco Delta, tells the story of the Warao origins on earth. Primordial man marries two sisters, having a son by one of them. A jaguar kills the man and assumes his shape. The sisters discover the deception and flee with their baby, Haburi, to a shaman, Wauta. Wauta kills the jaguar. One day, Wauta transforms the baby into a man and convinces him that she is his mother. Haburi honors her as his mother, believing the deception. In some versions he commits incest unknowingly with his real mother. Finally, he is told the truth and constructs the first canoe to flee with his real mothers. A parrot, however, informs Wauta of his flight and she attempts to stop him. Haburi escapes, sometimes by trapping Wauta in a log. Wauta transforms into a frog. Meanwhile, Haburi and his mothers travel to Trinidad and find permanent refuge in the northern earth-god mountain, Naparima Hill.

"The canoe and paddle, however, transformed into tree serpents, the canoe becoming a (female) red cachicamo (*Colophyllum lucidum* Benth., *bisi*) and the paddle turning into a (male) white cachicamo (*Colophyllum* sp., *babe*)" (Wilbert 1993:15). They traveled to the center of the earth, where the canoe-serpent "transformed into Dauarani, the Mother of the Forest, and became humanity's first priest-shaman" (Wilbert 1993:15). The first man, in the form of a Warao, appeared after Dauarani reached the center of the earth. Dauarani then traveled to Karoshimo, the southern earth-god mountain. Later, her soul traveled and settled at the point of sunrise of the winter solstice, and her body at the point of sunset (Wilbert 1993:15).

The miraculous statue in Siparia, carved from the red cachicamo (African cedar),<sup>29</sup> may well have represented Dauarani. The Warao in

<sup>28</sup> Called Cerro Manoa on Venezuelan maps.

<sup>29</sup> Fr. Eugene Delahunt reports that an earlier priest identified the wood as the African cedar.

the Orinoco Delta today tell the folk narrative of *Bisi* (the red cachicamo/canoe) and *Babe* (the white cachicamo/paddle), two tree-sisters who travel from Trinidad to the Orinoco Delta. One sister, Dauarani, returns to Trinidad while the other remains in Venezuela. This mirrors the narratives told to me in Siparia. As Mrs. Houston, an "altar lady" at La Divina Pastora church, explained, "It is two sisters. One remained in Venezuela and one was on a boat and so she came to Trinidad".

Warao mythology often portrays Dauarani as androgynous (Wilbert 1993:78), allowing the female canoe and male paddle to appear as sisters. Mrs. Popo, who grew up in Siparia, told a story she learned from her mother, a Warao woman who lived to be 104. In this version, La Divina Pastora were brother and sister. La Divina, the sister, stayed in Trinidad. Pastora, her brother, went back to Venezuela.

I don't think anybody knew how she get to Siparia. But it's always been. She always said it was a twin, a boy and a girl. La Divina Pastora. Pastora is the boy and La Divina is the girl. But the boy is in Venezuela. Pastora is in Venezuela. Anyone who goes to Venezuela will tell you that they've seen him and in Siparia is where La Divina remains. I don't know what caused her to remain, but she has always remained (1995).

The androgyny continued in the narratives of La Divina Pastora's first appearances in Siparia.

They had a little carat house where the Catholic people used to go and worship right there . . . and everytime they go there they see a short lady and a short man all covered, they come out of the bush. And one day a woman came and asked who they are. They are brother and sister. One is La Divine and one is Pastora. And she told the woman to ask anything and you shall get it. Ask me. And that had the woman kind of amazed. She didn't ask anything. She left and she came away and spread the news to other people. When they saw the person, La Divina Pastora, then they were asking for what they wanted and they start getting it. And as they start getting it they decided to open the chapel bigger and they started spreading the news to other people, Penal and Oropouche<sup>30</sup> (1995).

Even in her androgynous, twinned form, La Divina Pastora first appeared as a "real person" to the people closest to the Warao. The couple stopped coming as "more people started coming in and the brightness

<sup>30</sup> Penal and Oropouche are neighboring towns to Siparia.

was too much for her and she wanted a dark place". In contrast to the miraculous statue which "likes light," the couple vanished into the darkness when too many people arrived. The Warao also disappeared, as Mrs. Bacchus explained, "When people came, when the place started getting civilized and plant cocoa and things and didn't have so much forest. They disappeared. Because they say sometimes they're there and you couldn't see them". Mrs. Popo elaborated, "If the Warrahoon don't want you to see them, you couldn't see them. They used to be just there, but you couldn't see them".

During the rest of our discussions, Mrs. Popo spoke of La Divina only, without mention of her brother. She appeared "right where she is now, right on that very spot. High wood right there. Where she get those old clothes nobody know. . . . All about she used to walk. She never appeared but one place. Always coming and bless the people right where she is now". Moreover, she would wander day and night "but who she wants, see her. Who she don't, don't see her". To the Warao, the spot she appeared "was a holy ground. There's where they sat worshipping the sun coming and pilgrimaging to San Fernando. Walking to San Fernando and come right down here. Do baptize and ceremonial and all kind of things right there".

### **Twentieth century Warao rituals in Trinidad**

The sacred land of the Warao, the high wood of Siparia, was the place of Warao ritual until it became too populated. Warao ritual continued in Trinidad, moving to the forest areas of Quinam and nearby Mt. Diablo, the area immediately to the east of Quinam. Literally meaning "the forest of spirits," Mt. Diablo used to be the domain of most of the Warrahoons according to Sam, an orisha priest who regularly traded with the Warao prior to World War II. Sam spoke to me of two rituals he witnessed the Warao performing, though he admitted that he was young and did not try to learn details of the Warao religion. However, he was so moved by the rituals that he "had never spoken of it before. It's too sacred". Today, the forest plays an important part in his performance of Orisha ritual. "They had their own concept of God. Sometimes they had trees that they carved effigies in there. The roots rise above [the ground] were the legs. Some of the trees would remain there forever. For long periods of time. I don't know if they still remain". They carved various figures into the trees depicting men and women, birds and animals.

Warao mythology tell numerous stories of trees being carved and then coming to life. One version of the Haburi myth portrays Haburi as the first Indian who walked the earth alone with his son, a child born without a mother, searching for a mother for the boy.<sup>31</sup> He finds

<sup>31</sup> Narrative number 110 entitled "Haburi and Wauta" in Wilbert 1970, 231-233.



Wauta's hut deep in the forest. Wauta, the first Indian mother, offered them food. Haburi and Wauta embarked on a journey in a newly formed canoe. Leaving his son, Haburi told him, "Try to find company for yourself, making sons like I made you . . .". Haburi carved a child from the trunk of a tree, and called it his son. The wooden child had no life. Haburi looked down, and "when he raised his eyes, he saw before him a girl in place of that piece of wood that he had fashioned with his machete". They married, and from their children descended all the Indian tribes (Wilbert 1970:232).

In ritual, too, the Warao perceive spirits within trees. Dauarani, the original canoe invented by Haburi now transformed, became the patroness of male artisans, the canoe-builders. The master canoe-builder, in preparing to create a canoe from the *cachicamo* tree, sees "not the tree, but a female personage whom he must kill" (Wilbert 1993:67). Alone with the master canoe-builder, the spirit enters the tree before the other workers arrive, "and her feet become its roots, her body, its trunk, her arms, its branches, and her head, the crown of the *cachicamo*" (Wilbert 1993:70). The effigies carved in the trees around Mt. Diablo, Trinidad, certainly were seen by some who understood their significance and by many who did not. The area truly was, as Sam called it, "the enchanted forest".

Sam described another ceremony performed by the Warao in explaining to me that the Warao could not have gone to the Roman Catholic church to worship La Divina Pastora.

They carry on a different ceremony. When the Warrahoons are truly having their prayers . . . they will choose a place in the forest that is very calm and serene and they have a medicine man that conducts -- when I say a medicine man I mean the chief, or the spiritual man -- and while they're praying there, it is something to behold (1995).

The descriptions of the ceremonies weaved in and out of our discussions throughout the evening, as if the memories seemingly returned to Sam as dream images.

It is a divine service that they keep. They will go near to a river or waterfall or something like that and they will pray and the prayer is solemn and when you finish sometimes everybody bathes and everything and they come out. But when you leave that divine service and go, you're leaving with something, that part of the forest with you. You're leaving with a different -- to explain that part of it, no man can really explain it unless he experiences it. You can't explain that (1995).

Eventually, Sam explained more. He watched their ceremonies, performed in the Warao language, without being able to understand the

language. The Warao "get a young girl, young, say 11 or 12, and you'll get a manifestation". The reactions of others to the manifestation, the presence of a spirit in the girl, impressed Sam during the rituals. "They take her flowers, and they dress her sometimes, and when you see that they come by, big people, older heads" to be blessed and they give her offerings and she puts

her hand on your head and bless you. It's an honor for this child to come to you -- like it is a divine touch but that spirit will not manifest on that child again. When she has reached the stage of puberty it will not manifest and so you will see another one most likely, in another part of the forest (1995).

The vision of the girl, however, left Sam speechless. "When you look at them and look at the way they move -- something happens to you".

The Warao perform similar rituals today in the Orinoco Delta as puberty rites for young girls. As Wilbert describes, girls, usually 12 or 13, are secluded in the menstrual hut or a special corner of the house where they cannot leave their hammocks or even let their feet touch the ground. Twice a day, a couple called her step-parents carry the girl to a special seat outside and women pour water on her to insure fertility. She must remain silent for three days and eat only yuruma (the starchy pith of the moriche palm), morocotto fish, and drink only water. "Her hair is cropped, gathered in a basket, and buried. This is not only supposed to guarantee uncomplicated deliveries in the future, but also to forestall premature sickening and a death of the girl's parents" (Wilbert 1972:106). Her back is painted with geometric designs, circles and St. Andrew's crosses, and she is given a glass-bead necklace to wear forever more (Wilbert 1972:106). She emerges from her isolation to be honored and given offerings by her blood relatives in a ceremony similar to the ritual described by Sam.<sup>32</sup>

According to Sam, the Warao would decorate their ritual areas with arches made from palm leaves. Sometimes they would

just get grass and tie it in a bundle like that and have it at certain entrances and then this fellow, they would have a little stand made up this high . . . They'd bring fruit -- put leaves on top of that and fruit on top of it and when this fellow would cut a tree and say that they were blessing whatever it is and say the forest was giving them fruit and all (1995).

Sam likened the ceremony to the "harvest," within the churches, and the feast of the orisha Okun,<sup>33</sup> god of fertility and harvest, in Orisha Worship. According to Sam these rituals, initiated by the blowing of a

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication, Johannes Wilbert.

<sup>33</sup> "Okò" in Yoruba tradition.

conch-shell, the sacred trumpet of the Warao, were "so magnificent and I believe that it was their sincerity to the forest and to all the different elements that there was that give it that feeling".

Orisha Worshipers, like Hindus, recognize La Divina Pastora within their own worship differently. Sam believes La Divina is an aspect of Ilç, the earth principal in Orisha Worship, an identity he feels is being lost. His experiences with the Warao, witnessing their rituals performed in the forests around Mt. Diablo, may have influenced his perceptions of the miraculous statue. La Divina, to him, is simply the "Lady of the Forest". He tells her origin story,

She lived in the forest. And when they found that saint, they found it in the forest. [How it got there] no one knows. Some people say it came with the Spanish and it was a Spanish saint. Some people say it was one of the mystery of saints and all this. There are many different stories attached to La Divina Pastora. When they brought it out of the forest, and they had it there and put it in the church, it went back into the forest. And they went back and looked for it, and all they found was the bush. And then the priest said, "We will build a shrine right here. . . . And it's a mystery how she went back into the forest, she did go back. And they decided to build a church around her. And this is the church that the Spaniards built".

The forest represented not the untamed wild that it did in Africa, but a place of freedom for the runaway African slave and the Amerindian. As Sam stated, when the Catholics carry the miraculous statue around the streets of Siparia in religious procession, it signifies "she coming out of the forest and returning back to the forest". Until the 1950s, the Warao regularly attended the Catholic procession, watching the miraculous statue carried out of the church, through the streets of Siparia, and back into her shrine.

Why did the Warao stop coming to Siparia? A 1970 paper quoted Ma Joachim as stating, "a Siparia policeman is reported to have shot a dog owned by a Juarajoon man. They considered it an omen and ill luck as the dog was their mascot, and they never returned to Siparia". According to Sam, during years of the second World War, a Colonel in Trinidad "caused problems" for the Warao, robbing them and "troubling them. A lot of Warrahoons stopped coming to Trinidad from that". The greatest impediment to the Warao pilgrimage, however, came in 1950 when the Venezuelan government imposed restrictions on travel to Trinidad in hopes of curbing a growing epidemic, and forbade the Warao to travel across the sea. A few Warao do still come into Trinidad, landing at Quinam and building a hut for shelter and staying for a few weeks or a few months. Others join fishermen from Erin for short peri-

ods of time. To most in Siparia, however, their disappearance remains as much a mystery as the appearance of the miraculous statue.

### **The miraculous state**

Extant records further cloud the mystery of La Divina Pastora in discussing the statue itself. In 1841 Fr. Poirier wrote, "I am going to dedicate my new church to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, because of the devotion that these people testify for this good mother. I will need a painting or a statue of the Holy Virgin" (Poirier 1995, 2:396). The Siparia church apparently had no recognizable statue of the Virgin Mary in 1837/1838. While this suggests strongly that the statue known today as the Siparia Saint did not exist until after 1838, it seems unlikely that a mission dedicated to La Divina Pastora did not have a statue of the Holy Virgin until this late date. Two other possibilities must not be dismissed. The miraculous statue today is only a bust carved of dark wood, and Fr. Poirier may not have recognized it as the Holy Virgin. On the other hand, numerous legends speak of the statue being hidden in the forest and returned later to the church, or taken to other churches to return on her own to Siparia. The miraculous statue may have been removed from Siparia at the coming of the British, disappearing as did the Warao. Fr. Massé supports this latter theory. He writes:

She was brought into Trinidad by the Spaniards. At a certain Easter, probably when they were obliged to leave Siparia, to save this Virgin from profanation the Spaniards hid her in the neighbouring forest where she was found later. She was taken back to the village and placed in a little church which was then built (Massé 1988, 2:245).

This places the miraculous statue in Siparia prior to 1802, and during the time of the Warao occupation of the mission. D. W. D. Comins writes that Capuchin monks brought the statue to Trinidad in 1730 while fleeing an Amerindian revolt in Venezuela, placing her in Siparia prior to the founding of the mission itself. As Mrs. Popo stated, "She never told them where she came from -- where was her father? Who was her mother? That was her secret".

In describing the statue in 1879, Fr. Massé writes, "It is a mother image. She holds on her left arm the infant Jesus who has the world globe in his hand" (Massé 1988, 2:245). His earlier entry, however, creates more confusion about the miraculous statue. Prior to his tenure as priest of Siparia, Fr. Massé was assigned temporarily to the Siparia in 1878 while the current priest, Fr. O'Hanlon, returned to Ireland for six months. Fr. Massé took it upon himself to make many changes in the

church, actions that Fr. O'Hanlon resented when he returned. Fr. Massé writes that on his return Fr. O'Hanlon

reclaims from me several things which have disappeared, among others two large pictures which a gust of wind threw down and smashed into pieces, and a black virgin which was in the sacristy but with which I do not know what has been done. This black virgin has a curious enough origin. Formerly she was white<sup>34</sup> but one day Abbe Kums<sup>35</sup> was celebrating a feast for the negroes. The idea occurred to him to paint the virgin black and to offer it for the veneration of the negroes a virgin of their colour (Massé 1988, 59-60).<sup>36</sup>

Fr. Massé's comments are puzzling for multiple reasons. The statue today is created from the African cedar, a dark reddish color wood. Because only her painted face and hands show when she is dressed, Fr. Massé may have assumed she was half-white, and therefore needed to be painted dark in order to appear black. He fails to describe her as a bust, though he may have been familiar with similar imagery and did not feel it necessary to note this.

Fr. Massé's diaries prove most enigmatic, however, by stating that the Dark Virgin disappeared from the sacristy while presumably a statue of the Virgin Mary, never described as black, stood on her altar. Throughout his diary, including the period during which he resided as priest of Siparia, Fr. Massé makes no further mention of the Dark Madonna. Moreover, Fr. O'Hanlon's concern with the disappearance of the black virgin suggests she was of some importance.<sup>37</sup>

Parishioners today do not consider her black. Her face and hands are painted a dark copper color which gives her an Amerindian or East Indian appearance. A plaster of paris covering is smoothed over her face prior to painting, giving the face the appearance that it has been molded, not carved.<sup>38</sup> In fact, one informant became quite agitated whenever I used the word "carved," always correcting me by insisting

<sup>34</sup> The Rézeaus use the term "blanche mais".

<sup>35</sup> Fr. Kums, the predecessor of O'Hanlon, died of smallpox. His name is also spelled Kunes.

<sup>36</sup> Massé 1995, 2:14-15.

<sup>37</sup> Fr. Massé never hides the fact that he disliked Fr. O'Hanlon. European prejudices emerged in Trinidad, here the French (and more specifically, Breton) distrust of the English is magnified by Massé's contention that the Irish held all the worse traits of the British. Massé, furthermore, felt O'Hanlon was becoming senile.

<sup>38</sup> Niehoff and Niehoff, in refuting previous arguments that her dark color resulted from the oxidation of the original paint, state that she has never been painted and insist the darkness is her original color (see Niehoff and Niehoff, 153-156).

that the statue has "features no man could make". The women who paint and dress the statue, primarily African descendants and all members of the Catholic church, cite her high cheekbones and real black hair as giving her the appearance of being East Indian or Amerindian, and they paint her accordingly. The statue itself is actually a bust, standing about two-and-a-half feet high. She has arms which are jointed at the elbows and the wrists, allowing her to be dressed easily. Her neck is jointed, also, allowing it to turn freely. Someone in the past, however, nailed the neck so that it no longer moves. They also cut her long black hair. No one at the church remembers when or why they did so. Nor does anyone remember there ever being a second statue, one dark and one light. Perhaps at one time there were two sisters. And perhaps to the Warao, the sisters were *Bisi*, the canoe carved from the red cachicamo tree, and *Babe*, the paddle carved from the white cachicamo tree. The Mother of the Forest may well live in Siparia, Trinidad, at least as a remembrance.

Understanding the latent and manifest connections between the Warao and the miraculous statue of Siparia demands a thorough comprehension of each through time and space, an understanding that will never be completely known. Travelers to Siparia must have witnessed Warao ritual on their journey. Seeing these rituals on their pilgrimages, encountering the carved trees in the middle of the forest, or hearing legends of the supernatural power of the Warao influenced their own perceptions of the Siparia saint. The Warao's continued presence in Siparia further enhanced this. Others knew Warao ritual firsthand, as family and friends.

Multiple reasons exist for the pilgrimages to Siparia, which were already well-established by the 1870s. Each European, slave, and indentured servant brought with them their own sacred narratives, and saw within the miraculous statue of Siparia an identifiable image. Yet why this image? During the days of slavery and indentureship, the desire to return home reigned in the hearts of Trinidadians. For the slave and the indentured servant, returning home meant freedom, and pilgrimaging to Siparia re-enacted that journey. If the desire to be free underscored the devotions to La Divina Pastora/Suparee Mai, the perceptions of the Warao as free and powerful intensified the need to pilgrimage. Today, freedom for many signifies being Trinidadian, not subjects of a colonial power. Identification of La Divina Pastora/Suparee Mai as Warao, and as "the mother" of all, links the lives of her worshipers to the ancestral people of Trinidad. Through narrative, the miraculous statue of Siparia retains her familial connections across the sea, and acts as a continual reminder of the past, a past forever entwined with the Warao.

## **Abstract**

*In 1759 the Capuchins established a mission dedicated to La Divina Pastora at Siparia, Trinidad, to Christianize the Warao from across the sea in Venezuela. Today, a miraculous statue stands in the Catholic church which embodies the history of the people of Trinidad stands in the Catholic church. Hindus pilgrimage to the church on Holy Thursday night; Catholics carry the statue in procession three weeks later; and Orisha worshipers manifest her in ritual possession. Many residents of Siparia assert that the miraculous statue is Warao. The Warao inhabited the Siparia mission until the coming of the British in 1802, and continued to live in the surrounding forest until the 1950s. A few remember the Warao not only as traders, but also as people who performed their own rituals in the high wood of southern Trinidad. Nineteenth century documents corroborate their presence in the area while romanticism enveloped them in a sense of mystery which augmented belief in the miraculous statue. Today, La Divina Pastora and the Warao retain their ties in narratives. The Haburi myth, the folk narrative of Bisi and Babe, and origin narratives of the miraculous statue have established and continually recreate the familial connection between the people of Siparia and the Warao of the Orinoco Delta. The miraculous statue embodies the history of the people of Trinidad; a history which includes the Warao of Venezuela.*

## **Resumen**

*En el año 1759 los Capuchinos establecieron una misión dedicada a la Divina Pastora, en Siparia, Trinidad, para evangelizar a los Warao del otro lado del mar en Venezuela. Hoy existe una estatua milagrosa ubicada en una iglesia católica que forma parte de la devoción cristiana del pueblo Trinitario. Los Hindú hacen peregrinaciones a la iglesia durante la noche del Jueves Santo y, los católicos, tres semanas después, llevan la misma estatua en procesión. Los creyentes Orisha la tienen como símbolo posesivo en sus rituales. Los Warao habitaban la misión de Siparia hasta la llegada de los Ingleses en el año de 1802, y continuaron viviendo en el bosque adyacente hasta los años 50. Algunos recuerdan a los Warao no sólo como mercaderes, sino también como un pueblo que practicaba sus propios ritos en el alto bosque al sur de Trinidad. Documentos del siglo XIX corroboran su presencia en la zona mientras que el romanticismo los envolvió en una aureola de misterio que aumentó la creencia en la estatua milagrosa. Hoy la Divina Pastora y los Warao mantienen sus vínculos a través de las narraciones de éstos. El mito de Haburi, la narración de Babe y Bisi, y los cuentos del origen de la estatua milagrosa han establecido y recrean continuamente el vínculo entre la gente de Siparia y los Warao del Delta del Orinoco. La estatua milagrosa envuelve la historia de la gente de Trinidad. Es una historia que incluye a los Warao de Venezuela.*

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## Appendix

The following are a few of the many narratives telling the origins of the miraculous statue of Siparia, in addition to the stories told within this text. Each narrative reflects the influence, both culturally and individually, of its narrator. Written texts often influence the popularity of certain narratives, which were "written" because they were already prominent in the oral tradition. Included with some of the narratives I collected between 1993 and 1995 are stories printed in two newspaper articles, one of which was then reprinted in a local pamphlet honoring

the Siparia fête. I have also include a selection from a dramatization of the legends of La Divina Pastora, written and performed locally in Siparia.

(1) Written by Len. Reason, the "Saga of Siparia" dramatizes the discovery of the miraculous statue of Siparia, while admitting that "The real facts will never be brought to light, but we will continue to reflect on the stories we have". The opening narration, set in the "middle of the 18th Century," begins as "a group of Amerindians from Venezuela gather on the beach called Quinam near Siparia, and prepare to conduct a search for a missing idol of worship. But, before they began that search for Quinam Beach, it is traditional for them to dance to their gods, so that the gods may assist them in their difficult task". After a dance, the narrator continues:

This group of Amerindians suspect that another group from Venezuela, the Warrahoons (Juarajuns) have taken their statue, but no matter how they search the beach and the banks of the Quinam River, they cannot find anything. Before they depart in their canoes, they do another dance in appeasement of their gods.

*The second dance is performed.*

Now, no one knows for sure, but some time later, somehow, a group of Roman Catholic Missionaries, known as the Capuchins (who had settled in the area now known as Siparia) discovered a statue in the shape of the head and shoulders of a beautiful lady. They found it somewhere near Quinam Beach. The Capuchin Missionaries, it is said, had enlisted the aid of the Warrahoons who often settled there. The Capuchins waved goodbye to the Warrahoons as they set off on their return journey to Venezuela and wait patiently while their parishioners do a Work Dance before carrying the statue off to their Mission.

(2) In a pamphlet celebrating the Siparia fête, the Catholic celebrations for the Good Shepherdess, Theresa Noel cites a 1964 article in the Daily Mirror:

A Spanish woman while weeding her dasheen plots on the spot where La Divina Pastora Church now stands, accidentally chipped a doll-sized statue which lay hidden in the sand. It was Good Friday.<sup>41</sup> Blood oozed from the cut and the woman attended to the wound. But to her surprise by midday, the statue had changed into a beautiful girl. By evening it was an old woman. The news spread, a cottage was built, and "Soparee Mai" was established but not before attempts to have her re-

moved to St. Joseph, the then capital of Trinidad failed. Soparee Mai would reappear at Siparia each time she was removed to St. Joseph (3/28/1964; cited in T. Noel 1984, 5-6).

(3) A 1981 article in the *San Fernando Express* states that the apparition of Suparee Mai (the Hindu name for La Divina Pastora) occurred in the nineteenth century. East Indians were first brought to Trinidad as indentured servants in the nineteenth century.

The location was covered with wild flowers and shrubs and the soil was sandy. Hindus claim that they saw a baby one early morning wandering among the wild flowers. By noon the child had grown into a lovely young lady and when the sun went down in the west an old lady was frequenting the site. She grew with the day.

The Hindus who believe in the appearances of deities accept the presence of the Divine mother and consider themselves blessed to have seen the goddess.

But soon word leaked out to the higher authorities and efforts were made by the owners of the plantation to capture the mysterious lady. It is said that they approached the babe one day and she disappeared, never to be seen again.

And so each year Hindus continue to seek the goddess whom they believe still resides there but can only be seen by religious and devoted people.

(4) In 1994, Curtis Reefer of Siparia tried to remember stories from his grandmother, who used to be around the Warrahoons (Warao). His grandmother believed the statue was Warragoon. She died at the age of 97, 35 years before. As a young person he remembers that the Warrahoons came to worship her.

"She was a trade. They had to bring something just like everybody else, so they brought the statue here. That's another story that I heard . . . Then, again, that's a possibility, if they're coming here to trade. They used to come to the town of Siparia to get supplies".

(5)Tantie Myda, a Spanish lady in her eighties who once lived with a Warao man, related the following.

Plenty of people came there and they pray for when they was in trouble and they get through. Indians, Creole, and they told me, they say, "I got through to La Divina". I say, well, "She's a living saint. You see a statue there, but she's a living saint. They say she had three sisters. One used to be down so, in Arima. And one of them in Venezuela. There's three".

(6) Ma Lexia lived to be in her late 90s. She was ill in 1994 when I recorded this narrative, and passed away before I returned the following year. She grew up in Siparia and remembers the Warao coming to her house. Her grandmother spoke their language. During this taping her daughter, Mrs. Bacchus, and son-in-law by another daughter, Mr. Garroway, were present. The following is selected parts of that conversation.

MA LEXIA: "She was really somebody. She was people. She was a real lady, before they took her from Quinam Beach -- two men in a boat. She was a big, big stone inside the sea, on top the sea. And they pick her up and they bring her. She never talk, you know, but she watching you".

*The conversation turned to other subjects, but Ma Lexia kept returning to her story.*

MA LEXIA: "When they get her at Quinam Beach, she was a big, big rock inside the sea. And the people was fishing in a boat and they saw her standing. So the man said, look at the lady on top the rock".

MRS. BACCHUS: "My grandfather was always talking. They had a carat church. First carat church and the saint appeared and she was on a spot there where they had a lot of bush (cousin-maho, stickers). I can remember the church. He said they found her on that spot and they took her to the church and she stood there. They put food and things for her. So when they got up and went to church, she was not there. She was right back on the spot where she was. She went back there. So they took her back to the same church and it was always the same. She was always a-moving. She never stayed in the church. So they took her from here and carried her to the Oropouche church. But she didn't ever stay there either. And they didn't see her again until they find the statue in Quinam. They found the statue, not the person. She was a real person".

MR GARROWAY: "You mean, when she was in the carat church in Siparia, she was a small person there?"

MRS. BACCHUS: "They say it was a person, it was a real person. It wasn't a statue. It would open its eyes but she never talked. If you talked she wouldn't answer. But she moved from the church back to where they had took her".

(7) During Good Friday 1995, Beté, an older Hindu woman, recalled the story her mother told her. While some Hindu religious leaders call the devotions to Suparee Mai heresy, the East Indian people continue to pilgrimage to Siparia. Hindus, like most in Trinidad, believe in one God, though he might be called by different names. What outsiders perceive as deities, Krishna, Kali, Durga, Lakshmi, etc., are merely aspects of this one God. Jesus Christ is another aspect of the same God. Therefore, pilgrims to Siparia may be devoted Hindus and still worship their one God in the "Christian way".

"They would come and bathe in the river. And they would come and make the offering. And then they would beat drum and they would sing whole night and they would cook food and they would dance and thing. And they would put her with that thing they call the sari. Not a dress. She didn't have no dress. In those days now, the Indians [Hindus] and them, they have her. My mama say the Catholic people, the Spanish people, the Catholic people take she over. And then they started preparing -- they had church now -- and they started give her dress. And they take off the sari and putting on a dress. The Hindu people, then the Catholic come and the English people take her over then from the Hindu people so they started give her dress. They had changed, different. But she told me she is a very true saint. They say when the people come they started drinking rum and they come in drunk. And he want to see if she's a woman or a man and he lift up she dress. And she get vex. She don't like that. So they start to keep her unclean. And she leave the church and she go into the forest. And as the days come, she would come in the morning. She would come as a child. The lunchtime she come in as a full person. And then in the evening she d come in old. And then in the night she'd come in an old woman. It's a very true thing they say they seeing. And when the people coming, and when they coming to see her they have sari, the Hindu people. They never eat meat. They fasting. They eat no salt. When they started coming in the church, they coming in and soil her, you know. So she leave and gone into the forest. And then she leave and go to St. Benedict's, which is clean and nice. She told me that".

(8) A young Hindu pundit grew up in Siparia related this in 1995.

"What I ve heard, she came from -- nobody knew about where she came from. She was a short girl. If you used to have disease and problems she'd come and cure them. She'd go about curing people and one day she left. Why she left, I didn't know why she left. Nobody ever saw her again. Something she did and somebody chased her with a broom".

(9) This version from a Hindu pilgrim on Holy Thursday 1995 states that she has two sisters. This time, however, one sister is at Mount St.

Benedicts, a monastery in northern Trinidad high upon a hillside. Hindus also pilgrimage to Mount St. Benedicts, and profess that Suparee Mai (the miraculous statue) can be seen there. The narrator is a Hindu woman, but said "I love praying in the Christian way". She stated that she was born on Christmas day, "like the Lord Jesus".

"Well, I hear she appear here, right. Like a real person, a saint, an angel. She used to turn a babe and then in the evening she used to turn an old, old lady. And during the middle of the time she turn young. Well, the people wanted to touch her. People, they passed, you know. Wicked people seeing this girl and they wanted to touch her and she did not let them. And she appeared gone. But she has two sisters, one in St. Benedict's and one where she is here.

*Our conversation continued, eventually returning to her origins*

"Well, this was not a church at the time. It was just a little place, a carat church. And the saint appeared. People seen her and they come and seen her. And they asked for things like ...I don't know, whatever they want. And their troubles, and they say 'Help me and help me'. And they pray and ask and they get everything. And they make their offering and they get results. The Lord sent her here to do work for people, so people would get help. She's like a mother to everybody. She come natural like me and you. But she come to do spiritual work, but people they passed. When they come in they hit she with a broom. They touch she. They want to touch she. You can't touch. So then you don't see her. She come old, old, old, old. Pretty, but old. When you come again you see her in a baby cradle rocking. That's so sweet. Every day she would change different. Different with the day. You see people now, they find she been a young person, they want to touch her. But, no, you can't do that. The Lord sent her to do she job. But them don't know that and they want to touch her. She get angry, disturbed. 'I will go'. She didn't tell you. She disappeared. But she does come, in all different way. She does come. Every day she here -- her spirit, she come here. But she don't come back as a people like you. You know why, because people are wicked".

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University of California at Los Angeles  
Folklore and Mythology Program  
1037 Public Policy Bldg.  
Los Angeles CA 90049-6249

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