Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973) is considered to be a manifestation of dissenting cry against the English Canadian social and cultural tradition. Elizabeth Waterston in *Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature* (1973) observes that it is an outburst against Mackenzie’s scorn of the dirty, lazy savages (20). To this day, *Halfbreed* is considered a landmark autobiography in the history of Native Canadian literature. It is widely taught in the higher education institutions. It is an autobiography of survival that successfully overcame a sense of shame related to Native identity. She brings attention to the way race in the Canadian multicultural society has become a decisive force to reckon with. The consequences of racial thinking on Metis society that consists of half-breeds or non-status Natives is depicted. The humiliating experiences of Natives found in their lives and the debilitating sense of shame shared by Natives is aptly depicted by Campbell. In the process of narration, Campbell develops a sense of empowerment and defines Metishness as a legitimate identity in the context of Canadian multiculturalism. The shame and anger that results from the degradation and traumatic experience are not portrayed as debilitating but are revealed as transformative forces. Depicted as an autobiographical story telling, it has become the representation of individual and collective survival for the possibility of political change.
Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* is an epic account of Native woman’s struggle to survive and come to terms with the past with the objective of creating a better future in the climate of social oppression and violence. Campbell narrates her own story in political, revisionist and provocative way. She contrasts whites with Natives, and status Indians with Metis (half breeds or non-status Native people). She presents the Metis identity as something real and essentialist and definable. Bonita Lawrence is of the view that Non Status Native people were created arbitrarily by the external forces. The entire category of Natives were designated ‘half-breeds’ and now called Metis. Campbell in a non-revisionist way, essentialising the race, establishes a political sense of Metishness within the context of multicultural Canadian society. In this way, the term Metis is identified as the need for defining and classifying people. In this perspective, Campbell is understood to be operating with the framework of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’. But relating to ethnicity, as the people themselves experience it, half breed identity is perceived. Campbell takes it on her own to define Metishness from her own experiences, instead allowing it to be defined by Colonialism. Followed by other Metis writers, she takes the possession of the term. In *Halfbreed*, Campbell documents her growing sense of empowerment embracing Metis identity. *Halfbreed* has won the social consent of the Canadians in considering Metis as ethnic cultural category, replacing the sense of nothingness. Acquiring the contextual support, Metis has become the acceptable identity and a focal reference point to the persons of mixed heritage.
Metis is bestowed with legal ethnic category in Canada and was eventually included in the Canadian constitution Act of 1982.

Maria Campbell, growing in Metis community in Saskatchewan, recounts how she experienced poverty and racism along with society’s institutional violence and the destruction of families. Campbell’s childhood was happy until the death of her mother. After her failure in taking care of her younger siblings, her family was cut apart by the social services. Her brothers and sisters were separated from each other. Campbell escaped from the misery of the situation by marrying a white man. But after he turned out to be abusive, she ended up with addiction to alcohol and drugs. Becoming a victim of prostitution, she attempts suicide with the objective of saving her children from the misery of life.

Campbell achieves a sense of self empowerment. She developed confidence in herself and in her people inspired by her strong willed Cree great grand mother Cheechum. She was also inspired by Civil Rights Movements and Native movements. She grows into a cultural and political activist channeling anger, frustration and shame. Campbell writes: “Great Grandma Campbell, whom I always called ‘Cheechum’…often told me stories of the Rebellion and of the Halfbreed people…Cheechum never accepted defeat at Batoche and she would always say, “Because they killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different” (11). Here, she refers to the humiliating experiences during and after Metis rebellion, the battle of Batoche of 1885. She breaks the collective silence of Metis and uses the silence against the shame of being Metis. She documents Metis uprising since
1885 and the consequences of the execution of the legendary Metis leader Louis Riel for treason. Campbell executes the role of a civil rights activist recapturing the past and trying to establish a secure home without the fear of displacement. She effectively transforms the feeling of shame and humiliation from debilitating and destructive feelings into sources of power and faith. Halfbreed is an insight into the situation of hatredness and racism experienced by Metis. She writes: “I am not bitter. I have passed that stage. I only want to say: this is what it was like; this is what it is still like. I know that poverty is not still ours alone” (9). On behalf of herself and of other Metis, Campbell resurrects the individualities of Metis.

Autobiography is a tool for and a form of political activism. It can mediate experiences across cultural boundaries. It improves the possibilities for self presentation and opens up perspectives in public discourse. Through emphatic process, it links the personal and political. It challenges the traditional perspectives of colonialism and emotionally engages and agitates the readers into transformative action. It makes the invisible visible, forgotten unforgotten and invites attention to the incomprehensible causes. Campbell uses autobiography to consolidate her political agenda. Her autobiographical truth consists of stories of the horrible realities and conditions of Metis. Previously, they were little known in the public. Campbell describes the dire necessity to share her life through writing:

Like me the land had changed, my people were gone, and If I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. That is when
I decided to write about my life…write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams. (2)

Campbell’s autobiography proposes and constructs an alternative history. It brings forward the Metis perspective to the history of Canada. It has challenged the hegemonic ways of knowing and looking at history and the ways in which it was written. In a multicultural society, the non natives may not be able to sense the victimization of individual by the powerful culture. Mullen Sands observes: ‘the process of writing and reading autobiography can lead to mutual respect and harmonious interaction and fair representation” (1997. 49). So Halfbreed is perceived as the story of self-discovery and an act of ethnic self definition. It is also perceived as a therapeutic process that transforms shame and anger into a dialogue that engages the writer. The involvement of the writer and the reader is an act of remembering that leads to the process of healing. Jenneifer Browdy de Hernandex considers this practice of remembering and rewriting as the formation of political consciousness and self identity. Campbellll claims the right to self definition and begins the process of detaching herself from the sense of shame attached with the status of halfbreed. Julia V. Emberley in Tresholds of Difference. Feminist Critique, Native Women Writings, Post Colonial Theory (1993) writes: Halfbreed is an important example of how Metis women writers reclaim the revoking of cultural positions. It is on these lines Campbell addresses the ways that form the identity of Metis dismantling the stereotypical
assumptions imposed by the dominant society. Carrying the historical representations, Metis have to survive against the stereotypical images of ‘dirty squaws’ and ‘drunken half-breeds’. Campbell describes this situation recalling the advice given by her friend: “That night Marion scolded me, ‘if you want help, never tell them the truth. Act ignorant, timid and grateful”’ (153). The Metis have been pushed to act according to these preordained stereotypical images. Campbell had to adjust her own behavior and appearance according to them: “I went to the office in a ten year old threadbare red coat, with old boots and a scarf. I looked like whitefist Lake Squaw and that’s exactly what the social worker thought. He insisted that I go to the Department of Indian Affairs” (155). This demonstrates the extent to which the notion of race has had an effect on the lives of Natives in Canada. To receive the assistance of welfare measures, Campbell has to face and accept the racial prejudices of the white society. She talks about metaphorical ‘blankets of shame’. These blankets have acted as shields from protecting the Natives from the sense of shame. Referring to her strong minded great grandmother Cheechum she writes: “My Cheechum used to tell me when the govt. gives you something, they take all that you have in return—your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul” (159). Campbell writes that Cheechum “used to say that all our people wore blankets, each in his own way. (...) someday though people would throw them away and the whole world would change” (159).

Campbell in an effort to overcome her personal problems, joined AA group where, incidentally, she met other Native and half breed people. They
played an important role in the Native movement in Alberta. She met other political and cultural activists: “I met students from other countries. I listened to everything they said, and brought home piles of books to read until late at night” (178). But even in the company of political activists, she used to feel inferior. But her sense of inferiority reinforced by the scholarly rhetoric used by those activists. It is the knowledge about her own books on the history of Native people that gave confidence in her potential abilities. She learnt more about the present and past conditions of the Metis, through her job and her friends. She saw the hopelessness of the conditions in Metis people and has experienced periods of hopelessness on her own. Gradually, she learnt to accept the slowness of change and the importance of perseverance. Understanding the lessons of traumas of unsuccessful uprisings, she worked towards change through minor improvements and achievements. Campbell writes: “For these past couple of years, I have stopped being the idealistically shiny-eyed young woman once I was, I realize that an armed revolution of Native people will never come about…we would only end up oppressing someone else” (184). Campbell has promulgated the idea of pride in a unified sense of Metisness. She of the firm view: “I believe that one day, very soon, people will set aside their differences and come together as one… Then together we will fight our common enemies. Change will come because this time we won’t give up” (184). This historical and cultural conviction is the resonance of Louis Riel’s perseverance to protect the culture of Natives according to a common legend: “My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them
their spirit back”. This popular quotation by Riel has become the most referred in Native history writings and in the meetings of Native history scholars studying Native literature. This has crystallized the resistance of Natives in response to various forms of oppression. Indeed within the history of violence, oppression, bitterness and shame there is possibility of finding an alternative history with Native creativity and determined resistance. It is at the backdrop of literary and cultural resistance, Maria Campbell portrays shame, anger and traumatic experiences as transformative forces through the act of autobiographical storytelling. The spirit of resistance is portrayed as an individual and collective resistance initiating the possibility for political change. She concludes the autobiographical narration with faith, victory and encouragement: “The year of searching, loneliness and pain are over for me. You’ll find yourself, and you’ll find brothers and sisters. I have brother and sisters all over the country, I no longer need my blanket to survive” (184). Casting away the cultural impediments, she makes a space for change and hope.

Understanding Native literature is based in the assumption that there is Native/Aboriginal group identity and the identity is manifested in the works of Native writers. However, there has been an ongoing debate in theorizing Native/Aboriginal identity. Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed has aptly represented the academic and critical debate in relation to Aboriginal identity. In the course of her autobiography, Campbell establishes self identity in a variety of ways in the description of her childhood. She situates herself within a highly incomprehensible web of kinship ties and makes distinctions between various
strands of *Halfbreed* families in northern Saskatshewan of Canada. She also presents her family complex relations to ‘treaty Indians’ and ‘Indian relatives’. She links the Kinship ties through her great grand mother Cheechum and to the rebellion of Louis Riel of 1869 & 1884. She also identifies herself as a larger pan-tribal group of Native people declaring that she has brothers and sisters all over the country. Describing herself as a representative of Metis Association of Alberta, she describes herself as’ half breed’ and ‘half Indian’. Burdened by this multiplicity and complexity, critics have often tended to define Campbell’s social identity by a process of ‘restriction’ observed by Michael Hames-Garcia. In this the multiplicity of ‘self’ becomes restricted and the identity is reduced and understood in terms of the ‘self’ with political salience. From this perspective, Halfbreed varies significantly depending on the position and assumptions of the critic.

On the eve of the publication of *Halfbreed* in 1973, Maclean’s magazine published excerpts from *Halfbreed* in an issue carrying the work of two other Aboriginal writers, Duke Redbird and George Manuel. The magazine’s cover has carried out an Aboriginal man’s face half illuminated and half shrouded in darkness. The man’s expression is sad and a single tear runs down his cheek. The cover page carried the words: “Death of a great spirit: Canada’s Indians speak out”. This has conveyed that the Aboriginal people are tragically doomed and it is challenged by the Aboriginal world inside. The literary works of Aboriginals speak out their deep seated faith in their indigenous cultural values both philosophically and as a practical way of life. The Native writers do not see
themselves but consider themselves as: “dying today for our non-aboriginal people’s sins”. The disparity between Campbell’s representation on the cover page of *Halfbreed* and the cover page of Maclean’s reflects the difference between Native and Non native writers. The early interpretation of *Halfbreed* was considered to be the result of widespread public response. This went on to receive nationwide recognition and became a watershed in the history of Native literature. As the Canadian best seller, it became a large body of literary critical work. Beth Cuthand in an interview with Hartmut Lutz in *Contemporary Challenges Conversations with Canadian Authors* (1991) has asserted that reading *Half Breed* is a must for understanding Native Canadian literature.

Many of the Native critics perceive Native/Aboriginal identity as an essential critical and political concept that provides modes of articulate to examine the significant relationship between lived experience and social location. Campbell has observed that *Halfbreed* is about group identity: “it is not my story I’m telling; it’s the story of a people” (85). But critics have made claims about who her ‘people’ are? Some perceived it as the representation of Pan tribal Native identity. Other critics came forward to accept essentialist conception of identity which refuses to recognizes the instability and internal heterogeneity of identity. Critics have considered Campbell as a person of mixed descent and hybrid identity. Paula Moya in her essay “Introduction: Reclaiming Identity” in the book *Reclaiming Identity Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* acknowledges: “the instability and internal heterogeneity of identity categories” (3). Another body of critics have identified
the inherent identity politically mobilized within the text. This process is one of resistance to non aboriginal society and government. For other critics, *Halfbreed* particularly works primarily through the sense of shared identity created among the Natives. It is also analysed from the perspective of post positivist realism.

Native/Aboriginals came together and formed a cultural unity during 1960s & 1970s. The context of Native unity has helped the success of *Halfbreed*. Beth Paul in 1976 in CBC Radio documentary described Halfbreed as the harbinger of ‘New Native Literature’. This has created social consciousness in North American Public to recognize the social and cultural presence of Natives/Aboriginals. Craig Womack in *Reasoning Together: The Native Writers Collective* (2008) argued that the early seventies were a turning point: “By 1973 a critical mass had been reached so that Native people were no longer considered an exclusively historical phenomenon but a modern one” (11). This change was obviously evident in the public consciousness particularly in Canada and Campbell has commented: “Canada wanted to know about Native people”. *Halfbreed* has justified this context and created the possibility of insight into contemporary Native/Aboriginal culture. The understanding of Native culture was expressed by writers in different ways. Bataille and Sands used the terms Indian, mixed blood and half-breed interchangeably. Kate Vangen has called Campbell an ‘Indian Writer’. Helen Buss described Campbell as ‘mixed blood person’. All these labels given to Campbell were without any cultural affiliation. Julie Cairnie described her as “Native Canadian Woman
autobiographer”. This is how Native writers were critical of their texts situating them in particular Native cultures. This particular criticism has distinguished *Halfbreed* from European autobiographical tradition. Armando, Jannetta in “*Metis Autobiography: The emergence of a genre amid Alienation, Resistance and Healing in the context of Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed* (1973) presented a typical argument that Halfbreed’s oppositional potential lies in invoking the oral tradition of natural story telling. Similarly, Kevin John in the thesis ‘The Construction of Identity in the Life Writing of Native Canadian Women’ finds that the Aboriginal oral tradition is present in the text through its multivocality, conversational tone and non-linear and anecdotal form. This criticism has valorized *Halfbreed* as Native work and paid little attention to the social, political, cultural and regional circumstances that influenced the content.

After winning the consent of the Nation towards recognizing the Nativeness, some Native texts are criticized for privileging a singular and Pan Indigenous culture over the numerous cultures. Native scholars have played a greater attention to the identities and political priorities of Native communities. This has paved the way for Native Nationalism. *Half breed* is considered as representative of Native nationalism. But it is strange to understand that Campbell never projects her social position as Metis. It is only after the publication of *Halfbreed Metis* was refered widely to French speaking public of aboriginal mixed descent. Campbell holds family ties both from French and English speaking people of mixed Cree and European descent and has primarily identified herself with English speaking halfbreed. Campbell was completely
aware of the distinction between halfbreed and Metis at the time of the publication. She uses the word ‘Metis’ to refer to a broader group of Aboriginal, though she refers to herself as a ‘halfbreed’: “I am a resident of Alberta, yet I can sit down with a man from Labrador (we are both Metis) and through talking we will find out things about each other—what the system is doing to us” (Interview with George 3). ‘Metis’ is used by various groups depending on their situation and carries a shifting and contesting meaning. Many of the ‘halfbreed’ families regained under bill C-31 are considered as First Nations people. Many of the critics who analysed the content of *Halfbreed* are influenced by the political effort in attributing meaning to ‘Metis’ and ‘halfbreed’. They have aligned their critical analysis of *Halfbreed* with current definitions of ‘Metis’ and ‘halfbreed’.

The term ‘Metis’ has engaged the critics to acknowledge the historical instability and internal heterogeneity evident in the qualities of transparence and self evidence. Toni Culjack in the essay “Searching For a Place in Between: The Autobiographies of three Canadian Metis Women” insisted that Halfbreeds asserts a Halfbreed rather than a Metis identity: “Although the sense that Maria Campbell views herself as a Metis Woman…Campbell’s use of the term ‘Halfbreed’ is problematic in number of ways. The Community she was born and raised on was distinctly a Metis Community” (The American Review of Canadian Studies. 137). Culjack has argued that Campbell has made a mistake and failed to acknowledge her inherent Metis identity. Armand Ruffo in the essay “Remembering and (Re)Constructing Community: Considering Maria
Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Gregory Scofield’s *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of Metis Childhood*” in the books *Canada and Decolonisation: Images of a New Society* (2003) discusses the disruptions to Campbell’s Metis identity and emphasized that *Halfbreed* projected a world view based on Metis culture. On the similar lines Jeannie Willis in the thesis “writing the Heroes Learned form the Foremothers Oral tradition and Mythology in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Eaven Boland’s *Object Lessons*” emphasizes on the continuity between Cree oral traditions and Halfbreeds rhetorical techniques and argues that autobiography is a historical chronicle of the Metis people in Saskatchewan. These critical responses have established the inherent and positive Metis identity in *Halfbreed* carried forward by the grandmother Cheechum. But the critical responses have ignored the other forms of identity that Campbell expressed in her autobiography, particularly pan-tribal ‘Native’ identity. Tol Foster in the essay “Of One Blood: An Argument for Relations and Regionality in Native American Literary Studies” in the book *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, ed by Craig Womack, Daniel Heath Justice and Christopher Teuton, observed that the Culturally Specific approach should not exclude attention to the contributions and collisions between communities. Campbell’s insistence that the division between halfbreeds and other groups is the product of the system and it sucks everyone further substantiates the critical perspectives.

In contrast with the critical emphasis, other group of critics have perceived *Halfbreed* as an example of hybrid Native identity. This approach
towards Native literature has been adopted since eighties. Influenced by post
colonial and post modern perspectives, it has offered alternatives to binaries in
defining Natives as pure and traditional or assimilating and vanishing.
Aboriginal people of mixed descent have become the popular subjects for the
critics interested in hybrid identity. Jodi Lundgren in the article “Being a
Halfbreed: Discourse of Race and Cultural Syncreticity in the Works of Three
Metis Women Writers” considers Metis as inherently hybrid: “Hybrid by
definition, Metis identity is predicated upon what is an inescapable and
characteristic feature of all post colonial societies” (Canadian Literature. 144).
Lundgren emphasizes, the ways in which young Maria’s western education
stands in contrast to the learning of traditional Native ways. Julie Cairnie in the
essay “Writing and Telling Hybridity: Autobiographical and Testimonial
Narratives in Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed” focuses on Maria’s Childhood
fascination with European literature and its influence on childhood game. She
observed: “ the children perceive and negotiate the incongruity between the
context of the game and the context of their lives” (98). This negotiation
between Native life and modern culture is the subject of project for many of the
writers with composite cultural origin and background. Writers of such
background celebrate the negative and positive aspects of cultural hybridity.
They maintain a balance in portraying the painful angst exploitation inherent in
Native life and celebrate the rich cultural heritage. Kevin John Kardynal in the
thesis “The Construction of Identity in the life writing of Native Canadian
Women” sees the identity of Campbell as ambivalent and divided. It is observed
that Campbell oscillates in between Native heritage and the strong desire for possessing upper class wealth and life style. This conflict is central to her downfall. This incompatibility is apparently perceived by Campbell. Recognising the identity as fluidly transcultural and negatively as a painful representation of hybridity, the critics have considered these as two separate cultural identities. Monika Kaup and Debra Rosentha Austin ed. in *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter American Literary Dialogues* (2002) considers this as “the plural poetics of Metissage” (197) and also “a Native Like resistance Movement” (198). Comparing Campbell’s identification with Riel rebellion, her perception is perceived as a failure to fulfill the promise of hybridity.

Critics of Hybridity school have perceived that the hybridity of Campbell is manifested in the synthesis of genres in *Halfbreed*. Julie Cairnie in the essay “Writing and Telling Hybridity: Autobiographical and Testimonial Narratives in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*” focuses on the dialectical tensions between autobiographical and testimonial narratives and concludes that *Halfbreed* is an integration of both the forms. Jeannie Willis in the thesis “Writing the Heroes Learned from the Foremothers: Oral Tradition and Mythology in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*” concurs with Cairnie’s observation and states that *Halfbreed* is autobiography blending of her Community’s oral conventions with English literary conventions. It subverts both the practices and debunks simplistic notions of authenticity. Armando Jannetta in the essay “Metis Autobiography: The emergence of a genre amid Alienation, Resistance and Healing in the context of Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*” draws parallels between
Metis and Campbell’s autobiographical genre and suggests that Halfbreed has to be perceived as a hybrid/halfbreed or go between fiction of historiography. According to her Campbell’s work oscillates in between defined and undefined space holding creative potential and freedom.

Craig Womack in the essay “Theorizing American Indian Experience” argued that the influence of one culture on another is universal and ordinary and it cannot be presumed as the divided identity. The insistence of the scholars on the hybrid identity of Aboriginal people do not represent the need for Natives to represent strongly to form a particular identity. Jo-Ann- Episkenew, a Metis critic and scholar in her critique of Halfbreed opined that identity confusion is pivotal to the theme of the novel. In the essay “Socially Responsible Criticism: Aboriginal Literature, Ideology, and the Literary Canon” she observed: “Granted negotiating identity in the purportedly post colonial society is a challenge that all Indigenous people face. However, many academics persist in the belief that it is confusion about their identity—and not the racist oppression that is a legacy of colonialism— that cause of mixed blood characters their difficulties” (Creating Community: A Roundtable on Aboriginal Literatures. 57). Interpreting on hybridity, Jo-An Episkenew argues that criticism of Aboriginal literature is ignorant of the ideological contexts in which the works were written. Christopher Teuton in the essay “Theorising American Indian Literature: Applying Oral concepts to Written Traditions” argues that the Aboriginal writers are insisting that the issue of culture sharing has little to do
Many Native and cultural critics are of the view that the notion of identity is actively mobilized as an alternative to inherent identity projected in *Halfbreed*. Robert Warrior in *The People and the Word: Reading Native Non-Fiction* (2005) has observed that the attempt to fix Native/Aboriginal identity has fixed and constrained the study and genuine understanding of Native literature. He observed: “Native American discourses continue to be preoccupied with parochial questions of identity and authenticity. Essentialist categories still reign insofar as more of the focus of scholarship has been to reduce Indian literature and thought and to establish why someone or something is ‘Indian’ rather than engage in the myriad critical issues crucial to an Indian future” (Tribal xix). As an alternative way to establish the Native identity of the text, Warrior suggests that critics should concentrate on how Native texts are part of larger processes of political and social engagement. It is on these lines that some critics have projected *Halfbreed* as politically active. Kateri Akinwenzie Damn in the essay “Dispelling and Telling: Speaking Native Realities in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree*” states that *Halfbreed* became more than a personal, literary act of autobiography. She firmly said, that it became an important public act of telling considered to be a social and political act.

*Halfbreed* is considered as an act of political resistance against colonialism. Her observation: “I write this all for you, to tell you what it is like
to be a *Halfbreed* woman in our country” (8) has influenced the critics seriously in inducing a response in non Native readers. Kate Vangen in the essay “Making Faces: Defiance and Humour in Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Welch’s *Winter in the Blood*”, quoted Campbell as saying : “ I tried being the militant speaker and the activist…that’s when I realized that …writing was the best way to reach people” (The Native Literatures. Ed. Thomas King. 190). From this perspective, Campbell is understood to have engaged in a historical subjectivity, denied to First nations. Janice Acoose has observed that the text is seen as a challenge to the dominant ideas about the Natives. *Half breed*’s literary intervention has dismantled the existing stereotypes and succeeded in subverting the master narratives of white Imperialist history.

The very perception of ‘autobiography’ has changed by the post colonial criticism. It has viewed the act of ‘writing’ as the colonized peoples attempt to preserve the experiences of past history. Retrieving the past history through memories and the act of writing is considered as an act of resistance to colonialism and imperialism. Understanding *Halfbreed* as a narrative resistance becomes a significant act in the general circumscription of literary resistance. Stephen Slemon in the popular essay “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World” while offering a critique of resistance theory has argued that the very act of resistance is grounded in the multiple and contradictory structures of ideological interpellation (Unhomely States: *Theorizing English-Canadian Post Colonialism*. Ed. by Cynthia Sugars Peterborough. 2005). It is pertinent to observe that the social and literary resistance is formed by the
understanding and assumptions of the critic. In other words, it is formed by the constant interaction of the critic and the text. It is also shaped by the assumptions of the circumstances.

For many of the readers *Halfbreed’s* subject of resistance to colonialism has been an important analytical and critical aspect that influenced the criticism of Campbell. But this has limited the understanding of *Halfbreed*. Daniel Heath Justice has cautioned that such perception runs the risk of being merely reactionary and prevented *Halfbreed* from being understood as a creative and transformative work. Heath Justice as one of the significant Aboriginal critics who has theorized the Native/Aboriginal identity as constituted by ongoing and circumstantial influences. Aboriginal critics and writers over the years have often focused on the role that *Halfbreed* has essayed in constructing cultural unity among Aboriginals/Natives across the world. Emma Laroque, a contemporary of Campbell, considers *Halfbreed* as a text of rebuilding Native relationships: “I do not read Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed- I experience it. Maria told a story, her story. She did not use the Metis as a vehicle for worldview, a doctrine or even as a social protest. She simply told a story, and because it is authentic, it is my story too” (91). These responses convey the development of shared identity based on an experience of communication. Heath Justice has articulated these as vital in reconstructing Kinship relations: “Kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that’s done rather than something that merely is” (150). Daneil David Moses has used this metaphor of kinship to assert that Native
writers in Canada considered Campbell as an active influence. Most of the Native writers have considered Campbell as ‘the mother of us all’. The popular Native Canadian critic Lenore Keeshig-Tobais agreed: “She is Of course she is” (83). For many of the Native writers this sense of affiliation was distributed with the influence of Campbell. But this sense of reconciliation and cultural relationship is not unique to Metis readers. Many of the Native/Aboriginal writers have expressed the similar cultural solidarity when they were interviewed by Hartmut Lutz in the early nineties and they had accepted the strong influence and the connective quality of *Halfbreed*.

The solidarity of Kinship fostered by *Halfbreed* is significantly different from the abstract pan-tribal unity that is assumed by some critics to exist among Native/Aboriginal writers. Lisa Brooks in the essay “Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism” asserted as a “historically and spatially Specific intertribalism- which is based in the actual relations between individuals, families, nations, and places as well as a continuous attempt to build and maintain communication and relations” (253). She has further opined that the active intertribalism is enacted and connected by “networks of writing Indians” (254). These networks are manifested in *Halfbreed* obviously. Substantiating this Episkenew has declared: “the reception that *Halfbreed* has received surprised and motivated the aspiring Native writers; it revealed that mainstream Canadian would listen to their stories” (Aboriginal. 123). This is strengthened by Acoose observation that ‘the movement initiated by Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* is growing ever stronger’. All the Native writers have
considered as a vehicle for their own resistance and empowerment. Even decades after publication, Campbell’s autobiography continues to influence Native/aboriginal generations. Gregory Scofield, in his 1999 autobiography *Thunder Through My Veins* observed that both Campbell and *Halfbreed* were integral to his own life struggle. Scofiled has asserted that writers such as Campbell “made me want to write. They brought my mind and spirit to life. They gave me a sense of something larger than myself, something more profound than the pain, fear and anger. They led me to a place of belonging a permanent home where I have found a voice to speak with” (xv). Scofiled’s sense of aboriginality is evoked through *Halfbreed* and it provided to him a sense of understanding with the larger community. The autobiography had provided a foundation with which to maintain and nourish his own literary voice. The scholarly criticism on Aboriginal literature has focused on the resistance to dominant Canadian society. Scofield is much concerned with the resistance of the text than with the abilities that connect the Aboriginal people together. This function of Aboriginal literature is not completely explored by the public criticism.

*Halfbreed* has been interpreted in the light of many political and theoretical issues since its publication. It has played a significant role in consolidating Native literature. It has exemplified the Native identity, particularly Metis identity. It was considered to be an authentic text for hybridity. Understood and perceived as a resistant text directed at White readers. It was considered to be a community building work for Aboriginal
writers. It’s appeal was broader and served a wide array of purposes. Any attempt to conclude the meaning of the text with relativist claims becomes futile. Since identity is socially constructed, it conveys different things to different people. But such relativistic approaches are damaging and unsatisfying. Craig Womack has worried about such relativistic confusions that advocate an open ended definition to the Native experience. Craig Womack in the essay “Theorising American Indian Experience” argued for recognizing a core sense to Aboriginal/Native experience. Recognising the core identity is essential even it is fluctuating. According to him, it can provide a core meaning of Nativity, even in the oscillating condition. The dire necessity is to tap the core sense of Nativity without confining to restrictive notion of identity, while addressing the complexity of work.

The recent post positivist realism reclaims the Native identity as a meaningful term of analysis without falling into dangerously restrictive claims. Michael Hames Garcia in the essay “Who Are Our Own People? Challenges for a Theory of Social Identity” says that through a careful and continually correcting process of interpretation, one can accurately grasp the complexity of the social processes and multiple conditioning that make the truth of experience. There are many efforts to fix and contain identity in Halfbreed on the theoretical lines. Most of the critics are in favour of an approach that acknowledges the multiplicity of identities that create the meaning in the text. Campbell identifies herself as a mother, as a Halfbreed, a Native person, a representative of the Alberta Metis Association. Hames Garcia probing such multiplicity cultural
complexes argues that such social identities do not make essentially separate axes that occasionally intermingle. Garcia is of the view that they mutually constitute each other’s meanings. He is also of the view that instead of restricting our critical focus on a single identity, we can investigate how and why certain identities in a text are affirmed or excluded. They are the contexts for exclusion and affirmation. They are also historical characters and social functionaries. This cannot be considered as a celebration of hybridity and a relativist affirmation but as a self-proclaimed post–positivist realism. This particular theoretical approach allows us to distinguish between more or less true and ethical identity claims. They enable us to move towards a more coherent view of the real experienced complexity of identity.

Campbell’s fictional autobiography is extremely important because it functioned as an important model for achieving wholeness and connectedness for Native Women in North America. Howard Adams observes such Indigenous people as: “isolated and individualized people” (178). The text is an important legacy for Native women as it represented Native women in the persons of Cheechum, Grannie Campbell, Quachich, Grannie Dubuque and her mother as survivors of the colonial regime and abusive relationships. Campbell’s text has intervened in a literary tradition that had constructed Indigenous women’s lives from within White European Canadian Christian patriarchy. Written in English Colonizers language, privileging the patriarchal hierarchy, the autobiography consists of conforming to the Christian patriarchy. The author’s first act of resistance manifests in the construction of her text. Many Native/ Aboriginal
writers considers the act of writing as a political act that discourages decolonization. Campbell appropriating the coloniser’s language identifies the oppressors unjust system, laws, processes and works towards decolonization. Campbell prefaces her text by defiantly addressing the colonial world: “I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” (2). Her reference to herself as a *Halfbreed* seriously disturbed many liberal White-Euro Canadians who think of the term as derogatory. Howard Adams a staunch Metis activist observed that in Canadian history ‘halfbreed’ refers specially to the group of people who are part Indian and part white. According to him, Halfbreed people did not have a choice as to whether they could be Indians or white or in between. Society considers them as members of the Native society and it still does today. Campbell and others still used the term *Halfbreed* with a nationalistic pride and also to raise the consciousness of Natives in understanding the inherent racism in Canadian society.

The resistance of Campbell is obvious in the language that she repeatedly uses from English to Mitchif to Cree. The resistance is also evident in Campbell’s names of the relatives. Her greatest influence and confidante is her great grandmother referred to as Cheechum. Another maternal relative is referred to as Qua Chich. The text also resists the conformity to the Euro-Canadian patriarchy. She indulges in introspective analysis to reawaken herself. In this process, she challenges the white Christian patriarchal constructs of Indigenous women which are racist. She firmly contextualizes her autobiography as a proceedings from Halfbreed Indigenous ideology. Campbell’s strong sense
of family and community is embodied in the context. Thomas King in the preface to All My Relations described that the Native identity is caught in the web of ‘Kinship that radiates from a Native sense of family’ (xiii). Firmly rooting her narration in Halfbreed Indigenous ideology Campbell challenges the suffering images of Native women as she considers her family as a resourceful and inspiration to her community. She considers her grandmother Cheechum is a great source of inspiration, strength and love who withstood the powerful onslaughts of colonialism by tenaciously clinging on to the Native ways of life.

Campbell writes: “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” (15). The Christian referred is Campbell’s great grandfather Campbell. He is addressed by the old people as ‘Chee-pie-hoos’ of ‘Evil-spirit-jumping-up- and –down’ (14). Campbell implies that Chee-pee-hoos, who came from Edinburugh, Scotland and ran a Hudson’s Bay store considered Cheechum as a loose woman influenced by the stereotypes of Native women as prostitutes. Old man Campbell’s White Euro-Christian patriarchal culture has provoked him to think that his ‘wife was having affairs with all the Halfbreeds in the area’ (14). Though Cheechum had married this Scottish immigrant, she had successfully resisted every kind of domination. During the 1885 Resistance at Batoche, while great grandfather worked with North West Mounted police, Cheechum collected information, ammunition and supplied provisions to the rebels. On knowing this, the old man Campbell punished Cheechum by stripping
her naked and beating her in public. After this, Campbell died mysteriously and Cheechum went to live with her mother’s people in the area known as Prince Albert National Park. Cheechum’s mother’s people are Natives, according to Campbell. Though they were never part of the reserve and were not part of the treaty makers, Maria Campbell proudly remembers them as Natives. Cheechum scorned the offers of welfare and old age pension from the colonials. She completely remained self-sufficient and depended on the Native ways of hunting and nurturing a garden:

Cheechum built a cabin beside Maria Lake and raised her son. Years later when the area was designated for the Park, the govt. asked her to leave. She refused and when all peaceful methods failed the RCMP were sent. She locked her door, loaded her rifle and when they arrived she fired shots over their heads, threatening to hit them if they came any closer (15).

She married her son to a ‘Vandal’ woman whose family had been involved in 1885 resistance and this shows the pattern of continuous resistance. Campbell described her grandmother as a strong woman who went to the white community to cut brush for seventy five cents an acre. Cheechum brought up her grandchildren completely in Native way. She gave her children warm clothes wisely choosing to wrap their feet in an Indigenous way with rabbit skins and moccasins. Grandmother Cheechum confirmed to the powerful, dynamic and resourceful Native pattern of living to which Maria Campbell has adhered. Campbell as the author remembers the physical ability of her grandmother in
tilling the land “ Grannie Campbell and her children had only one team of horses and Dad used those to work for other people , Granny on many occasions pulled the plough herself “ (16). Like Cheechum, Grannie Campbell was totally self sufficient. Till she was old, she brushed and cleared and leveled the settler’s land. She looked after the babies when they were sick.

Grannie Campbell’s older sister Qua Chich is also a representative of resistance to which Native women . She has successfully survived the treaty making interventions of the Government. Campbell remembers how she withstood with firmness the attempts of relocation to an Indian reserve. She patiently bore the marriage which left her widowed, destitution and poverty which afflicted her brothers and sisters. Campbell remembers Qua Chich as a strange old lady who cussed at her dog in Cree. Qua Chich was considered quite wealthy because she owned many cows and horses as well as a big two storey house. She successfully maintained her home and property after her husband’s death. She was also stingy with money. She demanded for a signature on formal papers to lend money to the desperate. This exemplifies the business skills of Qua Chich and she falls into the pattern of resourceful women.

Campbell presents variety of Native women personalities who resists the confinement to stereotypical images that imprison Native women. Campbell’s mother whom she describes as ‘quiet and gentle, never outgoing and noisy like the other women’ challenges the very limiting stereotypical princess/squaw images. Campbell acknowledges that her mother, like so many others ‘was always busy cooking’ , the author recognizes that she was quite unlike the other
Metis women because ‘she loved books and music and spent many hours reading to us’ (17). Campbell’s maternal grandmother also resisted the stereotypical confines that non Native people construct for Indigenous women. She described her as “treaty Indian woman, different from Grannie Campbell because she was raised in a convent” (18). Campbell’s Grannie is Dubuque marrie Pierre Dubuque, a French immigrant who ‘arranged his marriage … through the nuns at the convent” (15).

In the early years of her childhood, Campbell failed to comprehend the devastating effects of Christianity that inflicted on her culture. Later, as a young writer who believed in decolonization, Campbell began to understand how Christianity has constructed and defined her identity on the lines of patriarchy. She understood that Christianity is a powerful agent of colonization and it constantly attempts to hegemonies the lives of the Natives. Campbells mother and grandmother Dubuque were raised in Christian convents and the Christianity has completely eroded even the remote cultural connection that had with the original ways of life. Grannie Dubuque’s life was completely looked after by the convent nuns who married her off to Pierre Dubuque. She remembers that her people never talked against the church or the priest regardless of how bad they were. She recalls the undaunting and unquestioning faith of her mother in God. Despite the selfish nature of the priests to swallow whatever is offered to the church, Campbell’s mother: “accepted it all as she did so many things because it was sacred and of God” (32). On the contrary, the priest showed no respect for what was sacred to the Natives. He bitterly remembers that he took things “
from the Indian Sundance Pole…(things) that belonged to the Great Spirit” (30).

But the grandmother Cheechum understood the power politics manifested in the actions of the priest and resisted the domination thoroughly. Cheechum hated the church, the Catholic God and the priest. She expressed publicly that the Christian God had taken more money from them than the Hudson’s Bay store.

It is pertinent to observe that the knowledge, values and belief system of Cheechum was derived from the closeness to the land. The Native perspective of life stands in complete contrast to the Western Christian dogmatism. Physical and psychological affinity with the land showered tremendous insight and skills on Cheechum to understand the human relations. She is also bestowed with the rich understanding of plants and animals. Having undergone social, political and cultural changes, she developed her own individualistic opinions on the issues of war, the church, the role of men and women and the government. Campbell derives consolation to withstand the death of her mother from the words of her mother: “I have never found peace in a church or in prayer. Perhaps, Cheechum had a lot to do with that. Her philosophy was much more practical, soothing and exciting and in her way I found comfort. She told me not to worry about the Devil, or where God lived or what would happen after death. She said that regardless of how hard I might pray or how many hours I spend on my knees, I had no choice in what would happen to me or when I die… She said God lives in you and looks like you, and not to worry about him floating around in a beard and white cloak; that the Devil lives in you and all things… Her explanation
made much more sense than anything Christianity had ever taught me” (72-73). Cheechum has derived infinite wisdom from the simple Native ways of living.

The simplicity of Cheechum is often contradicted by the maternal relatives of Cheechum and Campbell describes them as strict Catholics and superstitious Indians. Contrary to Cheechum’s subtle teachings for spiritual and cultural richness, Grannie Dubuque implicitly encouraged Campbell and her siblings to seek out material wealth. To conceal the poverty and to imitate the western modes of living, Dubuque all the time urged the children to pretend as if they are eating only western dishes. Despite the attempts of Campbell’s grandparents to conceal the poverty, the harsh realities of their lives intruded upon their games. Grannie Dubuque’s idealization of white culture all the time remained as unfulfilled goal for Maria’s family.

The language employed by Maria Campbell obviously depict the author’s conformity to the White Euro Canadian Christian patriarchy. She refers to the difference between ‘Treaty Indian’ & ‘Halfbreed’ women and makes a broad generalizations that are more stereotypical than the opinions decided by the reality. She explains that Treaty Indian women do not represent themselves but Halfbreed women resist and represent themselves with great spirit. These differences represent the part of the pattern between ‘Indian’ and ‘Metis’ people: “There was never much love lost between Indians and Halfbreeds. They were completely different from us…quiet when we were noisy, dignified even at dances and get-togethers. Indians were very passive—they would get angry at things done to them but would never fight back, whereas Halfbreeds were quick
tempered – quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget” (26). Observing on the aspect of recollection in her conversation with Hartmut Lutz in *Contemporary Challenges* Campbell insists that “When it comes to Aboriginal people in Canada, we have the church to ‘thank’ in all areas, whether we are Metis, non-status or whatever, for the dilemma that we are in now” (47). With a matured understanding of life Campbell says that a priest had total power in the community but their influence has come down in the recent times. In the contemporary situation as the church is loosing its control, it is now incorporating indigenous ceremonies and rituals. She astutely maintains: “When you can’t completely oppress a people, if you are losing them, then you incorporate their spiritual beliefs” (47). Examining from Campbell’s cultural context, it is understood that the dreams, hopes and ambitions of Campbell are shattered by Christian patriarchal intrusions.

Campbell was thirty three years old when she wrote *Halfbreed*. She spoke about the process of writing to Hartmut Lutz: “When I started to write *Halfbreed* I didn’t know I was going to write a book. I was very angry, very frustrated… I always carry paper in my bag, and I started writing a letter because I had to have somebody to talk to, and there was nobody to talk to. And that was how I wrote *Halfbreed*” (53). Thus her writing became an act of resistance. The construction of the text gave her a renewed vision. It established a stronger relationship with the powerful, resourceful and dynamic women who inspired the natives in an exemplary way before her. The issues that were discussed by Campbell were rarely discussed by Native woman writers. The problems of
racism and sexism analysed by Campbell are the common experiences of many Native woman. Campbell had experienced this suffering and has survived the genocidal attempts on Native people. She also has survived the colonial oppression, abusive men, and systemic racism and sexism. She refuses to whitewash the sufferings experienced by her ancestors. She do not yield to the attempts of liberal humanists and wanted to question the inglorious history of Canada: “…the history of Canadians, is that they are killing us with their liberal gentleness… Because the kinds of things that have happened to Aboriginal people in Canada are things that were so ‘nice’ that nobody’s ever bothered to record them because they were done in such a nice way …Nobody ever would believe that in Saskatchewan at the same time people were loaded into cattle cars, not having bathrooms or facilities, and were carted off, hauled some place, and dumped off in the middle of the snow…We need to write these stories ourselves” (58-59). Campbell refuses to erase the memories of inglorious past. But she is also critical of the lives of the Natives that have internalized the colonial practices. She recollects the words of her grandmother Cheechum:

Many years ago, she (Cheechum) said, when she was only a little girl, the Halfbreeds came west. They left good homes behind in their search for a place where they could live as they wished…The white man saw that was a more powerful weapon than anything else with which to beat the Halfbreeds, and he used it and still does today. Already they are using it on you. They try to make you hate your people (47).
She is of the view that the colonial practices are manifested in the family violence and the methods of exploitation that the Natives practice. Metis practice the cultural aspects of colonialism and they consider colonialism as a privilege to be subscribed. Campbell remembers how her own father was beaten and died after unsuccessfully attempting to politicize the community. She narrated with anger and real sense of loss:

Daddy started to drink that summer and I began to grow up. Our whole lives, and those of our people, started to go down hill. We had always been poor, but we’d had love and laughter and warmth to share with each other…He seldom smiled and he hardly ever talked to us unless it was to yell. When he sobered up he’d try to make up, but it never lasted long. Once he even slapped Cheechum (67).

Campbell’s family lived through extreme poverty but they were able to stay together and help each other. Campbell observed that when the Natives lost their collective living and collective dreams, they lost their hopes and self respect. Campbell’s father lost self respect after his own people turned on him. Frantz Fanon’s analysis in The Wretched of the Earth substantiates this aspect. Dr. Howard Adam in Prison of Grass has argued that colonised people criticizing their own people is nothing but the inheritance of the colonial culture.

Campbell remembers how she became a victim of colonialism due to the cultural practice of internalization of the white ideals. As children they always dreamt of becoming the Germans and Swedes. She thought: “they must be the
richest and most beautiful on earth. They could buy pretty cloth for dresses, ate apples and oranges, and they had toothbrushes and brushed their teeth every day” (27). This fascination represents the idealization of white culture. She remembers the childhood dreams of “toothbrushes and pretty dresses, oranges and apples, and a happy family sitting around the kitchen table talking about...tomorrow” (114). As she recollects the shattered lives of men and women, Campbell realizes the shattering of many hopes and dreams. The prominent symbol of the policy of assimilation, is embodied in the Indian in the suit. It is only in the status of reawakening, she meets and realizes many Natives who have shattered and sold their dreams. She recounts all these lives towards the end of her narrative. She is devastated by witnessing the Natives who have turned out to be puppets within the framework of colonialism only to help the colonials to achieve their goals of oppression.

Campbell has not subjected herself to colonialism in any situation in her life. She has survived like a strong, vital and resourceful women within her family. She has survived colonialism in its absolutely worst form oppression. She has bravely withstood the systemic racism and sexism, drugs and alcohol addiction. She has refused to die as the victim of Canadian society’s racism. Her ability to withstand is compared with Margaret Lawrence’s beaten down Piquette Tonnerre and also with William Patrick Kinsella’s Linda star. Her survival left her as an archetypal symbol for emulation to other Native women. Many of the Native Women writers found comfort in solidarity with other Native women. Thus Campbell found ‘herself ‘and many more sisters and
brothers. Reclaiming herself, she became a representative of exemplary courage.

The quest for Feminist Self identity in the Halfbreed culture motivates Campbell to an exploration of the Native Women’s legitimate history. Campbell’s Halfbreed becomes a model for other Native women, as justification for her own life story being presented to the world. She posits a different notion of gender formation in relation to dominant capitalist societies. The predicament of women is doubly dispossessed in Native society. Gayathri Spivak and Smith observe that the lives of the women are in ‘double bind’ in most cultures. But much more so in the case of Canadian Natives. Campbell’s quest for identity undergoes a double dispossesion in the Native Canadian society. As woman and as a Native woman, Maria experiences gender and cultural ordeals to establish her personal as well as racial identity. Choked with cultural insights and spiritual fervor, the novel weaves itself around the world of Cheechum and eventually becomes a communal text designed to create racial identity. Campbell’s recreation of her own history and heritage becomes a problematization of master narrative forms creating an entirely different form of identity.

Campbell valorizes the cultural identity of Halfbreed and challenges the Euro American belief that ‘blood’ is the determinant of characters and experience. Thus it offers a challenge to racist discourse more radical than a mere inversion of terms would have been. The observation of Jodi Lundgren in the essay ‘Being a Halfbreed’ justifies this perspective: “Discourses of race
divide people by suggesting that their differences are genetically entrenched. Cultural syncretism, conversely emphasizes hybridity, and the Metis identity has always been syncretic” (67). The inter textual stories in Halfbreed evoke parodic subversions to maintain cultural differences between Native and White, or Indian and Metis. Jeannette Armstrong’s Slash carry short stories ‘Hightune Polly’ and ‘Uncle Tomhawks’ on similar lines. Homi K. Babha in the Location of Culture writes: “the display of hybridity, its peculiar ‘replication’ terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery! The stories that make faces’at the dominant culture, that mock the representations of the Indian or Metis as ‘lazy, ‘passive’, ‘drunken’, etc. become in Babha’s words not metaphorical substitutions’ but metonymies of presence. Babha after stemming from an agonistic rather than antagonistic experience: the aim of (colonial violence), Fanon writes is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the culture. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity permits the possibility of reading textual agonism as a mode of resistance to the unifying pressure of colonial subject effacement and constitution.

Bakhtin’s notion of Carnivalization and hybridization all come to be part of a search for identity and wholeness. Humour needs to be subversive as well as empowering. In contrast to the German and Swedish immigrants, the Halfbreed’s ‘laughed’, ‘cried’, danced and fought and shared everything. Vangen suggests that it is Campbell’s use of humour, ‘making faces’ as it were, at the absurdity of cultural and racist stereotyping, that retrieves Halfbreed as an exemplary text which surpassed the discursive antagonies of biculturalism.
*Halfbreed* does not conclude with the inscription of a new totality of identity. In an attempt to save herself from the terrible loss of ‘self’, Campbell understands the pain and horrid experiences of other Native women who had endured pain and victimization. She gets involved in the Native movements. She reaches the deeper levels of spiritual awakening and healing by dismantling the cultural, racial and sexual boundaries.

W.H. new in *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* (1990) says:

Representatives of European culture play- a number of roles in those Canadian literary work in which India’s are present. The most role is as soldier, fighting other whites. In only four of twenty cases are pictured specifically as conquerors of Indians. The next most common role is as an ‘agent of progress’, a rubric which includes missionaries. Settlers and other forces of cultural change (25).

Campbell’s *Halfbreed* is the literary and social document that speaks for these versions of misrepresentation. The colonials had always appeared as incarnations of treachery and oppression in Campbell’s life. Her first experience was with white children at school. They used to mock at the Native old clothes and the poor feeding. Natives were teased by the white children as “gophers, gophers, Road allowance people eat gophers” (147). Maria was ashamed of these social teasings and she used to shout at her mother saying: “all of you no-good Half-breeds” (147). Cheechum used to explain the social reality of her being as to how the whiteman found a powerful weapon to victimize the Halfbreeds.
Jeanette Armstrong in *Splash* explains this phenomena as ‘One of the effects of it is the way people see themselves in relation to those who are doing the colonizing (New. 139). This was a revelation to Campbell from her grandmother Cheechum. Her another significant experience with the Whites was when the Mounties attracted her with candies to betray her father who had a secret store of fur, meat and whisky. It is her foolishness that sent her father to imprisonment. Her another experience was the failure of her father in the rebellion as a result of ugly trick managed by the whites. These experiences have destroyed their peace and happiness in their home and resulted into the death of her mother and the enduring poverty and negligence. Campbell had to look after the six younger ones surviving against the odd circumstances. Though she managed her schooling, she was always dread of the welfare people (white colonizers) fearing the snatching of her own children. To protect the children and to provide them a happy life, Maria Campbell marries a wealthy whiteman. She plunges into married life at the age of fifteen against the wishes of her father and the relatives. Unfortunately this turns out to be a bitterest experience to her, as her husband Darrel betrays the children and abandons her to live in the dingy apartment of Vancouver. This sudden break up led her to addiction and caused a great physical and mental strain. Many Natives were driven to madness and were forced to end up in prostitution or nervous breakdown.

Campbell emphatically rejects the missionaries and refuses to be influenced by the machinery of progress. As a child, she had the experience of waiting till the completion of the meal time: “they all had to wait and let him
eat first” (29). The missionaries used to gullible the natives that they were picked up by God and Campbell wonders as to why her father was not picked up by God. The same priests used prohibit the children from plucking the ripe strawberries saying that they are the property of God. Campbell has exposed this duplicity: “We had seen him many times taking things from the Indian’s Sundance pole, and, that belonged to the great spirit” (130). Campbell could associate Christianity only in connection with old clothes whey they left at the doors of Natives as an act of Indian charity. Beyond this, Campbell could not think of anything good because no priest had attended her mother’s funeral rites.

Campbell exposes the absence of Natives in the literary roles envisioned by the colonials. W.H. New observes: “The literary images which transmit the assumption that Native people would either fade away or assimilate in future time seems, with hindsight, to be based on naïve and wishful thinking” (105). Campbell draws strength from her bitter experiences to create a new Native literature. To her Native literature means: “Native people telling their own stories, in their own ways, unfettered by criteria from another time and place” (125). She tries her best to regain ‘a sense of the self’ and ‘importance to the community’. In the process of revamping a system, Campbell is guided by the advice of her grand mother Cheechum: “Go out there and find what you want and take it, but always remember who you are and why you want it” (Campbell 86). Maria experiences self realization after her life in the mental hospital where she could find a lot of women and men who suffered agony and oppression as part of same system that had oppressed her. She has found her brethren in
Eugene Steinhaur, Stan Danesl, Gilbert Anderson, Kay Gilbert and the like. Her contacts with the inmates of the Prince Albert penitentiary confirmed her place in the society. She could posit herself where she should work for her community. Through these activities, Campbell finds solidarity and it becomes a paramount value. She finds reciprocation in the live of every Native. Armstrong’s *Slash* carries a quotation parallel to the words of Cheechum in *Halfbreed*: “You’ll find yourself, and you’ll find brothers and sisters” (Campbell 157). Campbell found her brothers and sisters who were determined to keep aside the shame of being a native and particularly the degrading position of native women” (New 130). She vows to exhibit loyalty to people and assures the future to the community that stood against the dichotomy of the imposition. She uses *Halfbreed* as a title to her novel with the intention of using as a shaft against the contemptuous attitude of the dominant power against the Natives.

*Halfbreed* undermines the western inscription of alienation in the mother-daughter relationship. Diana Brandt in *Wild Mother Dancing-Maternal Narrative in Canadian Literature* (1993) proposes an alternative reading to convey how the daughter’s development is arrested by her mother’s absence, how the mother disappearance signals the daughter’s entry into the unprotected world of male aggression (Brandt. 49). The journey of the mothers becomes a significant metaphor in the novel. The journey of the mothers from ancestral home to a farmhouse twenty five miles way Maria and Darrel moving to Kettleriver, brings the climax of the life experience that symbolizes her movement away from her ‘self’, past and tradition into the wilderness of
insecurity and self destruction. Campbell’s narrative strategy inscribes the mystical position of spirituality of the dominant discourse. It explicitly and discursively situates the writing as an act of resistance and historically it proves that it is within the circumscription of contemporary Native movement. The reading of the text ascertains that Campbell ascertains that the responsibility of the writer is to respond to the shared view of the world that she has with Natives. Christine Welsh in the essay “Voices of the Grand mothers: Reclaiming the Metis Heritage” says that “Native women will be rendered historically voiceless no longer. We are engaged in creating a new history, our history using our own voices and experiences. And as we raise our voices –as we write. Sing, teach, make films-we do so with the certainty that we are speaking not only for ourselves but for those who came before us whom history has made mute… And so the voices of my grandmothers are alive today, for they speak through me” (Welsh. 24).

In the present context teaching Halfbreed has become a challenge as the readers are engaged with multiple identity claims. The critical responses also have come a long way since this colonial ‘stare’ as the Native readers, writers and professors have gained significance. The critics of Native literature have grappled with Halfbreed for decades attempting a variety of theoretical perspectives. The expansiveness of the meaning has inflated the formation of identities and undoubtedly the legacy it has initiated will continue to inspire and live on.