

Alter/Native Narratives in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*

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الروايات البديلة في "السلالة الهجينة" لماريا كامبل

إن الكتابة الحياتية تختلف عن السرد الزمنى التقليدى للسيرة الذاتية و تشترك مع تقليد الرواية الشفهية المنتشرة في مجتمعات السكان الأصليين. فهناك علاقة وثيقة بين الكتابة الحياتية للمرأة و الرواية الشفهية في معظم ثقافات السكان الأصليين لأمريكا الشمالية. و لأن صوت السكان الأصليين كان قد تم إسكاته و إستبعاده تاريخيا من الخطاب العام، فإن القصص الحياتية التي تم نشرها أصبحت موقع بديل يتيح للسكان الأصليين الفرصة لمقاومة مختلف الأنظمة القمعية التي يفرضها المجتمع السائد. تعتبر ماريا كامبل من أوائل النساء الميئي (الهجناء) التي كتبت عن الظلم الذي يواجهه السكان الهجناء في روايتها "السلالة الهجينة" (1973)، حيث مهدت الطريق لجيل جديد من الكاتبات اللواتي ينتمين للميئي. و ينقسم السكان الأصليين في كندا الى ثلاثة أقسام و يعتبر الميئي أحد هذه الأقسام الثلاثة الذين إعتادوا على إخفاء هويتهم بسبب الشعور بالخزي الذي نما لديهم أثناء تواجدهم بالمدارس الداخلية. و قد واجهت كامبل التفرقة العنصرية و الظلم الإجتماعى في بداية حياتها حيث أنها تنتمى لسلالة الميئي ومثلهم تشعر بالخجل من هويتها الهجينة حتى وجدت ملاذا أمانا فى التراث الثقافى الذى تنتمى اليه. و يعتبر كتابها "السلالة الهجينة" موجهة نحو تعزيز التراث الثقافى لسلالة الميئي لتغيير الشعور بالخزي لدى السكان الأصليين. و قد نجحت كامبل فى تغيير معنى 'الهجين' من الداخل. إذ أن فخرها بثقافة الميئي كان تحديا واضحا للصورة النمطية التي فرضها الأوروبيون على المرأة الأصلية. و لا يعتبر إختيار كامبل لهذا النوع من الكتابة الحياتية و الذى يتضمن خصائص من الرواية الشفهية تحدى صريح للسرد التقليدى للسيرة الذاتية السائدة فحسب و لكنه أيضا محاولة للتشكيك فى الإصدارات التاريخية للماضى فى 'روايات السادة'. و بما أن الكتابة الحياتية تشمل خصائص كلا من الرواية التقليدية المكتوبة و الرواية الشفهية، فإن الكتابة الحياتية سمحت لكامل بإحتواء تعاليم جدتها لوالدها (رواية شيشم) جنبا الى جنب قصة حياتها فى محاولة لإستخدام الروايتين فى تغيير حياة السكان الأصليين للأفضل. يحاول هذا البحث توضيح أن إستخدام كامبل لإسلوب الكتابة الحياتية مع التركيز على سلالة الميئي يدل على التصالح مع موروثها الثقافى كما يعد خطوة ناجحة نحو الحصول على الرواية البديلة للسكان الأصليين. و يستخدم البحث منهج فرانز فانون فى كتابه "معدبو الأرض".

الكتابة الحياتية – فانون – النص البديل – الإرث الثقافى – "السلالة الهجينة" – السكان الأصليين.

Alter/Native Narratives in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*

Abstract:

Life-writing differs from the traditional chronological narrative of autobiography and has a lot in common with the oral tradition of storytelling widespread in indigenous communities. A close relation can be detected between women's life-writing and the storytelling tradition embedded in most of the indigenous cultures of North America. Since indigenous voices "had been historically silenced and excluded from the public discourse, published life stories have become an alternative site for indigenous people's resistance to various oppressive regimes imposed by the dominant society" (Horakova 4). Maria Campbell is one of the first Metis women to write about the injustices faced by Metis people in *Halfbreed* (1973), paving the way for a new generation of Metis women writers. The Metis, one of Canada's three Aboriginal peoples, have always had to hide their identities out of the shame they were taught to feel when they attended residential schools. Belonging to and ashamed of her Metis origin, Campbell faced racial discrimination and social injustice in her early life until she found refuge in her cultural heritage. *Halfbreed* is directed towards the reinforcement of Metis cultural tradition in order to alter the Natives' sense of shame. Campbell succeeded in transforming the meaning of 'half-breed' from within. Her pride in her Metis culture challenges the stereotypical image of the Native woman imposed by the Europeans. Her choice of the genre of life-writing including characteristics of the oral tradition, is not only a direct challenge to the prevailing norm of autobiography but also an attempt at questioning "historical" versions of the past that were developed in the "master narratives". Encompassing both written and oral tradition, the genre life-writing allows Campbell to withhold her Great Grandmother's teachings (Cheechum's narrative) together with her own narrative in an attempt to use both narratives to alter or change Metis people's life. This research aims to show how Campbell's use of the genre of life-writing with its focus on the Metis people signifies a reconciliation with her cultural heritage and a successful attempt towards an alter/Native narrative. For its theoretical framework, the paper will draw on Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Life-writing – Fanon – Alter/Native Narrative – Cultural heritage – *Halfbreed* - Indigenous.

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According to the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing (OCLW), life-writing involves, and goes beyond, biography. It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factual. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups. Life-writing includes autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals (written and documentary), anthropological data, oral testimony, and eye-witness accounts. It is not only a literary or historical specialism, but is relevant across the arts and sciences, and can involve philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists. Hence, the genre includes not only different written forms but also the oral tradition of storytelling. As such, the term life-writing stands for writing about life.

Maria Campbell's appropriate choice of the genre life-writing in her first book *Halfbreed* (1973) serves several ends. Encompassing both written and oral tradition, the genre life-writing allows Campbell to withhold her Great Grandmother's teachings (Cheechum's narrative) together with her own narrative in her attempt to use both narratives to alter or change Metis people's life. Campbell addresses her book to both Halfbreeds and Europeans. This is clearly stated in her introduction, "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country"(8). Aiming at educating and entertaining Halfbreeds in a narrative style common with the oral tradition they are familiar with. On the other hand, the book is a direct form of resistance to the Europeans, challenging the master narratives, deconstructing the stereotypical image of Halfbreed women, resisting their racial attitude towards her people and giving voice to Metis people's version of historical events.

In "Why Native Literature?" Armand Garnet Ruffo stresses the sense of collectivity and shared values among indigenous people as the common goal of many indigenous writers:

As an expression of voice, or, more correctly, a community of voices, Native writers are attempting to find expression in a society that does not share their values and concerns. The form of these voices, like content itself, varies according to individual author, but as community, theirs is a collective voice that addresses the relationship between colonizer and colonized, the impact of colonialism, and, moreover, functions on a practical level by striving to bring about positive change. (Ruffo 110)

In *Reading Indigenous Women's Life Writing in Australia and North America: A Twenty-first Century Perspective*, M. Horakova explains how re-writing history in Indigenous women's life writing is

closely linked to its educational function, and most Indigenous women write about the efforts they are prepared to take in order to document the past for their family and community as well as for a wider cross-cultural audience. They want to make their life experience a public knowledge in order to acquaint others with the suppressed histories of Indigenous people during colonization. (10)

In indigenous communities, storytelling has frequently been used as a means of making sense of the colonial appropriation of indigenous lands and cultures and as a tool for remembering the past. The stories in oral tradition were not only supposed to entertain, but also to educate and to pass on knowledge. Since indigenous voices "had been historically silenced and excluded from the public discourse, published life stories have become an alternative site for Indigenous people's resistance to various oppressive regimes imposed by the dominant society" (Horakova 4). Life-writing depicts indigenous people's difficult position as the marginalized "other" in dominant cultures. It addresses the previous invisibility of indigenous people who finally assert control over their representation and tell their version of colonial histories. As such, life-writing expresses indigenous people's suppressed histories and helps indigenous people to re-write their history aiming at educating readers. These life stories or life-writings have a lot in common with the oral tradition of storytelling widespread in indigenous communities but differ from the traditional chronological narrative of autobiography. Hence, a close relation can be detected between women's life-writing and the storytelling tradition embedded in most of the indigenous cultures of North America. In *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Paula Gunn Allen points out the importance of life-writing for indigenous women explaining that for them re-writing history acquires yet another dimension: if indigenous peoples' history was generally ignored by European settlers, then the lives of indigenous women were virtually non-existent in the colonial, social and textual landscapes (9). Storytelling for Metis women was therefore a mode of "passing knowledge, maintaining community, resisting government control, and sharing the burden of hardship" (Schaffer and Smith 101).

In "Reviving Native Culture and Tradition with the Help of Elders – A Study of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*", A. Kamaleswari states that story telling is "a well-knit factor closely connected with the ancestral tradition of orature. *Halfbreed* is full of incidents where reference to storytelling is made. Many elders and grandparents are good storytellers" (4). The role of the elders is clearly depicted in the character of Cheechum.

Elders like Cheechum still have vivid memories of past victories and defeats and of their unique nineteenth century lifestyle. These cultural and historical factors encourage the Metis to retain and develop a strong sense of identity. The Metis believe that keeping culture and traditions alive requires passing the teachings and wisdom, to those, who are prepared to take on the tasks from the elders. Through relationship established with Elders like Cheechum, people like Maria Campbell are beginning to take up the tasks of the Elders through their own learning.”(8).

Maria Campbell is one of the first Metis women who has written about the injustices faced by the Metis people in *Halfbreed* (1973), paving the way for a new generation of Metis women writers. The Metis, one of Canada’s three Aboriginal peoples, remained distinct from both their European and First Nations roots. As they were half natives and half whites, they were neglected by both communities. They have always had to hide their Metis identities out of the shame they were taught to feel when they attended residential schools. This research aims to show how Campbell’s use of the genre of life-writing with its focus on the Metis people signifies a reconciliation with her cultural heritage and a successful attempt towards an alter/Native narratives.

Maria Campbell was born on 26 April 1940 near Park Valley, Saskatchewan in North America. Her family was a mixture of French, Cree, English, Scottish, and Irish. They were called ‘Halfbreeds’ and they belonged to the Metis Community. At the age of 33, Maria Campbell wrote her first book, which deals with her own experiences, comprising nothing imaginary but bad and bitter truths of life. Entitling her book *Halfbreed*, Maria Campbell depicts the suffering and discrimination that the Metis people had to face. The Halfbreeds were homeless because the Canadian government had unfairly taken their land away from them and offered it to immigrants. After the Halfbreeds lost their struggle with the Canadian Government to keep their land in the 1860s, many Halfbreed families homesteaded in northern Saskatchewan. Halfbreeds settled down along the road lines where they built cabins and were called “Road Allowance people”. They remained poor and unable to establish their own social institutions such as church and school. Consequently, the Halfbreeds were subordinated and forced to speak the dominant language, behave the way whites do, and go to schools and churches that were built by the white society. This Law made most of the natives landless and almost in the status of beggars in the reservations built to them by the government.

The “Land Act” has turned the forefathers of Maria Campbell into homeless Road Allowance People. Born in a place where ancient Cree rituals has been practiced alongside Catholic ceremony, Maria grows up strengthened by the Cree traditions and the wisdom of her Great Grandmother ‘Cheechum’ and weakened by the burdens and shame resulting from her family’s steadily

growing poverty. *Halfbreed* speaks about Campbell's poverty-stricken childhood and early adulthood including her battles with drug and alcohol addiction, even her involvement in the drug trade until she finds refuge in her cultural heritage. In "Voicing Difference: The Literary Production of Native Women", Barbara Godard stresses the didactic elements in life-writing calling indigenous women writers "cultural brokers" who wish "to spread their knowledge of indigenous existence among the mainstream society through more accurate accounts"(103).

Halfbreed is directed towards the reinforcement of the Metis people's cultural tradition in order to alter the Natives' sense of shame. Maria Campbell's cultural mission is clear in her introduction, "I 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 frustration and the dreams. . . . 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"(Campbell 8).

Unlike autobiography and similar to oral tradition, Maria Campbell begins her narrative by giving her Great Grandmother's version of the history of the Metis people. Like oral tradition, contemporary indigenous women's life-writing does not usually begin with the writer's own life story, but it starts with the history of the region and the people occupying the land, often going back to the history of the author's community. Campbell gives the Metis people's version of the military confrontation known as the North-West Rebellion of 1885 which ended in Louis Riel's arrest, trial, and execution on a charge of high treason. Campbell then gives an account of her family, postponing the introduction to and the narration about herself till chapter three. Campbell's life-writing also differs from autobiography in its end results. Campbell managed to restore herself to order not through telling her own personal story but rather through telling the collective story of her people as well as her understanding of the true meaning of Cheechum's lessons and through adherence to her cultural heritage.

In "Remembering Who You Are: The Synecdochic Self in Maria Campbell's 'Half-Breed'", Wayne K. Spear states that according to "the synecdochic model of selfhood, the individual is a part of the unfolding narrative of a people, and can thus be understood only in relation to the whole" further explaining how structurally the "story of the 'I' begins before the 'I' is born. . . . By the time of Maria's birth we have encountered not only the Riel Rebellion, but also the failed attempts of the Halfbreeds at farming, the conditions endured by the 'Road Allowance People'(8), and descriptions of Saskatchewan life in the 1920s"(Spear 6).

Maria Campbell manages successfully to include her Great Grandmother's narrative in her life-writing "Great Grandma Campbell, whom I always called "Cheechum," was a niece of Gabriel Dumont and her whole family fought beside Riel and Dumont during the Rebellion"(Campbell 15). Cheechum's lessons prevails the book. There is rarely a chapter in Campbell's life-writing in which she does not recollect her Great Grandmother's teachings. The book begins with the Metis people's version of historical events as given to Maria by her Great Grandmother at an early age. "She often told me stories of the Rebellion and of the Halfbreed people. She said our people never wanted to fight because that was not our way. We never wanted anything except to be left alone to live as we pleased"(15). Cheechum's role in the battle is particularly fundamental. Cheechum's sense of belonging to the Halfbreeds exceeded the social bond of marriage to a white man, "Great Grandpa Campbell came from Edinburgh, Scotland. . . . Great Grandpa married a Halfbreed woman, a niece of Gabriel Dumont. . . . He was not well-liked by his neighbours. . . . he was very cruel"(14). In 1885, when the Northwest Rebellion broke and her abusive husband allied with the North West Mounted Police and the white settlers against her people, she chose her people. She used to pass on "all the information she heard at these meetings to the rebels and also stole ammunition and supplies for them from his store"(14). Though she was severely punished by her husband when he discovered, Cheechum's sense of belonging to her people is not to be compared to a social bond to a man who does not belong to her people. Cheechum's deconstruction of the European version of history is given by Maria Campbell in chapter one. "The history books say that the Halfbreeds were defeated at Batoche in 1884. Louis Riel was hanged in November of 1885. Charge: high treason"(11). Campbell then gives Cheechum's alternative version of history whose attempt was to prepare in Campbell a political activist aware of the real history of the Halfbreeds, "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."(15).

Cheechum's clear cut view of the Halfbreeds' participation in World War II reveals her political awareness and cultural consciousness. When Maria Campbell's Dad was rejected, everyone was relieved, especially Cheechum. "She was violently opposed to the whole thing and said we had no business going anywhere to shoot people, especially in another country. The war was white business, not ours, and was just between rich and greedy people who wanted power"(24).

From a very early age Maria Campbell's rebellion has been clear. Though Campbell's Indian relatives refers to her ability to express her opinion as "the white in her", claiming that "Indian women don't express their opinions, Halfbreed women do"(27), Cheechum usually encourages her. Campbell rejects the townspeople's humiliation to Halfbreeds. When Campbell noticed how the "townspeople would stand on the sidewalks and hurl insults"(36) she questions Halfbreeds' shameful walk with their "heads down"(36) in response to such embarrassment and refuses to do the same. "I made up my mind then and there that I would never walk like them: I would walk tall and straight and I told my brothers and sisters to do the same"(36). Cheechum is very proud of Campbell and she lays her hand on her head saying, "Never forget that, my girl. You always walk with your head up and if anyone says something then put out your chin and hold it higher"(36).

Cheechum's lessons found refuge in Maria Campbell. She listened carefully to her Great Grandmother's teachings which aroused in her the sense of rebellion necessary for change. Cheechum awakens the political activist in her and prepared Maria Campbell to anticipate the right leader and to be ready to follow. Campbell's misinterpretation of Cheechum's teachings at first brought about her failure in life. Later, her disillusionment, reinterpretation of Cheechum's words, looking for her own people and her adherence to her cultural tradition saved her.

Maria Campbell loved Cheechum, her Great Grandmother, and listened to her teachings. Whenever Cheechum stayed with the family preferring to sleep on a rug in a corner, Campbell used to join her. "I loved that corner of the house and would find any excuse possible to sleep with her. There was a special smell that comforted me when I was hurt or afraid"(Campbell 19).

Maria Campbell feels angry, as a young girl, when her father used to burn the white people's charity boxes, "Christian duty", dropped off during Christmas at each path of the Halfbreeds. "I cried, because I knew it contained cakes and good things to eat, and clothing that I had seen their children wear"(28). However, when she goes to school and sees how the white girls tease her Halfbreed friends whenever they wear these old dresses, Campbell is glad that her father burned these boxes. Cheechum also scorns offers of relief from the welfare as well as "the old age pension. While she lived alone she hunted and trapped, planted a garden, and was completely self-sufficient"(15). Nevertheless, when Maria had no other choice but to go to the Welfare office, a friend advises her to wear the "welfare coat"(133) explaining, "If you want help, never tell them the truth. Act ignorant, timid and grateful. They like that"(133). Maria follows her friend's advice but declares, "I left his office feeling more humiliated and dirty and ashamed than I had ever felt in my

life”(133). For six months Maria continued to live on charity from the Welfare office, during which time, she “kept her head down, wore an old coat and acted timid and ignorant”(135). But Maria remembers her strong-minded Cheechum whose teachings reveals how she is not culturally trapped:

My Cheechum used to tell me that when the government gives you something, they take all that you have in return – your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul. When they are sure they have everything, they give you a blanket to cover your shame. She said that the churches with their talk about God, the Devil, heaven and hell, and schools that taught children to be ashamed, were all a part of that government. When I tried to explain to her that our teacher said governments were made by the people, she told me, “it only looks like that from the outside, my girl. (137)

Maria Campbell depicts how her, “people have always been very political. . . . They talked about better education, a better way of life, but mostly about land for our people”(64). Maria Campbell’s Dad started going to meetings in an attempt to organize an association for the Halfbreeds and to get one united voice to represent the Halfbreeds in their area. Though Grannie Campbell was against his getting involved in politics, Cheechum encouraged Dad telling Grannie Campbell, “Even if nothing happened and he did go to jail, he at least tried, and he could give his children no greater gift”(65). Maria’s pride in her father was great, “How proud I was of my Dad!”(65). When the family was allowed to attend one of those meetings, Maria Campbell, the young activist, courageously speaks to the speaker, “I told him I thought he was wonderful and that Cheechum had already told me all the things he’d said”(66). The children suffered at school as a result of the father’s political involvement. For Maria Campbell the whites “didn’t matter; I could accept their ridicule, but our own people I could not understand”(66). Again thanks to Cheechum’s understanding, Maria Campbell is made aware of the reality behind the scene. “Cheechum talked to me and tried to make me realize why people did this. She would tell me, ‘Ignore them, they are nothing, only frightened people. They laugh with the whites because it is the first time in their lives that the white man has talked to them like men.’”(Campbell 66). Nevertheless, at such an early age, Maria Campbell’s disillusioned mind is clear in her clear cut view concerning those men, “I hated those men! How could they be so fooled”(66).

Unfortunately, one night Dad returned home sad and defeated, he told Cheechum that they failed. Maria noticed how on that night something “inside him died and he became another defeated man. . . . he looked like an old man. He sat down and put his head on the table and began to cry”(67). For Maria, it was the first time she heard her father cry.

Maria Campbell noticed that Cheechum “cursed [our] men for being weak”(68). Nevertheless, in her attempt to comfort the little girl, Cheechum put her arms around Maria and held her close saying, “It will come, my girl, someday it will come”(67). Cheechum trained Maria Campbell to anticipate the right leader and the proper time to achieve change. She kept on telling Maria, “Wait my girl. It will come. I’ve waited for ninety years and listened to many men. I have seen men quit and have felt as you do, but we have to keep waiting and as each man stands unafraid we have to believe he is the one and encourage him. You’ll feel discouraged like this many times in your life but, like me, you’ll wait”(68).

Maria Campbell remembers one of the Halfbreed women’s regret for wasting her life. Before dying, her neighbor Sophie “felt bad because she’d never in her life tried to do anything to make her situation better. She said she regretted that instead of trying to improve things for herself and for our people, she had let herself believe she was merely a ‘no good Halfbreed’”(90).

At the age of fourteen, Maria Campbell’s rebellion is clear when she expresses to Cheechum her wish to finish school and her longing to be different from the other women of her community “who had nothing but kids, black eyes and never enough of anything,” Cheechum just smiles at Maria saying:

Now I know that you belong to me. Don’t’ let anyone tell you that anything is impossible, because if you believe honestly in your heart that there’s something better for you, then it will all come true. Go out there and find what you want and take it, but always remember who you are and why you want it. (86)

Cheechum’s cultural awareness is reflected in her clear cut view of the colonial strategies to disempower natives through cultural hegemony. She explains to Maria how the Natives left their homes and lost their dream:

They fought each other just as you are fighting your mother and father today. The white men saw that 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... I will beat you each time I hear you talk as you did. If you don’t like what you have, then stop fighting your parents and do something about it yourself. (47)

Here, Maria Campbell admits that she has learnt from Cheechum her first real lesson in life. In “A Feminist Reading of *Halfbreed*”, Rohini Mitra depicts here that “Maria learned her first important political lesson from Cheechum” showing how Cheechum always “encouraged Maria to rebel” against self-humiliating acts (7).

For Maria Campbell, a Metis, the brutal realities of racism, poverty, pain, and degradation intruded early and followed her every step of her life. Her story is a harsh one, but it is told without bitterness or self-pity. The whole text is mainly concerned with frequent discrimination, with the negative impact with which the Metis had to live their life. The narrator conveys her sorrow and sufferings by emphasizing what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman. Through her experiences she explains how badly the whites treated her and her people.

Maria Campbell declares that "Cheechum had the gift of second sight" that always came true. Campbell says, "I am sure that she could see what was in store for me but because she believed life had to take its course she could only try to make me strong enough to get through my difficulties"(Campbell 22).

For six month Maria had a recurring bad dream. She dreamt that her mother would die while giving birth to her eighth child. And that before her death, she would make herself a coat from Uncle Frank's old army overcoats and once she finishes sewing the last button in the dream, she dies and leaves them alone. When Maria finds her mother sewing that coat she has seen in her dream, she warns her mother who pays no attention to her words but Cheechum does and they both try in vain to stop the mother. On her way to hospital to give birth, the mother wears that coat, fastens the last button and leaves. Maria feels "so empty that night, not lonely, just empty"(69). Unfortunately, Maria's dream came true and the mother dies while giving birth leaving a devastated husband and eight children.

At the age of twelve, Maria became responsible for this big family after the mother's death. They soon had to move their home once their teacher reported them to the relief people. Maria points out how the new place "seemed desolate and unfriendly compared to our comfortable log home. The only consolation was that the relief man would not find us and we could be together"(75).

Maria meets a man who belongs to her people at a horse race. Smoky's admiration "started a new page in my life. It was a man, not a boy, who told me I was beautiful and wanted to see me again"(99). Maria Campbell never forgets Cheechum's advice, when Smoky visits them, she remembers Cheechum's words concerning her attitude to men, "Never ever try to impress a man, be yourself"(99). She later rejects Smoky's marriage offer exclaiming, "Marry you? You've got to be joking! I'm going to do something with my life besides make more Halfbreeds"(101). Though Campbell's reaction shows her ambivalence towards Halfbreeds, "I loved my people so much and missed them if I couldn't see them often. I felt alive when I went to their parties, and I overflowed with happiness when we would sit down and share a meal, yet I hated all of it as much as I loved it"(102). Nevertheless, her words to Smoky reveal her determination to bring about change to herself and to her people.

In order to keep her siblings from being taken by the welfare, Maria decides to get married to a white man, Darrel, at the age of fifteen. This is the only time that Maria did not follow Cheechum's advice. "Cheechum was heart-broken; she refused to come when she heard that Darrel was white, saying that nothing good ever comes from a mixed marriage. She had hoped that Smoky and [I] would marry"(Campbell 105).

Unfortunately, her husband reported her to the Welfare Authorities and her siblings were placed in foster care. The husband turned out to be abusive. He took her to Vancouver, British Columbia, and abandoned her in the slums, penniless. Though Maria longed for Cheechum's help, she could not face her. "I thought of my Cheechum, whose strength and comfort I so desperately missed. I couldn't go to her because I was ashamed. Everything had gone so wrong"(108). Maria's failure prevents her from going to Cheechum, "how could I go home and say to her I'd failed"(120). After breaking up with him, Maria is confronted with the brutal realities of urban racism and poverty. Having a female child in her hands, Maria tried on various hands. Within few years Maria Campbell is addicted to alcohol and drugs, prostitutes herself, and attempts suicide nearly taking her three children to death with her to save them from the misery of living.

Maria Campbell passes through the painful experience of quitting more than once. "Many people have written many things about withdrawal, but writing it can't describe the pain, ugliness and terror you go through"(120). She soon returns back to drugs and lives in a "filthy little hole"(123) with another drug addict who abuses and beats her. In the middle of her despair, Campbell suddenly remembers Cheechum's words saying, "You can have anything you want if you want it bad enough"(124). This time, Campbell's strength comes from Cheechum, "again I went through withdrawal. Although it was worse than the first time, in a way it was easier, because this time my Cheechum was with me the whole time, I could feel her presence in the room with me and I wasn't afraid"(124).

Maria Campbell's misery reflects the results of white superiority over a poor native woman. Maria depicts how her aspiration to assimilate into the European culture has been misleading. "Dreams are so important in one's life, yet when followed blindly they can lead to the disintegration of one's soul"(116). It was her poverty that made her get into such bad circumstances. Nevertheless, her adherence to her cultural heritage, following the values taught by Cheechum saves her.

In "Blankets of Shame: Emotional Representation in Maria Campbell's Half-breed," Verna Heikkila states that "Campbell describes her own life, tells her own story, but her tone is openly political, her approach revisionist, and her style provocative"(2). Maria blames all the native men for her devastation, "I

blamed them for what had happened to me . . . and for all the girls who were on the city streets. If they had only fought back, instead of giving up, these things would never have happened. It's hard to explain how I felt. I hated our men, and yet I loved them"(Campbell 123).

After being saved from her second suicidal attempt taking her three children with her, Campbell suffers nervous breakdown and is kept in hospital for a while. In order to leave hospital, Campbell has to attend AA meetings regularly. "Before permission was given to leave the hospital, the doctor warned me that if I was to survive, I would have to belong to AA the rest of my life"(142). Maria Campbell follows the doctor's advice. Her meeting with people like herself allows her to understand the true meaning of Cheechum's teachings.

I began to understand what Cheechum had been trying to say to me, and to see how I had misinterpreted what she had taught me. She had never meant that I should go out into the world in search for fortune, but rather that I go out and discover for myself the need for leadership and change: if our way of life were to improve I would have to find other people like myself, and together try to find an alternative. (Campbell 143).

Maria Campbell finally finds the brothers and sisters her Great Grandmother has been speaking about. "I understood these people, and they understood me. It was here that I first met the people that would play an important role in the Native movement in Alberta"(143).

Maria Campbell's last meeting with Cheechum before the latter's death starts with a confession. "She asked me then what had happened, and I told her everything that I could never have told my father. When I had finished, she said, 'It's over now. Don't let it hurt you. Since you were a baby you've had to learn the hard way. You're like me"(149). Cheechum reassures Campbell in her belief that it is more important for people to find solutions for themselves. "I'm glad you believe that, and I hope you will never forget it. Each of us has to find himself in his own way and no one can do it for us. If we try to do more we only take away the very thing that makes us a living soul. The blanket only destroys, it doesn't give warmth. But you will understand that better as you get older"(150).

Maria Campbell ends her book by Cheechum's view that reflects an alternative history. "My Cheechum never surrendered at Batoche: she only accepted what she considered a dishonourable truce. She waited all her life for a new generation of people who would make this country a better place to live in"(156). Cheechum's last advice for Campbell is a driving force towards change in Alberta. Maria's last meeting with Cheechum is a driving force towards change. "When I came back from Saskatchewan, the horrible conditions of my people and my talk with Cheechum made me feel there was no

time to waste”(151). The main idea was to “speak to government with one voice”(155). They “founded the Alberta Native Communications Society, which managed the Cree radio program and a monthly newspaper to keep the people informed and aware”(155). “The Native movement grew in strength, not just in Alberta, but across Canada”(156).

In “On National Culture,” Frantz Fanon traces the works of native writers depicting three distinct phases that they usually go through; the first phase of “unqualified assimilation,” in which “the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power”(Fanon 222). In the second phase “we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. . . . Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed estheticism”(222). Finally, the third phase of national literature in which “he turns himself into an awakener of the people, hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature”(223).

Halfbreed traces Maria Campbell’s life showing how as a “native” writer she herself has passed through Fanon’s three phases. In the first phase of ‘unqualified assimilation’ Maria Campbell assimilates into the European culture, marries a white man and looked for “material possession”. The second phase is marked by her reinterpretation of Cheechum’s lessons. Finally, Campbell’s decision to write her own story based on Cheechum’s reinterpreted narrative in an attempt to awaken her people marks Fanon’s third phase, “hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature”(Fanon 223).

As a Metis writer writing in English, Maria Campbell belongs to the “native writers” of the third phase. Though she did not follow Fanon’s path in her writing process, nevertheless, her life-writing, *Halfbreed* (1973), can be easily classified within Fanon’s third phase that of “a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature”(223). Fanon defines national literature as a literature “of combat, because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space”(240).

Campbell’s life-writing thus brings forward the Metis’ perspective to the historical events and thus proposes an alternative history, challenging hegemonic ways of knowing, looking at, and writing history. She met other political and cultural activists through a woman she befriended “I met students from other countries. I listened to everything they said, and brought home piles of books to read until late at night.”(Campbell 151). However, even in the company of these political activists, she continued to feel inferior, her sense of inferiority was reinforced by the scholarly rhetoric used by those activists.

Instead, she turned to her own books, “I started reading Canadian and Indian history”(152). Maria’s triumph is brought about by the help of her own people and Cheechum’s lessons. Her adherence to cultural heritage was her means of survival. *Halfbreed* is a story of triumph over racial oppression as well as of overcoming a sense of shame related to ethnic identity. Through the act of life-writing, the shame and anger resulting from the degrading and humiliating experiences function as driving forces for Campbell to fight back. Learning from the lessons of history, Maria Campbell became more realistic in her aspirations of change, “For these past couple of years, I’ve stopped being the idealistically shiny-eyed young woman I once was. I realize that an armed revolution of Native people will never come about; even if such a thing were possible what would we achieve? We would only end up oppressing someone else”(156).

Maria Campbell realizes that her years of searching, loneliness and pain are over. As her Cheechum has predicted, she has found brothers and sisters all over the country. “The years of searching, loneliness and pain are over for me. Cheechum said, ‘You’ll find yourself, and you’ll find brothers and sisters.’ I have brothers and sisters, all over the country. I no longer need my blanket to survive”(157).

Thanks to Cheechum’s cultural awareness, she managed to prepare Maria by giving her true values to adhere to at the moment of crisis, and by demonstrating pride in Metis identity. Moreover, Cheechum’s clear cut view concerning the white settlers’ hegemonic strategies towards Halfbreeds together with her challenging version of historical events all lead Maria to belong to Fanon’s “native writers”. Due to her strong bond to her Great Grandmother, unlike the rest of her brothers and sisters, Maria manages to survive. In spite of the fact that Maria has misinterpreted Cheechum’s teachings for a while, nevertheless, at the moment of crisis she managed to re-interpret every word that her Great Grandmother once taught her and this helped her to pull herself together. Making use of the true value of Cheechum’s teachings saved her from being culturally trapped for long. Campbell’s adherence to her Metis’ cultural heritage is a clear manifestation of her awareness of her native culture.

Maria Campbell believes that cultural awareness is important for the Metis to survive. The Indian relatives of the Campbells provided Maria with priceless opportunities for learning the difference between the Metis and the Indians, and for enhancing her sense of cultural distinctness. Intimate familiarity with Native culture brings to the Metis a sense of identity. Those who lack a strong cultural background are confronted with the problem of identity loss. Hence, the main goal of Native organizations is to save and rebuild pride and to develop a sense of identity, by providing the Metis with many opportunities to expose themselves to their ancestral culture and customs. According to Maria Campbell the main causes of the Metis people’s contemporary identity crisis are their

feelings of inferiority and shame in being Metis. Hence, she strongly believes that Native organizations and elders can assist the Metis in their exposure to native culture and customs and in mingling with other native people in order to understand and retain their own cultural traditions.

Campbell's cultural awareness, gained from Cheechum's lessons, guides her to return to her own people at the right moment. Through their help she recovers from her addiction and depression. Their support helps her regain her identity and dignity. Knowing that adherence to her cultural heritage is a key to the survival of the Metis, Maria Campbell works in native organizations throughout Canada to help the Metis people to regain their pride in being Metis and to retain their Metis identity. Her following publications are short illustrated histories for children, which include *'The People of Buffalo'* (1976), *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit* (1977), *Riel's People* (1978) and *Achimoona* (1985). These books are designed to provide young Native people with Native stories, which help to instill in them a pride in their cultural heritage and a positive image of Metis identity.

Campbell has succeeded in transforming the meaning of Halfbreeds from within. In writing the term 'Halfbreed' capitalized all through her book, Campbell has definitely managed to alter the humiliating stereotypical term into an honorable nationality for Metis people to be proud of. Together with the great effort of the social communities and elders, the Metis have their own language, flag, art, music, songs, national anthem, heroes, claim for a homeland which both reflect and culminate in a strong sense of identity and history. Hence, life-writing becomes a tool for and a form of political activism leading, finally, to the inclusion of the Metis as one of Canada's aboriginal people in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982.

Maria Campbell's cultural awareness is clearly depicted in her attempt to change the devastating impact of racial discrimination on the Metis people. She ends her book with words of faith, victory and encouragement, "one day, very soon people will set aside their differences and come together as one. May be not because we love one another, but because we will need each other to survive. Then together we will fight our common enemies. Change will come because this time we won't give up"(Campbell 156- 57).

Cheechum's alternative history aiming at raising Campbell's cultural awareness, managed to save her. Campbell's reinterpretation of Cheechum's lessons and her adherence to cultural heritage in her life-writing to alter the Halfbreeds' sense of shame and to replace it with pride in their cultural heritage achieved its end. Hence, Maria Campbell's use of the genre of life-writing with its focus on the Metis people signifies reconciliation with her cultural heritage and a successful attempt towards alter/Native narratives.

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