

## Additional Papers

Recognizing a Saint:  
The Politics of Identity within the Canonization of Kateri Tekakwitha

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**Abstract:** On October 21, 2012, Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth century Native American woman from upstate New York, became the first Native American saint in the Roman Catholic Church. Through the application of specific theoretical framings, most notably those of Charles Taylor and Patchen Markell, this piece will critically examine the ways in which conceptions of “identity” and “recognition” play influential roles in the story of this saint.

**Keywords:** Kateri Tekakwitha, sainthood, identity, recognition, race

In 2006, a young boy in Washington State named Jake Finkbonner was playing basketball when he hit his face on the rim. As a result of that injury, Jake caught a flesh-eating bacteria that nearly took his life. Because of Jake’s Native American ancestry, his family’s Roman Catholic priest informed them of a particularly relevant historical figure to whom they should pray for intercessory healing. That figure was a Native American woman named Kateri Tekakwitha. On Monday, December 19, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI announced the intention to make Kateri Tekakwitha a saint in the Roman Catholic Church, and on October 21, 2012, she was made the Church’s first Native American saint.<sup>1</sup> What does this mean for

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<sup>1</sup> This article, at times, uses the terms “Native American,” “Native,” and “Indian” interchangeably, except when specifically referencing work by Vijay Prashad, which discusses Indian-Americans and not American Indians.

Catholics or Catholic women? What does this mean for Native Americans? As evidenced already, this analysis will more often offer questions rather than answers. Ultimately, this article will explore particular historical significances in the “life” of this saint as well as some of the variant responses to this announcement, and, through the application of specific theoretical framings, it will critically examine the ways in which conceptions of “identity” and “recognition” play important roles in this story.

### **A History**

Kateri Tekakwitha, also popularly referred to as “Lily of the Mohawks”, was a Native American woman of both Algonquin and Iroquois ancestry. She was born in 1656 in a Mohawk community near present-day Auriesville, New York. Her mother was a Roman Catholic Algonquin woman, baptized by French missionaries, and her father was a Mohawk chief. When Kateri was four years of age, a smallpox epidemic swept through her village, killing both of her parents as well as her brother. While she survived, she was left with noticeable scarring on her face and heavily damaged eyesight. In 1676, Jesuit Father Lamberville baptized her when she was approximately twenty years old, which is also when she took the name “Kateri”, a supposed Iroquois pronunciation of the name “Catherine”, in honor of Saint Catherine of Siena, the ascetic Italian tertiary from the fourteenth century.<sup>2</sup> This was a particularly unique act on behalf of Father Lamberville, given the common practice of “withholding baptism to Indians until the moment of death or until the Jesuits

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<sup>2</sup> The ascetic practices connecting Saint Catherine of Siena with Kateri Tekakwitha are significant and will be discussed further in this article.

were certain no relapse was likely.”<sup>3</sup> As a result of her Catholic baptism, Kateri experienced severe chastisement and harassment from her Mohawk community, particularly from her aunt and uncle whom she had lived with since the death of her parents. In response, she fled in 1677 to the St. Francois Xavier Mission in Kahnawake, a territory of the Mohawk nation located in Quebec.

It was at the mission that Kateri began practices of bodily self-mortification and penances, and developed close relationships with two other Indian converts, Marie-Theresa Tegaiguenta and Marie Skarichions. She additionally undertook a vow of chastity, and one of her spiritual advisors, Father Cholenec, “presided over a ceremony in which she pledged perpetual virginity and gave herself to Christ as his wife”.<sup>4</sup> This particular form of devotion, a ceremonial marriage to Christ, was certainly not uncommon for Catholic nuns as well as penitent laywomen, as in fact Saint Catherine of Siena performed such a commitment, although this act was uncommon for Native American converts. Indeed, as noted by Elizabeth Abbott in her *A History of Celibacy*, “in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, Kateri Tekakwitha had become the first Iroquois sacred virgin”.<sup>5</sup> She died at the mission in 1680, at the young age of twenty-four, with her spiritual advisors Fathers Cholenec and Chauchetiere nearby. Kateri’s last uttered words professed her love for Jesus Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Abbott, *A History of Celibacy* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 129

<sup>4</sup> Ibid,130

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,130

## Production of a Saint

The process towards Kateri's beatification began in 1884 in Baltimore during a meeting of American Catholic bishops. In his book, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*, author Allan Greer notes that this group of bishops had joined at this time to work to establish the "church's position in a predominantly Protestant society with pronounced anti-Papist traditions."<sup>6</sup> Greer argues that it was through this effort that they eventually arrived at Kateri:

So began the search for an American saint that could symbolically root the church in American soil. By the time the bishops gathered at Baltimore, they had identified a perfect candidate: an innocent Indian from the distant colonial past, the embodiment of nature and the land, and the antithesis of immigration, urban grime, and industrial conflict.<sup>7</sup>

However, it was not until approximately half a century later that the first step in the process of canonization was completed. In accordance with this process, she was first declared "venerable" in 1943 by Pope Pius XII. After this, beatification was officially completed in 1980 following Pope John Paul II's pronouncement that "her numerous unverified miracles [equaled] one certified miracle."<sup>8</sup>

Greer further attributes central roles in the canonization campaign for Kateri to Father Clarence Walworth and his niece, Ellen (Nelly) Walworth. Nelly Walworth not only officially published Father Chauchetiere's hagiographical manuscript of Kateri's life, she also published her own biography of Kateri entitled *The Life and Times of Kateri Tekakwitha*. Although her text is non-hagiographical, and therefore written in a completely separate vein, and "native identity" appears to be of much

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<sup>6</sup> Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 193

<sup>7</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 194

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 195

greater concern, Greer notes that Walworth does express a simplified, primitivized image of “Indianness”: “Walworth’s heroine nevertheless carried markers of an essentialized Indian identity: pure otherness beyond the reach of historical progress.”<sup>9</sup>

In an apparent effort to express the sort of monumental, lasting effect that Walworth’s biography has had upon continued understandings of the saint, Greer offers his reader the historical significance of Kateri’s name as it is contemporarily known:

Nelly Walworth, anxious to eliminate the blatantly European ‘Catherine’ from her title, was using a Mohawk mispronunciation of an Italian saint’s name, linked to a French approximation of a Mohawk name, to clothe her heroine in an identity designed to look immaculately aboriginal. The gambit was a complete success; ever since, Tekakwitha/Catherine has been known around the world as ‘Kateri Tekakwitha’.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the efforts of Father Clarence and Nelly Walworth, as well as the group of bishops that met in Baltimore in 1884, various disparate groups and individuals continued to work to accomplish canonization for Kateri. Jesuit Father Paolo Molinari, the Tekakwitha Conference, and the Blessed Kateri Committee are just a few of the groups that worked to promote the sainthood of Kateri.

The timing of the beginning of the process for Kateri’s “recognition,” the ending of the nineteenth century, was one that, Greer argues, supported the facilitation of this project. He suggests that this period of time in the United States was one in which a certain nostalgia or sentimentality was becoming popularized towards the “primitive” Native Americans, “associating them with nature and with

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<sup>9</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 197

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 197

the picturesque and the exotic.”<sup>11</sup> The rise of an “updated and Americanized” devotion to Kateri, Greer suggests, originates from a “primitivism” that not only serves to identify the “other,” but also to locate a reminiscent dimension of the self as within the emergent modernism of the time: “The ‘primitive’ was fascinating not because it negated modernity but because it gave definition through contrast to the progressive and the modern, while providing a focus for nostalgic fantasies generated by the anxieties inherent in modern life.”<sup>12</sup> The notion of “identity through contrast” will be discussed further in this article.

### **Multivalent Entity**

Greer refers to the variety of literary manifestations of Kateri, noting the numerous groups, both European and American, that have employed her image as representative of disparate identities. However, Greer suggests, her malleability arises from an apparent voicelessness:

Her basic muteness in the hagiographical/historical record made her all the more adaptable to the needs of writers and artists working in different settings around the Atlantic world. For centuries, it was Europeans and Euro-Americans who invoked and reshaped her story, always a tale of the Indian Other recounted in counterpoint to the author’s own situation.<sup>13</sup>

For many contemporary devotees, particularly a large number of female Native American followers, Greer argues, Kateri represents a sort of successful integration of “competing identities,” identities that were bifurcated as a result of colonization. As Greer notes, Kateri’s Indian devotees see themselves and their struggles as embodied within her:

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<sup>11</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 195

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 195

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 199

They admire the Mohawk saint partly for her ability to remain fully native while becoming fully Catholic; in other words, Tekakwitha seems inspiring as a woman who could respond creatively to what the Euro-American world had to offer without sacrificing or betraying her indigenous culture. Perhaps these women see in her an idealized image of the courage and strength they themselves need to avoid being torn asunder as they try to be effective in the contemporary world while staying true to their native heritage.<sup>14</sup>

The concerns expressed by these particular women, this bifurcation of identity into a supposed choice between “tradition” and “modernity,” we can see expressed in a similar fashion and responded to critically in Vijay Prashad’s *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Prashad, while speaking specifically in regard to the experiences of South Asians in the United States, offers critical analysis that appears to be particularly salient in comparison with the comments offered by these devotees of Kateri, some of which will be discussed further throughout this piece.

Greer additionally suggests that part of what has inspired a sense of signification of identity between Indian women and Kateri is, in a sense, her lack of particular fixity, or in other words, her “pan-Indian” qualities. He notes that the Tekakwitha Conference, in particular, capitalizes on this type of essentialized representation:

...the Tekakwitha Conference is founded on the belief that, notwithstanding tribal diversity, there is an underlying Native American essence. Various symbols meant to evoke generic Indianness—eagles, feathers, tipis—predominate in the organization’s iconography...[they] work from the assumption that Native Americans are fundamentally one.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 205

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 202

Prashad also suggests that women are employed as “repositories or showcases of culture.”<sup>16</sup> Can we see Kateri then becoming a sort of “repository” of a conception of “generic” Native American culture? It would certainly seem that disparate groups have indeed used her image in such a manner.

### **Reconciliation of Images**

One of the most notable attributes that connects Kateri Tekakwitha’s practices as a penitent Catholic laywoman with her namesake, Saint Catherine of Siena—besides her symbolic marriage to Christ—is her asceticism. Abbott provides us with a brief glimpse of some of these practices, which deeply echo those of her Sienese predecessor. It was at a secret shrine constructed in the woods near the mission that Kateri would go with Marie-Theresa Tegaiauenta and Marie Skarichions in order to assist one another in their penance. In this place, Kateri

thrust coals and burning cinders between her toes and branded her feet as the Mohawks marked their captives. She walked barefoot in ice and snow, slept for three nights on a bed of thorns, and when she ate, mixed ashes into her food. Kateri also fasted strenuously, though like all other residents of the mission, she had to do her share of the daily work.<sup>17</sup>

Just as Saint Catherine of Siena likely died at quite a young age as a result of starvation due to her extreme ascetic practices, so too was Kateri’s even earlier death likely the result of similar practices.

As Prashad notes, “the construction of the desi as essentially docile ignores the deep roots of radicalism;” here we can see a quite similar misconception of Kateri. The history of Kateri’s deeply ascetic practices of bodily self-mortification,

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<sup>16</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), 183

<sup>17</sup> Abbott, *History of Celibacy*, 130



including practices such as starvation and self-flagellation, inherently conflicts with the serene, saintly character of “Lily of the Mohawks.” It is indeed an apparent positioning against the “primitive savages” of her Mohawk tribe that this image of nobility and gentility arises. How could the image of a “noble savage” be reconciled with one whose invocations of penance were so extreme as to cause even her “Jesuit mentors [to be] understandably torn between encouraging [her] holy sacrifices and reproving [her] excesses”?<sup>18</sup> Certainly, this imagination appears to disregard her radicalism, perhaps in favor of an image more strictly in keeping with that of the “docile” minority.

Elizabeth Abbott’s argumentation parallels this line of thinking. Abbott even goes so far as to question Kateri’s Jesuit Fathers’ responses to her passing, positing Kateri’s extreme ascetic practices as indeed a potential threat to the Fathers’ authority, a potential threat that was quashed with her death:

Empowered by her asceticism, her celibacy, and the glory of her marriage to Jesus, she might well have stood her ground against them as her namesake, Catherine of Siena, did even with the pope. All it would have taken, after all, was a disputed principle she was passionate about. Fortunately for the Jesuits, she died too soon for such an issue to arise.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is undeniably quite problematic to offer suppositions regarding both how Kateri might have acted if she had not died at this time and how these Fathers might have perceived her death, without supporting evidence for either supposition

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<sup>18</sup> James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 125

<sup>19</sup> Abbott, *History of Celibacy*, 132

it does seem fair to assert that, in light of certain historical evidence, Kateri's ascetic practices were not entirely approved of by her spiritual advisors.

Another rather bold assertion that Abbott offers is an argument that is more particularly useful for this discussion:

In death, safe from the scandalmongers and angry relatives who had plagued her in life, she was [the Jesuits] best weapon in their holy war for Indian allegiance. Alive, she might somehow have embarrassed them, perhaps by false accusations of apostasy when she sneaked off into the woods or, in freezing midwinter, stripped off all her clothes to stand penitently in front of a cross in the cemetery.<sup>20</sup>

This is an important comment because it, in a way, reiterates an argument suggested by Greer earlier in this article regarding the malleability of the image of Kateri Tekakwitha as a result of her early passing and relative "muteness." By focusing on particular attributes, or perhaps even wholly inventing them following her passing, the missionaries could shape and employ the character of Kateri Tekakwitha as a model for Native converts. She could also serve, post-death, to assist the missionaries in eliciting Native converts because she was, and importantly still is, ethnically "other." This attribute, Greer asserts, is what has substantially supported her success within North America, and explains how she has been able to serve as a model image of both the "savage" and "saint":

What made Tekakwitha doubly attractive as a nationalist icon for American Catholics was her status as both noble savage and woman/girl. Nations were frequently personified in the nineteenth century through female figures—Britannia, Marianne, the Virgin of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 132

Guadalupe—who symbolized not only fecundity but also continuity with the past.<sup>21</sup>

## Responses

The responses from Native Americans to the announcement of Kateri's canonization, as certain interviews and articles seem to suggest, are varied in nature. Overall, the greatest preponderance of responses comes from Catholic clergy and not Native Americans. Both groups, Catholic clergy and Native Americans, however, are reiterative in their responses. Some of the most familiar refrains coming from clergy are that this announcement to canonize means a great deal to Native Americans who have expressed great joy in response to it. The relatively few responses available from Native Americans also express similar responses, which can be well-illustrated by a comment from Eleanor Edwards, a Mohawk Catholic from Syracuse, New York: "'To us, she was a saint long ago', said Edwards, 80. 'What the church did, it's just a formality.'"<sup>22</sup> That the news of this approval from the church is merely a "formality" for devotees who consider Kateri to already be a saint appears to be an idea expressed not only following this announcement, but one that Greer shows us has been iterated years before this movement. A woman from one of the many nation-wide "Kateri Circles," groups of devotees associated the Tekakwitha Conference, succinctly expressed this sentiment several years prior to the recent announcement: "'There's this Indian saint, Kateri. She's already a saint to me. Of course, the white people make too much to do with having all this

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<sup>21</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 194

<sup>22</sup> Sean Kirst. "'She was always Indian': Kateri Tekakwitha to become first Native American saint;" [http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2012/01/post\\_229.html](http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2012/01/post_229.html)

documentation and paperwork. To me, she became a saint the day she died.”<sup>23</sup> This is an interesting comment in and of itself. Not only is this devotee explicitly devaluing the role of the church in determining how individual adherents practice their beliefs, but with this particular choice of words she is also simultaneously reaffirming the significance of the death of Kateri in obtaining sainthood.

With regards to the contemporary responses to this announcement, there are a few additional significant attributes of which to make mention. The predominant Native respondents in recent interviews and articles are Catholic, nearly all are of Mohawk heritage, and most are women. Although there appear to be a few articles that make claims upon the existence of “mixed,” variant responses from within the Native community to the news, there appears to be little supporting evidence of the “negative” responses. Those that do exist do not appear to be derived from any Mohawk community.<sup>24</sup>

### **A Political Recognition**

Can we look at this particular moment as an instantiation of what Charles Taylor might deem “recognition”? Is the movement to canonize Kateri Tekakwitha a form of a “politics of recognition”? In his article entitled “The Politics of Recognition,” Taylor discusses the “demand for recognition” by focusing on the links between “recognition” and “identity”:

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<sup>23</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 203.

<sup>24</sup> “Mixed Reactions To First Native American Saint;”

<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/10/146695395/mixed-reactions-to-first-native-american-saint>

“Catholic Church prepares to canonize first Native American saint despite mixed reactions;”

<http://www.pri.org/stories/politics-society/religion/the-catholic-church-prepares-to-canonize-its-first-native-american-saint-8448.html>.

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the Precognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.<sup>2526</sup>

One could certainly argue that the process of canonization of an individual could be interpreted through a “politics of recognition.” The Catholic Church and the Pope are making determinations about an individual’s identity. In this case, Kateri Tekakwitha is bestowed the title of “Saint” because she has performed specific acts that, following consideration by the church, warrant the addition of that particular dimension to her identity. In terms of Taylor’s conception of the individual’s identity, recognition through modes, such as the bestowing of sainthood, is a necessary component of shaping that identity. For Taylor, this public recognition through institutional structures such as a church is essential for the creation of a social identity, particularly for historically oppressed groups of peoples such as Native Americans.

As several authors following Taylor have pointed out, there are some significant issues with this conceptualization of identity and a consequent need for recognition. K. Anthony Appiah responds to Taylor’s “recognition” by noting not only the predominance of identity as something collectively-constructed through social discourse, but also the constraints put upon individuals through such imperatives for “recognition”:

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994), 462

<sup>26</sup> This article is referencing a digital version of this text.

The large collective identities that call for recognition come with notions of how a proper person of that kind behaves: it is not that there is *one* way that gays or blacks should behave, but that there are gay and black modes of behavior...Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories.<sup>27</sup>

Appiah goes on to solidify his argument challenging a politics of recognition by stating that “the politics of recognition requires that one’s skin color, one’s sexual body, should be acknowledged politically in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self”.<sup>28</sup>

What happens, then, when we see a sort of politics of recognition being projected upon an individual no longer living? How does this affect present-day groups of peoples that “identify,” in numerous ways, with this particular individual? In direct opposition to Taylor’s argument, it would appear that “recognition,” not non- or misrecognition, is what is working to “imprison” the individual. In his book, *Bound by Recognition*, Patchen Markell argues that recognition, in accordance with Taylor’s usage of the term, not only fails to accomplish its intended goals, but furthermore reinforces subordinating structures of oppression. This, he notes, is a problem of misrecognition, but in a different sense than what we see in Taylor’s usage of the term:

the pursuit of recognition comes to be bound up with a certain sort of misrecognition...not the misrecognition of identity...but an even more fundamental ontological misrecognition, a failure to acknowledge the nature and circumstances of our own activity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Taylor and Gutmann, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, 2456

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 2495.

<sup>29</sup> Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003), 1465

Part of what is misrecognized for Markell is that of the notion of a “fixed” identity, of a sort of bounded selfhood. This, he argues, is what makes a politics of recognition not only unsuccessful, but inherently “incoherent”. Instead, Markell points to arguments regarding the construction of identity put forth by Hannah Arendt, which suggest that identities are constructed through action, but are never either complete or bounded, and that one can never wholly “own” their identity because of their inherently indeterminate nature.

### **Identifying a Saint**

“Only the Bible, we are told, had the capacity to save the innocent children from the hideousness of their parents.”<sup>30</sup> For Kateri, it would appear, only the Bible and death can save the innocent from the hideousness of herself. When she was alive, she lived like so many other Native converts, betwixt and between identities. When she converted to Catholicism, she was rejected by her Mohawk community, sometimes violently: “The shamans ridiculed her, the villagers accused her of witchcraft and hounded her, and her own aunt denounced her as a wanton seductress.”<sup>31</sup> Because of her conversion, the recognition from her fellow villagers as a Mohawk woman had been stripped of her, or at the very least polluted by her actions. So she left her community, looking for both a haven and a home. The mission she encountered appeared to have accepted her as a fellow Catholic, but this determination would be inaccurate, superficial. To her spiritual advisors, her hagiographers, particularly Father Chauchetiere, Kateri was still “other,” but in a perhaps unexpected way. For his hagiographical purposes, she was the “lily among

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<sup>30</sup> Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*, 24

<sup>31</sup> Abbott, *History of Celibacy*, 129

thorns” in the sense that she was an “anti-Indian Indian [who] possessed an inner self fundamentally at odds with the sinful society in which she grew up.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, her identity as a saintly Catholic woman was “other-ized” in this instance in the sense that it was seen as being intimately, irrefutably bound up with her “other” identity—that of a Mohawk. For her Jesuit Fathers, Kateri could not be saintly without being a Mohawk; for the Mohawk community from which she derived, she could not be a Mohawk while being a Catholic. However, one of the issues that we see pointed out by Markell, Arendt, and Appiah with regards to a “politics of recognition” is that of the presupposition of “fixed” identities. If we consider womanhood, adherence to Catholicism, and Mohawk-ness to be stable, bounded, easily-definable modes of identification, then we are already starting the process of “recognition” with both incoherence and impossibility. A “politics of recognition” that would follow such an assessment would only serve to reinforce the constraining power structures that defined what Kateri Tekakwitha was and was not, as a person, when she was living.

Markell and Prashad also note the problematic nature of using “positive” images of an individual for “recognition,” which presents issues undeniably echoed through responses from devotees. Referring to a comment made by Jesse Helms in which he praised Indian-Americans for their capacity for success, Prashad states that “I am being told that I am good not according to my own terms but according to

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<sup>32</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 57. It is certainly important to consider the motivations behind authorial choice of descriptions, particularly when analyzing hagiographical texts; however, for the purposes of this article, I am choosing to work with descriptions/illustrations of Kateri that have had substantial, lasting effects on how the saint is regarded contemporarily and less concerned with deconstruction of hagiographical intention.



terms devised by the values upheld by Helms. My being good is easily used to denigrate those who not only do not do well but who also deride the values upheld by Helms".<sup>33</sup> Thus, the usage of "positive" imaging, such as with Kateri Tekakwitha being held up as a model for Catholics, Indians, and, particularly, Indian Catholics, becomes quite problematic in that, in this case, her status as saint is positioned historically against the "savagery" of Native Americans. Kateri becomes "good" because they, the "savages," are "bad." "'There was somebody good a long time ago,' she said. 'It was Kateri. As a child I heard, "Why can't you be good like Kateri?'"<sup>34</sup>

One particular type of comment we see repeated over and over again from the Catholic Mohawk community of Kateri devotees is that she often served as a "model" for "goodness." As children, their families had images of her in their homes, and these now-adult followers have used her story and personage as an example of proper behavior with which to follow. However, would the official "recognition" of sainthood from the church now reinforce the usage of Kateri Tekakwitha as a sort of "model minority" who other Catholics should attempt to emulate?

### **Birth/Death**

In observance of the death of Kateri, Father Cholenec made the following comment: "'This face, so marked and swarthy, suddenly about a quarter of an hour after her death, and became in a moment so beautiful and so white that I observed it immediately...and cried out.'"<sup>35</sup> As it is, according to one of the Jesuit Fathers in

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<sup>33</sup> Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*, 8

<sup>34</sup> Brian Hayden. "Mohawks prepare for Kateri Tekakwitha's canonization," <http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20120527/NEWS05/705279846>

<sup>35</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 17

attendance of her passing, Kateri Tekakwitha left her worldly existence with beautiful, white flesh. What can be made of this comment? Can an implication be derived that, in this brief moment, through the painful process of her death, we can see racial boundaries transgressed? Or is this merely making mention of a transgression of the physical disfigurement caused by her smallpox wounds? Greer seems to argue for both: "With this momentous death, both [Father Cholenec and Father Chauchetiere] implied, God had removed the marks of disease, suffering, and racial inferiority, transforming the Mohawk into a radiant corpse exuding a saintly aura."<sup>36</sup>

Throughout, this article has attempted to explore some of the history of, and responses to, the saint that is "Lily of the Mohawks". The work here has challenged the notions of this saint as both a "fixed" entity as well as a successful integration of "native" and "colonizer." Furthermore, by engaging with the illustrative example of Kateri, we can see how the notion of "recognition" should be challenged as being a necessity for social cohesion, and indeed, how her placelessness shows the relative incoherence of such a politic of "recognition." Greer notes that "Tekakwitha was not an outsider, but neither was she an absolutely secure insider."<sup>37</sup> Kateri Tekakwitha, once baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, was no longer accepted as a Mohawk, but neither was she understood to be like one of her Jesuit Fathers. She lived betwixt and between modes of identity, just as many other Native converts in

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<sup>36</sup> Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 17

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

the early Americas, and now, as of October 21, 2012, she has been moved from this liminal space to the fixity of sainthood.

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