Chapter II

The Métis Maria Campbell Voices (Her)Story

Literature subsists on a certain political, economic, and social context which it may reflect or challenge. In Canada, this situation is oppressive. All Canadians are migrants from another place, with the possible exception of the Native people. One group which can be generalized as white and male has great deal of power and prosperity at the cost of other groups. These groups are discriminated by the majority-white community on the basis of racial, ethnic, gender and class differences.

The appropriation issue and Oka confrontation clearly demonstrate that there are fundamental rifts between First Nations people and non-Native people in Canada. These rifts are manifest in the inequality of economic, social, and cultural power between the two groups. (Lutz 1)

This immense body of the literature of the Native people of Canada has been neglected for long and ignored. There are various reasons for this indifference: the European cultural superiority and attitude of cultural imperialism and paternalism that instigated and fostered supporting stereotypes of the Indians. In political and economic
terms the White Canadians’ protest against the aboriginals are clearly heard. The Natives too protest, in turn.

The first contacts between the Indians of Canada and Europeans occurred as early as the mid-fifteenth century on the Atlantic coast, presumably when cod fishing ships used timbers and harbours for repairs. By the time of Carrier’s arrival in 1534, the Indians of the area had been experiencing contact with Europeans for almost a century. The introduction of iron tools and the spread of disease meant that the impact of the European was felt before actual contact occurred. Thus, Native ways of life were influenced by the White men even before the fur traders and missionaries arrived to record them. The replacement of stone, bone and antler tools by ironware affected a revolution in the economic life of the Atlantic tribes, and disrupted the balance of power.

As an expression of voice, or, more correctly, a community of voices, the Native writers are challenging to find expression in a society that does not share their morals and concerns. The appearance of these voices differs from writer to writer, but as a society, theirs is a collective voice that deals with the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Native culture and society was in a state of distress and disintegration by the time it was first described. Early accounts of the position of Indian women in their cultures were written by fur traders and missionaries, and inform the readers as much about the ideological perspectives of the authors as they do about the subject at hand.
Native people were subjected to beliefs that have had very real and awful consequences. While Native culture may be appropriated due to the imbalance of power between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal people, it is ironic that this very imbalance which makes it impossible for the Native culture to position itself within the dominant society.

The process of “coming home” through stories could be thought of as the experience of discerning the luminal space between Cree culture and the mainstream society. There are discursive differences between the colonized and the colonizer as they are embedded within different interpretative vantage points. (Leod 20)

Native writing in Canada has made incredible growth within the last five years. At the same time, it seems to go along logical lines of development. Native authors in Canada share an enduring and uninterrupted tradition with their elders, because for many Natives the change from traditional life-style to an urban one is very modern. Those writers, most consciously drawing from their own oral traditions and their epistemological heritage, seem best prepared to create new forms of literary expression and address issues urgent and meaningful which a rising global audience is ready to listen. Spiritual understanding encodes the spirit of Native heritage, and the oral tradition is the strongest appearance of that wisdom.
After the Natives of America being stolen of their land, language and much of their tradition, they are correctly doubtful of any outside interest in the center of their artistic tradition and cultural identity. Therefore, it is essential that Natives themselves are in full control of the whole range of their literary production. In Canada, there are extraordinary actions by Native scholars and writers to record what appears fit to be shared with the conventional or what may seem endangered by destruction, otherwise. In the case of Inuit people, various proposals were taken to record oral traditions for the forthcoming generations. This shows the concern of the Native people to preserve their culture and tradition. Next to the oral tradition, autobiography is the most commonly used form of literary self-expression and self-definition by Natives in North America.

While in US the Native autobiography flourished in the Twenties and Thirties, in Canada it seems to have reached a peak in the seventies. (Lutz 116)

This lagging of time is due to diverse developments in Native-non-Native relations and in different government policies in relation to Native cultures, as well as to the overall development of Canadian literature in general.

For younger authors, the experience of separation from their parents and family while attending residential school, the ensuing
culture-shocks, and the subsequent impairment of ethnic identity, are common themes. Maria Campbell marks a similar account in her autobiography *Halfbreed*. “There is a freshness of voice in much Native writing that by its very sound and character invites us to see ourselves anew” (Brundage 37).

Over the last few years, many elucidations of the works of Canadian Aboriginal literature lack a fundamental understanding of the ideological context in which the works were written. Most of the writers of these interpretations are grounded in the ideology of the colonized people who are the authors and subjects of the texts being deduced. The study of Native Canadian literature was abandoned until the late seventies. Over the past decades, an overflow of writers and their participation has changed the very trend of Native writing. They struggled against the dominant white writers and have achieved in finding their voice. They have accomplished extremely through writing and publishing fiction, drama and poetry wherein they discuss the critical evils that affected them in their province.

Very common and returning patterns in the works of the Native writers include their disgust of being Indians and their deep-rooted revulsion towards the white civilization. To get away from the sensitively and piously rotten condition they begin to use drugs which they find difficult to give up later. They have now started their protest march
against the white with self-assurance in themselves and aspiration to focus their people who are suppressed and dishonored by the whites.

Native literature discloses the deepness and position of the culture, states Native perception and points of observation common to other Natives and reveals the exquisiteness of the world and its beauty rarely recognized by non-Native writers. Native literature records oral narratives, values, beliefs, traditions, humour, and figures of speech. It highlights communal living and depicts a blending and sharing; elders wait to teach Native ways to the young who may be struggling in a foreign culture of questioning traditional ways. Non-Native readers may not always realize the strength and beauty of the literature but will recognize common themes. For Native readers, the literature is a source of strength and personal development.

Discussions of identity and representation in Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed show the mystified and estranged situation of the Halfbreeds in Canada. The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan symbolizes 85,000 Métis in the province and it is estimated that there are similar numbers in Manitoba and Alberta. In this context, it is relevant to define the term ‘Métis’ before proceeding to the problems faced by the Métis society women. Persons of mixed-blood are given different names throughout the world. In Canada, the term ‘Métis’ is given to persons born through inter-marriages of French Canadian (mostly English or Scottish) males and Native females (mostly Cree). Such contact between European
men and Indian women resulted in the birth of a new ethnic group, called the Métis people. The successors of this group played a vital role in Canadian history. The eight Métis Settlements (Colonies) of Alberta are the only lands in Canada set aside for the exclusive benefit of Métis people. Established under the authority of the Métis Population Betterment Act of 1938, the settlements were intended to provide the Métis who have been victimized by horrors of the Depression years, with a land base upon which viable communities could be built.

The fear of the Halfbreeds that their rights would not be respected by the Canadian government when it acquired the land from the Hudson’s Bay Company, along with the prejudice of the white Protestant settlers, led to the Red River Rebellion of 1869. Louis Riel established a provisional government at Fort Garry, Manitoba, but escaped to the United States in 1870 when troops arrived from eastern Canada. So with their leaders and their lands gone, the Halfbreeds fled to the areas south of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and established the settlements of Duck Lake, Batoche, St. Louis and St. Laurent..... They elected Gabriel Dumont as their President and with him eight councilors. (Campbell 9)

The Métis leaders who had fought for nearly a decade to have land set aside for the exclusive benefit of their people had envisaged
the Settlements as a means by which the Métis would gain control of their own destiny. After forty-two years of existence, the Settlements are yet to fully realize that goal. Attempts have been made by previous governments to acculturate the Métis Settlers. These attempts failed, but in the meantime, progress towards the original goal was lost because of government meddling in the affairs of the Settlements. However, through the constant efforts of the various leaders, the Settlements have gradually taken over increasing control of their own affairs. Their goal is to create self-reliant, secure, and prosperous communities built on the strengths of Land and Culture. However, the manner in which this goal is eventually achieved is perhaps more important than the goal itself. Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* is a product of this anxiety.

Before one can proceed with a discussion of the Métis in English Canadian literature we must understand the traditional interpretation of Native Indian history, namely, that the Indians were, and in many cases are still, classified as savage, and the Europeans and their descendents as civilized. To be sure, all kinds of theories, debates and controversies have abounded since 1492 about the nature of the Indian. Still, no matter how divergent the views, how fiercely fought the controversies, there were common beliefs about the Indian whether in a colonial, imperial, and/or missionary position. The "Whiteman", whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, believed in a cultural hierarchy through which
humanity moved from savagery, through barbarity to civilization. The Whiteman’s belief in "civilization" and its antithesis "savagery" were perhaps the most central and certainly the most persistent idea throughout the centuries. If the belief in cultural hierarchy has survived, so has its ethnocentric basis. One of the results of ethnocentrism was the "double-standard" way in which Indian vices and virtues were judged. Cultural myth is a very prevalent and deeply rooted aspect that has been equally imposed on the Métis history, as well as on the literary characterization of the halfbreed or Métis.

The recent historiography on the history of the Métis has taken a change for the better. Publications now emphasize the roles of individuals other than Riel and Dumont. Twentieth Century personalities, contemporary land claims and even Metchif French are not given prominence. This special issue of the Canadian Journal of Native Studies reflects the new historiography. Topics which were once simply included within a general overview of Métis history is presented in this volume. Essays on Métis material culture, land claims, agriculture, commissions, Métis cultural and Ethnic compositions, and the Métis in literature form part of this special issue. Metchif French, for too long considered a "patois", is included as is a comparative study of Métis, Hybrid societies of Western Canada and Southern Africa. The role of the Métis during the treaty making process, something that has been long overlooked, is evaluated using Treaty 3 as a model. The
many Native Studies Departments and Programs across this country must be given credit for this new approach to research going on in Métis history.

Maria Campbell grew up in Métis community in northern Saskatchewan in the 1940s and 1950s. The events of her life from early childhood ‘in the bush’ to adulthood ‘in urban isolation and confusion’ are related in her autobiography *Halfbreed*. It became the fast seller and still is the most important book authored by a Native person from Canada.

Of all the autobiographies written and published by Native individuals in Canada Campbell’s is probably internationally the best-known (Bataille and Sands 11 Klooss, “Fictional”), and it has served as a model for later Native authors who are encouraged to follow the example set by the Métis women from Saskatchewan. (Lutz116)

Campbell’s *Halfbreed* is celebrated as a Native’s autobiography. It is a communal declaration of the humiliations and scandals experienced by the author as Métis. Maria has effectively proved in her works the decline of their culture and customary hunting after the introduction of the reserves by the government officials. Besides raising her family and being an untiring cultural and political activist for Native
rights, Maria Campbell has worked with and worked for Native communities, particularly for women and children.

This book is the story of Maria’s life as a Métis child in northern Saskatchewan and of her life as a young woman in the city. Some of the literary qualities are immediately obvious to the readers- the very brief retelling of the history, the humour, the irony, the understandment. The oral tradition, apparent in the writer’s style, assumes that the listener (or when transferred to writing, the readers) comes from the same background as the storyteller. Because of the common heritage there is no need for lengthy descriptions or wordy explanations. There is no need for elaborate display of emotions: in fact, emotion is rarely expressed because events speak for themselves. (New 126)

Despite the complex legal issues that intensely influence the social and political context in which Halfbreed arises, Maria’s Métis family does not experience the confusion and alienation as referred to by various scholars. Maria starts her Halfbreed by illustrating the nature of Halfbreed people and their origin. Close familiarity with Native culture is a key to the survival of the Métis. It can help them to take pride in being Métis and to retain their Métis identity. Maria Campbell is very proud of being Métis and her people.
I grew up with some really funny, wonderful, fantastic people and they are as real to me today as they were then, How I love them and miss them? (Campbell 25)

Maria is fortunate to have Cheechum as her childhood companion. Despite her extreme poverty and the terrible racism of white people in the area, Campbell recalls some happy times in family and community events. She remembers her cheechum as a spiritual centre of her life. Despite the images of poverty and economic destitutions faced by Maria’s family, the first part of Halfbreed is permeated by laughter, music, and a sense of joy in the community.

Maria considers herself to be fortunate enough to get in contact with many elders, of her own tribe as well as of others. She identifies her cheechum as a Native woman. She explains that cheechum’s mother’s people were non-status Indians. She finds no confusion with her cheechum as being a Métis woman. Though she is a mixed race of European and first nation’s heritage, she hated the European settlers:

Cheechum hated to see the settlers come, and as they settled on what she believed was our land, she ignored them and refused to acknowledge them even when passing on the road. She would not become a Christian, saying firmly that she had married a Christian and if there was
such a thing as hell then she lived there nothing after death could be worse! (15)

The dominant white society has never treated the Native as a normal human being. The whites come to the reservation areas to take pictures of the Native people. In other words, a white man’s Native is like a specimen in museum, dressed in their traditional beaded dress. Maria amusingly notes this as follows:

> Once summer comes we can make a few dollars here and there. The Calgary stampede always needs Indians. There’s no need to go out and earn a living on the street. We can fix up outfits for ourselves, and go to pow wows, and put on for white people, and get paid. (133)

Maria elaborately describes the Natives’ homage for the elders, their joint living and their faith in superstition. Maria’s happiness had its source in her great grandma, cheechum. According to Maria, her cheechum was a superficial woman who had powers to forecast the future. Thus she could foretell the death of her brother who shot himself dead. On another occasion, she envisioned the death of her aunt ahead of time and took all the members of the family to her house. Within minutes of their entrance, the aunt expired. She could also advise others of their misfortune in unhappy occurrences. With this hovering
spiritual sense, she made Maria find the right path, though she happened to reach the wrong way.

Once, when we were all planting potatoes and she and I were cutting out the eyes, she stopped in the middle of a sentence and said, “Go get your father. Tell him your uncle is dead.” I ran for Dad and I can remember word for word what she told him. “Malcolm shot himself. He is lying at the bottom of the foot path behind your mother’s house. I’ll prepare the other. Go!” (Malcolm was dad’s brother-in-law). Dad took off, with me right behind him. When we reached Grannie Campbell’s no one was home. While Dad went to the door I sped down the foot path. Just as cheechum had said, my uncle’s body was lying there just as if he was sleeping. (21)

Though Maria claims that she has overcome her bitterness, her anger seethes just below the surface, anger undoubtedly justified. She makes no attempt to understand non-Native society, just as non-Native society has made no attempt to understand hers. She tells dispassionately of British war brides who were lured to Saskatchewan by Métis men:

Two of the war brides I remember well. One was a very proper English woman. She had married a handsome
Halfbreed soldier in England believing he was French. He came from northern Saskatchewan’s wildest family and he owned nothing, not even the shack where a woman and two children were waiting for him. When they arrived, his woman promptly beat the English lady up and gave her five minutes to get out of her sight, and told the man she’d do what the Germans didn’t do (shoot him) if he didn’t get his ass in the house immediately. (24)

Maria highlights on the root-cause of the Natives’ troubles in *Halfbreed*. She identifies as mis-education, stereotypes, racist and discriminatory practices as the reasons for their sufferings. Racism is backed up by the entire social system. Since the entire social system work against Native people, it is possible for whites to treat the Natives scruffily. The contemporary Métis plight has been rooted in the Canadian government’s unwillingness to recognize the Métis as a racial entity having justifiable aboriginal rights. The lack of legal recognition has had negative and deep consequences for the Métis socially, economically and psychologically. In response to the accelerating social disintegration of the Métis and their gradual assimilation into the dominant society, Métis political organizations began to appear throughout Canada in the mid-1960s. The Métis are susceptible to the stigma of inferiority, rejection by the white dominants and non-Native Canadians’ ignorance, on a daily basis. “If we walked into stores the
white women and their children would leave and the storekeepers’ wives, sons and daughters would watch that we didn’t steal anything” (36).

Language is an important cultural element, booming with beliefs and values which are different from those of other cultures. Therefore, the contact with other than one’s own mother tongue, combined with the use of one’s unique language, has insightful effects upon personal development. This developed a sense of dissimilarity in Maria from other Native people. But she never lost self-importance in herself and her people.

I do recall most vividly a punishment I once received. We weren’t allowed to speak Cree only French and English, and for disobeying this, I was pushed into a small closet with no windows or light, and locked in for what seemed like hours. I was almost paralyzed with fright when they came to let me out. (44)

Similar sense is reflected in Janice Kulyk Keefer as she utters the following:

And I had inherited something of my mother’s problematic relations to language. As a fourteen-year-old émigré, fluent in Polish and Ukrainian, she was put into a kindergarten class to learn English. Eventually, she learned perfect
English from haunting the movies and devouring Lux Theater on the radio, yet she was always made to feel uncomfortably different because of her last name, which was not Smith or Jones, but Solowska (165).

The system of education has affected the personal development of the Natives. They are easily subjected to feelings of hostility by the discriminatory practices which are reinforced by text books, teachers and their peers. Maria states that education which is based upon white middle-class culture is a major force in aggravating the feelings of inferiority and shame and in lowering the self-respect and self-image of the Métis.

In my first year English class, I know that I, like many other Native American students, was frustrated and alienated by the curriculum because no works of Native American authors were included on the course reading list (Lutz 20-21).

Educational system should not make the Natives develop a feeling of lowliness and lowering the confidence of the Native children. It should help on the other hand, to implant in children a pride in their Native tradition and cultural identity, and confidence in their own abilities which are definitely necessary to be sensitive in the pluralistic society of Canada.
Many Métis see the educational system as the main admittance to entry into the social hierarchy and a key to success in Canadian society. They have no alternative but to make use of the educational system in order to improve their social status. This fact exaggerates the acculturation process leading to a bend of their culture. Métis or Native children easily feel discouraged and uncomfortable because their text books usually convey a negative stereotyped image of Native people as hostile or cruel savages.

I attended a mission school operated by the oblate nuns. Unlike residential school kids, we got to go home every day. The nuns were often condescending toward us and to our parents. They called us savages and dirty drunken Indians. (Kenney 20)

Coupled with the problems created by text books, the teacher’s lack of accurate knowledge of Native people also poses a threat to the personal development of Métis or Native children. Teachers are mostly white people and so they seldom have a proper understanding of Native issues.

Our first teacher was a sad-looking little English woman in her late forties. She had never taught half breeds before and we soon realized that didn’t like us. (Campbell 48)
Métis people are more likely to be subjected to biased and racist practices which are performed by whites than by other groups. Cases of reluctance to have a Métis as a close friend, or to marry a Métis, serve as good examples of the racist discriminatory practices experienced by the Métis.

The important thing to consider among these numerous variations of the ‘Imaginary or white man’s Indian’ is that historically each of these imaginings has been projected and readily imposed upon Native people for the purpose of subjugation, whether it be physical, psychological, or spiritual. What makes this all the more insidious is that these projections have taken on a life of their own. (Lutz 112)

Racism and sexism work together in the lives of Native woman and it greatly influences their economic realities. Although racism influences the economic situation of the Natives, they are less likely to be in the labor force. The impact of sexism complicates and worsens the economic situation of Métis women. The double impact of racism and sexism in the lives of halfbreed women is obvious, since they experience the worst unemployment problems. This forms a contributing factor to the poverty of Native women. By the early 1800’s, Native women with a background of ties to fur traders were found living with their offspring, relatively independently.
The journals of Nor’Wester George Nelson in the Lake Winnipeg area around 1810, for example, refer to at least two such instances. In this northern region where Métis groups were just becoming visible as such, the offspring of such female-headed units would have contributed to Métis emergence, being themselves neither Indian nor trading post residents. A further line of inquiry, related to women's symbolic roles in the formulation of concepts of Métis descent and identity, in contradistinction to the patrilineal European identities that were not readily available to this new people units need further attention in looking at female emergence.

Family situations are also the contributing factors for the poverty of Native women, due to the fact they generally have more children. Moreover 80% of the families are headed by women. As a part of the depressed society, Maria victimizes that the oppression of the Métis women is due to the material circumstances of their lives and so she wants to be different from them.

I longed for something different for us; how I didn’t want to be like our women who had nothing but kids, black eyes and never enough of anything. (Campbell 86)

The Indian relatives of the Campbell’s offer Maria with inestimable chances for learning the dissimilarities between the Métis and the Indians, and for enhancing her sense of cultural distinctness. According
to Maria, Indians are quite separate from the Métis and slightly hostile to each other.

Then there were our Indian relatives on the nearby reserves. There was never much love lost between Indians and Half breeds. They were completely different from us-quiet when we were noisy, dignified even at dances and gettogethers. Indians were very passive- they would get angry at things done to them but would never fight back, whereas Half breeds were quick-tempered- quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget. (26)

Maria has interfered in constructing the Native women’s lives from within a white-Euro-Canadian-Christian patriarchy. She has written her text in the English colonizer’s language and thus seemingly advantaging the patriarchal hierarchy. Her first act of confrontation manifests itself in the construction of her text. In this context, Maria is one of the first few Native writers who have appropriated the colonizer’s language as a tool to bring out her oppression towards the dominant society.

Maria’s acquaintance with Native culture, beliefs and oral traditions was developed through many opportunities to participate in various traditional customs and to enjoy hearing the Métis history and their stories. It is the quality of her Native cultural background that
makes Maria different from other Natives. She is raised by her Métis parents and extended family in a Native community. Her familiarity with Native traditional practices is represented through eating Native traditional food, observing Native spiritual customs, using a dialect of her Native language, and maintaining close contacts with Native relatives.

Her daily experience of Native ways creates a priceless accumulation of knowledge of her culture. This Native experience enables Maria to hold a positive outlook towards her people, and to see the Métis as distinct from either Indians or Whites. Through her experiences she learned the real meaning of life. Augmentation of cultural consciousness has positive consequences for Maria throughout her life.

Intimate familiarity with Native culture is a very important and powerful authority in reshaping Campbell’s mind positively. Cultural awareness is important for her pride and identity, which is a strength that enables her to stay and survive as a Métis in a pluralistic society. “They took me to pow-wows, sun dances and Treaty Days, and through them I learned the meanings of those special days” (Campbell 27).

During her school days, Maria realizes that her diet was very different from that of the whites:
They had white or brown bread, boiled eggs, apples, cakes, cookies, and jars of milk. We were lucky to have these even at Christmas. We took bannock for lunch, spread with lard and filled with wild meat, and if there was no meat we had cold potatoes and salt and pepper, or else whole roasted gophers with sage dressing. No apples or fruit, but if were lucky there was a jam sandwich for dessert. (50)

Maria has a deep sense of attachment toward her Native food, function and festivals. She has a great affection towards her people; she missed them when her family moved away from their settling after her mother’s death. She missed her familiar Native diet during a Christmas occasion:

We sat down and tried to eat Christmas dinner, but the roast beef and new toys couldn’t replace what we had known. We had never eaten beef before and we found it flat and flavorless. (90)

Maria could tolerate every thing but not the loneliness which she senses as the cruellest one in the earth.

Christmas was a sad time, even if Daddy was home. He tried to make us happy, but in spite of all our efforts we were a lonely family. Our people were too far away to visit
and we missed the excitement and love we shared at home with them (79)

The silencing of the white dominants, either by vicious suppression or by delicate removal, does not mean that their voices have vanished. Those voices live within the collective memory and the collective unconscious of colonized people and the historically suppressed cultures.

Maria explains her understanding of the relationship between colonialism and sexism in Native society thus:

I realize now the system that fucked me up fucked up our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief, combined with the ancient Indian recognition of the power of women is still holding our people back today. (144)

Many Native people were subjected to the racist and discriminatory practices which existed even in the church and Christian missionaries. Priest often forced Christianity down the throats of Native children. It’s an ever burning sore in Maria’s heart that the Roman Priest refused to hold the burial services for her mother.

Funeral services were to be held in the Roman Catholic Church. On the day of the funeral, Father Cardinal came over and told Daddy that he would not hold the services for
Mom because Daddy had not called a priest in to administer the Last Sacrament before she died. (70)

Sexism as well as racism is a part of the daily inheritance of colonialism in Native society. However, it is not enough for the colonizers to control the material reality of the colonized, in addition to political, economic, religious and cultural oppression. Since the colonizers control all the official systems of communication, including education, the myth of the possibility of achieving equality prevails. Maria feels that the colonized fail to achieve equality, not only because of lack of opportunity but also due to their own laziness or stupidity. The same feeling is echoed in the words of Ann Cranmer:

As a product of my own colonial history where the blood of the oppressor runs together with the blood of the oppressed in my veins, I embody the nature of the oppressor and the oppressed and by extension, the silence of the oppressed and the ability of the oppressor to speak.

(126)

The problems of being a half breed woman amidst the white society are clearly illustrated by Maria. When Campbell mother leaves them, Maria being the eldest girl, stays at home from school to look after her younger brothers and sisters. She faces many problems while baby sitting. She has to abide by the rules of the white dominants to get
the family allowances and to escape from being dropped out in an orphanage.

We had no house keeper after April. Jamie and I took turns missing school to baby-sit the younger ones, and because we were in the same grade we were able to help each other with home work at night. After a week, the teacher said if we missed any more days she would have to report us and the family allowance would be cut off. (91)

The love and affection towards her brothers and sisters force Maria to choose a man from the dominant society, the main stream that her cheechum hated, ignored and refused to acknowledge throughout her life. Her relatives, friends and neighbours refuse to accept her decision. But she makes up her mind and tries to keep herself cheerful and creates a will to enjoy life. All her efforts result in vain when she happens to realize the true colour of her man. All she gets is slapping and kicking. Without an option Maria bears the harassment of her husband. To an extreme end, when her husband sends her brothers and sisters with the refugee men she finds herself broken pieces.

Darrel was in Prince Albert the day the welfare people came. We were all home and the children were eating lunch when a station wagon pulled up. I looked out the window and I knew that this was it. It was all over. The kids started to cry and
hang on to me, but they were pulled away and were in the wagon within a few minutes. I couldn’t move. I felt like a block of stone. The wagon drove away with six little faces pressed to the windows, crying for me to help them. I walked around in a daze. Everything went to pieces inside. (107)

The poor educational status of the Métis influences their employment rates. Poor school attendance and high drop-out rates reveals that a number of young Natives cannot help starting adult life without obtaining skills which facilitate them to make a good living in a pluralistic environment. Limited by education, the Native men are less signified in the professional or managerial fields which would offer them opportunities to climb the social ladder. Not finding a good secure job is the main source of failure for Native groups. This leads to alcohol abuse and other ill-effects on their personal and family lives:

More recently the stereotypes have settled either on the welfare bum or on the tragic victim debased by the alcohol, disease, and treatment of the whites. (Petrone 12)

Alcohol abuse is seen as one of the major social tribulations among the modern Métis. This situation is especially widespread in urban settings. While moving to larger cities where the Euro-Canadian systems and culture are predominant, many Métis experience loneliness, frustration, segregation, puzzlement and denunciation. The
pessimistic penalties of alcohol abuse include negligible lawful infractions, fighting, violence, and personal and family crises such as suicide, sudden deaths, and child neglect.

Maria Campbell has a similar story to tell in *Halfbreed*. Suffering from a lack of self-respect fostered by her ambiguous cultural tradition, Maria is pulled into the underworld of white urban society, acting out her role as a “no good” Indian and destroying her body through alcohol and drugs. (Godard 22)

Natives’ powerlessness, their disgrace and their social status always distressed them. These discarded and traumatic circumstances have driven them to self-destructive behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse, and projected Maria Campbell and Smoky as examples of suicidal Natives. In the case of Smoky, extreme frustration causes him to shoot his two white women and then take his own life. When Campbell is in Vancouver, she lives under great pressure, as she apprehends that if David may smell her past history. Therefore, she begins to lose her weight. Her desperate and stressful feelings drive her to self-destructive behaviour such as use of drugs, alcohol, neglecting her child and attempting suicide attempt. Maria responds to the hopelessness and frustration as:
I started to drink again, and as soon as David had gone on a trip I would phone a cab driver to pick up a bottle and deliver it to me. David knew nothing about my past, and I so afraid he’d find out some how I began losing weight, and had no appetite. (Campbell 139)

The domination she had internalized tells her she is insignificant, and more or less intended to become a prostitute, a drug addict or a suicidal statistic.

These alcohol-related problems are caused by cultural breakdown and alienation, discrimination, inadequate housing conditions, unemployment due to limited education, and resultant dependence on government welfare. The urban experience leads many Métis to self-destruction by excessive alcohol use and its related problems.

I was using pills and drinking a lot, but instead of finding any escape, I became more and more depressed, and began to hate myself. At times I was utterly lonely there was no one to talk to. Mr.____ was out of town a lot and even if he were there, he didn’t want to listen to my problems. (119)

Maria finds herself living as a chief example of ‘Native women’, which makes her feel even more strongly that there is no good halfbreed. She is paralyzed, not empowered, by the recognition of the depth of her
oppression as a half breed woman. Her awareness of the commonness
and systematic nature of all kinds of oppression only make her feel
helpless to change her own reality, and lead her to attempt suicide.

Finally I made up mind to commit suicide, and to take my
children with me. I was afraid no one would want them and
they would only be pushed around. (119)

Maria’s problems with drugs and alcohol stem from her belief
that she is powerless to change her reality. She is unable to kick the
habits until she believes that she can do more than react to the
situations. She can act to change and control her reality. She calls her
cheechum helps to recover from all sorts of illegal acts. Then with the
balanced spirit of her cheechum, with her own remarkable strength of
will and that of her good friends, Maria is able to find spiritual freedom
and true identity as a Métis woman.

Then one night I found myself thinking of cheechum and of
my childhood. I remembered her saying, “You can have
anything you want if you want it bad enough”. I got up and
went for a walk and suddenly it was so clear I could quit if I
made up my mind. (124)

When Maria remembers cheechum's words and example of living on
her own terms, she recognizes that she does have the power to control
herself and to change her reality.
The problems faced by the Métis community are interrelated and are profoundly rooted in the denial of their aboriginal rights to lands and resources. A decrease in wild life and widespread environmental destruction has destroyed the traditional Métis economy. Urbanization has been accelerated by the fact that many landless Métis are forced to migrate into larger cities to seek their fortunes. Urbanization is one of the leading causes of the contemporary Métis identity crisis.

These problematic endings emphasize the very real limitations not only to what women can accomplish in the public sphere, but also to what accomplishment in the public sphere can mean for women. (Brownley 62)

The Native characters’ response of the external description transfers them to external, because their inherent inferiority grounds them far more misery and suffering. The Halfbreeds always keep their heads down when they go to town. This significantly contributes to Maria’s sagacity to be a Halfbreed woman. She ignores the abuses of the whites who consider themselves superior, since she recognizes that the same ‘respectable’ white men who hate the ‘shifty’ Halfbreeds during the day will, after dark, drink and gamble and fight with Halfbreed men and attempt to rape Halfbreed women. Her experience gives the slouch to the myth of Halfbreed ‘depravity’ as opposed to the god fearing ‘morality’ of the whites, revealed by women as well as the men. This truth, which comes out of Maria’s experience, is not acknowledged.
at large. Officially, the Halfbreeds and the whites are separate because of their unequal nature. The major image in mainstream Canadian society is not one of white men raping Native women, but one of a group of cruel ‘savages’, imposing unnamable slaughters upon a weak and innocent white woman. Intellectually, Maria identifies that she is not lower, as a Halfbreed to whites and as a woman to men. But frequent contact with a power structure describes her and her people as ‘good for nothing’ but ‘working and fucking’. Due to the practice of colonization and the corresponding internalized oppression, Maria accepts the external definition of herself as essentially inferior as a Halfbreed woman.

The Métis tend to have endured from dominant stereotypes which represent them as drunken, filthy and lazy. Racist and biased practices towards the Métis are the cause of psychological and emotional stress discouraging their ambitions for independence. She strongly persists on the need for political unity, in response to the dominant society’s “divide and conquer” plans which keep them in a state of continuous powerlessness and isolation. She swears that Métis political organizations make it possible to eliminate the economic differences and improve the status quo:

My people have always been very political. They get involved in political campaigns for local white politicians. As a child I remember listening to them talk and argue far into
the night about why this party or that was the best. They talked about better education, a better way of life, but mostly about land for our people. However, when one of our own people said to hell with white politicians- let's get our men in, or organize our own people into a strong association- that was something else.(Campbell 64)

Canada’s child welfare system has destroyed many individual Métis families, and the entire Métis communities. These systems are active in causing the Métis to lose their identity, remaining uncertain of who they are and unsure of where they belong to. Maria makes the claim that the attitudes of the dominant society, expressed through education, racist and discriminatory practices, and the child welfare system, are the major contributing factors for the Métis contemporary problems. The child welfare system in Manitoba has moved in recent years from the large scale export of Aboriginal children to parallel Indian and non-Indian systems. Métis children, making 27% of the total, have been included in the non-Indian category and continue to suffer from a lack of heritage participation and control. The problem is considered to be systemic.

Intimate familiarity with Native culture is a key to the survival of the Métis and their children. It can help them to take pride in being Métis and to retain their Métis identity. Without this, they are most likely to become nothing and fail in a pluralistic society. Cultural awareness
influences and reshapes a Métis consciousness of who and what a Métis is. However, this realization only immobilizes Maria. Campbell realizes the incredible size and power of the system that is overwhelming against them. Her *Halfbreed* stands testimony to this.

Many Métis move into a larger society which is greatly different from their Native community. They are subjected to rejection, isolation, exclusion, unawareness and discrimination by the dominant society. They do not usually show active resistance, but instead accept their maltreatment. The feelings of inferiority and shame in being Métis are the root causes of the Métis contemporary identity crisis. Maria strongly recommends that better understanding of the Métis by non-Native people will help improve the status of Métis.

She didn’t like Indians and talked in front of me as if I were deaf. She would tell her visitors that we were only good for two things- working and fucking, if someone could get us to do it. She made jokes about hot bucks and hot squaws and talked like we were animals in the barnyard. I despised that woman, but because I needed the money I kept my mouth shut and pretended it didn’t bother me. (94)

Exposure to Native culture and customs and the experience of mingling with other Native people have a significant effect on the development of Métis’ consciousness which serves to create awareness
among them. A new sense of Métis identity is thereby created. The metamorphosis of the character of Maria in her support for Métis political organizations represents possible solutions to the Métis identity crisis.

Written during the height of Native activism, *Halfbreed* reflects the political climate of the early 1970s. Campbell views her own life and struggles as a continuation of Métis resistance. It is ironic that she chose as her title the word that has been used by both whites and Indians in Canadian society as a label of scorn. Instead of rejecting the term of abuse, she wears it as a badge of merit and pride. (Petrone 7)

Unlike the other Métis, Maria never lost her original Métis culture. From the beginning, she acknowledges who she is and takes pride in being Métis and loves her people. Her concern lies not with herself, but with her people.

I loved my people so much and missed them if I couldn’t see them often. I felt alive when I went to parties, and I overflowed with happiness when we would all sit down and share a meal, yet I hated all of it as much as I loved it. (Campbell 102)
Maria believes that self-determination is the key solution to the troubles of contemporary Métis. She refers to isolation and indifference as the real barrier to Métis self-determination. She accepts that many of her people as well as herself wear such blankets. But she has no idea of how to fling it away until she becomes involved in the activities of alcohol, drugs and prostitution. These activities make her more politically aware. As a result, she comes to realize the need for unity among the Métis in order to throw away her blanket, to assert her survival in the dominant society, and to work for her community’s development.

Maria is conscious that many Métis people are unified through political organizations that fight for the improvement of their socio-economic conditions, and for the survival of a self-determining Métis people. Maria promises that continuous struggle will guide people to success and free them from isolation and apathy. Awakening awareness of who they are and where they belong to can be the key factors to Métis survival as distinct people in the dominant white society.

In response to the hurrying social breakdown of the Métis and their steady integration into the dominant society, Métis political organizations began to emerge throughout Canada in the mid-1960s. Since then, the organizations have accomplished a lot in lessening the economic poverty of Métis society, and in uniting many Métis people who would have been deprived of being Métis a few years ago. By
reviving traditional cultural traits and by establishing a sense of their historical traditions, the Métis organizations have also helped to create a new sense of ethnicity. This new shared feeling of belonging will probably lead to Métis survival as a separate ethnic group within the dominant society. Federal government policies as external forces and Métis political organizations as internal forces have influenced the growth of ethnic consciousness and group identity among the Métis.

Maria’s depiction of the Métis political organizations appears to be trustworthy. She has been involved in political activities and has witnessed the scope to which these organizations have promoted ethnic group identity. Her views echo the realities of these organizations as unifying forces.

By the 1880s, the issue of political and social equality for women was gaining a prominent place in public discourse in Canada. The increasing visibility of violence against women within the family, a new ‘scientific’ discourse which located sexual desire in the female body, and the shift to women working outside the home in an industrial economy were among the factors which led women and men to question the logic of the ‘sexual contract’, and to attribute to women a ‘self’ which domesticity seemed to proscribe. (Dean 57)
Writing is the work of creating soul, alchemy. It is a search for the core of the self. Either an autobiography or confession impresses an array in language and makes a logical whole out of the disorganized remains of a life. As a Native woman writer, Maria Campbell articulates and creates her self-defined individuality in the act of writing, by naming and defining authenticity in defiance of the external definition. She considers writing as a tool for survival and a means to reach her goals. She says that the Canadian Native women not only communicate with their own identities but also with the cruel society which has a ready-made definition ‘inferior’ to place upon them. By filing the differences between the external and the self-definition it is possible to change that oppressive reality. In spite of the discrepancies between the Natives and the non-Natives, the culture need a kind of flexibility, adaptation, and re-creation of self in relation to the environment that has guaranteed the survival of her people in the North since time immemorial. Trust and holiness are inseparably connected to the physical realities of life and provide the means for curing the oppressions.

Campbell, who had very strong, intimate ties to her Métis community and family throughout her childhood and also adolescence, uses the fertile ground of Métis, Cree and French symbolism and traditions to create a highly aesthetic, imaginative autobiographical story which borrows
from the story telling traditions passed to her through her cultural education within her Métis community. Maria Campbell addresses some of the same issues, histories and experiences but is able to draw on a wealth of cultural traditions in both the form and content of its presentation and representation. (Armstrong 35)

The Métis of the Treaty Ten area appear to have been dealt with as at Montreal Lake in 1889 and at the Treaty Eight negotiations. The order-in council simply refers to precedents to the south and west and notes that the Indians and Métis "have from time to time pressed their claims for settlement on similar lines" (42). The procedure followed at the making of Treaty Ten seems to have been little more than the continuation of the Métis policy established in 1889 and 1899, which ultimately derives from section 31 of the Manitoba Act. Some general conclusions can be drawn regarding the claims of the Métis people of Canada and the way in which these have been recognized and dealt with by the Government. Outside the western interior of Canada, they do not appear to have been dealt with at all, except insofar as those who lived like and among the Indians were admitted into the Robinson Treaties at the discretion of the chiefs.

No special provision was made for dealing with Métis when Treaty Nine was negotiated in Northern Ontario in 1905. The James Bay Agreement, negotiated in the early 1970’s, marked a reversal of
this tradition. The Métis were provided for in the agreement signed in 1975, as they were later in 1978 in the Northeastern Quebec Agreement with the Naskapis of Schefferville. It was in the western interior of Canada that Métis were most numerous and where they formed distinctive communities. They were also considered to be influential with the Indians. On these two accounts, the Government of Canada took some notice of them. They were not, however, treated as Indians. Métis admission into Indian treaties was a practice which was followed only to a limited extent in the new North-West. As in the Robinson treaties, it applied only to those Métis who were most closely identified with the Indians, although some element of choice was permitted.

This method was not meant to apply to the entire Métis population. There was no attempt to include them all in treaties. Morris and others stated that the treaties were not for them. The Indian Act of 1876 specifically excluded them except under exceptional circumstances, while amendments in 1880 and 1884 provided for their withdrawal. The Manitoba Act pointed the way to the procedure to be adopted for extinguishment of Métis title. Métis claims rest upon the same general foundation as those of persons recognized by the Government of Canada as having Indian status. They rely upon governmental recognition of an aboriginal interest in the soil, a usufructuary right constituting a burden on the Crown's title. The
Manitoba Act (section 31) recognized aboriginal title in the soil insofar as Manitoba Métis were concerned. It sought to extinguish that title by a land grant through an issue of scrip. This pattern was later extended to the Métis of the North-West Territories and then to those living in territory surrendered by Treaties Eight and Ten.

The procedure adopted for dealing with the Métis was unilateral. It proceeded by legislation and order-in-council. It did not even have the appearance of a negotiated settlement which the treaties had. Métis commissions did not negotiate terms, but simply examined the status of claimants to determine their eligibility to participate in the compensation offered. Indian title was extinguished, in theory at least, from the bottom upwards, while Métis title was extinguished from the top down. Furthermore, while the Métis were treated as persons having aboriginal rights, and in that respect different from other Canadians, they were not to form a continuing category of special status persons like the Indians. As a group, they do not have treaty rights, nor does the Indian Act apply to them. Although of part Indian ancestry, they have been treated as being no different from other Canadians.

Racism and sexism, the base of the hierarchy within Canadian society, have prohibited Native women from conveying their understanding of the world by masking the voices and, in some cases, silencing them entirely. When Native women like Freeman, Culleton, Maria Campbell, and Jeannette Armstrong tell their own stories in their
words; however, the truths they converse cannot exemplify but begin the process of curing.

If there is any gap between the real world of the Natives and the literary approach, it lies in the elements of hope and expectation which Maria puts in *Halfbreed*. She expects her audience, Natives and non-Natives to learn from her work. Her *Halfbreed* provides her own people with a way to overcome their contemporary plight, and she provides mainstream Canadian society with deeper understanding of the Native people and their problems. She is convinced that the sorrows and hardships of the Natives will ultimately fade away. A future will come when the Natives will enjoy being Native and take pride in themselves and their cultural heritage, as they did more than a century ago.

The present research would like to sum up by suggesting one specific research strategy that could serve to make our knowledge of women in Métis communities more precise. It would help to refine available data on this topic in generational terms. We often tend to collapse fairly broad time spans and to telescope generations in looking at developments over a century or more, when it would be useful to distinguish these phases of familial and domestic cycles more clearly as the microcosms from which Métis communities grew. The alliances of white traders and Indian women in fur trade post contexts were qualitatively different from second-generation alliances involving the first
women of biracial descent, and second-generation from third-generation ones.

More detailed family histories with time depths of three, four, and five generations, could bring out important and subtle comparisons and paths of change, as the experiences of these Native families accumulated, and as persons outside them in turn responded and reacted to them, helping to confer on them a new ethnicity. More broadly, such studies would also contribute to better knowledge of Métis demographic profiles. The rapid expansion of Métis families between the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth centuries is a major phenomenon whose implications, social, economic, and political, remain to be fully worked out. Its analysis, along with that of many other issues in Métis history, must begin with the dynamics of relationships between women and men, parents and children, and their close kin and contemporaries. It is all too easy to learn more about the men than the women; but new kinds of systematic study can redress the balance, contributing richer perspectives not only on individuals and families but on Métis social history in its broadest sense.


