The Narrative Repatriation of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

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Abstract: Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th-century Mohawk convert, is one miracle shy of becoming the Catholic Church's first Native American saint. Contemporary devotion to her is widespread among diverse Native American communities, and she has become the symbolic figurehead of indigenous catholicism. This article explores the repatriation of Kateri through narratives, as told by her Pueblo women devotees. I suggest that in the women's counterhagiographical discourses, Kateri is translated from a historically silent figure, bordered by colonial Jesuit categories, into a multivalent intertribal Catholic symbol—a reclaimed Indian saint of creative and heroic character. In my discussion of ethnotheology of sainthood, I examine divergent understandings of Indian identity, Catholic community and the nature of sanctity. I trace the multiple voices which tell Kateri's lives—from the standardized colonial account to contemporary devotees' rescripting of and experiences with "their saint."

Résumé: Il ne manque à la Bienheureuse Kateri Tekakwitha, une convertie Mohawk du XVII^{e} siècle, qu'un seul miracle pour devenir la première sainte aborigène américaine de l'Église catholique. La dévotion à Kateri Tekakwitha est très répandue dans différentes communautés indigènes et elles devenue un symbole du catholicisme indigène. Cet article analyse le phénomène de rapatriement de Kateri à travers les récits des femmes Pueblo qui lui manifestent leur dévotion. Je soutiens que Kateri, une figure silencieuse, circonscrite par les catégories coloniales des Jésuites, est devenue, dans le discours anti-hagiographique des femmes, un symbole catholique intertribal polyvalent—une sainte proprement amérindienne d'un caractère créatif héroïque. Dans ma présentation de l'ethnothéologie de la sainteté, j'examine des conceptions divergentes de l'identité indienne, de la communauté catholique et de la nature du sacré. Je retrace les nombreuses voies qui racontent la vie de Kateri—du compte-rendu colonial standardisé aux revitalisations que ses fidèles provoquent chez et avec «leur sainte».

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th-century Mohawk convert, is one miracle shy of becoming the Catholic Church's first Native American saint. Contemporary devotion to her is widespread among diverse Native American communities, and she has become the symbolic figurehead of what devotees call "the voice, presence and identity of Native Americans" in the Church. This paper explores the repatriation of Kateri as a colonial symbol through narratives, as told by her New Mexican Pueblo women devotees. I suggest that Kateri, a quiet and paraphrased character in the 17th-century Jesuit accounts, is given "voice" by her contemporary devout in four interrelated narrative ways: first, by the rescripting of her deathbed words; second, by their daily dialogue and interaction with the proto-saint, encounters which are often perceived as miraculous; third, by the sharing of these miracle stories with other devotees, and last, by the group's popular proclamation of Kateri's full-fledged sainthood, an acclamation which challenges the Vatican's understanding of sanctity. This layering of reclamations constitute what I have termed *narrative repatriation*. Finally, I argue that in the women's counterhagiographical discourses, Kateri is translated from a historically silent figure, bordered by colonial Jesuit categories, tropes and epithets, into a multivalent intertribal Catholic symbol—a reclaimed Indian saint of creative and heroic character. Since her death, she has been transported along the intercolonial missionary rails from New France to New Mexico, through the locomotion of narrative.

I begin with the premise that saints *are* their stories; that is, that saints exist in and through the narratives that are told about them (Woodward, 1990; cf. Orsi, 1996). Thus saint-making—both in its official and populist dimensions, is a process whereby a life is transformed into a "text," broadly defined. My research focusses on the devotional stories which are told about Kateri by Pueblo women as narrative theology, in which both the divine and the self are revealed, and as counterhagiography, stories which challenge the colonial narra-

tives of this young Mohawk woman's identity and purpose.[1]

Here, hagiography becomes more than simply standardized stories about saints, but also stories about selves, both the official and the popular "selves" who transmit and translate Kateri's narratives (cf. Orsi, 1996). By the term "counterhagiography," I seek to underline the multiple, changing and often contradictory discourses which tell a saint's life. Such a notion of counterhagiography moves the story of a saint's life away from the traditional hagiographical practices which "do not manifest a Saint, [but rather] . . . mince him into spiritual lessons" (Woodward, 1996: 369, 370; cf. Noble and Head, 1995). My understanding of counterhagiography is closely linked to what I have called an "ethnotheology of sainthood"—the folk understandings about the lives, nature and function of saints.[2] In the specific case of Kateri, her colonial biographers and her contemporary devotees, I use the term "ethnotheology of sainthood" to refer to a situation where the people's beliefs and experiences override, or at least differ from, the Church's official statements and stories about Kateri (cf. Vecsey, 1997: 107). In employing these concepts, I hope to underline the populist dimensions of saint-making and the ways in which devotion to saints and the stories told about them shape saints' characters. At a general level then, this research is interested in the "conversations" between Kateri Tekakwitha and her devotional communities, and in the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization of Kateri.

In this exploration of the repatriation of a colonial mythico-historic figure through contemporary devotional narratives, it becomes clear that Kateri's story is not linear; there are multiple narratives with multiple endings; she is multiply "translated" (Behar, 1993). In the colonial version, she is trapped in the Vatican, waiting for a miracle; she is an unfinished chapter in the official canonization story, lacking the last plot move, a final evidence of sanctity to bring the Church to a "happily ever after" conclusion to the Jesuit/Mohawk encounter. The heavy printed volume of Kateri's *Positio* waits for other documents, written proof of the hero's activities. In a contemporary postcolonial version, her story takes us on a multisited speaking and appearance tour—from kitchens in adobe homes, to meetings in church halls in the centre of the hard packed plazas of many New Mexican Pueblos, to the sweltering August national meetings in universities across the U.S., where Kateri speaks to her devotees about her past and their future.

A Mohawk in New Mexico

New Mexico is home to fully one tenth of the North American Kateri "Circles," small Catholic grassroots devotional groups dedicated to Kateri Tekakwitha. Native devotees of Kateri can be found in disproportionately high numbers in the Southwestern United States (Tekakwitha Conference, map in headquarters office; Vecsey, 1996: 204). Although the Pueblo people have a tradition of indigenous Catholicism and devotion to saints that predates Kateri's arrival in the Southwest (Vecsey, 1996), she is nevertheless singled out by many in the Pueblos as a representative and embodiment of what it means to be a Native Catholic.[3]

After her death, Kateri's cult flourished, and her life and death became central icons of Jesuit missiology in North America (Vecsey, 1997: 99). The evolution of her cult was predicated on the multiple translations and rewritings of Kateri's biography across colonial Europe. Despite the widespread intercolonial use of her story, it was not until the late 19th century when "concerted efforts aimed at securing Tekakwitha's canonization began in earnest" (Greer, 1998: 151). At the turn of the 20th century "an explosive proliferation of hagiographic materials as an Americanized version of the Kateri industry took flight" (ibid.). What followed was the creation of two parallel Vice-Postulators and canonization campaigns, one American, now based in Fonda and Auriesville, New York, and one French Canadian, centred on the mission site in Kahnawake, Quebec. (ibid.; cf. Vecsey, 1997: 100). According to the Native women I interviewed, Kateri arrived in New Mexico in the 1930s, via the missionary school system. As I discuss below, early childhood stories and school plays about a young Mohawk girl served to prompt devotion to the proto-saint later in the lives of her contemporary devotees.

This article is a product of 12 months of fieldwork between 1996 and 1999, during which I spent most of my time with the various Pueblo peoples, both on their reservations, particularly Isleta and Jemez, and in the urban centre of Albuquerque. I also interviewed people from the Mescalero Apache and Navajo reservations, attended three Tekakwitha Conferences, and conducted preliminary research and visited Kateri's shrines in Kahnawake, Quebec, and Auriesville and Fonda, New York.[4] In many cases, the Kateri devotees whom I met were acquainted with each other through the regional and national Tekakwitha meetings. Many devotees also had family on various reservations and I followed these kinship lines wherever possible.

While many individuals and communities plan and attend the annual Tekakwitha Conference, devotees also meet monthly in local reservation-based devotional groups called Kateri Circles. During my fieldwork, I attended many of the monthly meetings, each hosted by a local Circle, and became aware of several common themes and issues of interest. First, the Kateri Circles exist to prepare for and enact what happens at the annual Conference. Fundraising is a key issue, as many participants are elderly and on fixed incomes, and find the yearly travel to be financially challenging. Bake sales, bread sales, enchilada sales, bingo, and other activities are held throughout the year to raise money for travel to the Conference. As well, the tribal government is often asked for financial support, which is provided in some cases. Second, Kateri Circles pray in unison for the canonization of Blessed Kateri. On several reservations, a large statue of Kateri circulates between the members' homes, spending a month at each (cf. Behar in Badone, 1990: 101-102). Third, Circles discuss their roles in the community and consider their responsibilities on the reservation, and their spiritual and social functions as local members of the national Conference. Fourth, the Circles often try to attract new members largely through the vehicle of the Church by witnessing to the efficacy of Kateri and announcing events concerning the proto-saint before or after the local Sunday mass. The priority given to these ventures varies from group to group and is often a spirited topic of discussion of at meetings.[5]

This research focusses specifically on New Mexico Pueblo women's devotion to Kateri, who is identified by these women as both Native American and Catholic (cf. Rodriguez, 1994). My understanding of Kateri has been shaped primarily by the experiences and narratives of women. For the most part, devotion to Kateri is women's business. This is not to say that I did not meet or hear about men whose lives were radically changed by an encounter with her. However, those who attend Kateri Circle meetings regularly, plan and prepare for her feasts, tend, dress, adorn, and clean her statues, and tell her stories are primarily women (cf. Orsi, 1996: xiii). Further, the place that I came to hold in the communities of the Southwest centred on my own gender. It was "natural" for me to spend time talking to other women, and although I did speak to men, particularly priests, it was more difficult to arrange interviews with men. Men were less interested than women in talking to me, and there was an air of potential inappropriateness around those encounters with men. Essentially, I associated with, lived with, cooked with, and talked with women and was included in their networks.

It is difficult and even undesirable to circumscribe the area of one's research before arriving in the field. Before my extended fieldwork in New Mexico, I knew the kinds of places I wanted to go, the sorts of people I imagined interviewing, and I had a half a dozen good "contacts." But much of the forward motion and travelling in my research was prompted by an introduction or an invitation to another place or person. "Oh, you must go see so and so who lives in such and such a place. She knows a lot about Kateri." And so I would travel, following links of friendship and family, tracing lines of community around the diversity of Native Americans who claim Kateri as their own and who envision themselves as "her people." My exploration took on the rhythm of three weeks here, a month there, a few days here, and then back to where I had started.

My research is narrative-oriented, an ethnography of a symbol, rather than focussed on a single geographic community (cf. Tedlock, 1982). I follow the creation and adaptation of Kateri as a symbol and a metaphor for Indianness. I follow her story, its retelling, and the conflicts that ensue from this narrative and its translation (cf. Marcus, 1995: 106-110). The early French missionaries and the contemporary community of devotees are all bonded by these stories; it is this "social cartography," mapped across history and countries, which is the focus of my research (Marcus, 1999: 7). In brief, Kateri is a multi-sited phenomenon, multiply placed in time and space, and therefore, following her stories, colonial and contemporary, requires exploration of many "locales"—text, person, and myth (cf. Clifford, 1990: 64; 1997: 21, 27, 56, 67, 86; Dubisch, 1995: 7; Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 94).

Kateri in the 17th Century

Tekakwitha was born in 1656 to a Mohawk father and an Algonkian mother on the south bank of the Mohawk River, near what is now Auriesville, New York. When she was four years old, a smallpox epidemic claimed the lives of her parents and brother, and left Tekakwitha weak, scarred, and with damaged eyesight. After encountering Jesuit missionaries in 1674, she began to take religious instruction. In 1676, at the age of 20, she was baptised and given the name Katherine, which was later translated as Kateri. One year later she moved to the Francis Xavier Mission (Kahnawake) near Montreal.

Kateri grew to fruition as a saint in the soil of the Jesuit mission at what is now, Kahnawake, Quebec, located 14 kilometres south of Montreal. Founded in 1667 as a Jesuit mission settlement composed primarily of Mohawk and Oneida, Kahnawake is the oldest of the Iroquois reserves in Canada. The community moved

three times between 1676 and 1716. Its residents finally formed the settlement called by the French missionaries, Sault St. Louis, and by the Iroquois, Kahnawake, after a Mohawk settlement in the Mohawk Valley (present day Fonda, New York) (Morrison and Wilson, 1986: 314).[6]

By many accounts a mission of remarkable vitality (Koppedrayer, 1993: 286), Kahnawake was an example of a "praying village," where neophytes were encouraged to live under the guidance of priests and separate from their former "pagan" life (Axtell, 1992: 162-163; Axtell and Ronda, 1978: 33). At Kahnawake, Kateri made a formal vow of virginity and practised extreme austerities and devotion such as flagellations, branding, exposure, and fasting. Kateri was at the mission just over two years before she died in 1680 at the age of 24 (*Positio*). Kateri's pious existence did not end with her physical death; her biographies include numerous accounts of miracles, visions, and prophecies, all attributed to Kateri's intercession, which is said to continue to the present day. Kateri's holiness has been recognized by the Church. She was declared Venerable by Pope Pius XII in 1943, and was Beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1980.[7] Yet Kateri remains one official miracle short of full-fledged sainthood, despite the widespread devotion, particularly in the Southwest, that her beatification prompted.

The Colonial Narrative: Kateri's *Positio*

Let us start back in the 17th century, at the beginning of the story. In researching the historical figure of Kateri Tekakwitha, the *Jesuit Relations* stand alone as the record of the events and circumstances surrounding her life, death, and significance.[8] The *Jesuit Relations* are the annual reports of the French mission to the "New World," and incorporate the observations of all the missionaries. The *Relations* begin with the arrival of the Jesuits in the lands of the St. Lawrence River drainage in 1611 and cover a period of about 200 years.

The greater part of the material describing Native life in New France is found in the reports from 1632 to 1673, when the *Relations* appeared annually (Spalding, 1928: 883; Vecsey, 1997: 3-5). At the time of their publication, beyond their roles as missionary records for the order of Jesuits (Thwaites, 1896-1901), the *Relations* were held to be of "great ethnologic value due to the fact that they are a collection of all the references made by a large number of intelligent men who lived for years among the people of whom they wrote.... They are told simply and there is no reason to question their accuracy" (McGuire, 1901: 257). Joseph McGuire, a turn-of-the-century anthropologist, presents the *Jesuit Relations* as an "objective" source of information regarding Native peoples (cf. Vecsey, 1997: 8).

However, the *Jesuit Relations* were not without purpose and audience. They were intended for the edification and information of a general French readership and were designed to obtain support for the Jesuit missions in New France. Historian Christopher Vecsey states that, "Designed for public consumption, the *Jesuit Relations* were a witness to catholic faith; they were devotional literature meant to edify readers for the glory of Church and God, and to raise funds for the missionary endeavour" (Vecsey, 1997: 8). The *Relations* depict the process by which American Indians became imbued with Catholic culture and as such "were truthful propaganda, feeding the French curiosity about the Indians and the New World, and spurring pious zeal for the conversion of the Indians" (Wade, 1988: 25).

It is essential to note that Kateri comes to us primarily as a literary creation (Greer, 1998: 139; Koppedrayer, 1993; Shoemaker, 1995). Canadian historian Allan Greer claims that, "Of the Jesuits who knew her well, two wrote about her extensively: Pierre Cholenec, her confessor, and Claude Chaucetiere, who stood watch at her deathbed" (Ibid.: 138).[9] Greer goes on to say that these book-length accounts are the only sources about Kateri's life, and that, needless to say, "There is no Iroquois testimony on the subject that survives from that period" (Ibid.: 139). Perhaps most importantly, Cholenec's and Chaucetiere's texts were all written in the hagiographic genre; "these are not simply biographies, they are *vitae sanctorum*, lives of a saint" (Ibid.: 139; cf. Koppedrayer, 1993). It is from these early Jesuit writings that Kateri's *Positio*, the documents gathered when a hopeful saint's cause is first presented to the Vatican, was compiled. *In their story, the Jesuits are Kateri's voice, and she is their triumph.*

The Quiet Colonial Kateri

In the Jesuit narrative, as well as in later contemporary and colonial reproductions of her story, Kateri is said to have had a "predisposition to the faith," and to have endured the "terrible circumstances of pagandom in which she began her life" (Bechard, 1980: 28; Brown, 1958: 161; *Positio,* 119-123, 241-244; cf. Bechard, 1967, 1992; Buehrle, 1954; Bunson 1992). This discourse of something wonderful emerging from the most unlikely circumstances serves to show how far Kateri had to progress to become pious and virtuous. Smallpox arrived with the colonists, and Kateri's encounter with this disease marks the first "sign" of her uniqueness. Kateri survived, but both her parents and her younger brother were killed. Kateri herself was left weak, scarred and with damaged eyesight. These disabilities, according to

her biographers, marked Kateri as an "outcaste" of sorts, left without family or beauty.[10] An "orphan" (according to Euro-American paradigms of kinship), she went to live with an uncle and an assortment of aunts who mistreated and tormented her, attempted to prevent her from pursuing her interest in Christianity, and tried to force her to marry against her wishes. In this narrative, Kateri becomes a misfit, further and further distanced from and even at odds with her life among the Iroquois. At the same time, she is described as "courageous," bearing the burden of the insults and cruelty of her people (Brown, 1958: 129-131; *Positio,* 139-141).

The Jesuits arrived like an answer to a prayer, providing a solution for all of Kateri's problems. Her first encounter with Jesuit missionaries occurred in 1667 when Fathers Fremin, Bruyas, and Pierron visited her village and were hosted by her uncle. Kateri was assigned to the missionaries' care during their stay, and it was then that her interest in Christianity peaked (Vecsey, 1997: 96-97). In 1674, Kateri met Father de Lamberville when he visited her home. She announced her desire for baptism and began to take religious instruction. On Easter Sunday in 1676, she was baptized and given the name Katherine (later translated as Kateri). Yet baptism only increased her troubles. Now a complete misfit among her "traditional Iroquois people," and tormented and teased by them, Kateri is said to have *fled* her village, on the advice of Father de Lamberville, to live at Sault St. Louis, the St. Francis Xavier mission near Montreal. This interpretation of Kateri's journey as flight to a "safe haven" is important. Kateri is described as "coming home to a place where she finally belongs" (*Positio*, 142-154, 246-249). As Greer argues,

> Space has a moral and spiritual meaning in all of the Jesuit *Vitae* of Tekakwitha. . . . Saints' Lives since ancient times tend to be organized around movement between a "bad" place and a "good" place; the subject experiences adversity in one locality—usually some version of a "desert" or a wilderness—and glorification in the other. Cholenec's Kateri conforms to this pattern to a striking degree. The move from the "abominable country" of her birth—"another Egypt"—to the "promised land" of Kahnawake is the primary spatial dynamic. (Greer, 1998: 149; cf. Brown, 1958: 150; *Positio*, 249-252)

Kateri lived at the mission for just over two years before she died. During this time, Kateri pronounced her vow of perpetual virginity, formally declared herself to be the "wife of Christ" and became, as the Jesuits called her, "the First Iroquois Virgin" (Bechard, 1980: 128-130; Brown, 1958: 183; *Positio* 287-289). These events mark the beginning of Kateri's "official" ascetic life. At the mission, it seems that "flagellations, branding, exposure, fasting, metal spiked belts, thorn-filled beds, and so on were Kateri's practice of Christianity" (Koppedrayer, 1993: 287; *Positio*, 181-183, 286, 289-293). Yet Kateri did not practise these alone. Cholenec documented the zeal and asceticism in his biographies of Kateri.

> The Mission of the Sault was at that time very fervent under the guidance of its holy missionaries. . . . Several times a week some of them chastised their bodies until they bled; others, while gathering firewood, wore iron bands around their bodies for entire days. . . . The women, who always go to extremes, did all this and more. (*Positio,* 282-284)

Ethnohistorian David Blanchard also mentions that Kateri was the leader of a "band"—a confraternity of women devoted to an imitation of Kateri's spirituality (Blanchard, 1982: 92-93). The Jesuit fathers understood this group of women to be imitating Montreal nuns. Chaucetiere says, "Kateri Tekakwitha is known to have visited Montreal and the nuns with Father Pierre Cholenec and some other companions in 1676" (Chaucetiere in Blanchard, 1982: 91). Further, in 1696, Cholenec declared that such a vow of virginity "was an unheard of thing among her people, and all the more to be admired in Katherine since those of her sex, being supported by what a husband brings home from the hunt, all aspire to marriage, and consider that they have attained the greatest happiness possible in this life, when they have met with a good hunter" (*Positio*, 291).

By contrast, Blanchard argues that although Kateri was responsible for first proposing the formation of an association of virgins, she did this in order to "resurrect" the traditional Iroquois belief that virginity created great power in an individual. Traditionally, Blanchard continues, such Iroquois "convents" were supported by the community until the arrival of the Europeans who "dishonoured the profession" (Lafitau 1974 in Blanchard, 1982: 92).

The *Relations* do indeed suggest that there existed a small group of women who practised extreme austerities, chose a life of virginity, and who may have seen Kateri as a model (*Positio,* 181-185, 262-273). Greer and Vecsey argue that it is possible that,

> During her lifetime, Kateri was simply one member among thirteen of a group of pious and ascetic young women, and Chaucetiere's mission history accords much more attention to that collectivity. These women

> not only resisted overwhelming pressures to fornicate, they renounced marriage itself and, in some case, cut off their hair to discourage suitors. (Greer, 1998: 141; cf. Vecsey, 1997: 90)

Moreover, Greer continues,

> Anyone familiar with Iroquoian cultural traditions will recognize the indigenous antecedents of the "sisters'" practises of female friendship, sharing, fasting, and self-torture, though of course the Jesuits chose always to depict these in the European language of Counter-Reformation piety. (Greer, 1998: 142; cf. Vecsey, 1997: 41, 42, 97, 98)

According to Chaucetiere and Bechard, Kateri's "sisters" or "band" *followed* Kateri's exemplary influence "in the practise of the most Christian virtues" (i.e., they were not part of a group instituted or even encouraged by the Jesuits and Kateri was the group's initiator) (Bechard, 1976: 157, 1992: 138-144; Thwaites, 1896-1901: 64: 122, 124, 62: 175-177). It appears then that Kateri was indeed part and perhaps leader of a group of women at the mission and that they participated in the ascetic fervour which marked Kateri's time at the Sault. It is provocative to imagine how and why Kateri was singled out by her priests and how her extreme practices were interpreted by the Jesuits who were writing her biography shortly after her death.

Kateri's life of piety ended in 1680 with her death. At the age of 24, having been sick and weak for months, Kateri uttered, "Jesus! Mary! I love you!" and went "to be with her Lord." She is said to have faced her imminent death with joy, secure in the knowledge that she was giving God what He had asked of her (Bechard, 1980: 30). According to Bechard, who, as Kateri's former Canadian Vice-Postulator may be considered as the key representative of her contemporary colonial biographers, "fifteen minutes after her death before the eyes of two Jesuits and all the Indians that could fit into the room, the ugly scars on her face suddenly disappeared" (Bechard, 1980: 152; Skanaieah, n.d.: 3). This "miracle," which rendered Kateri "beautiful," was at once taken as a sign of her saintly life.

Kateri's deathbed words are proclamation of love for the colonial pantheon and a cry of missionary success. These five words essentially constitute the only scripted line she has in the Jesuit account (*Positio,* 302). Of further significance is that this deathbed utterance of the names of Jesus and Mary is continually reproduced in a standardized fashion in later colonial biographies of Kateri (Bechard, 1980; Brown, 1958; Buehlre, 1954; Bunson, 1992; Skanaieah, n.d.). There are however, some reports of another dialogue she may have had with her female followers just prior to her death, the most popular line of which is "I will love you in heaven" (Bechard, 1980: 150-152; *Positio,* 204). Perhaps, following the lines of Koppedrayer's argument, this communication with her "devotees" might be seen as part of the literary creation of Kateri—a preview of her colonial sainthood, as understood and recorded by the Jesuits. All other accounts in the *Positio* of Kateri talking, such as her requests of the Fathers to start a "convent" for Native women, or to take a vow of virginity are paraphrased—pre-understood and pre-interpreted by her Jesuit audience and narrators (Bechard, 1980: 128-129; Brown, 1958: 179; Bunson, 1992: 113). Kateri is quiet in their account, speaking only obedience to their decisions and love for their God. As I will demonstrate below, Kateri's deathbed words are "rescripted" by her contemporary Pueblo devotees to convey a message of intertribal Indian identity rather than an affirmation of conversion (cf. Preston, 1989: 52).

The record of her spiritual practices and, undoubtedly, her final declaration of love for the Jesuit deities, deepened the piety of the French Jesuit community in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Her name came to symbolize the miraculous transformational efficacy of Catholicism among Indian peoples (Vecsey, 1997: 99). For these early Jesuits, Kateri is holy *despite* her Indianness. She is "a lily among thorns," (*Positio*, 142) and, "like a lily," the colonial account declares that she too had her "roots in slime" (Brown, 1958: 114). On her tomb in the mission church in Kahnawake, Kateri is memorialized as the "fairest flower ever to bloom among the Mohawks." "Her people" were something to be overcome and transcended.

The 17th-century Kateri is historically silent, speaking only before her death, and at all other times before, according to the Jesuits, "this savage was perfect. She never said anything which could shock anyone, and if her tongue slipped through her impetuosity, she imposed a harsh punishment on herself" (*Positio,* 162). In the Jesuit narrative, she is an almost voiceless colonial extraction from the missionary encounter, her life "minced into spiritual lessons" and a standard hagiographical plot (Koppedrayer 1993; Woodward, 1990: 369, 370). The *Positio* divides her life into short lessons of cardinal virtues:

> [The Vatican's] Congregation for the Causes of Saints is quite precise in its understanding of holiness.... Holiness is manifest by a two-tiered structure of virtues: the three supernatural (so-called because they

> are infused by grace), virtues of faith, hope and charity (love of God and of neighbour), and the four cardinal moral virtues (originally derived from the ethics of Aristotle) of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Since all Christians are expected to practice these virtues, a saint is someone who practices them to a heroic or exceptional degree. (Woodward, 1990: 223)

Kateri's virtues, as recorded in her *Positio*, and for which she was declared Venerable, are vast, yet predictable and precise. The account of these virtues constitutes a pointed narrative of her life that emphasizes her ability to be "a Christian by desire," "predestined by God to accomplish great things" (*Positio,* 29). The record of her holiness begins:

> Katherine had received at birth a naturally fine character. While she was still a child and a pagan, it was noticed that she shrank from all that was evil, that she was gentle, even timid, not curious, nor proud. Thus, even then she appeared prepared by nature for the practise of every Christian virtue. (*Positio*, 29)

In the key moments of her life, particularly in her chastity and obedience, her biographers argued and the Vatican agreed in 1943, that all the necessary saintly virtues were exhibited to an uncommon degree.

In this colonial narrative, Kateri is dislodged in two ways. She is, in the Jesuits' accounts, taken from her Iroquois home and sent to France. And it is their praying villages and fracturing of communities which precipitated Kateri's resettlement in Kahnawake. Further, in the colonial story, Kateri is dis-membered, in both senses, losing or perhaps foregoing citizenship among "her people"—and her life is broken by her biographers into standard European hagiographical tropes.

Contemporary devotees affirm and propagate the Jesuit images of and stories about Kateri; they too recount her virtuous love and charity and her deathbed cry for Jesus and Mary. Yet they also work creatively in the quiet narrative space between the heavy lines and bold summaries of Kateri's colonial life. It is important to note that the narrative creation and negotiation of Kateri as a saint points to a dialectic and dynamic relationship between popular and official religion, and not a simple opposition and competition between two discrete levels (cf. Badone, 1990). While contemporary devotion to Kateri is largely a grass-roots endeavour, the narratives about her have their origins in the "official" *Jesuit Relations*. The stories recounted about Kateri today encompass both "traditional" and innovated elements of her life, at once affirming and moving beyond the official biographies. Further, in the narratives of the devout, the Church's definitions of miracles and saintliness are expanded by the widespread miraculous experiences of Kateri's devotees. Finally, while Kateri is enmeshed within the Vatican process of saint-making, she also moves beyond these limits in her devotees' acclamations of her as already a saint.

In these facets, we have seen that the symbolic figure of Kateri cross-cuts the borders of orthodoxy and official Catholicism. Yet I am careful not to oversimplify Kateri as solely a popular character, nor to see devotion to her merely as a defiant act of the laity. The boundaries are simply not that clear. I seek to see beyond a theoretical construct of official productions and popular responses, or of folk innovations and official regulations. Kateri's sainthood is not so much a competition or struggle for moral and theological control between the folk and the Church officials as Macklin (1988), Margolies (1988) and Wilson (1983) suggest for other similar cases (cf. Gudeman, 1988). Rather, Kateri's case is more a matter of the expansion and contraction of definitions and functions of a saint, on both popular and official levels. In the fluid and dynamic space between these spheres, Kateri, as a symbolic figure, models and remodels the place of Native Americans, both historic and contemporary, in the Catholic Church.

Making/Loving a Saint 300 Years Later

Contemporary devotion to Kateri is largely a narrative phenomenon; spoken or printed stories of her life and miracles are the primary impetus for involvement with her. Local priests, nuns, and catechism classes both in the Catholic boarding schools and on the reservations served to transmit the key elements of Kateri's life to Pueblo and Navajo youth as early as the 1930s, when the first stirrings of her cause were coming to the surface. Many contemporary Pueblo devotees recall hearing about Kateri, from their mothers or grandmothers, from this time.

For example, Aunt Grace, an Acoma woman in her late 70s, told me about the first time she heard about Kateri as we were talking over coffee in her trailer home on a cold and windy Albuquerque January afternoon in 1998.[11]

> I remember that at a church in Acomita [part of the Acoma reservation], there's a picture of her on the wall. I always wondered who she was, that Indian lady. I don't remember how old I was when I first saw that picture. I just wanted to know who she was. I had an aunt in Acoma and once when she was saying the

> rosary, I walked in and said "Hello Grandma." "Oh Grace! I was just praying for you to Blessed Kateri." "Who's that?" I didn't know her. My Grandma had probably heard from the Father in the church.

Similarly, Margaret, a Navajo and Choctaw semi-retired nurse who leads the Albuquerque Kateri Circle, recounted this story about how her family came to know Kateri.

> My cousin's mother knew about Kateri way out in Navajo [Nation] in the thirties or forties. She didn't know exactly the person's [Kateri's] name, but she talked about this Indian woman up from the New York area who was a holy woman. People from here may have gone up north to visit and found out about Kateri.

Annette, Margaret's Navajo cousin who lives in the small village of Lukachukai nestled against the Chuska mountains, told me how she had first heard about Kateri through her mother who,

> . . . heard about her from St. Joseph's boarding school where I went. Mom used to call her "the Girl of the Woods" and I had an old picture of her that Mother gave me of her wrapped in fur, but she didn't have a wooden cross. Mom gave me a medal of hers too. My mother told me the story of Kateri.

These childhood narratives seem to have formed dormant seeds of knowledge about Kateri so that when her beatification became headline news among Native American Catholics in 1980, her devotees easily recognized the proto-saint as part of their Indian familiar and familial heritage.

Dying/Living Words

In the stories that contemporary devotees tell, Kateri is posthumously and retrospectively given new deathbed words. Kateri's rescripted voice speaks a message of unity between the "Indian" and the "Catholic" ways, and among diverse Native Americans—"her people"—an expanded and redefined community (cf. Marcus, 1999: 7). For many of Kateri's devotees in the Southwest, the question of the relationship between what they perceive to be traditional religion and Catholicism is one that works itself out in the life and person of Kateri. In the 17th century, Kateri's Catholicism was predicated on the *erasure* of her Indianness. By contrast, for her contemporary devotees, however, Kateri is said to embody what it means to be *both* Native and Catholic—two identities fragilely combined in post Vatican II permissiveness (Holmes, 1999. cf. Angrosino, 1994; Beaver, 1973; Biernatzki, 1991; Buckley, 1991; Cote, 1996; De La Cruz et al, 1991; Hiebert, 1984; Kozak, 1994; Schreiter, 1985; Stewart and Shaw, 1994; Tesfai, 1995; Thorogood, 1995; Yamamori and Taber, 1975; Verstraelen, 1995; and Zuern et al, 1983). On many occasions, Native American Catholic women told me about their experiences of Kateri's unifying message.

In February 1998, at the kitchen table in her adobe home, Heather, an elderly Jemez woman who has been attending Tekakwitha Conferences since 1984, recounted to me how she first heard about Kateri in the mission schools of the 1930s, and also, even at that time, how she perceived (or perhaps now perceives in retrospective memory) the unifying message delivered by Kateri on her deathbed. Of note as well in Heather's vision of Kateri is the way in which Kateri predicts her own saint-hood, not dissimilar in this matter to the way in which the Jesuits wrote about her life as hagiography.

> *Paula:* How did you first learn about Kateri?
> *Heather:* I first learned about Kateri from the mission school here at the Pueblo. There was a Mohawk Indian kind of play. That was maybe in the seventh grade, back in the thirties. So I knew about her already. It must have come through the nuns.
> *Paula:* What were you taught about Kateri at school?
> *Heather:* Oh, that she was an Indian woman who died of smallpox of the time. And the scars. In front of the bishops and the priests, when she had been lying there for fifteen minutes, they disappeared! She was just like the Blessed Virgin. I guess that's how the priests knew she was going to be beautified, beatified. And Kateri said that the Native Americans have to help. She asked for our help to make her the first saint. She said, "You must gather people from all different places and start having conferences."

Stephanie, another elderly member of the Jemez Kateri Circle, has devoted her life since the 1980 beatification to making Kateri's cause known. Stephanie accomplishes this by frequently telling the saint's story to family and friends, and by never being without prayer cards in her embroidered apron pocket, ready to give them to anyone who Stephanie thinks "needs a little cheering up." On this February morning, during that same week-long sandstorm in Jemez when I interviewed Heather and several other of the local "Kateri ladies," Stephanie and I were puttering around the woodstove in her old adobe house at the edge of Jemez Pueblo and waiting for some pinto beans to cook. While their spicy aroma filled the room, Stephanie recounted an experience at a Tekakwitha Conference almost 20 years earlier where she was struck by the penultimate message from Kateri.

There was this group of old Mohawk women and they were having this get together, all sitting in a circle. I said, "Am I welcome?" and the ladies said, "Sure." There was this one Mohawk lady who was ninety-three. She talked about how Kateri died and how her grandmother saw her and knew her way back. She said that when Kateri died, she was made a saint. When Kateri was little, she lost her mom and dad. You probably heard about that. Anyway, this old lady said that Kateri said this on her dying bed to her people and the priest. "I want my Indian traditional way and my Catholic way, combined together because they both lead us back to the One that gave it to us. It was given to us by just One, the Father Spirit. And to all my Indian people," she said, "When I put my foot down on that sacred ground of the Lord's, I want to do it on behalf of you, all my Indian people. You are going to grow beautifully in this way." That really impressed me so much, what that old Mohawk lady was talking about. There was another old lady that was sitting across from her in the circle and she said, "Yes! That's what my uncle told me too. He was saying the same thing." That means that Kateri was a *Catholic Mohawk Indian* girl—our Indian saint.

Later that afternoon, over a bowl of chili-hot beans and freshly made tortillas, Stephanie reiterated her understanding of what Kateri said before she died, the proto-saint's intentions for her people, and how this all fit into the postconciliar worldview and Indian unity.

Some of the old priests didn't like our Indian way. In fact, right here in the Pueblo, they called us pagans, because they didn't understand our Indian religion. By the time of the second council, what do you call that? Vatican II. It was there that was decided after Kateri and her group had already brought it up, they decided it was OK. Some of the priests had already found out about our beautiful way of prayer—our Indian language, our Indian way. That way the Catholic way and the Native American way can just build up. And that is what this young lady, Kateri wants. *She said so before she died.*

Heather's and Stephanie's stories recount Kateri's "own words" and give the silent saint a new voice. Rather than simply proclaiming her love for an imported Jesus, in these women's stories, Kateri speaks to "her people"—Indians everywhere—and that Indianness, once bemoaned and obscured in colonial times, is now celebrated, consecrated even, as Kateri tells her people how to be *both* Catholic and Indian. These contemporary deathbed narratives push at the boundaries of the Jesuits' reports. Her women devotees today relocate and reanimate Kateri's quiet colonial voice, giving her new words. Further, "her people" perceive in Kateri's articulation of Native Catholic identity, a new moral of the missionary story.

Waiting for a Miracle

For me, I see that she is already a saint. In my heart, in my *book, in my living with her, her statue here, she is already a saint. If the Holy Father doesn't see it, well, . . .* (Aunt Grace's voice trails off, not quite ready to push orthodoxy and authority any further). *I say to Kateri when I pray, You are already a saint. You are already up there. You have already seen my husband and all the people who have been involved in the Conference who have passed on. They have already seen her as a saint. She is with them now. A lot of people say that in praying to her, she has answered all their prayers.* (Grace, interview, 1998)

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 documentation and paperwork. To me, she became a saint the day she died. She had that clear complexion when she died after having had smallpox. I've always felt that she was a saint to me. (Margaret, interview, 1998)

The stories about Kateri's deathbed words and message form the basis of a relationship with the proto-saint in which she is understood to speak regularly and empathetically with her devotees. This interaction and dialogue with Kateri—stories which begin "Kateri said to me . . ." or "Kateri appeared to me . . ."—can be said to characterize contemporary devotion to the saint. This discourse, between a devotee and Kateri, as well as among the devout as a group, is dominated by miracle talk. As noted above, Kateri is one miracle shy of becoming the Church's first Native American saint. Waiting for that final miracle and for Kateri's canonization can be a frustrating and discouraging time. Many of her devotees feel passed over by the Pope and by the Church, pointing to the seemingly interminable span since her beatification, a time which for them has been filled with "miracles-to-me," visions and dreams of the proto-saint, experiences which are regularly recounted and shared in the devotional community. Kateri is a strong protagonist in these stories, and not a mere subject of Jesuit action and account. She converses with and acts on behalf of an engaged and responsive audience. The stories her devout then tell can be seen as resistance narratives where the silenced saint speaks and the colonized

respond. These kinds of counterhagiographical discourses are perhaps most clearly exemplified in devotees' popular proclamation of Kateri as a saint—a chorus of voices which pre-empt and even challenge the Vatican's hesitation in her canonization.

Despite the strong "saint-to-me" feeling of Kateri's devotees, making an official saint today has become a complicated process of colonial hagiography and Vatican decisions. The procedure begins with a collected biography of a potential saint's life, or *Positio*, which, when approved, will show her virtues to be exceptional, and will earn her the title of Venerable. Next, a proven miracle is required. After it is investigated and passed by the Vatican's medical board, the Pope beatifies the candidate and declares her Blessed. One more miracle, similarly scrutinized, will allow the Pope to canonize her and make her an official saint (cf. Margolies, 1988: 95-96; Woodward, 1990: 64-68, 99; 1988: 95-96; Wilson, 1983: 191-192). Yet despite the apparent strictness and rigour of the canonization process, there *are* different possible paths on the road to sainthood, and Kateri has followed one of these alternate routes.

In 1943, 263 years after her death, Kateri was declared Venerable on the basis of the information contained in her *Positio*, following the usual course. This document consists almost entirely of the writings of the 17th-century French Jesuit missionaries in New France and was collected and processed according to the orthodox lines of canonization. However, in 1980, Kateri was beatified on the strength of *rumor miraculorum*, on her *reputation* of virtues and *rumour—read: narratives*—of miracles, instead of one or more specifically accepted miracles (*Kateri,* 1985: 143: 25). Yet rumours and reputation aside, before Kateri can be officially canonized, the Pope is insisting on one irrefutable miracle, a medical cure for which Kateri only has been invoked and for which no local doctor nor the Vatican's medical consultants can find a scientific explanation.

In many ways, the saint-making process has become increasingly dependent on the co-operation of doctors and the availability of medical records. Moreover, advances in medical science have made it increasingly difficult to prove miracles. For the Vatican to accept it as "miraculous," a cure must be complete and of lasting duration and be inexplicable by all known scientific measures. As well, the recipient of the miracle must have invoked one saint only (Woodward, 1990: 206). Many a potential final miracle for Kateri has been discarded because the believer prayed to more than one saint at a time, so that it is impossible to know which one to credit with divine intercession. The difficulties in meeting physicians' requirements for medical miracles precipitated the 1983 reforms under Pope John Paul II which reduced the number of required miracles by half so that only one is needed to become Blessed and one more to be declared a Saint (Ibid.: 193-208, 85, 99).

In the mean time, stories of her many miracles granted to devotees, similar to those "rumours" which brought about her beatification, trace their way through Pueblos, onto the reservations, around the Kateri Circles, and into the national Conference. These miracles are proclaimed in testimonies, and shared among friends and family members. Many of those whom I met in the Southwest had themselves experienced blessings from Kateri which they considered to be real miracles. So Kateri *acts* like a full-fledged saint, interceding and responding to her devotees' petitions, performing miracles and answering prayers. Among her devotees there is both a fervent desire for Kateri to be canonized, and a concomitant realization that when she becomes a saint, it will not make any significant difference in their own devotional lives. Already, she is "a saint to us," say her Native women devotees. In their eyes, the Pope lags behind in his refusal to acknowledge Kateri's saintliness. They *know*, through their own dialogues with Kateri and those of others that she is indeed their saint.

Thousands of miracles *have* been attributed to her by her devotees since her death, yet none of these have held up to the Vatican's strict standards. Despite the current political or ecclesiological "good timing" to canonize her, and despite the thousands of miracles her devotees claim she performs everyday, Kateri is not yet a saint. The final miracle could come at any minute, or never. Her cult is still growing and the story of her life is spreading, yet she is not really—when measured by Vatican approved miracles—a single step closer to sainthood than she was at her beatification in 1980. During his canonization update at the 1999 Tekakwitha Conference held in Spokane, Washington, American Vice-Postulator Father Paret was clearly frustrated by the lack of co-operation from the medical community in several cases of miraculous cures attributed to Kateri. He urged the faithful to see her many miracles as blessings, even if they are not recognized as full-fledged miracles by the Vatican:

> We need one more authentic miracle, authenticated by the doctors in Rome. But this is *not* a cause for discouragement! I have *hundreds* of letters coming into my shrine thanking Kateri—so *many* cures, so *many* favours. This leads to more prayers, and more prayers get us closer to that one elusive miracle that would put Kateri over the top. There was this boy in Georgia a

few years ago who got a screwdriver in his eye. He was blind in that eye so they prayed to Kateri for him and he could see again. But when they got the medical records, nothing in them said that he wouldn't be able to see, even though the parents were told this. And, there was this Mohawk woman who was on oxygen and in a wheelchair for fourteen years. She was cured by Kateri too. I went to see her but again, nothing in her medical records said anything about her dependence on oxygen, even though she was. Once again, the medical records failed. These two cases are of no value for Kateri's canonization, *but* they should still *encourage* us. These are tremendous blessings, but we still need the medical testimony. They go over things very carefully in Rome, they won't just grant miracles.

Yet so many of Kateri's devotees have themselves experienced blessings from Kateri which they considered to be true miracles—ranging from physical healings and spiritual graces to new jobs and found objects. Tara is an active member of the San Juan Pueblo Kateri Circle and has known about Kateri since the Pope's visit to Phoenix in 1987. During my early spring visit to San Juan in 1998, she told me that "Kateri is the first person I turn to when something goes wrong." Such conversations and daily interactions with Kateri affirm the proto-saint's contemporary presence and participation in her devotees' lives. Kateri regularly grants what can be called "miracles-to-me." For example, Tara believes that Kateri has proven effective for averting disasters. One evening, in the chilly wooden pews of the local church where we were talking after the women had finished their choir practice, Tara recounted this narrow escape from an automobile accident:

> This was *a miracle to me.* In our Kateri Circle, we have a traveling statue of Kateri that each member gets to keep in her home for two weeks. I had had the statue in my house and I was bringing it over to the next person. I had her lying on the front seat beside me, like a little passenger. The weeds are tall on my road and I almost hit one of those four wheel drive vehicles coming the opposite direction. It would have been a head on crash! But all I saw was some dust to my right. That vehicle must have *flown* over my truck. I always thank Blessed Kateri for saving me that day. *That was a miracle. It happened to me.*

Of greatest consequence perhaps, is Kateri's ability to work medical miracles, many in cases which the devotee felt to be hopeless. Alane, a Navajo and Choctaw member of the Queen of Angels Indian Chapel congregation in Albuquerque, sister to Margaret and cousin to Annette, told me about her niece who, with Kateri's intercession, made a remarkable recovery from an accident.

> In 1995, my nine year old niece was hit by a drunk driver up near Lukachukai on the Navajo Nation. My dad's from there. They flew her to the University of New Mexico hospital in Albuquerque. She was crying, in terrible pain, in intensive care. She didn't want anyone to touch her. The following Sunday, at Queen of Angels, we had a Kateri Circle meeting. I mentioned her accident during our prayer circle. I went into the middle of the circle and everyone put their hands on me and prayed to Kateri for my niece. That afternoon, my sister Margaret and I went over to the hospital to see her. We laid hands on her with all the prayers that people had given us at the Circle. I pinned a medal of Kateri on her hospital gown and brought a picture of Kateri to put by her bed. The next day, she was out of intensive care. The next day she was walking with a walker. The next day, with crutches. The next day, all by herself. And the next day, they released her! The doctor was so surprised at how fast she healed. He said it was almost *impossible*! Ever since then, I've always prayed to Kateri.

Kateri is also credited for miraculous healings in Jemez. Stephanie, who experienced and then shared Kateri's rescripted deathbed words, told me about both her granddaughter, Shawna's cure, and her own rescue from the edge of death.

> My granddaughter came to us deformed. She could barely sit or walk. She was on the floor on her belly. Then I started praying to Kateri and as it is right now, she's walking with the crutches and leg braces. That was through the intercession of Blessed Kateri that she got that way. The doctor told us that Shawna would never walk, that she would need a wheelchair. But she walked! She's walking. She's been having a lot of problems with her legs, but she's OK. That's one of the intercessions where Kateri helped.
>
> And then myself. I was in the hospital a few years ago. I had had a heart attack and I was just laying there. That was the second one I had. I thought, "That's it." I didn't think I was going to be able to get well again. As I was laying on the table, I could not feel myself. But I could think. My mind was not gone, but my whole body seemed like it was gone. I started to think, "Mother Mary," thinking of how Kateri always called on Mary. "Blessed Kateri, help me! Touch me!' As soon as I said that, she touched me and I came back. I could feel my whole body again. She touched me. I heard one of the doctors say, "She's coming back," and then they started

> working on me. Right after I said, "Kateri, hold me! Help me!" she did right away. She touched me and my whole body came alive again. I said, "Thank you, Kateri."

The circulation of miracle stories such as Stephanie's is an important part of community life among Kateri's devotees in the Southwest. Victoria, the director of religious education in Jemez, and, in her mid-30s, one of the youngest members of the Jemez Kateri Circle, told me about some of the miracle tales she had heard, including Stephanie's account of her heart attack:

> Stephanie, who lives over by the entrance to the Pueblo, I heard that when she had a heart attack, she prayed to Kateri and she came to her and then her heart attack wasn't as bad as the doctors said it would be. She's up and around again now. Her whole family was gathered at the hospital because the doctors said it was really bad. But it didn't turn out to be. *I heard her story*. And another one, this lady who is half Isleta and half Acoma but is married to a San Juan man, she also prays to her. She was ill or something in the hospital and Blessed Kateri came to her and she got well. *I heard her story too.* The ladies always hear those kinds of stories at the meetings and Conferences.

As a result of this exchange of narratives, those whom I interviewed had not only their own miracle stories to tell, but also those of others they knew. These narratives were common property of the whole community of devotees to Kateri in the Southwest, experienced by some yet owned by all. The frequent sharing of the miraculous accounts, both in public venues such as the regional meetings or the Tekakwitha Conferences, and more privately among family members and friends (and anthropologists!), provides the vehicle for the propagation of Kateri's extraordinary powers. In these narratives, we see new plot developments, different from the Jesuits' testimony. In the contemporary stories that Kateri's devout both individually and collectively tell, the proto-saint is *not* waiting for a miracle, nor are her devotees. For them, Kateri is already a full-fledged saint, the active hero in the series of miracle stories told of her. She is a "loud" woman who speaks, appears, guides and intercedes for her people.

Kateri, then, is a saint by experience and by acclamation. In these popular miracle narratives, we see a community proclamation about the nature and true reality of a saint, statements which are largely in contradistinction to the Vatican's processes. Further, in the stories the devout tell about Kateri, we see again the potency of the rumour of miracles. Kateri is a saint by reputation—and by proclamation. At the 1999 Tekakwitha Conference, a Native nun gave an energetic and humorous speech to the general assembly during which she "accidentally" referred to Kateri as a saint: ".... SAINT Kateri. (pause). Oops, did I say *SAINT* Kateri? (a slightly longer pause). I meant... (breath in) **SAINT** Kateri! (picking up speed and energy...). Her and all those other Indian saints which haven't been recognized yet! Don't wait for others to do it! Canonize them yourselves!!!" The audience applauded in enthusiastic agreement, thrilled to be pushing the boundaries of orthodoxy en masse.

I heard a similar story a few years earlier during my field work on the Mescalero Apache reservation. I had followed advice from several devotees in Jemez: "You must go to Mescalero, Paula. They're real big on Kateri down there!" In the summer of 1998, I spent time in Mescalero with Sister Rachel, a non-Native nun. She had worked on the Apache reservation for several decades, and during our tour of the cavernous grey stone mission church there, she recounted this story of Mescalero's popular acclamation of Kateri's sainthood.

> When the Pope came to Phoenix in 1987, we took two busloads of people from here, including a dance group. We brought a big yellow banner, the one that hangs here in the church, to Phoenix too. It says, "*Saint* Kateri Tekakwitha, Bless Our People." We really expected her to be canonized then, but she wasn't. [Sister Rachel's downward glance betrayed the fact that she still feels that disappointment keenly]. But now, [she said, with her mood rising and a twinkling smile], whenever I'm giving a tour of the church or something, I tell people that Kateri has been popularly acclaimed as a saint in Mescalero!

The nun's proclamation and the audience's response at the Conference, as well as the visible presence of Mescalero banner, which hangs to the left of the altar, can be seen as counterhagiography. Both nuns and devout are nudging the limits of official sainthood, telling different stories about Kateri's life, narratives that end with Kateri as an active intercessor who appears to and converses with her devotees. Further, these beliefs and experiences constitute an ethnotheology of sainthood, where the popular stories about a saint shape her character and activity.

The basis for Kateri's popular canonization—those events which make devotees believe that Kateri is a full-fledged saint—are the visions, dreams, answered prayers and miracles that the faithful receive from her. She acts as though she were a saint, protecting, leading and healing "her people." And it is through these inter-

actions and conversations that Kateri becomes, as her devotees say, "a saint to me." Perhaps, as Orsi suggests, is it useful to think of the hagiography of a saint as "stories in two voices" (Orsi, 1996: 119). More accurately, I think, these are better understood as stories in multiple voices. In the Native women's counterhagiographical stories of their encounters with Kateri, we hear voices that tell Kateri's life and post-mortem and postcolonial existence creatively and expansively, beyond the silent limits set in the official accounts at the Vatican.

The silence of Kateri's short earthly life and her truncated official story allows for a great deal of imaginative space for her after-life interactions with those who claim her as their own. According to her devotees, Kateri acts broadly and miraculously in all areas of their lives. And perhaps most imaginatively and most miraculously of all, through her newly scripted deathbed words, Kateri serves to unite many Native American Catholics, bringing them under her mantle, into the Church, sweeping out a historical and spiritual space for their uniqueness. She both *tells* and *is* a new story, speaking with and modelling for a new audience a moral of miraculous unity, wellness, recovery and wholeness.

Narrative Repatriation: Rumours and Shouts

Kateri's official hagiography may be "on hold" at the Vatican, waiting for a miracle, but for her contemporary devotees, her story continues along a different trajectory. The official hagiography of Kateri is a colonial monologue, a singular myth beginning in 17th-century mission encounter and ending in the judgements of 21st century medical science. In these contemporary postcolonial conversations and acclamations, in these dialogues, rumours and shouts, Kateri's story moves beyond the quiet tropes embedded in the colonial narratives of a saint's life. Freed from her dis-membered and decontextualized existence in the 17th-century Jesuits' recounting of her cardinal virtues, among Southwest Native American devotees, Kateri is re-membered, given citizenship in tribes beyond her blood kin, multiply re-contextualized, and even, one might say, repatriated.

Repatriation refers to the return of something valuable and sacred to its homeland, to its people. The term often refers to items of indigenous *material* culture which have been taken by non-Natives, and used for their own purposes whether educational, museological, or simply to satisfy greed. These objects were taken out of context and removed from their communities of origin for decades. Now, with the help of new attitudes, and in the United States, new regulations, many of these artifacts are currently in the process of being returned to their originating communities. I suggest that it is possible to view Kateri as a figure who has been taken "out of context," and used by Europeans and then Euro-Americans for missionary and theological purposes. Even now, boards of White males in and from countries far away from her place of origin control Kateri's canonization process. Yet through contemporary devotional stories, Kateri is being brought back home to the reservations, repatriated, reclaimed by many, and endowed with new words, purpose and identity.

These retellings of Kateri's deathbed words, the stories of saintly activities, the communal sharing and circulation of these narratives, and the folk proclamations of her full-fledged saintliness can, I suggest, be seen as a kind of *narrative repatriation*. The narrative repatriation of Kateri is a multilevelled process in which she is both given voice and spoken about. In this article, I have argued that among contemporary devotees, we see the repatriation of Kateri's words, of her character and activity, of a united indigenous community, and of her sainthood. First, Kateri's deathbed message has been reconceived by her devout. Her "original words"—"Jesus! Mary! I love you!"—constitute the key line of dialogue in the colonial account. For the Jesuit authors, Kateri's death is the penultimate moment where her significance as a "successful convert" and imminent saintliness is revealed and embodied in her immediate beauty. This scene is rescripted by Kateri's contemporary devotees. In the accounts of Heather and Stephanie, Kateri has new lines, and a new message, that of unity and advocacy. The significance of Kateri's death is placed into the mouth of the dying woman herself. She has a message for her people, prophetically uniting diverse Native Americans and previously diverse religious systems, the "Native" and the "Catholic." Her utterance is no longer simply a submissive cry of love for a colonial Christ and his Virgin Mother. Kateri's deathbed words, both colonial and postcolonial, can be said to paraphrase Kateri's significance, symbolic citizenship and ethnic identity. Yet the postcolonial moribund Kateri has much more to say than the quiet colonial subject of the Jesuits' account. In their repatriation of her dying moments, contemporary devotees rewrite and thereby reclaim their saint's final words.

Second, in Stephanie's and Heather's stories about the narrative moments preceding Kateri's death, we see a precursor of the kinds of contemporary conversations, interactions and mutual patronage between Kateri and "her people." These dialogues are largely focussed on the miracles experienced by devotees. Kateri speaks to and

intercedes for her people on a regular basis; "Kateri said to me . . . and saved me . . . that was a miracle to me." These miracles are owned by the group as a whole and told again and again as cherished proof of Kateri's efficacy and involvement. For her devotees, Kateri's prime character is no longer "a lily among thorns," but rather she is recast as a powerful intercessor, deeply connected with and an integral part of the community of the devout.

The sharing and circulation of these miracle stories in local devotional groups, regional meetings, and the national conferences can also be seen as kind of repatriation and reconstruction of a Catholic indigenous community. Kateri's "people" are no longer her fellow 17th-century converts, nor the Mohawk family she left behind. Rumours of Kateri's miraculous activities articulate and create a group of devotees which is inter-tribal and lives beyond the borders and boundaries of the missionary encounter. Moreover, the impulse towards inter-tribal unity is seen by many Kateri devotees as "miraculous." This miracle discourse seems to imply that such unity could not have been accomplished without the figure of Kateri as a model. Kateri is described first and foremost as "Native American like us." Her ethnic identity is broadened and her life is retold as one that manifests a message of unity to "her people"—that is, all Native peoples. For example, a play recounting Kateri's life that was staged during the 1996 Tekakwitha Conference ended with the miraculous resurrection of Kateri who appeared to her grieving friends with the message to love Jesus, love each other, and "above all, unite." Thus both her earthly life and her post-mortem existence are interpreted by contemporary devotees as embodying a divine message of Indian unity, a message which would be clarified, and a unity which would be cemented by her canonization.

Finally, in their witnessing of and testimony to Kateri's miraculous powers, audience and tellers are emboldened to proclaim her full-fledged sainthood. Kateri is "brought home" with shouts of acclamation as being "a saint to me"/ "a saint to us." The counterhagiographical stories about Kateri's words, actions, and life challenge the corpus of written documents which gather dust in Rome. The devout tell stories with multiple endings, stories which travel beyond Kateri's tomb, beyond the cardinal virtues into which her life story is minced in the *Positio*, to multiple sites and diverse peoples. Her Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache women devotees, along with other Native American Catholics, reclaim Kateri from the Vatican, from the 17th-century Jesuits, and from colonial mission history.

Counterhagiography: Stories of Return

My vision of the Kateri movement is both multilocal—I take the reader into many communities both past and present, and multivocal—we come to hear hagiography, or the tales of saints' lives, as stories told by many voices. These accounts of Kateri, from those of the 17th-century Jesuits to contemporary devotional narratives, are positioned and audienced testimonies; they are "partial," in both senses of the word, truths (cf. Clifford in Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 1-26). Kateri's life, both earthly and post-mortem, is continually reinvented, condensed, expanded, and localized. The revelation of Kateri's saintliness and her incarnation as a Native American are ongoing narrative processes.

Stories are the vehicle by which Kateri is brought back from the colonial use of her as the ideal Mohawk convert and justification for missionary activity. Through these narratives, Kateri is taken out from behind glass showcases and colonial reflections. Those who claim her as their own are an expanded and diverse group of Native Americans. Further, Kateri is, it might be said, hesitantly *returned* by the Church. She is beatified but not yet canonized; that final step, that ultimate recognition is still sought. Yet in the counterhagiographical narratives we have looked at, this hesitation is pre-empted by proclamations and reclamations. Kateri has been translated and transported, largely through narrative, from the 17th century to the 21st, from obedient convert, silent, trapped in colonial categories, to powerful intercessor with a clear message to her people of unity, indigenous identity, ownership and belonging.

Notes

1 This article is part of a larger project which began as my doctoral research conducted between 1996 and 1999, the manuscript from which has been contracted for publication by the University of California Press. My research has been generously supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and McMaster University. I am most grateful to Sally Cole, Barbara Tedlock, Bill Rodman and the two anonymous readers for their guidance and suggestions for this article.

Geographically, my research stretches from north of Window Rock on the Navajo Nation, to just north of the Mexican border on the Mescalero Apache Reservation. I spent time in Laguna, Acoma, Jemez, Isleta and San Juan Pueblos; Lukachukai and Fort Defiance, Arizona; Ruidoso and Mescalero; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. It is important to realize that my research did not extend to the biggest Pueblos of Hopi and Zuni, where, to my knowledge, Kateri is not venerated, consistent with the largely traditional and non-Catholic nature of those communities. When I refer to "Pueblo women" in the article, I mean those prac-

tising Catholics and devotees of Kateri from the Pueblos listed above. The Pueblo people are a diverse group religiously, and my focus is on the significant and active yet not terribly numerous group who have found a home in a 17th-century Mohawk saint. Finally, the general term "devotees" refers to that self-articulated community of "Kateri's people" in New Mexico and Arizona which includes Pueblo, Navajo, Apache, Choctaw, and multi-tribal Native American women.

2 I borrow the term "ethnotheology" from T.J. Steele who uses it ambiguously to refer to the relationships of New Mexican santeras to the santos they represented in art (Steele, 1994).

3 There are nineteen Pueblos in New Mexico today, divided by language and geography. The Northern Pueblos are: Taos, Picuris, Nambe, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, San Juan and Santa Clara. Southern Pueblos include: Jemez, Cochiti, Sandia, San Felipe, Santa Ana, Santo Domingo, Zia, Isleta, Acoma and Laguna. Finally, Zuni is located in western New Mexico and has its own administration. The Pueblos can also be classified by the language families: Tewa, Tiwa, Towa and Keresan (Sando, 1992: 6-7).

4 The Tekakwitha Conference National Center is a pan-Indian organization which claims to be the "voice, presence and identity of Native American Catholics" and to represent "a growing unity within Native Catholic communities with the special protection of Blessed Kateri." The Tekakwitha Conference began in 1939 as a support group for missionaries working among Plains Indians. In 1977, the purpose of the conference was challenged and it opened its membership to all "Catholic Native Americans and those in ministry with them." The year 1980 marked not only Kateri's beatification, but the beginning of the national movement and the establishment of the National Center in Great Falls, Montana (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet, n.d.; Tekakwitha Conference Newsletter, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1988).

The goals of the Tekakwitha Conference are to incorporate traditional elements of Native spirituality into the Church; to unify Native American Catholics while respecting tribal differences; to pray for the canonization of Kateri; to share the story of her life; and to follow her example of holiness (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet, n.d.).

The Tekakwitha Conference organizes annual meetings of members, the locations of which change each year depending on which tribe wants to host the gathering. Activities at the conference include daily masses, healing and reconciliation ceremonies, speeches, canonization updates, informal prayer groups, educational workshops, a powwow on the last night, and for the first time in 1999, an evening talent show.

5 Kateri Circle members receive direction from the national Conference headquarters in Great Falls, Montana, in the form of suggestions for activities in the *Cross and Feather News*, as well as from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in a monthly mailing to the president of each Kateri Circle. In this way unity is sought; yet at the same time, it is recognized that each Circle exists to minister to, respond to and evolve from the surrounding local community.

6 See also Koppedrayer (1993: 285-286) and Vecsey (1997: 96-100) on Kahnawake's history. Blanchard discusses Mohawk motives for founding Kahnawake, namely trade interests, avoidance of the debilitating effects of alcohol, and the desire to create a place where Catholic Mohawks could practise their religion yet still remain active in the affairs of the Mohawk Nation and the Iroquois Confederacy (Blanchard, 1982: 88-89; cf. Axtell, 1981: 83, 1982: 37; 1992: 162-163; Axtell and Ronda, 1978: 33; Koppedrayer, 1993: 295).

7 There are three stages in the canonization process. First, a candidate's writings and life history are collected and the cause is presented to the Vatican. When these documents have been examined, and the candidate's virtues deemed extraordinary, she may be declared Venerable by the Pope. Authenticated miracles are necessary to move the candidate through the next steps. One miracle is needed for Beatification (the candidate is called Blessed), and one more for canonization (the Blessed becomes a Saint) (Woodward, 1990).

8 There are a few other sources such as the letters of Fr. Cholenec, Kateri's confessor, published in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères parquelques missionaires de la compagnie de Jésus*. Arguably, these sources share the same audience and purpose as the *Jesuit Relations*.

9 See Greer's (1998) "Savage/Saint: The Lives of Kateri Tekakwitha" for an expert in-depth analysis of these two men.

10 This outcaste status is based on Euro-American notions of beauty and the nuclear family. Buehrle claims that "Kateri's life among the Iroquois would have been limited by her handicaps... She was disadvantaged in that she was scarred, was not pretty, had damaged eyesight and no mother to help her.... If she had been pretty, things might have been very different [i.e. she would have married]" (Buehrle, 1954: vii, ix).

11 Without children of her own, she is known by many as Aunt Grace. In 1997, I walked the 100 mile pilgrimage with Aunt Grace and her niece, June. Although in her late 70s, Aunt Grace kept pace with us in the water truck and served us little paper cups filled with water and orange slices every few miles on our journey. When we arrived at our destination, Chimayo, New Mexico, Aunt Grace held me as I cried from relief and exhaustion, and whispered in my ear, "You are my child now." From then on, I have been her adoptive niece and she has been "Aunt Grace" to me.

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