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All For The Glory of God: Reconstructing the Jesuit Perception of Odawa Female Identity in New France, 1660-1675

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By Eric Morningstar

Abstract: The relationship between the French and the Odawa was a tumultuous one when compared to other Native-French relationships. This can be largely attributed to the European misperception of Odawa cultures and fierce independence. This was especially true in their dealings with women. When the French Jesuits arrived as missionaries to the Odawa, they found little cooperation with their mission to convert the "savages" to Christianity. Eventually, they came to view the vulnerable women, primarily mothers and widows, as their doorway into influencing the larger Odawa population. They could play on the desperation of these women, then use them as examples of Christian virtue to influence, subjugate, and eventually convert the "sinful, sexual" women and the men who were seeking wives and gain a strong foothold in the Native population.

Introduction: A Brief Overview of the Historiography of the Odawa's Relations with the French and the Importance of Jesuit Relations

Much of what is known about indigenous relations with the settlers of New France comes from the history of the fur trade, but the economic enrichment of the motherland and the establishment of a new colony only made up a part of the French-Native experience. French traders and missionaries developed relationships with various tribal groups including the Ojibwe, the Huron, the Potawatomi, and the Odawa. Of the many groups that dealt with the French, comparatively little has been written concerning the Odawa, including their experiences with the Jesuits who sought the conversion of native souls. While many scholars, such as Richard White, have discussed the Native-French relations as a sort of "Middle Ground"—a relationship founded on respectful reciprocity—relations with the Odawa proved more difficult[1]. As a group of nations, they tended to maintain their own ambitions and were certainly unreceptive to the religious message of Christianity and to the Jesuits who preached it to them.

French impressions of the Odawa were frequently negative, however this was largely due to failings of European perception to recognize the culturally formed identities of native peoples. These impressions of the Odawa, and indeed many Native American groups, persist even today. Susan Sleeper-Smith has written extensively on the mischaracterization of Indigenous peoples in the Great Lakes region. In her book *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*, Sleeper-Smith criticized historians and lay people alike for continuing to favor the popular conceptions of Indians as primitive people clad in animal skins who have since disappeared from the land. In her estimation, historians are guilty of perpetuating this image by being skeptical of new studies emerging that describe the agency of Indigenous groups even as they faced cultural change as a result of contact with Europeans. Indeed, she wrote, "…Indians have existed as viable, distinct people from the earliest times to the present and [I] contend that, while encounter changed indigenous communities, it also encouraged the evolution of strategic behaviors that ensured cultural continuity." [2] For Sleeper-Smith, these misconceptions started with Europeans' first impressions of natives. In her 2018 book, *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792*, Sleeper-Smith noted that Frenchmen such as Jacques-Charles de Sabrevois, who was commandant at Detroit at the beginning of the 18th century, considered the Odawa "…'not so neat or so well made.'" They were also far too engaged in the games and sports of their own culture. These included lacrosse and dish.[3] Despite

[1] Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 118-133. The term, "Middle Ground," as it appears throughout the current work, refers to either White's book or the concept therein defined by him. He wrote of the concept as pertaining to willing participants seeking, "…to justify their own actions in terms of what they perceived to be their partner's cultural premises…either perceived or actual…Any congruence, no matter how tenuous, can be put to work and take on a life of its own if it is accepted by both sides."

[2] Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 1-2.

[3] Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 57. Dish was a

these negative generalizations, Sleeper-Smith lauded Sabrevois' observations of Indian women and their roles in native society. He described their agricultural efforts as "'very industrious,'" and Sleeper-Smith promoted the use of more historical sources that were sensitive to gendered roles to allow for a more accurate representation of native agency and identity.[4]

The Odawa also may not have been as compliant in dealing in the French fur trade. During the 17th century, they were willing to undermine French economic networks by working alongside the English who wished to trade illegally at Michilimackinac. English canoes began appearing there by 1685, and the Odawa encouraged them to return so that they could trade their furs for British goods instead, especially cloth.[5] Sabrevois noted just how industrious the Odawa proved to be, as were the Miami and Illinois, but it's not certain he recognized how focused they were on furthering their own inter ests. Near Montreal where there was a lack of forest runners, or *coureurs de bois*, who operated as independent fur traders, the Odawa became middlemen, gathering beaver pelts from the north to trade with the English.[6]

Odawa-French relations also fell short of the popular narrative of harmonious friendship and kinship with the French that characterized what is known as the Middle Ground in terms of warfare. Richard White commented in his book on the Middle Ground that the Odawa were not the greatest allies in the French confrontation with the Iroquois throughout their expedition in New France. The Odawa experienced many failures. On one occasion the Odawa attempted to poison the Iroquois with cornbread. The plot failed because a Huron woman who had been married to an Iroquois informed her son of the danger and he informed the rest of the Iroquois so that the mass assassination never took place.[7] In choosing poison as a weapon, the Odawa appeared less capable of more familiar forms of direct warfare with hatchet and firearm. That the plan was so easily foiled also possibly spoiled the image of the Odawa as expert warriors.

During the winter of 1661-1662, the French labeled the Odawa as woefully unprepared for the harsh weather conditions. The French saw the lack of preparation as amounting to cowardice, adding on to their negative perception of the Odawa regarding their lack of military prowess. White argued this using the observations of the famous French fur trader and explorer, Pierre-Esprit Radisson. Radisson, along with his brother in law, Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, lived among the Native tribes in New France, including the Ojibwe, Sioux, Huron, and the Odawa in the middle to late 17th century. The pair also helped start the Hudson's Bay Company by aligning with the English businessmen in Boston.[8] According to White, Radisson described the Odawa as the, "'cursedest, unablest, the unfamous, and cowardliest people I have ever seen among four score

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game of a chance involving six black and white colored stones placed into a bowl. Each player would shake the bowl to see how the stones would land. If all six stones were the same color, the player would receive six points. One point was awarded if only one stone was a different color.

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5] Ibid., 84-85.

[6] Ibid., 104.

[7] White, *The Middle Ground*, 3. *For clarity, members of the Odawa and Huron clans were gathered together at this time.

[8] Germaine Warkentin, ed. *Pierre-Esprit Radisson: The Collected Writings.* (The Publications of the Champlain Society, 2012), 1:3.

nations.'"[9] He accused them of eating the dogs they had domesticated because the 150 Odawa families possessed very little food. They were so desperate according to Radisson that they scavenged the carcasses of animals that had been killed much earlier in order to consume bones and entrails. The men were so depleted by the end of winter that they even consumed their own bowstrings. They also consumed used beaver-skin diapers.[10]

Still, Radisson's estimation largely missed the intricate strategies and intelligence utilized among the Odawa to preserve themselves. The Odawa, like others of the Algonquin language group, engaged in the practice of exogamy. It wasn't appropriate for men to marry women who belonged to the same clan.[11] White noted, "The Ottawas…depended on kinship to obtain aid from the peoples of Green Bay against the Sioux…it would not be Algonquians who would bear primary responsibility for creating a larger alliance of all the refugee centers."[12] So, to the French explorers it seemed that the Algonquins existed in a state of dependency upon others, but this is a misconception. It was through Odawa exogamy that the Odawa kept an eye on their own ambitions by expanding their kinship groups, and this included marriages to the French. They formed extended kin networks for the purpose of prosperity more so than for preserving peaceful relations with the French. Such misconceptions of native identity and societal roles were not uncommon and they further illuminate how negative impressions were formed due to native reality not meeting European gendered expectations. For example, during the winter of 1659-60, Radisson and des Groseilliers offered presents to an unclear Algonquin group which comprised items like kettles, hatches, and knives for the men and items like vermillion paint (for makeup), combs, and needles for the women. The Frenchmen were disappointed when Algonquin women were as interested in using kettles and Algonquin men also desired the red paint.[13]

Odawa resistance to French encroachment can especially be seen in their relations with the Jesuits who represented an extension of the empire and its church, which were inextricably linked. Cornelius J. Jaenen is a professor at the University of Ottawa who has focused his career on French-Native relations in New France as well as the history of the church in New France. In his *The Role of the Church in New France*, he wrote the following:

> Religion was seen as the basis of civil society. Therefore, the state was religious…As for the New World, it was to be brought under Christian dominion…The French could not conceive of a church which was independent of state authority. The role of the church was to develop the civic and social conscience as well as the spiritual life of the colonists.[14]

The role of the church in New France thus served multiple purposes. On the one

[9] White, *The Middle Ground*, 8-9.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Michael McDonnell. *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), 9.
[12] White, *The Middle Ground*, 22-23.
[13] Bruce M. White, "The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles in the Ojibwa Fur Trade," *Ethnohistory*, 46, no.1 (1999): 119.
[14] Cornelius J. Jaenen. *The Role of the Church in New France* (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1985), 4.

hand, the Jesuits served the French government in its aims to develop an hospitable colony that could enrich the empire. They also, more foundationally, served the Catholic Church and its mission to spread the Gospel throughout the world for the conversion of souls. The Odawa were aware that the French had their limits when it came to religious tolerance, and they reacted by treating the missionaries harshly.[15]

Among the Algonquin groups they dealt with, the Odawa were particularly reluctant to embrace the Christian message, preferring retain their own culture. References to these difficulties appear in Father Jacques Marquette's letter to the Father Superior of the missions in the Relation of 1669-71. Of the Sinagaux Odawa he wrote,

> The Nation of the Sinagaux Outaouaks is very far from the Kingdom of God, because of its extreme attachment, above all the other Nations, to indecencies, sacrifices, and jugglery. They turn Prayer to ridicule, and scarcely will they hear us speak of Christianity; they are proud and without intelligence, so that I think there is so little to be accomplished with this Nation that I have not even been willing to baptize the children who were well, or those who seemed able to escape disease,--contenting myself with being on the watch for the sick.[16]

Marquette's reluctance to even baptize healthy children speaks to the trouble of developing spiritual relations with the Odawa. As referenced earlier, the Jesuits perceived the glory of God's mission for them to convert the world even in the torture of the Iroquois and the deaths of their religious brothers. Marquette considered the Odawa behavior as blasphemy, making fun of prayer and refusing to listen to the word. Instead, they favored their own ways. Marquette described the Keinouché Nation in a similar way. He wrote,

> The people of the Nation of Keinouché declare themselves boldly, saying that it is not yet time…one of whom, who is rather old, is looked upon as a wonder among the Savages…The Outaouaks, superstitious to an extraordinary degree in their feasts and their juggleries, seem to harden themselves to the teachings that are given them.[17]

The examples of the Sinagaux and Keinouché Odawa suffice to suggest that even among the Alongquins, the Odawa caused frustration among the Jesuits. They frustrated them so much that the same Jesuits who lauded the death of René Menard (who too suffered frustration for his efforts to convert the Odawa) as proof of God's will that they convert the savages. It was through this frustration that the Jesuits pursued a different strategy for their mission. Throughout the era of French presence, the Odawa struggled to maintain their culture and identities, and the Jesuits proved to be a strong opposing force to this aim. They sought to remake the "savages" in the Christian image and essentially erase centuries' worth

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[15] White, *The Middle Ground*, 25-26.

[16] Thwaites, ed. *Relations*, 54: 171.

[17] Ibid., 171-173. *Keinouché is the Algonquin word for pike fish. The nation was a member clan of the Odawa.

The term "Jugglers" (those performing the "juggleries") is referred to elsewhere in the *Relations*. In volume 33 and the report from 1647-1648, Father Paul Ragueneau refers to Jugglers among the Hurons, Odawa, and other Algonquin tribes settled along Lake Huron. Jugglers were medicine-men, called Saokata by the Natives, who could see the desires of the soul and frequented the sick.

of history and custom. Further, the Jesuits, in their difficulty in establishing a Christian following among the Odawa, focused on women as points of entry to spiritual salvation. In so doing they exploited women and sought to provide a model of the perfect convert.

The Jesuits in New France from 1660 to 1675 paid attention to the concept of female gender among the Odawa as it pertained to the conversion process. Gender, and basically all societal roles were seen through the psychological lens of the Christian mission. Prior to conversion, women were treated like other savages devoid of Christian learning and salvation. The Jesuits did acknowledge some sense of Odawa gender roles, however, especially that of the mother. They used this role to manipulate women and to further their goals of conversion. If a female member converted, she was immediately adopted as a Christian, and she was perceived like other Christian women. This meant the Jesuits saw converted Odawa women as inferior to men and more susceptible to giving into temptation and sin. They of course rationalized this patriarchy through the traditional understanding of original sin and man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Extensive use of Jesuit writing may be criticized when writing their history, and this is because of the presumed bias and hyperbole in the documents. It is an unnecessary concern for the present paper because any bias and hyperbole would only penetrate deeper into the Jesuit perception. That Father Hierosme Lalement described earthquakes in 1662 and 1663 as supernatural phenomena that were accompanied by such marvels as flying serpents, balls of fire in the night sky, and meteors thunderously issuing forth from the Moon,[18] should not discourage the inclusion of his voice. The religious believed that God could control the Earth and all within it to reveal His will, just as Christ could calm the seas.

The Primacy of Conversion

In analyzing how the Jesuits in New France perceived and used gender conceptions in their relations with the Odawa, it is first necessary to ground this analysis in the reality that the Jesuits basically saw all societal roles and action in terms of their Christian mission: the conversion of the natives. They prefaced many of their reports with notes that conversion was their primary goal in all things. They described their own hardships as a way to glorify their mission, and they also framed nearly all reports of events in this fashion, including death, torture, and warfare.

From the first of their compiled relations in 1610, the Jesuits communicated their primary mission was the conversion of natives. Marc Lescarbot was a parliamentary advocate and lawyer who spent the winter of 1606-7 at Port Royal, and the following spring he explored the harbor of St. John and the River St. Croix.[19] Writing to the queen in 1607, Lescarbot highlighted the spread of Christianity as of the utmost importance to the glory of the nation. He wrote,

[18] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791* (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 48:37.
[19] Thwaites, ed., *Relations*, 1:306-307.

> God having created me a lover of my country and zealous for its glory, I cannot do less than impart to it whatever affects its interests; and so doubtless it will be greatly encouraged by the tidings that the name of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in the lands beyond the sea, which bear the name of France.[20]

Still, from the first Jesuit narratives from New France, the spread of Christianity was not soley for national glory. The Jesuit mission was a spiritual mission first and foremost. The first true narrative of the relations is titled, "La Conversion des Sauvages qui ont esté baptisez en la Nouelle-France, cette annee 1610," and Lescarbot wasted no time informing his reader of the severity of the religious mission. Alluding to the book of St. Matthew, he stated at the beginning of the narrative, "…This Gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come." [21] Immediately one notes that the Jesuits could not conceive of themselves as only French. They were Christians serving the "whole world" and "all nations." This general preface to the conversion process was followed by a scolding and admonition over the failure to adhere to Christian duty to spread the gospel. He stated, "…I have complained enough in my History of the cowardice of these later times, and of our lack of zeal either in reclaiming these poor erring ones, or in making known, exalted, and glorified, the name of God in the lands beyond the seas, where it never has been proclaimed."[22] The failure to make the New World a Christian world was seen as the Jesuits' responsibility, and that world could not even begin to form an appendage of France's empire until conversion was complete. Lescarbot added, "And yet we wish that country to bear the name of France, a name so august and venerable that we cannot, without a feeling of shame, glory in an un-Christianized France."[23] There was no glory in a pagan world, and it is clear from this early report that the Jesuits really only possessed a rudimentary but binary conception of identity in New France at the beginning of the 17th century. There were only Christians and "savages" that must be saved. From a Christian missionary perspective, the world could not be conceived of in another fashion, and this ideology would frame the many experiences of the Jesuits in New France, including their own hardships, deaths, and warfare.

The divide between the Christians and "savages" persisted in the Jesuit perception and continued to be of singular importance, even as the French engaged the Iroquois in their many wars. Hierosme Lalemont, who became a Jesuit at the age of 17 in 1610, served as a missionary in New France nearly continuously until his death in 1638. He served as a superior in Huron missions and became general superior at Quebec in 1645. He left in 1656 when he was called back to France to take a university position, but he returned in 1659 to become Vicar-General of Quebec.[24] Writing to the Reverand Father André Castillon in 1663, Lalemont stated, "The Iroquois, hitherto invincible, have met

[20] Ibid., 55.
[21] Ibid., 59. *Title translates to "The Conversion of the Savages who have been baptized in New France, this year 1610."
[22] Ibid., 63.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Kevin Knight, "Jerome Lalemant," New Advent, The Catholic Encyclopedia, accessed 4/04/2020, https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08752c.htm.

with defeat on all sides at the hands of the Savage Nations allied to us, and of our Christian Algonquins, who have been victorious by the aid of the most Holy Virgin."[25] Lalemont revealed several elements of the Jesuit perception of the other during their mission in New France. The Jesuits perceived others in terms of their status in the conversion process. The French may have possessed native allies, but if they had not converted, the Jesuits could only consider them part of the "Savage Nations." Meanwhile for those who had converted, members of the Algonquin tribal group (of which the Odawa are a part), they could be counted among the flock and even worthy of the intercession of Mary. They were not seen as Algonquins but as Christian Algonquins. Unconverted Odawa had been victorious in battle through another, lesser, natural mechanism.

Regardless of the environment of war, the Jesuits continued to write of their experiences in terms of their Christian mission of conversion. Members of the allied nations settled within the vicinity of Quebec in 1663 continued to receive baptism, and generating new converts proved more important than many horrors. Lalemont commented,

> Despite the raids of the Iroquois, God has been able to choose his Elect, not only from among the remote Nations…but also from among those dwelling four and five hundred leagues from us, where more than two hundred children, baptized before dying, have carried their innocence to Heaven.[26]

These words lead one to assume the Jesuits had begun making more personal distinctions when it came to identity, beyond the Christian/savage divide. This was simply not the case, even though the Iroquois were named specifically, with allied and enemy lines clearly delineated. This suggests the Jesuits may have acknowledged the French national causes, but Christian conversion remained the primary concern. Lalemont stated as much when describing the Jesuit outreach efforts to the Iroquois. He wrote, "Even among the Iroquois, our enemies, more than three hundred children have received this favor [baptism] at the hands of our Frenchmen who were captives in their country—God using our afflictions and losses to secure the happiness of his Elect."[27] Enemies and allies in the French war simply didn't matter as much in the Jesuit worldview compared to the creation of new Christians in a land that must be Christian. Hardships, "afflictions and losses," were only important as revelation of God's will that the natives be converted. Lalemont left no room for doubt how dominant this view was. Even after reflecting on French suffering he stated, "The past makes us hope everything for the future, Canada being a work of God, and the conversion of the Savages having been the chief motive for the establishment of the Colonies there planted."[28]

To the modern reader, Lalemont's words are troubling. Here is a Jesuit proclaiming the Good News to France, and this news included the death of 200 children. Had they not been baptized, one wonders skeptically whether or not their departure would have even been worthy of reporting. Nevertheless, they were, and in receiving the sacrament they became evidence in a report of how God continued to bless the Christian mission being carried out by the French

[25] Thwaites, ed., *Relations,* 48:25.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 25-27.
[28] Ibid., 27.

Jesuits. That Frenchmen were captured by the enemy Iroquois was secondary to the "chief motive" as well. As prisoners, they were able to continue the Jesuit mission of conversion, and their suffering was worth it. Even enemy children had been able to receive the baptism, and this must be understood as God's will. All of this is significant in understanding Jesuit perceptions of native identity in New France. Whatever sense of horror one has, spreading the word meant winning souls for God, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. Nothing was more important in their perception.

The Jesuits even rationalized the torturing and killing of French enemies as means to the end of salvation for New France. An important author of these accounts was the Jesuit missionary René Menard. Menard was known to be fluent in both the Odawa and Huron languages, in addition to four other native languages.[29] In the Relation of 1659-1661, René Menard described how the Jesuits passively observed the judgment and execution of a male member of the Iroquois by their Algonquin allies. Throughout the process, the glory of God in securing conversion was the only concern. Menard wrote,

> The Algonkins, who were the Judges and executioners of this criminal, did not use much formality in the matter. They were Algonkins and he professed himself an Iroquois; that was sufficient to prove him deserving of death by fire…he prepared himself for receiving holy Baptism, and did receive it a little before ascending the scaffold…Is it not a marvel to see a Wolf changed all at once into a lamb, and enter the fold of Jesus Christ, which he came to ravage?[30]

The Algonquins escaped any judgment or even commentary for their actions. They were justified. The Iroquois captive's death only became significant when he was baptized, transformed from a minion against Christ's fold into one of the elect. The glory of successful conversion was what the Jesuits deemed important, far more so than the treatment of human life.

A final example of Jesuit writing must be examined to emphasize just how dominant the conversion mission was in determining how the Jesuits perceived identity of the other in New France. This example also speaks to the concern of using Jesuit writing in reconstructing their history. The glory of their Christian mission was the primary factor influencing Jesuit perception, even as they wrote of losses among their own ranks. This is especially evident in the report concerning the death of Father René Menard in 1660. The elder Jesuit had been staying with a small company among the Odawa. With little in the way of provisions and making negligible process in converting them, the father made his way through the wilderness, getting lost frequently, on the way to preach to Hurons who had been attacked by the Iroquois.[31] He finally met his end in the forest, feeble and exposed to the elements and mosquito bites. Two companions

[29] Louise P. Kellogg, "The First Missionary in Wisconsin," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 4, no.4 (1921): 419.

[30] Thwaites, ed., *Relations,* 46: 89. *It is worth noting here that the Iroquois in question belonged to what the Jesuits referred to as the Wolf Nation. Still, one cannot ignore the likely allusion to 1 Peter 5:8 which reads: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." To the Jesuits, the unbaptized were obstacles to God and thus aligned with the cause of the Devil.

[31] Thwaites, ed., *Relations,* 48: 127-129.

were with him but could not help. One of them described Menard's last moments: "While he lingered alive, hunger and the other hardships drained his strength, and made that blessed soul leave its body, and go to enjoy the fruits of so many labors undergone by him for the Conversion of the Barbarians."[32] The Odawa had resisted his efforts. He was old and sickly, and yet Menard pushed on, driven by his holy mission only to die without achieving his last goals. To anyone else, the priest's death might be considered a foolish waste. Heading to preach to the Hurons, Menard relied on emotional gestures in his conversations with "savages."[33] It is hardly surprising the man and his small company got lost, and yet the critical commentary on the priest's death is that he was able to go to Heaven because of his efforts to convert the unbelievers.

A certain Jean Guerin was Menard's companion on this expedition, and his fate also reveals just what the Jesuits were willing to celebrate as God's rewards for their efforts of conversion. Lalemont wrote of his death:

> …having devoted himself to us for the purpose of cooperating by his services in the conversion of the Savages…he met his death in that glorious calling, following his good Father to Heaven after following him so far on earth. For as soon as he learned of his death, he thought of nothing but quitting the Outaouax [Ottawa/Odawa], among whom he had been left, in order to go in search of the Father's body; but God had other plans for him and constituted him the Missionary-in-chief of that poor Church, which could not enjoy its Pastor's ministrations.[34]

Guerin was esteemed by his Jesuit brethren for supporting their conversion efforts, and Lalemont surely believed it as he described how God selected this man to be the chief missionary among the Odawa. It is a surprising way to interpret this situation, given that Geurin was accidentally shot in the side by Frenchmen and died almost instantly after uttering the name of Jesus and dropping to the ground. He was only one year into his ministry, though Lalemont was careful to point out that he did manage to baptize more than 200 children.[35] These examples demonstrate just how much conversion dominated Jesuit thought in New France in the 17th century. It did not matter what hardships the Jesuits faced, be they raids from the Iroquois, earthquakes, the death of children, or even their own fates. The primacy of conversion controlled their perception of others and of themselves. Only after the Jesuits formed a perception of a group in terms of conversion did they begin to consider their personal identities. These conceptions as well, however, were subservient to the status of unconverted savage, and the Jesuits utilized manipulation of gender roles and expectations to gain new female converts.

Jesuit Recognition of the Odawa as Others and Their Manipulation of Gender

To begin, the Jesuits' relations with the Odawa as a whole were not favorable.

[32] Ibid., 137.
[33] Ibid., 135.
[34] Ibid., 145.
[35] Ibid.

They recognized traditional gender roles among the Indians, especially that of the mother caring for her babies, widows, and young women in general who engaged in what Jesuits considered sinful behaviors. They resolved to manipulate native women and mothers for the cause of conversion, and it is through this manipulation that one can see how the Jesuits recognized traditional female gender roles among them—at least in so far as they opened doors to conversion.

Evidence comes again from Father Menard, this time from a letter to Hierosme Lalement at Quebec in 1661. Menard began with the usual affirmation of the Christian mission. All that he saw was instructive in his conversion efforts, even the slander against Christianity among the Odawa. Despite all this, Menard concluded, "…God's kindness, which has guided me, has shown me that it was not without design that Paradise was to be peopled with these poor folk who, although they seem to be of the lowest degree, are men as well as the Europeans and the other nations of the earth."[36] Again, the Jesuit perception of the natives as people could only move beyond the Christian/Savage divide if the neophytes truly converted. When Menard discussed God's design, the notion that Paradise was destined to be populated by all peoples of the earth was dependent upon Christian conversion. Before conversion, the native were sufferers in iniquity that should be pitied, and Odawa women were often seen as in need of saving.

Menard offered an example of such a poor unfortunate in his description of an abandoned Odawa woman with two small children and described her in a way that framed her situation as an opportunity to inspire conversion. Of her he wrote,

> I entered almost on all fours, and under that tree I found a treasure. It was a woman, abandoned by her Husband and her daughter, who had left her two little children, and they were dying…she expressed in these words: 'My brother,' she said to me, 'I know well enough that my people do not approve their discourses; but, for my part, I relish them very much, and what thou sayest is full of consolation.'[37]

It is almost sickening to read that Menard's first thought upon seeing this woman left in a hovel with toddlers was that she was a "treasure." She was so because Menard recognized that she was a mother about to lose her children, a condition even among the hardened Odawa that made her susceptible to hearing the promises of the Christian faith. What's worse is that Menard was not even mostly concerned with saving her soul but that of her dying children who possessed no ability to resist or assert their identity. He wrote of their deaths:

> But I prized much more highly the opportunity that God gave me for assuring myself of the salvation of the 2 little Innocents, by administering baptism to them. I returned some days afterward to see that good creature, and I found her fully resolved to serve God…she never failed to do so, no matter what affairs she had on hand or how pressed she Was to obtain her wretched livelihood.[38]

[36] Thwaites, ed. *Relations,* 46: 127.
[37] Ibid., 127-129.
[38] Ibid,. 129.

an appropriate target of conversion in her desperation. This is why she listened to his words, for the sake of her dying children, and the father was only too happy to offer their eternal salvation. They were prizes of the holy mission, innocent and secure in their departure to heaven. The woman gave up attachment to her own culture's ideology, but in her new devotion she was still considered a "creature" who must earn her "wretched livelihood." There is no mention of the woman having received baptism in the letter, and Menard made no further mention of her in the narrative. She proved useful as an example of how the Jesuits could fulfill God's promise of salvation in the new world—a process that accepted the manipulation of a mother's weakness to sway even the spiteful Odawa. It is worth noting here as well that in relating this information to Lalemont, Menard offered information that could be used to arm other priests engaged in this spiritual work. Menard embellished the narrative to show the potential of targeting sick mothers to win converts. He described one of the Odawa woman's children, not even 2 years old by his estimation, observing his mother in prayer before eating and raising his hand to his forehead as if to make the sign of the cross. This attribution of complicated abstract thought by a dying child made for an inspiring tale for Jesuits seeking to find a way to penetrate difficult and unreceptive cultures.[39]

Another example of how the Jesuits recognized traditional gender roles among the Odawa women can be seen in their manipulation of widows. Menard, again writing to Lalement, counted two widows among those saved in New France as worthy exemplars of conversion work. The first was an older woman with 5 children who was concerned for the life of her 16-year-old daughter. Menard wrote that she approached him and begged that, "…God might have pity on her and restore her [the daughter's] health, which she had lost some months ago. She was suffering from a chronic catarrh…I made her pray, and then had her bled…This induced the Mother to come with all her family and ask that they also might pray to God."[40] Menard again set an example of how the Jesuits can gain ground with the Odawa for the sake of conversion. Widows with older children whose illnesses could be treated successfully opened the possibility of winning converts. The other widow of note was much younger but no less vulnerable. Her husband had been killed by an Iroquois six years prior, and she spent most of her time with her mother. She also sought out the promise of the Jesuits and became a convert. So ardent was her faith that Menard wrote that, "It seems as if God chose her in the place of some Christian women of 3 Rivers…For she began to serve God so fervently that the others left her; and she heeded my words and the impulses of grace more than anything that deranged persons could say in their ill humor."[41] Again, the Jesuits saw the potential in the manipulation of women in vulnerable positions. Desperation led them to seek out salvation in this world and the next, even if it meant renouncing their own culture and embracing the Catholic faith. The desire for the Christian promise and the aid of the Jesuits could create lasting devotion, and this was a reality that the Jesuits willingly exploited to further their efforts—all for the glory of God.

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 135.
[41] Ibid.

Conversion Leads to Subjugation for Odawa Women

Once the Jesuits in New France found that manipulation of mothers and widows offered them an opportunity to win over the Odawa, their perception of those women who converted changed dramatically. The Jesuit perception of the natives began with seeing them simply as savages to be converted. Their fates were unimportant as long as ground could be gained for their heavenly purpose. In approaching the Odawa nations, the Jesuits in New France encountered a fiercely proud people who enjoyed their way of life and wished to continue doing so. This created great disdain among the Jesuits for groups such as the Sinagaux Odawa. Seeing vulnerable women, such as abandoned mothers and widows, the Jesuits seized an opportunity to add numbers to the Christian populace. Without being Christian, they were merely sinful and savage women who could pose threats to men's virtue. However, once conversion had been completed satisfactorily with the Jesuits, another shift in their perception of Odawa women took place. They became Christian women separated from their former identities. They were proper Daughters of Eve, dangerously susceptible to the sins of the New World and in need of protection.

To begin examining how this step in the evolution of Jesuit perception of the Odawa took place, attention should be paid to a letter written by Jacques Marquette. Marquette made it known just how determined the Odawa were to maintain their culture, highlighting their use of "juggleries." Jugglers were medicine men, and Marquette wrote of an instance when a sick Kiskakonk Odawa woman desired their assistance to cure her ailment. She asked for a specific dance. This was a heathen act and entirely unacceptable in the presence of those who had converted and become proper Christians. Marquette wrote, "I pointed out to them this woman's impiety as well as the juggler's…An old Christian immediately took the word, and told the Nation that the young people's dissolute conduct must be stopped, and that the Christian girls must never be permitted to be present at those dances."[42] Marquette's preoccupation with the presence of Christian girls being present as the medicine men performed their dance for the ailing woman deserves attention. He was not concerned for this sick Odawa woman. She was demanding a pagan ritual instead of seeking the healing powers of God or his Jesuits. The whole scene must be made an example of sin, and it was not the savages who put an end to it. It was an "old Christian" (presumably an Odawa convert) who demanded the medicine men stop their ritual and let it be known that Christian girls should never be exposed. Here again we see the old divide between Christian and savage. Interestingly, though, there are members among the Odawa who have converted and are no longer considered "creatures" like the abandoned woman. The Jesuits won over Odawa female youth and accepted them into the Christian fold. Their native identities were replaced with Christian ones, and as Christian women, they were recognized to be more susceptible to sin because of Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden.

It is unfortunate that much of the commentary on Odawa women as Christian women largely came from the reports of men speaking about women with painfully limited insight tainted by religious sexism. Nevertheless, the Jesuits' documents were replete with examples of projecting Christian morality on

[42] Thwaites, ed. *Relations,* 54: 173-175; *Relations,* 60: 225.

women whose culture had always been reluctant to embrace the religion. Nevertheless, the priests in their writing set up examples of the ideal converted woman, and in many ways the criticisms of the sinful woman centered around their sexual lives. In many instances, these two conceptions were often discussed together, as if to make the agenda of conversion clearer. Examples of this exaggerated holy woman do offer insight to how the Jesuits thought of Odawa women in the 17th century. They revealed the religious lifestyle they were ordered to impose on these native women, a lifestyle they should relish if they ever hoped to be saved by God. For example, in speaking with a male neophyte that would later completely convert, Father Menard noted a seemingly dangerous flaw. He was unmarried. This surprisingly earned him respect after the Odawa male, later baptized Louis, let his motivations for bachelorhood be known—He needed a *virtuous* woman. Menard wrote of this man:

> But I heard that he was not married, and I persuaded myself that he was worse than those who were settled. I found here, however, that in fact he was not so; and, what is more, that although he was sought after because he was clever and belonged to a great family, he nevertheless rejected the advances of all the girls or women who lived with him, and that they could never draw any licentious or indecent word from him—so much so that none amused themselves by importuning him in that direction.[43]

Louis was a particularly interesting neophyte in Menard's eyes. He possessed the spiritual strength to resist the sexual relations sinful women and girls wanted to share with him, and he did it seemingly with enough ease that no one pushed the matter on him. In Menard's estimation, resisting the sexual advances of sinful women could've also inspired the natives to convert. He stated of Louis, "…[He] has excited the admiration of our savages by resisting, with a constancy unknown among them, all the temptations of the spirit of impurity, which are probably as frequent here as in any other place in the world."[44]

When Menard questioned Louis as to why he has remained single, he was equally impressed with his answer that he wished to marry a virtuous and intelligent woman. He was especially pleased because Louis said he certainly did not want to marry the kind of typical Odawa woman in that area. He related to Menard:

> 'No, my Brother,' he said; 'but what I am resolved to do is not to live in the fashion of my people, or to unite myself with any woman who has a coarse mind, such as I find very common here in that sex. I will never marry unless I find a chaste woman, who is not abandoned like those of this country.[45]

Menard revealed here two specific details of the Jesuit perception of the Odawa woman, perfected by Christian conversion, by including details of everything she was not as a "savage." The unconverted women and girls lacked intelligence and practiced sexual debauchery. Only a "chaste woman," a good Christian woman

[43] Thwaites, ed. *Relations,* 46: 131.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 133.

without sexual proclivities, could be considered a worthy wife.

Another discussion of ideal virtuous Odawa women, if they were ever baptized, comes from Father Lalemont's relation of 1662-64. The story told of a more virtuous man being revered above the sinful-seeming unconverted Odawa women. This virtuous man was none other than Jean Guerin, the companion to Father Menard when he died, who became the missionary-in-chief. Lalemont reported that while he lived among the Odawa, he engaged in solitary prayer every morning, and the natives marveled at his ability to pray even during his sleep in a mysterious fashion.[46] Perhaps his greatest quality, however, was his refusal to be tempted by the female natives. Lalemont stated,

> "So reserved was he with women that he would not look them in the face. When he tried to persuade his Companions to follow his example, they used to answer him laughingly…wishing to reproach him with having let the Savage women rob him of many things because of his unwillingness to look at them."[47]

Jean Guerin, who was not even a proper Jesuit or priest, provided an important lesson in virtue to his companions. The Odawa and the French who lived among them must have been aware the temptation of women.

Still, the unconverted were primarily seen as savages. The Jesuits in their time in New France did not hesitate to prop up the virtuous Christian female converts as prime models for other Odawa women to follow. This is perhaps best seen in the report on an Algonquin woman named Tegahkouita, who was captured by the Iroquois, otherwise known as Catherine, the Iroquois Saint. The Jesuits touted Tegahkouita as the saintly model of the converted Odawa (and really, of all Algonquin groups) woman. According to the report, she even embodied the spirit of Christian duty in her captivity. For example, it is written that Tegahkouita had a dislike for "all this finery which was appropriate to her sex."[48] Further, she looked back on the times she obeyed her Iroquois parents (in wearing finery) and considered it a sin. Upon conversion it is said that she willingly sought out extreme penance and "almost continual tears."[49] The fathers noted that even during times when the rest of the natives would regularly engage in debauchery, Tegahkouita saw an opportunity to know "early those of whom God wished to make use, to conduct her to the highest degree of perfection." Instead of engaging with the other natives, she conducted herself with "modesty and sweetness" as she assisted the missionaries.[50] The story of Tegahkouita, in persevering in captivity among the enemy, provided the sinful, savage, and uncoverted Odawa woman a guidebook to proper Christian behavior and identity. It is ironic that Catherine had to struggle to maintain her Algonquin identity among the Iroquois, only to have the Jesuits exploit her and still manage to rob her of her cultural identity.

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[46] Thwaites, ed. *Relations,* 48: 147.
[47] Ibid.
[48] William Ingraham Kip, trans.*The Early Jesuit Missions in North America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 83.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 85

Conclusion

The Jesuit relations with the natives in New France represented a key portion of Native-French relations, and their religious imperialistic zeal has not figured as much in the general historiography. Among native groups, the Odawa have received considerably less scholarly attention, most likely because they proved difficult partners in their relationship with the French. While most histories of New France have painted these relationships as being more harmonious compared to those with other European colonizers, the Jesuit perception of native identity reveals a much more sinister reality. For the Odawa, the Jesuits could not even conceive of them as proper humans while they remained "savages" unreceptive to Christian teaching. This was so much the case that Jesuits such as Jacques Marquette considered not even preaching to groups like the Sinagaux Odawa. Odawa women opened the opportunity for the Jesuits as they found them in vulnerable positions that could be exploited. Only with the promise of conversion did they eventually recognize the women as women, and immediately their attention turned back to their original purpose—conversion for the salvation of souls and setting examples of proper female Christian conduct. Despite the modern reader's reaction, the Jesuits in New France in the 17th century would claim these exploitations of culture and identity were worth it, even if it meant disregarding Odawa identity—all for the glory of God.

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