South Indian and Spanish Virgins: Reclaiming the Goddess

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Abstract

The Hindu Fire-walking Festival celebrated annually in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), a province of South Africa, preserves the ritual and mythology of Draupadi, one of the ancient female *Amman* (Mother) deities of south India. The veneration of these powerful virgin goddesses is one of the most popular aspects of South African Hindu worship brought to KZN by the early Tamil indentured labourers from 1860 onwards. Many features of this festival bear striking resemblances to the Easter processions of the Virgin Mary of the Roman Catholic tradition in Málaga, Spain. A comparison of the characteristics and rituals of these two much venerated female figures reveals their perceived power to protect and ensure the wellbeing of their devotees and their virginal status, however differently envisioned, is believed to enhance their spiritual power. In addition to this, the processions share the emphasis on austerities undertaken to demonstrate devotees' devotion; and the association of both female figures with new life, fertility and spiritual regeneration. Their annual processions also have an educational function in transmitting knowledge of mythology and ritual from one generation to the next. Female figures have been used in patriarchal religious traditions to control and manipulate women into compliance. We believe that the powerful, autonomous figure of Draupadi already has the potential to become a liberating model for women. Although the Spanish Virgins are not as yet perceived as empowering in any truly feminist sense, if popular Roman Catholic sentiment could reclaim the pre-Christian, and probably pre-patriarchal, concept of 'virgin' as meaning 'independent of male control' - a model conceived for and by women - then the patriarchal hegemony of Catholicism could be undermined.

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Introduction

In this paper, we attempt a comparison of the rituals and function of the south Indian *Amman* Goddess, Draupadi, with those of the Virgins of the Spanish city of Málaga during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). We then consider this comparative material from a feminist standpoint, exploring the possible influence of the visualization of the images of Draupadi and the Virgins on gender identity and on the empowerment of women. Criticisms that we offer about traditional ways of conceptualising 'the female' in both traditions arise not from hostility to either Hinduism or Catholicism. On the contrary, it is from a profound interest in, and respect for, the rich symbolism and enduring power of these religious systems in which the Goddess and the Virgin have played, and will continue to play, such pivotal roles. The paper is divided into four sections: in the first two we present the data on Draupadi and the Virgins before moving on to some tentative comparisons in the third section and, finally, we conclude by placing the comparative material within a broader hermeneutic framework.[1]

South Indian Virgins

Draupadi, the Mother of Fire, is one of the south Indian *Amman* (meaning "mother") goddesses brought to South Africa by early Tamil settlers from 1860 onwards and remains very popular today. These ancient and vibrant female deities have been regarded as being responsible for the well being of humans, animals and nature. She is revered as the great Mother Earth, who gave birth to all life, and to whom all will eventually return. These deities, who are often referred to as "folk" or "village" goddesses, are regarded as guardians of the villages and are usually depicted as married to the villagers, presiding over the destiny of all the inhabitants. Although they are often feared as the cause of diseases and natural disasters, and easily angered, they are also revered as the great fertile, nurturing Mother Earth, both creator and destroyer (Brubaker 1983; Kinsley 1986: 197). The worship of these Dravidian mother goddesses is one of the most ancient forms of religion with roots tapping into some of the earliest manifestations of human spiritual experience.

Draupadi's origin is in the great classical work, the *Mahabharata*, one of the two great Hindu epics dating from approximately the second century BCE. Both epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are enormously popular and have had a profound influence on Indian religious life. The *Mahabharata* is a dramatic tale of fortunes lost and won, of treachery and faithfulness, of defeat and final victory and vindication. Like Helen of Troy, Draupadi, its heroine, is a woman regarded by many men as a great prize, a valuable object to be competed for and squabbled over, who becomes the central reason for internecine conflict bringing about disorder (*adharma*) and devastation to society. Draupadi was the daughter of King Drupada, born from the sacrificial fire, a portent of her future

significance. Later she became the devoted wife of the five Pandava brothers, showing herself to be a strong, spirited, and outspoken woman. When the treachery of their relatives, the Kauravas, caused her family to lose their inheritance and condemned them to years of exile in the forest, she courageously devoted herself to their welfare. She was subjected to numerous attempts by men to seduce and vilify her but her religious faith and purity brought her safely through these ordeals. The most significant of these incidents was when Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava brother, had her dragged by her long hair into the men's court where, in front of a crowd of men, he attempted to strip off her sari. Draupadi's desperate appeals to the god Krishna resulted in his miracle of the endless garment which could not be removed. This incident is pivotal in the narrative as it is regarded as justification for the internecine war and bloody carnage that followed. Draupadi, in her anger vowed revenge, pledging not to retie her hair until she had washed it in the blood of her enemies. This eventually happened at the great battle of Kurukshetra where Draupadi and her family achieved victory and exoneration with the eldest Pandava, Yudhisthira, ascending the throne with Draupadi as his queen. The Sanskrit *Mahabharata* presents Draupadi as a human woman, but a Tamil version of the epic dating to c.1400 CE, includes additions which relate her apotheosis to the powerful Mother Goddess of Fire and her annexation to the south Indian *Amman* tradition (Hiltebeitel 1988). The Tamil version recounts how when she was eventually vindicated, she demonstrated her faithfulness and purity by walking unscathed across a pit of burning coals. Draupadi's odyssey can be viewed as a quest for spiritual perfection where, after enduring and overcoming various indignities and sufferings, she finally achieves victory over her adversaries, and with it, purification and sanctification. Ultimately, her ordeal of walking through fire confirms and seals her divine nature, transforming her into a goddess worthy of the worship of her devotees who must imitate her faithfulness and virtue.

In the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the Draupadi fire-walking festival consists of many richly symbolic rituals re-enacting the central features of her mythology. For ten or eighteen days (depending on the decision of the temple committee) devotees participate in various rituals and dramas recapitulating aspects of Draupadi's story, which climax in the fire-walking ritual where a crowd of worshippers walk barefoot through the pit of coals. The Goddess is believed to precede them across the fire, protecting the faithful, so they will emerge unharmed and in a new healthy state that will benefit the entire worshipping community. This idea of rebirth from fire is a common theme in Hinduism (Diesel 1990: 1994). The decision to participate in the fire-walking ceremony involves the taking of vows. Individuals vow on their own, or another's behalf, that if illness or misfortune is averted or overcome they, or the person for whom the vow was taken, will walk across the fire for a specified number of times. The breaking of a vow is believed to result in dire consequences.

Another prominent feature of Tamil festivals in KZN, and particularly the Draupadi festival, is possession trances where certain devotees believe themselves to be possessed or overshadowed by a particular deity who bestows divine powers on them, such as being able to act as oracles, and to heal. In this state people adopt the characteristics associated with the possessing deity, so that very often women possessed by one of the fierce goddesses behave in wild, uncontrolled, and assertive ways, generally regarded as unacceptable for women in traditional Hindu society. Many devotees also demonstrate their devotion to the Goddess by undergoing austerities such as having needles pushed through their cheeks and tongues, and hooks, with orange marigold flowers and limes suspended from them, hung in rows across their chests and backs.

Like most Tamil religious festivals, the Draupadi fire-walking festival commences on the first evening with a flaghoisting ceremony marking the beginning of the festival period. All south Indian temples have a flagpole outside the front where the flag, bearing the symbol of the relevant deity, is raised at the beginning of the festival in their honour. The emblem, or "vehicle", of the *Amman* goddesses is a lion or tiger, one of the fierce cats associated with strong, independent goddesses, both in the Hindu and other traditions. This occasion is the first time in the year that the brightly decorated image of the Goddess, carried on a palanquin and covered by a large umbrella, is brought out of her sanctuary to begin the round of activities that constitute her annual festival. Like a royal personage embarking on a campaign, she sets out to display herself to her subjects and reclaim their allegiance. Some temples have images of Draupadi which include a wig of long hair that hangs down on either side of her shoulders as a reminder of the central episode in her mythology when she was severely humiliated and dragged by her hair into the Kaurava men's court. Accompanied by a crowd of devotees, the priest and temple officials bearing her traditional weapons (a sword and trident), she is carried round the temple and the fire-pit before being placed facing the flagpole. The flag with the lion painted against a white background is raised to the accompaniment of loud drumming and chanting by the crowd. At various times during these proceedings individual devotees experience possession trances, swaying, dancing, and swirling rhythmically. Some temple congregations process with the image of Draupadi round various Indian suburbs during one of the weekends of the festival to allow a maximum number of people to experience a sighting of her. This is in accordance with the Hindu concept of *darshan*, meaning to see and be seen by a deity or holy personage, which is believed to bring spiritual benefits. These processions are reminiscent of Draupadi's vindication wrought by the Pandava victory at Kuruksetra that is acted out in the ritual and drama of her festival.

The flag raising ceremony often involves the tying of turmeric-dyed wristlets to all festival participants: a device for focusing devotees' minds on their commitment to the festival, as well as sign of their purity. Turmeric's yellow colour is

a reminder of the saffron associated with royalty, and so with the status of the goddess, and is also used for purificatory purposes particularly in the bathing of brides. During the days preceding the fire-walking devotees attempt to attain a state of ritual purity by observing a fast which involves a purely vegetarian diet, avoidance of alcohol, as well as sexual abstinence. The *kalsam* ("pots") ceremony involves filling large brass vessels with milk or water, which are decorated by having coconuts placed over their mouths and conical bamboo frames decorated with marigolds constructed over them. These are also sometimes called *karakam* and are believed to be representations of the Goddess herself. These ritual pots are carried on the heads of the first devotees to cross the fire, symbolising the Goddess crossing the pit ahead of her worshippers.[2] Some temples perform a *navadhanya* ("nine grains") ritual where nine different grains or beans are sown in a tray and allowed to sprout in the temple before being disposed of at the end of the festival. The healthy sprouting of the grains can be seen as the promise of a successful festival, followed by a good and prosperous year for all involved.[3]

An important aspect of the traditional Draupadi festival, still maintained in India, but almost a thing of the past in South Africa, is the performance of a cycle of dramas covering the central episodes of the Draupadi mythology from the Tamil *Mahabharata*. They are known as *Terukkuttu*, meaning "street drama". The origin of these dramas can be traced to approximately 1600 CE (Hiltebeitel 1988). Many temples in India perform a series of eighteen plays (over as many nights) that culminate on the final night before fire-walking with the drama entitled "Eighteenth Day War" dealing with the death of Draupadi's tormentor, Duryodhana, and thus her victory and vindication. The centre-piece of the cycle is "Dice Match and Disrobing" depicting the incident of Draupadi's humiliation and attempted seduction in the Kaurava court (ibid.). The final night's drama includes the fulfillment of Draupadi's vow of revenge on her and her family's enemies, and as she stands on the fallen body of Duryodhana, she reties her loose hair into its bun (*kuntal*). Simultaneously, the women in the temple are given the signal to tie up the hair on the image of the Goddess, thus depicting her cleansing from the indignity of having been seen by males with her hair loose in public - a terrible violation and insult for a traditional Hindu woman. The impact of the dramas are heightened by the fact that they are performed at night, outdoors in the temple precincts and end at about daybreak (Diesel 1994). Like the medieval "miracle plays" in the Christian tradition, these dramas have helped to transmit knowledge of the background mythology to generations of largely illiterate people.

The fire-walk, the climax of the festival, always takes place on a holiday, such as Sunday or Easter Friday, so people are free to spend the entire day participating in the various rituals. Thousands of devout, or simply curious, onlookers are attracted to the temples, where a carnival-like atmosphere prevails, with

devotees circumambulating the temple with trays of offerings of fruit, milk and camphor. There are also stalls selling food, religious books and pictures as well as prayer items. On fire-walking day, the pit in front of the temple is blessed by the priest performing a *havan* fire ritual and a small pyre of wood is then lit from the fire on the priest's tray so that, symbolically, this is a sacrificial fire where devotees will offer themselves to the Goddess. Wood is then piled up to make a larger and larger pyre, with flames leaping metres into the air. A procession headed by drummers, followed by three or four "chariots" decorated with garlands of flowers and pictures and images of deities, and accompanied by crowds of devotees, makes its way to a nearby stream where participants perform a ritual washing. Most male participants wear *dhotis*, thin coloured cloths around their waists which leave them naked from the waist up, whereas women either wear saris or more western type clothes. The preferred colours are red and yellow, both considered auspicious in Hindu tradition. There is usually a couple of hours between the washing and the formation of the final procession to the temple during which people form into family groups where participants are prepared for the final ritual. A band of musicians, consisting of drummers, cymbal players, and singers, moves round among the groups, and the rhythm of the drumming, together with the chanting of religious songs, is the cue for many to enter into the trance state. Some devotees are then "pinned" with skewers and hooks, and have garlands of marigolds thrown round their necks (Diesel 1994: 1998a).

Eventually, in the late afternoon, the temple officials announce that the fire is ready and the procession forms to make its way to the firepit. Drums are beaten with renewed vigour, those with *karakam* decorated pots lift them onto their heads, and the chariots drawn by men with ropes attached to hooks in their backs take their places at the front of the procession. For the entire distance of about half a kilometre to the temple, the road is lined with parked cars and thousands of spectators. Simply to witness the colourful, noisy procession of deities, and possessed devotees swaying and dancing, is considered to be a *darshan*, bestowing blessing on the faithful. At various points along the road the procession is halted by people, mainly women, placing burning camphor across its path and requesting blessings from the participants. Babies and young children are hoisted onto shoulders so as to be included in the blessings. Marigold petals are thrown over participants. At the crossroads, women wielding buckets of turmeric and water splash the road to purify it and cut limes into quarters to scatter in the four directions to dispel evil demons that may have been attracted by the attention being bestowed on the Goddess. The whole atmosphere is charged with intense religious fervor. At the last crossroads before the temple, the image of Draupadi which has been carried out to meet the procession is held high so that all can see her. Devotees report that her eyes sparkle as she encourages them onwards towards the fire. She then precedes the procession into the temple grounds and is seated on the far side of the pit to watch and protect her faithful as they

cross the coals towards her. Tradition claims she spreads her miraculous sari over the coals to cool them so that they feel like a "bed of flowers" (Diesel 1998).

The tightly packed crowd in the temple grounds cheers the devotees on. At the edge of the pit the congestion is intense. Temple officials carrying the official *karakam* pots are the first to cross the fire. The rest of the devotees follow one at a time. It takes nine or ten steps to cross. Most people run across as quickly as possible, their feet sinking into the intensely hot ash; others walk slowly, palms of hands pressed together prayerfully. For many it appears to be a considerable ordeal, and some seem on the verge of collapse on reaching the far side to prostrate themselves before the Goddess. The crowd claps and cheers encouragement, chanting "Aum, Shanti! Aum, Shanti!" (Diesel 1990: 1998).[4] Finally, all the participants make their way to the temple to offer thanks for an ordeal safely accomplished. The Goddess is again processed round the temple and returned to her sanctuary within. Some people return to the still extremely hot fire-pit, prostrate themselves at the edge, and scoop up some of the ash to take home with them as this is believed to be particularly holy and to have powerful curative properties (Diesel 1990: 1998). Through the performance of this ritual the Goddess' victory over the demons of evil and chaos is reenacted and she has led her devotees across the fire, protecting those with faith, so that a new harmonious state can prevail. The passage through fire is symbolic of the purification and transformation of individuals and communities. Two evenings after the fire-walk, the flag lowering ceremony brings the festival period to a close. The rituals which began within the temple, and moved outwards to the wider community, come full circle back to the temple. The Goddess has completed her annual round of appearances in her community, making her colourful and powerful presence felt among her devotees.

The Draupadi mythology is typical of that of many *Amman* goddesses which relate the suffering of hosts of women exploited, insulted, betrayed, raped and killed by men (Kinsley 1986: 200-4). These unjustly treated and righteously angry women drew strength from their purity and determination, and gained victory over male treachery and violence, eventually bringing healing to their communities. Many tales record these human women being elevated to divine status, so demonstrating the ultimate victory of women's strength. This is a textual tradition which gives centre stage to women's experience of injustice, suffering and vindication. Hindu goddesses fall into two categories: consort goddesses who are largely dependent on males for their identity (such as Sarasvati, wife of Brahma, and Laxshmi, wife of Vishnu) and are generally benign, gentle and subservient; and independent, 'virgin' goddesses, such as Kali and the *Amman* deities, free of all male control and characterised by their autonomous strength and challenge to patriarchal norms. The term 'virgin' used to describe these female deities (as well as numerous goddesses of the ancient world, such as Athena, Artemis, Ishtar, Isis) does not mean sexual inexperience or inactivity, but refers to their autonomous state, undefined

by any sexual relationship with men. Harding says of such a virgin, she: "belongs to herself alone, she is one-in-herself' (1982: 103).[5]

It is consort goddesses, particularly Sita the wife of Rama of the *Ramayana*, who are held up as role models of ideal, selfless and submissive wives, in a culture obsessed with marriage. Recently, however, Gupta has suggested a break with this tradition by viewing the fearsome and powerful Kali as "the personified wrath of all women in all cultures", and "a source of social and spiritual liberation for all women and men" (Gupta 1991: 31, 15). Draupadi too has the potential to be reclaimed as a determined, courageously outspoken Amazon-like matriarch with whom women can identify in their suffering inflicted by male domination and in their bid to subvert patriarchal hegemony (Diesel 2002: 13).

Spanish Virgins

The intense devotion to the Virgin Mary in Spain is well known. The Virgin of Pilar in Zaragoza is one of the country's divine patrons (along with St. Theresa and St. James) and the black Madonna of Montserrat (*La Moreneta*) has been a site of continuous pilgrimage for centuries. There is hardly a *pueblo* (village) or even *barrio* (suburb) without a church or special shrine dedicated to the Virgin, as Christian's study (1972) of the communities in a mountainous valley in northern Spain demonstrated. However, it is in southern Spain, especially in the province of Andalucía, that devotion to the Virgin reaches cultic proportions, evident, for example, during the elaborate processions of *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) in major cities like Sevilla, Granada and Málaga. In 2001, during *Semana Santa* in Málaga, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, there were 41 processions, featuring 78 *tronos* (biers or floats), carried by about 10,000 men from all sectors of Malagan society.[6] Women did not carry the floats but participated in the processions as costumed *nazarenos* or black-clad penitents.

Each day of the week had a different theme as the story of Christ's passion, death and resurrection was publicly dramatized. For example, on Palm Sunday, one of the floats (*Humildad*) featured statues of Christ and Pilate, in full Roman toga, accompanied by a superbly dressed statue of a Roman soldier; whereas on the Monday of Holy Week, a solitary statue of a bound Christ (*Cautivo*), was carried through the streets by one of the *cofradías* or brotherhoods.[7] Other themes included the arrest in the garden of Gethsemane (featuring statues of Peter, John, James and Judas, as well as Roman soldiers and real trees), the Last Supper and, of course, the Crucifixion.

However, of relevance to this paper is the fact that almost every float depicting an episode in Christ's passion [8] was followed by an impressive Virgin with names foregrounding her suffering ('Our Lady of Sorrows')[9] solitude,[10] compassion ('Our Lady of Mercy'; 'Our Lady of Pity'), her salvific influence ('Our Lady of New Hope', 'Our Lady of Salvation'), her cosmic powers ('Our Lady of the

Star'; 'Our Lady of Great Power') and her association with natural symbols ('Most Holy Mary of the Dove', 'Most Holy Mary of the Dew').[11] To describe the glittering array of Virgins, floats and processions during the week would be impossible. The following description, however, attempts to convey the structure and atmosphere of one such procession in a Málaga *barrio* (suburb). The ritual structure of the procession was almost identical in every case.

In this *barrio*, a crowd began to line the streets at 4.30pm. The balconies of the nineteenth century apartment blocks, which were draped with the somber purple of Passion-tide, were also packed with spectators, some of whom carried bags of rose petals with which to shower the Virgin as she was carried past.[12] A drum roll announced the arrival of the band (composed mostly of high-school children), who began to assemble at head of the street and play the introductory bars of one of the solemn marches which accompany all Holy Week processions. Suddenly, a hush fell on the street. The *nazarenos*, dressed in long, dark green robes with masks and tall, pointed hoods (reminiscent of the hoods worn by victims of the Inquisition), began to group themselves in processional order. Interspersed amongst them were crucifers and candle-bearers, in richly brocaded vestments, and thurifers lustily swinging their thuribles, from which clouds of sweet-smelling incense drifted above the crowd. A man alongside us lifted up his young daughter, who was dressed exactly like a *nazareno* (veiled but without the hood), to greet her mother who was in the procession. The great doors of the *templo* (the shrine-like garage where the float, costumes and processional regalia are stored) began to swing open; the music became more stirring as the band played the Spanish national anthem, and the first float, that of Christ before Pilate, slowly emerged, swaying gently, as the 180 male bearers, robed in green and white, began the long march which would last until the early hours of the morning. Sporadic clapping and then a respectful silence greeted the appearance of the life-like statue of Christ, clad in purple and gold, his bowed head framed by the three golden flames, symbolic of the trinity. Behind the float walked a group of women, dressed in black and wearing the mantilla and traditional *peineta* (high comb) on their heads. One was barefoot, another blindfolded, like some of the male bearers, thus publicly atoning for their sins. The procession began to move very slowly in time to the music; the ringing of a silver bell signaled to the bearers that they could rest; the bell rang again and the float was heaved above their heads.

Cofradías could be fined, we were told, if they did not adhere strictly to the published timetable for processions. There were five others in the city that evening and all of them had to have a chance to parade down the main boulevard, lined with seated dignitaries. Then the moment for which all had been waiting: the emergence of the Virgin. An ornate silver *trono*, in exuberant Baroque style,[13] adorned with cherubs, lamps, candles, fresh pink flowers and white wax petals, was slowly carried out of the *templo* by 250 male bearers, moving slowly in time. (Each bearer has to carry 50 kilograms or so and many display the resultant bruising with

pride). The statue of the *mater dolorosa* (the mourning mother), dressed in white and silver, was festooned with satin bows and silver rosaries. Above her head, a crown swayed as the procession moved and from her shoulders was draped an intricately embroidered *manto* (cape) of purple velvet, so long that it covered the heads of all the bearers behind the float. The crowd broke into spontaneous applause. Showers of rose petals from the people on the balconies rained down on the *palio*, the delicate tasseled covering, supported by six slender pillars on either side of the float, as the Virgin moved slowly down the street, now illuminated only by the lights from her shimmering bier. '*Guapa, guapa* ('lovely, lovely')', shouted voices from the crowd. From a balcony, an elderly woman broke into a *saeta*, a wailing lament, which bore the tonal hallmarks of its Moorish past. As the last notes faded, with a cadenza-like flourish reminiscent of *flamenco*, the crowd cheered and the band struck up a march, using shrill trumpets in Turkish style. The silver bell rang and the Virgin's float began to negotiate an especially tricky corner, where some families had camped out for the evening with collapsible chairs and picnic baskets. '¡*Qué bonita, qué preciosa*! (How lovely, how pretty!)', they shouted. From there the Virgin followed her prescribed route through the city's streets and *plazas* until her return to her *templo* ten hours later.[14]

During the procession there would be frequent rests for the bearers who would be given wine, water or cigarettes by members of their families, 'seconding' them through this prolonged ordeal. Crowds thronged the streets at all times and, as the night wore on and the spirit of a vinous spring festival began to take root, the cheers became more ribald. For instance, as the soldiers of the Spanish Foreign Legion marched by, carrying their rather severe Virgin, a cheerful voice from the crowd shouted at one of the soldier-bearers, 'I would like to fuck you and have your baby'. At the end of one procession at about 4 am, when Dionysus seemed to have possessed many devotees, shouts of '*Arriba! Arriba!*' ('Up! Up!') filled the streets, and one especially heavy virgin was raised heavenwards by the gloved hands of the bearers. This took place almost at the very door of the imposing Renaissance Cathedral, dedicated, significantly, to Our Lady of the Incarnation. Interestingly, the Bishop of Málaga had specifically asked the faithful not to make the processions 'pagan' by, for instance, raising the Virgin three or more times above their heads. The faithful disobeyed. 'Paganism' was elsewhere in evidence: cafés, bars and restaurants, many bedecked with Holy Week posters, did a roaring trade and, significantly, the official *Semana Santa* timetable was sponsored by *El Corte Inglés*, an up-market chain of department stores, clearly taking advantage of the commercial possibilities of the festival.[15]

Comparisons

There are many notable similarities between the rituals of the south Indian *Amman* goddesses (Draupadi, in particular) and those of the Spanish virgins during *Semana*

Santa. Like the south Indian goddesses, who have their origins in village or community life, so each *cofradía* in Málaga has its own specific Virgin.[16] Although the Church maintains that there is only one Mary, the generic 'Virgin Mary', seems to be transformed into many different 'Marías' and 'Nuestras Señoras': there is *María Santísima de la Paloma*, *María Santísima de Consolación y Lágrimas*, *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*, *Nuestra Señora del Gran Poder*, each one individualized and revered by members of the *cofradía* and parish associated with the specific Virgin. Although technically not goddesses, these Virgins certainly have the status of the south Indian goddesses in their communities and are regarded as benign protectors, able to be approached with a special and trusting intimacy. For like the *Amman* goddesses, the Virgin Mary is also from a humble background, a lowly woman who understands the daily concerns and trials of the poor and downtrodden and is, in many ways, the champion of the marginalized. Hence aspects of the nurturing Earth Mother are present (some of the Virgins' titles highlight their compassion) and this nurturing power extends to combating disease, another notable point of comparison between the Virgins and their *Amman* sisters.[17]

What is not ostensibly present is the fear of the easily angered goddess, who can cause both disease and natural disaster. However, both 19th and 20th century apparitions of the Virgin are characterized by dire predictions and the Virgin's relinquishing of her role as *mediatrix*.[18] Presumably, neglect of the Virgins during Holy Week could well result in misfortune for the community.[19] Like Draupadi, the Virgin is revered for her steadfast religious faith and purity. As in the case of her Indian counterpart who was also originally, in the *Mahabharata*, a human woman, so Mary too was a human woman whose apotheosis, by virtue of her role as the Mother of God, is generally assumed by many believers, if not officially enshrined in Catholic dogma. It is significant that Draupadi and Mary share the important appellation of Virgin, although with regards to Mary, in contrast to Draupadi's independence, the concept traditionally emphasizes her relationship to her son by saying more about his exceptional nature than hers. Nonetheless, the purity implied by the title came to be regarded as enhancing her spiritual stature and reflects her connections with the virgin goddesses of the ancient world. Both the Hindu and the Roman Catholic tradition hold that the purity and virtue of virginity confers a spiritual and moral power on women.[20]

As Draupadi is associated with fire, so Mary is associated, especially during the processions, with the fire of hundreds of candles. For one brotherhood, she is *María Santísima de la Estrella* ('Holiest Mary of the Star') and for another she is *Estrella de los Mares* ('Star of the Seas') and *Iris de Eterna Ventura* ('Rainbow of Eternal Happiness').[21] The gold crowns and haloes adorning most of the Virgins' heads during the processions gleam in the candlelight, thus creating a fiery, star-like brilliance.[22]

However, of more relevance for purposes of comparison, is the fact that, during the first evening of the Draupadi firewalking, the image of the goddess,

carried on a palanquin covered by a large umbrella, emerges from her shrine to display herself to her devotees. Some Tamil communities, in fact, take Draupadi in procession around various suburbs, so that as many people as possible can see her and experience the spiritual benefits of *darshan*. In a similar vein, the many Virgins are taken out of their *templos* to process through the suburbs of Málaga, so that the pain, love and compassion of the mother mourning for her son can be seen and be appreciated by the faithful. Draupadi is a goddess visiting her people, reminding them of her power. Mary is the ultimate exemplar of motherhood and womanhood, moving through her communities of believers during the most important festival of the Christian year, to re-affirm the values of pity, love and compassion, but also to re-assert her powerful role as an intercessionary force. She is, after all, *Nuestra Señora del Gran Poder* ('Our Lady of Great Power'). There is no doubt that recognizing this brings considerable benefits to the believer.

Suffering is another prominent feature in the stories of both Draupadi, as a typical *Amman* goddess, and of Mary. Mary's title *Mater Dolorosa* ('Our Lady of Sorrows') emphasizes her role as grieving mother, sorrowing for her dead son. But just as she shares in the redemptive suffering of her son, so her own suffering becomes associated with salvation. Both Draupadi and Mary present devotees with a figure of pain, rejection and suffering with whom they can identify, and draw comfort. They can remind women that although suffering and hardship are an inescapable part of life, they need not be passively accepted, but can, when shared, become the motivation to overcome injustice and disorder.[23]

The performance of a cycle of nocturnal dramas during traditional Draupadi festivals is not precisely paralleled during *Semana Santa*, but there is no doubt that the various floats depicting important episodes in the passion and resurrection of Christ have great dramatic effect in the candle-lit streets of the city.[24] As the Draupadi dramas have an educative function, so too do the *Semana Santa* floats, depicting the essential elements of the Christian myth. The use of music to enhance the effect of the Draupadi rituals is paralleled by the use of music in the Holy Week processions. Music in the rituals of the former is often the cue for some devotees to enter possession trances. Although music does not have the same effect in the Spanish processions, there is something trance-like about the unaccompanied *saetas*, or the litany of fulsome praises chanted by the poet of Málaga, when *María Santísima del Rocío* ('Most Holy Mary of the Dew'—the Bride of Málaga) enters the *Plaza Victoria*. The number of children either participating in *Semana Santa* bands or dressed (in imitation of one or both of their parents) as *nazarenos*, or given especial vantage points in the crowds (usually on the shoulders of a family member) suggests that education in ritual tradition and beliefs is extremely important for the Spanish community as well. The family groups, which gather before the final fire-walking rituals, and the hoisting of babies and young children onto shoulders to receive blessings, confirm that the

Hindu believers have similar attitudes to the educative and beneficial role of traditional rituals.

The practice of austerities in the Draupadi festival to demonstrate devotion to the goddess (not to mention the fire-walking ritual itself) do not have exact parallels in the modern processions of the Spanish virgins, but the carrying of a massive *trono* for ten hours or so is a considerable austerity for the bearer, a few of whom are blindfolded, in atonement for specific sins. The women in black (a few of whom are barefoot), in mourning for Christ and in sympathy with the Mother, are indeed expressing their devotion to the Virgin and are sharing her *dolor*. Wearing the costume of a *nazareno* (complete with steeple-like hood), or heavily brocaded vestments, carrying a crucifix or heavy gilt candlesticks, wearing Roman armour and riding a horse, or playing in a marching band until the early hours of the morning could also be especially burdensome.

The final point of comparison is the fact that both the Draupadi festivals and the *Semana Santa* processions are associated with fertility, directly in the former case, indirectly in the latter. The sowing of the 'nine grains' in some temples or the planting of small gardens for the goddess clearly symbolizes Draupadi's regenerative power. The flowers or petals thrown at the processional figures of Draupadi and the Virgins can also be regarded as symbols of blossoming fertility (Warner 1976: 282). The *Semana Santa* processions happen to coincide with the arrival of spring and it certainly becomes obvious during the course of Holy Week that the mood of the participants and spectators is celebratory.[25] Amidst the parade of suffering, mourning and death, there is the hope of Easter Sunday, of resurgent life and regeneration after winter. *María Santísima del Rocío* (Holiest Mary of the Dew) is, in this respect, especially interesting. Crowned by a circlet of stars, she is one of three virgins not in mourning. In fact, her lips are parted in a slight smile and wears gold earrings - she is the 'Bride of Málaga'. In the *DM* supplement, some of her fulsome praises are cited: she is a 'beautiful young woman, whose simplicity, innocence and youthfulness deserve all amorous compliments' (*todos los requiebros*); she has a smile which 'arouses passions' (*sonrisa que levanta pasiones*). The sexual connotations are obvious; some of the *saetas* too are overtly sexual, commenting on the effect of the Virgin's cheeks and eyes.[26] It is indeed tempting to suspect that an ancient goddess fertility festival, designed to celebrate the spring, has become entangled with the roots of the Holy Week processions. As in Draupadi's fire-walking festival, a carnivalesque atmosphere certainly prevails during *Semana Santa*, as the intense commercialization confirms.

Interpretations

It is always difficult to know what to do with comparative studies of two religious systems that are so culturally and geographically distinct that diffusionist

explanations become impossible, if not downright cranky. Explanations in terms of origins are fraught with speculative traps (and have been since Herodotus) whereas Jungian interpretations, although imaginative and often persuasive, subsume local differences in universalism. What *is* one to make of the fact that the rituals of the Virgin Mary in an ostensibly monotheistic religious system bear startling similarities to those of a Virgin Goddess in an apparently polytheistic system? The similarities are startling, precisely because the systems appear and claim to be so different. Similarity, in effect, can only be understood in relation to *difference*. However, as one moves from the logic and symbols of one cultural system to the other perceived differences begin to unravel. The village goddesses of southern India make Hinduism seem polytheistic, although the system is officially monist. The Virgins of southern Spain make Spanish Catholicism seem polytheistic, even though the system is officially monotheistic. Intellectual categories, imposed by the official orthodoxy, with its rigid universalizing tendencies, begin to dissolve. One approach to the comparative material would be to explore the tension which exists between this official orthodoxy and the popular cult in both religious systems.

In the *DM* supplement to *Semana Santa* 2001, the Bishop of Málaga, Antonio Dorado, finds it necessary to put the processions in a carefully-argued theological context and, significantly, appropriates the processions and the brotherhoods for the official Church, deliberately entrusting the *cofradías* with ensuring that the processions do not 'degenerate into theatre', despite twice using the verb *representar* (which connotes theatrical representation) without disapproval. In the same publication, Clemente López, the president of the union of Holy Week *cofradías*, considers the processions to be public protestations of faith for members of the brotherhoods and, for the spectators, the means of contemplating Christ's passion. López, interestingly, focuses on the power of the images for the *cofrades*, which evoke 'sensations, feelings, memories and ultimate faith'.[27] In another series of glossy pamphlets entitled *Detalles de la Semana Santa*, the anonymous author of *Los rostros de María* ('Faces of Mary') carefully traces the legitimization of the use of images within the Christian church to the Councils of Nicea (787), Constantinople (869) and Trent (1545-1563), with supporting quotations from Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. The author stresses that statues facilitate access to the transcendent and infinite (which forms of language cannot do), thus making the invisible visible. The full text of the resolution of the Council of Trent is cited, in which the Church urges that images of Christ, the Virgin and the saints be given due veneration, not because of any divinity or power inherent in them, but simply because of the honour due to the original figures they represent. Such a view would reflect traditional Hindu attitudes to their divinities as well.

The above explanations offered for the Holy Week processions clearly reflect a need felt by the Catholic Church in southern Spain to define the theo-

logical boundaries of the processions. They are never ends in themselves, they are not to degenerate into theatre or entertainment but rather, they are to reveal higher truths, to renew and deepen the faith of the participants and the spectators, especially during a week when the fundamental tenet of the faith is commemorated, celebrated and reinforced: that Christ died and rose again in order to secure human salvation. However, that tension that exists between official ideology and the beliefs and ritual practice of the people is undeniable.[28] The processions are superbly theatrical, the *cofradías* are not immune to competition and rivalries,[29] the participants deliberately ignore the Bishop's injunction not to raise the Virgin more than three times above their heads (and this right in front of the cathedral opposite the Bishop's palace), the Virgins have their specific devotees and, in many respects, their own *culto*, despite the Council of Trent. Many of our informants who were not conventional believers (typical of Andalucía, where the Church's alliance with the Franco regime is not forgotten) explained their attendance at the processions in terms of 'our culture' and 'our traditions'. Thus for many Malagans, attendance at the Holy Week processions is a confirmation, not of their Catholic beliefs, but of their faith in the enduring nature of their community, of that indefinable something which constitutes being both Andalusian and Spanish. "The Virgins are our Virgins", *Málaga es mariana* (Málaga belongs to Mary) announces the anonymous author of *Los rostros de María* and it is this fiercely proud communal tradition which jostles with the overarching 'grand narrative' of the Church. The communal tradition has wider political and cultural resonance.[30] Significantly, the national anthem is played when all statues leave and return to their *templos*.

In the Hindu tradition also, tension often exists between popular devotion, as expressed by many women, and official attitudes, which attempt to demand orthodox adherence to teachings and practice. In KwaZulu-Natal the patriarchal priesthood has at times dismissed mother goddess rituals performed by women at home as 'backyard temple cults' (Diesel 1998b: 214). It seems that in both traditions, tensions arise between the male-dominated official clergy and the people, precisely because the popular religion involves veneration and worship of divine females. As many Malagans foreground cultural and nationalistic reasons for their participation in the Holy Week processions, so Hindus also frequently explain their participation in the fire-walking rituals as 'part of our Hindu custom', which reflects a sense of identity with the Hindu Diaspora community, as well as a pride in belonging to an ancient cultural and religious heritage.

Both the Holy Week processions and the Hindu concept of *darshan* have in common the importance of 'seeing' and the spiritual benefits this confers. López, in fact, speaks of the primacy of the image for the members of the *cofradías*.[31] Visualization is of fundamental importance to Catholic and Hindu ritual. Analysis of the 'gaze' has shaped much modern theorizing in film, media and gender studies. Examining these rituals through this theoretical lens can deepen our

understanding of them. In saying this, we do not mean to imply that looking at Draupadi and the Virgins as they pass is directly equivalent to watching a film in which the viewer is not directly involved, for the majority of believers who gaze at the Goddess and the Virgins, these images are powerful religious symbols. Influenced by Ricoeur and Turner, who have argued that religious symbols are opaque, open-ended, 'polysemic' and multivalent, Bynum et al. (1986: 2-3) have suggested that gender-related symbols do not simply reflect a culture's assumptions about gender and may have little, or nothing, to do with the actual social roles of men and women. Nineteenth century scholars who postulated the existence of matriarchies on the basis of powerful goddess figures in the iconographical or mythical traditions, clearly fell into this trap. However, Draupadi and the Virgins are women. Both men and women gaze at them and what this means clearly involves a complex interaction between symbol, text (mythology, revealed scripture or oral traditions) and the gendered viewer. As religion is the strong arm of political ideology (clearly evident in Franco's Spain and in South Africa under the apartheid regime), Draupadi and the Virgins are pieces in the mosaic of their respective cultures' ideologies.

According to Althusser (1993: 36-60), representation, especially at the service of ideology, is perhaps the most powerful contributory factor to the process of identity formation, or of constituting oneself as a subject. How could seeing Draupadi and the Virgins contribute to the formation of the believer's gender identity within highly patriarchal systems? In both ritual systems, men and women gaze at female figures on parade. In art and most cinema (and arguably in religious art on parade), men generally look at women and women watch themselves being looked at. As John Berger trenchantly argues (1972: 47): What significance might there be, if men look at goddesses and virgins and women, in turn, watch themselves being looked at? The image of Draupadi in procession is not preceded, or accompanied, by a male figure. She is independent and alone. The particular Draupadi images, which include a wig of long hair, should remind viewers of the incident when she was dragged by her hair into the men's court and humiliated by the eldest Kaurava who tried to strip off her sari. She pledged not to retie it until she had washed it in the blood of her enemies. Draupadi is a woman who has suffered, been abused and triumphed. Her sari, the symbol of her abuse, is now miraculously spread over the coals to cool them. She is the powerful source of new life, of fertility and spiritual regeneration.

Although the virgins are on their own floats they are almost always preceded by a Christ figure. They too have suffered, but it is the suffering of the mother mourning for her son. The Virgins are frequently depicted with hearts pierced by swords and their faces are almost always transfixed with grief. They are passive, submissive and alone in their suffering. As with Draupadi, their grief was caused by men. They are borne through the streets by men and the amorous compliments shouted at the Virgins (not their bearers!) are the kinds of sexist remarks

some men think women enjoy receiving. For the male viewer familiar with the mythology (to give an imagined example of the interaction between symbol, text and gendered viewer), Draupadi could be the powerful female who resists male abuse and who has the power to both challenge and nurture. For the woman (especially the abused woman) familiar with the mythology, she could be a powerful symbol of resistance and strength against the very male surveyor she has internalized. She is neither passive nor submissive; she triumphs in adversity with reactive anger. Draupadi could become a source of empowerment (that is, liberation from patriarchal discourses) for the many women who see her and are seen by her. 'That's me! I too can resist abuse!' would be a striking moment of recognition for a female gazer and would undermine the construction of the feminine as the powerless object which is viewed.

In contrast, the Virgins of *Semana Santa* seem good examples of how the powerful female is managed and contained within a patriarchal system. The Virgins are elaborately dressed and adorned, like grandiose Barbie dolls. The message for the male viewer familiar with the tradition seems to be that the traditional values of Spanish *machismo* - the man as protector, the woman as venerated, courted and adored - are legitimized by none other than God himself.[32] For the female viewer, the Virgins seem exemplars of motherhood - suffering, passive, silent, submissive and beautiful - despite the elaborate titles awarded to her. 'Woman, this is who you are; this is your place in the world; this is your role in life—Yes! That's me. I too can be a silent mother, revered, and acquiescent ', could be the moment of interpellation and recognition for the female viewer. Would the Virgins have the same effect if they were mourning over a lost daughter? We suspect not, for it is the mother-son bond which is at the very heart of this public re-assertion of the values that underpin the patriarchal, nuclear family, and, in particular, the 'father-ineffective' family in southern Spain.[33] The Virgin mourns her abused, tortured and murdered *son*;[34] her very essence is relational. While the Virgins seem only to have meaning *in relation to*, Draupadi, by contrast, stands alone. It is precisely this self-sufficiency, which, as Gross has pointed out (1983: 225), makes Hindu female deities a powerful resource for the recovery of the divinely female.[35]

Draupadi is thus potentially empowering for women but what of the Spanish Virgins? How are they able to be, if the ideology on parade seems to re-enforce the powerlessness of the woman who is looked at? Granted, the Virgins' floats are always grander, more impressive and generally more eagerly awaited than those of Christ. A patriarchal ruse, one might argue. The floats were designed and made by men and the Virgins are all the artistic creations of men. Women may have embroidered the *mantos* and may have dressed the Virgins, but these are women whose very identity as women has been shaped by the patriarchal ideology the processions exemplify. Patriarchy generally would not have survived as long as it has, had it not been for the support of women. Should one then argue,

as many feminist theologians have done, that the image and symbol of the Virgin Mother can only disempower women further and that Mary, as she is, has to go, or at least be re-fashioned, especially by those to whom she means most?[36]

It seems impossible to believe that many modern, educated and urbanised Spanish women could be empowered by the archetypal symbol of silent, suffering and acquiescent motherhood.[37] Judging by the sharp drop in the Spanish birth-rate and the re-conceptualization of what it means to be a woman, especially in the modern Spanish cinema, such a construct of submissive femininity, typical of the Franco era, certainly seems to have come under radical attack.[38] Chicana artists have certainly re-invented the Virgin of Guadalupe who has even been depicted as a kick-boxer. According to Rosalía Triana (Walker 2001: 86), traditionally:

> we [women] are told that we should be like the Guadalupana, a virgin and a mother and absolutely pure and also giving to everyone without thinking of ourselves. By the time you hit 13, you realize you can't do that. Then you think, I'm bad, I'm *malcriada*. By the time you become an adult, you begin to reshape your vision of Guadalupe, coming to see the best of yourself in her, even if the worst of you isn't'.[39]

There is no evidence to suggest that the Virgins of Málaga are being re-invented in this way but it is obvious that many women, young and old, participate in the processions (as both spectators and participants) and clearly find the rituals fulfilling at some level - whether this be emotional, psychological, spiritual or political, or a combination of all of these, as one would expect from a deeply-layered relationship between Spanish devotee and the Virgin Mother. Many weep openly as the Virgins pass. Can this kind of psycho-spiritual catharsis ever be truly empowering or liberatory? Or is this fulfillment stage-managed by the Spanish form of patriarchy and thus inherently disempowering?

It is surely the concept of the Virgin Mother (as traditionally interpreted, understood and paraded) which prevents the Spanish Virgins from being truly empowering. The 'Virgin Mother' is a flawed and ambiguous concept. Warner (1976: 337-338) has written eloquently of the impossible ideal which this presents for the modern Catholic woman, who, like Triana, is driven into feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem. The Virgins of Málaga are submissive, acquiescent mothers, but they are also Virgins of great power, rather like the mother in the southern Spanish (and Hindu) family. 'Be submissive, for therein lies your power' seems to be the message for women, and it is the ambiguity of this message which is one of Catholic and Hindu patriarchy's cleverest weapons.

Despite her independence and victories over men in adversity, neither Draupadi, nor any other of the *Amman* goddesses, nor Kali, has as yet been fully

recognized for the strong, empowering role models that they offer women, like, for example, the re-invented *Guadalupana*. Hindu goddesses remain mired in ambiguity. Despite worshipping divine females, traditional Hinduism (like Catholicism) still subordinates and silences human women. However, there are some indications in KwaZulu-Natal that Draupadi's greater potential for female empowerment (as suggested above) has begun to be acknowledged (Diesel 1998). It could be also argued that as mourning mothers and *mediatrices* supreme, the Virgins embody values like compassion, love and mercy, as well as strength and determination in the face of suffering, which presumably are empowering for women,[40] especially in a divided society in need of reconciliation (as is arguably the case in post-Franco Spain and in post-apartheid South Africa), but that they should be empowering for men too. Associating these moral emotions exclusively (and publicly) with the feminine perpetrates age-old gender stereotypes and validates *machismo*. In effect, a comparative study of this nature seems to suggest that the Virgins can only empower when their virginity is re-interpreted to mean: "The woman who is not defined exclusively by her relationships with men ..." as maintained by Mary Daly (1986: 84). In other words, powerful subjects freed from patriarchal discourses, rather than powerless viewed objects or managed intercessors who lack agency.

Instead of perpetuating the worn-out binaries (Christian/Pagan; Catholic/Protestant; us/them), the Church could reclaim and embrace the pre-Christian and, presumably pre-patriarchal, as part of its rich heritage. Clearly many of the participants and spectators in the Holy Week processions in Málaga have already done so, as some informants openly spoke of the influence of Greco-Roman and Islamic rituals on the *Semana Santa* processions. The fact that the Virgin of Guadalupe has been re-invented by some Mexican women also suggests that the Virgin presented by the patriarchal Church is being discarded for a Virgin conceived for, and by, women. The potential thus exists, as it does within patriarchal Hinduism, for the ancient pre-patriarchal symbol of the mother to be recovered, stripped of its patriarchal encrustations and restored to power by female-generated discourses.[41] Only when this happens, in our opinion, can the Malagan Virgins and Draupadi be truly empowering.

Comparisons with the Hindu system also contribute to the destabilizing of the concept of monotheism. There are as many Virgins and Christs as there are communities and 'brotherhoods'. Tamil devotees who make pilgrimages to Chartres during May each year to venerate a statue of the Virgin and Child (Boyer 2000: 42), show how boundaries created by the official patriarchal ideology are clearly beginning to shift, as well as demonstrating the adaptability of the religion to meet devotees' changing needs. Indeed, under the comparative gaze, the concept of difference itself begins to unravel. Worship and veneration of Draupadi and the Virgins may well be part of the same search for the female face of God, appropriated and distorted for centuries by those who fear its power to alter

social relations, and thus the nature of patriarchy itself. Certainly the tension between the people's religion and the official ideology in both Hinduism and Catholicism suggests that the process of undermining patriarchal hegemony and its bedfellow, orthodoxy, has begun where patriarchy first entrenched itself - with the appropriation of the worship of the Virgin and Mother.

Notes

1 Alleyn Diesel is responsible for the Hindu material, Michael Lambert for the Catholic. The comparisons and interpretations are a collaborative effort.

2 This vessel symbolism is not confined to Hindu goddesses, but appears to have been associated with goddess worship in different parts of the world since very ancient times. Interestingly, Neumann has claimed that the vessel is a central symbol of the female, the "life vessel" where life is formed and nurtured, and which also provides food and drink to all (1963:42).

3 Similar rituals, such as planting small gardens in front of goddess shrines, as well as growing sprouts as part of marriage ceremonies in Madras, south India, can be seen as representing the quickening of the life-giving, revitalizing powers of the Goddess, and her gift of fertility (Hiltebeitel, 1992: 57).

4 *Aum*, also written *Om*, is the mystical Sanskrit syllable containing the universe (the original creative sound) and is used in worship. *Shanti* means peace, often used as a kind of blessing.

5 Cf. Daly: 'The woman who is defined as virgin is not defined exclusively by her relationships with men' (1986: 84).

6 Research for this section of the paper was conducted between 9th and 15th April, 2001, in Málaga, Spain. My grateful thanks to my hosts, Bruce McMillan and Francisco Rio Oliva for their warm hospitality and their unrivalled knowledge of the Virgins and back alleys of Málaga which greatly facilitated access to and understanding of the processions. Detailed information about the daily processions was made available by the local newspaper *Diario Málaga—Costa del Sol* (edited by Javier Checa), which published a daily bulletin, as well as an impressive supplement covering *Semana Santa* in full. We have used this supplement (henceforth abbreviated to *DM*) and the bulletins as our primary source material for this article.*Canal Sur* (the television station of Andalucía) provided extensive coverage as well.

7 The earliest brotherhoods in Málaga date from the 16th century (*Veracruz* claims to have been founded in 1505, after the capture of the city from the Moors), whilst the latest foundation dates from 1994 (*Santa Cruz* or, in full, the *Hermandad de la Santa Cruz y Nuestra Señora de los Dolores en su Amparo y Misericordia*, the 'Brotherhood of the Holy Cross and Our Lady of Sorrows in her Refuge and Pity'). The highest number of brotherhoods were established in the first three decades of the twentieth century before the Spanish Civil War. In 2001, the largest, and clearly the richest *cofradía* (*Esperanza*), had 4000 *hermanos* ('brothers') and 500 *nazarenos*, whereas the smallest (*Salutación*) had 550 'brothers' and 200 'nazarenes'.

8 One *trono* on Palm Sunday (*Jesús Nazareno de la Salutación*) was not followed by a Virgin, whereas the Virgin of the Servites on Holy Thursday (*Maria Santísima de los Dolores*) was not preceded by a Christ.

9 By far the majority of the Virgins' titles focus on her pain and suffering. All the faces of the Virgins, with the exception of three, are streaked with crystal tears. For the origins and development of the cult of the *Mater Dolorosa* (see Warner1976: 210-211).

10 In five of the forty titles analysed; four of these are, significantly, used of the Virgins carried in procession on Holy Thursday and Good Friday.

11 In only two of the forty titles analysed.

12 For the use of roses in Marian imagery (see Warner 1976: 307).

13 Most of the floats are clearly Baroque in inspiration and are described in the informative pamphlets freely available as 'neobarroco' in style. One of our informants described the processions as 'Baroque art in motion'.

14 This procession ended with the *encierro* ('internment') at 2.30 am. Others could begin at 8.30 pm and end with the *encierro* at 4.30am. Sleep is not a priority during *Semana Santa*.

15 Evident in other pamphlets as well. Another timetable was sponsored by a chain of supermarkets called *Consum*. Alongside a picture of the face of *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* (Our Lady of Sorrows), her heart pierced with a golden sword, was an advertisement: *Consumer satisfaction in quality and price* (*Consumer Satisfacción en Calidad y Precio*). For the combination of worship and commerce in pilgrimages (see Turner and Turner 1978: 36-37).

16 For the role of the Virgin Mary as village patron in Spain (see Christian, 1972:175).

17 Perhaps the main impetus of Marian pilgrimages (whether to the Virgins of Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe or Walsingham) is the belief in the ability of the Virgins to cure disease (see Turner and Turner, 1978: 57-58, 70; Matter, 1983: 86, 88; Corrado Pope, 1985: 189-192). For disease and Indian village goddesses (see Brubaker, 1983: 152-154).

18 See Turner and Turner (1982: 157) on the La Salette apparition. For the vengeful side of Mary, see Hamington 1995: 198, n.46. Cf. Carroll 1992: 150.

19 Cf. Carroll's aptly-titled *Madonnas That Maim* (1992); Turner and Turner 1978: 161.

20 The Hindu term *tapas* refers to the spiritual power attained through virtue, devotion and faithfulness. History tells of large numbers of women in Hinduism and Christianity who found strength in their virginal status, whose independence and determination led them to found women's religious orders, to work for the education of women, and in so doing freed women from patriarchally determined roles.

21 The last two titles are used of the Virgin in a song sung on the 16th July for the feast of 'Our Lady of Carmen', patroness of sailors and navigation, and on Holy Thursday, when the navy delegation arrives accompanying 'Our Lady of Solitude' of the *cofradía* of *Mena*.

22 Many of the Virgin Mary's festivals were clearly 'Christianized' versions of ancient goddess festivals. For example, Candlemas, observed on February 2nd as the feast of the purification of the Virgin after the birth of Jesus, was originally a feast of lights in

honour of the moon goddess, and the celebration of the Annunciation was set to coincide with the spring equinox on March 25th (Harding, 1982: 130; Warner, 1976: 66-67).

23 See Maeckelberghe (1991: 165).

24 For Holy Week as one of the cradles of the European theatrical tradition (see Muir, 1997:65).

25 For the associations of Mary with spring, fecundity and the month of May (see Warner, 1976: 281 and Kinsley, 1986: 235).

26 Apart from the hands, the faces are usually the only physical features of the Virgins which are visible. Consequently, the various artists have paid especial attention to these: *María Santísima de la Paloma* ('Holiest Mary of the Dove'), for instance, has wondrous green eyes, fringed by lustrous lashes.

27 *La imagen llena nuestros ojos con el recuerdo del rostro venerado o del recordado instante de una procesión* ('The image fills our eyes with the memory of the venerated face or a moment in a procession recalled').

28 For tensions between official church teaching and popular cult (apparitions, ritual processions etc.), see especially Tentori's Italian example (1982: 96, 112-118); cf. Boyer 2000: 10.

29 For rivalries between *cofradías* in Seville (see Boyer 2000: 62).

30 According to Christian (1972: 100), 'In Spain the Virgin has become the pivot, the fulcrum, the hub of the emotional and cultural relations of whole collectivities'.

31 *Evidentemente, la imagen es lo primero que nos atrae* ('Evidently the image is the most important thing which attracts us').

32 Cf. Warner 1976: 183: "The more fervently religious the country—Spain, for instance—the more the menfolk swagger and command, the more the women submit and withdraw and are praised for their Christian goodness. *Machismo*, ironically enough, is the sweet and gentle Virgin's other face".

33 From an unashamedly masculinist Freudian perspective, Carroll (1986: 50-56) argues that the 'father ineffective' family-type, in which authority in the home is concentrated in the hands of the mother, results in an intensification of the mother-son sexual bond, which is strongly repressed in men, and then effectively released in excessive devotion to Mary the virgin mother 'disassociated from sexuality'. Carroll cites evidence suggesting that this family-type is especially prevalent in southern Italy and Spain, where devotion to Mary is at its most intense. Likewise, Carroll (ibid: 59-61) hypothesizes that daughters in 'father-ineffective' families experience as strong sexual desires for their fathers. Consequently, identification with the Virgin Mary allows women vicarious fulfillment of their desires for sexual contact with (and a son from) their fathers. Cf. Campbell (1982: 16-18) for similar attempts to probe the psychodynamics of the Mexican family in relation to the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

34 Carroll (1986: 62-67) extends his hypothesis to the occurrence of masochism in Marian devotion, especially in the Easter processions in Spain, in which he perceives strong emphasis on - and identification with - the mutilated son (killed by the father) as repressed sexual desire for the mother results in the need for punishment.

Carroll would interpret the austerities undertaken by the men in the Easter processions in a similar vein.

35 See Brubaker (1983: 149) on the independence of the village goddesses of southern India.

36 For an excellent overview of the arguments of feminist theologians both for and against Mary, see Hamington, 1995: 157-179. Cf. Maeckelberghe, 1991:13-42. Hamington proposes the model of 'Mary, Everywoman' (Mary as Woman, Mother and Sister) as a 'symbol-in-process' which seeks to liberate and empower Catholic women.

37 See Hamington (1995: 149, 154) for feminist analyses of the dominant image of Mary's suffering which argue that this valorizes female suffering, thus indirectly justifying the violent abuse of women.

38 When Warner published "Alone of All her Sex" in 1976, she could confidently write that the cult of the Virgin flourishes in countries like Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Belgium where women 'rarely participate in public life and are relegated to the domestic domain' (191). This may have been true of the Franco era, which ended with the dictator's death in 1975, but is not the case now. For changes in traditional attitudes to women in Spain, since the Constitution of 1978, which enshrined the equality of women and men before the law, the legislative changes of 1977-1984, the establishment of the *Instituto de la Mujer* in 1983, and Spain's membership of the EU in 1986 (see Moxon-Browne, 1989: 67-82).

39 Cf. Brennan (1988: 93) for an enlightened view of Mary from within the Catholic Church: "For too long the Church has had a male-centered understanding of Mary as 'the successful woman', the 'woman who meets our needs'. Rarely have we seen the image of Mary as the independent woman, the strong woman, the leader."

40 Cunneen (1996: 222) notes that for some Mexican-American women, Our Lady of Guadalupe was not a 'model of servility and suffering, but one of liberation and empowerment'.

41 Turner and Turner (1978: 236) suggest that modern interest in Marian pilgrimages may 'be one index of a resurgent "female" principle, after centuries of "male" iconoclasm, technical progress, bureaucratization, the conquest by reason and force of all natural vehicles.'

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