

Indigenous Identity And Power Politics

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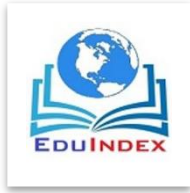
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ABSTRACT

The issue of identity and power politics is paramount in indigenous community and language. The indigenous are native, aboriginal 'ethnic group' who originally own the land. They have been marginalized and their power, identity, self, resources have been forcefully taken by the centralized groups. The text *Half-breed* (autobiography) by Maria Campbell is a collective story of her life. The way the story is narrated is in keeping with the oral form of the traditional indigenous storytelling technique. The novel addresses the indigenous communities, issues of their identity and power politics. It becomes a challenging work as the author is a female and indigenous writer. The text speaks about the Metis, identity by being neither indigenous nor Anglo. The author focuses on Metis identity and common Metis issues. *Half-breed* text serves as base to highlight the issues that the author as an individual, Metis struggle to regain power, rights and identity. The novel describes the life and struggle of indigenous group. The natives in *Half-breed* have always been politically intended. The Metis were disunited as they did not have proper leadership. The novel deeply ensconce struggle for identity, equality and power that the first nations face on a daily basis. Through this work she is able to utilize her own experience to represent the challenges which people face without power. The people of first nations of Canada have been affected by power struggles with colonial forces, Campbell demonstrates, the effects of the power struggle on the native people. She also brings to light the way in which the loss of power and land has affected the indigenous community and language. Campbell is able to inter-mingle private with politic by using a narration in which she combines her own tribal storytelling tradition with a writers critical eye which allows her to evaluate values and events that takes place.

Key words: Individual struggle in power politics, 'Métis community, power versus identity, indigenous community and language

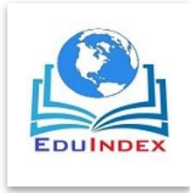


Indigenous people are also known as native, aboriginal ethnic group who is original or natural inhabitants of a country or region. Indigenous language is a language produced by original, or native people, and their lineage. The land holds a prominent part in indigenous culture, language, power and identity. Indigenous authenticity and freedom of expression of language is controlled by the 'Others' forcefully exercising their power. Indigenous writers identity and power is questioned and challenged by the 'Eurocentric'. Maria Campbell's writing became the authentic voice that resists for Metis community's identity and power politic to the center. Campbell as a writer successfully conveyed the experience, lost identity, and power loss to non-natives. The novel *Halfbreed* portrays the identity and power politic problems of Metis in Canada. Maria in *Halfbreed* is of mixed identity which means mixed blood, Metis.

In Canada, the term half-breed or Metis is called for the person who is born to French Canadian males and native females. Metis have no legal power due to this the identity is questioned in the society. Amateur to cultural diversity, appearance, economical scarcity and lifestyle all these factors has become the discrimination against Metis identity. In the text Campbell relates the lifestyle of Métis and their identity in white society through, her experience she portrays how White ill-treated Métis and how they remained shoddier and powerless, Due to bias government policies.

Campbell, addresses her grandmother as "Cheechum," was a niece of Gabriel Dumont, and her whole family fought beside Riel and Dumont, during the Rebellion. She often told me stories of the Rebellion and of the Half-breed people. She said, "Our people never wanted to fight because that was not our way. We never wanted anything except to be left alone to live as we pleased." Cheechum never accepted defeat at Batoche, and every time she would say, "Because they killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different." (1983: 11) Campbell gives voice to the Metis identity and breaks the overall silence of the Metis, the silence used for generations as a protection against the shame of being Metis. At the same time, she says the oppression of the Metis since the 1885 Metis uprising and the implementation of the legendary Metis leader Louis Riel for treason, the oppression and the shame that resulted from it, Campbell adopts the role of a Civil rights activist.

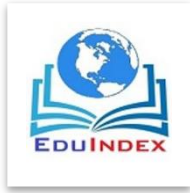
Through her autobiography, Campbell thus transforms the feeling of shame and humiliation from a group devastating and destructive feelings into sources of power and identity in the possibility, and necessity of change. Cheechum, in the novel consigns her language, power and most prominently the pride of Métis identity and power to her grand children. Cheechum says, "The war was white business, not ours, and was just between rich and greedy people who wanted power." (24)



Education for Metis students were so underprivileged, that they were battered with no trained teachers. Native language was taboo; Indigenous were downgraded and the language of the Eurocentric manner was persistently held out as superior. Colonial governments know that gaining physical control is not important so, they focused on mental empowering. The domination was implemented in the school system. The main idea was to remove Indigenous learning structure and force them towards the structures of colonizers. They imposed their language on the people. Students were humiliated or even beaten for speaking their native language in colonial schools. As language is the base for identity, and power of native people, due to colonial strength and power Indigenous language and people were discriminated and marginalized. 'Self Power' in minorities to fortify the idea of self identity desires of mainstream and aboriginals are contradictory. To withhold the self identity and power politic they should strengthen the own ideology but due to their own fear and insecurity they defined the 'Other' therefore the self identity and power represented the 'Other' The Metis to gain political power and struggles to help the non — status Indian to regain their lost identity in a new sense and to become an integrated belonging in the Metis community. Campbell is aware that continuous struggle will lead to freedom, power and identity.

The Campbell substantiates her rebellious thoughts towards the white society. The images presented in the school text books, tourists, and movies are influential in creating and promoting the negative images of the natives and Metis community. Film industry stands in the prime position in creating distorted and mythical images of the native Campbell developed a sense of authorization. She is inspired by her strong-willed Cree great-grandmother Cheechum, who gave her confidence in herself and in her people, and partly by the 1960s Civil rights and Native movements, Campbell gradually channel her feelings of anger, frustration and shame into her eventual work as cultural and political activist.

In *Halfbreed*, the humiliation resulting from the degrading, traumatic experiences commonly shared by Canada's Metis population, are not portrayed as weakening. Instead, identity and power are revealed as Transformative forces that, when managed through the act of autobiographical storytelling, hold a drive to fight back, resulting in both individual and the Metis community survival, and the possibility of political change. Storytelling is part of their tradition solution. Half breed establishes Métisness as a socially acceptable ethnic-cultural category, replacing a sense of nothingness, of being neither Indigenous nor white, of being only half-breed. The term Metis has thus, gained content and context, and become a reference point for other individuals of mixed (Metis) heritage. Indeed, Halfbreed thus participated in the process of establishing Métisness as a legally valid ethnic category in Canada, finally leading to the inclusion of the Metis as one of Canada's aboriginal people in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982.



Through the story *Halfbreed*, Maria Campbell voices the way Metis community is neglecting to long-term poverty on desolation which continues to affect even now. Maria Campbell concludes her story with the following words of assurance, conquest and support: “The years of searching, loneliness and pain are over for me. Cheechum said, ‘You’ll find yourself, and you’ll find brothers and sisters.’ I have brothers and sisters, all over the country. I no longer need my blanket to survive.” (1983: 184) She throws her weakness away and making space for change and to regain the identity, power and authority.

Eventually Campbell realizes that herself hatred is not her dependability but misconception of the mainstream society. She has defeated the obstacles of poverty, pain, dope addiction, prostitution, and self-pity. Through writing on her personal pain and about discrimination related to issue of identity, and power politics, Maria Campbell allows the reader to see things from a Metis perspective. Campbell through her work strongly suggests that a person should understand her own identity, and power of indigenous. This not only helps to improve the position of the people, but also provides the inner strength that they lack. Campbell believes that a close relationship with the community would definitely help in reshaping her peoples’ mind optimistically. Cultural awareness determines one’s identity that enables her to survive as a Metis. This is Maria Campbell’s identity, and source power.

In this way, Campbell operates within the framework of the colonial society, Instead of accepting the half-breed identity compulsory on her and “her people” by the colonial state, Maria Campbell takes it into her own hands to define Métisness as she experiences it. Indeed, Campbell, later followed by other Metis writers, has defined and re-defined the terms half-breed and Metis in her writing, thus taking possession of those terms. In *Halfbreed*, Campbell documents both the shame that she felt as a troubled young woman, as well as her growing sense of empowerment as she comes to embrace her Metis identity and power.