

An Analysis of Halfbreed: Maria Campbell's Escape and the Return

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Abstract: Maria Campbell is an outstanding Cree-M'áis writer, and her novel *Halfbreed* (1973) as her autobiography is seen as a foundation of indigenous literature for its description of indigenous people's experience in Canada. *Halfbreed* also recounts Campbell's experiences being subjected to discrimination from both white people and government. In the novel, Campbell addresses indigenous people's sense of losing the identity, which leads to their sufferings in the white world and halfbreed community. *Halfbreed* explores Campbell's escape and return from the aspects of discrimination in society and the dilemma of halfbreed community. First, it will analyze the suffocating survival environment where Maria Campbell lived, and reveal her harsh survival environment for being identities of halfbreed. Next, It provides the shift for Campbell's escape from passive attitude to positive attitude in life. Then, that Campbell's return to the halfbreed both biologically and spiritually records her salvation and psychological growth. From the perspective of Campbell's escape and return to interpret the novel contributes to understanding the history of Canadian indigenous and inspiring modern people who are in miseries.

Keywords: Campbell Maria; *Halfbreed*; Escape; Return; Suffering

1. Introduction

1.1. An introduction to Maria Campbell

Maria Campbell as the second descended halfbreed in her family was born in April of 1940 for Maria's Grandparents are combination of white and halfbreed. Under the influence of halfbreed family education and culture, that Maria Campbell is independent, determined and rebellious. Especially, Maria suffered a lot since her mother died. Although Maria was the oldest of eight children she had to look after her sisters and brothers. For improving living conditions Maria married with white man whom she didn't love, then she left home and went to Vancouver where she also suffered much, such as working as street girls, addicting drugs and alcohol, and disorder. In her twenties she returned to the Prairies and became a community worker and organizer. Out of her city experience and with the help of a group she wrote *Many Laws* (1969), a hand book explaining the laws and problems that confront First Nations people who move to the cities.

1.2. An introduction to *Halfbreed*

In *Halfbreed*, Maria present the difficulties she overcame to realize the dilemma that indigenous people suffered, and then awake inside to help the group as possible as she can. This is journey of self-searching in *Halfbreed*, a moving account of a woman who struggled with poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual abuse and prostitution till she was thirty-three years of age and begin her healing process, after she accepted many others help, Maria starts to awake inside and to know what she should do for her halfbreed. Campbell tells her own story in the context of M'áis culture and a forgotten history. She voices for the halfbreed people ignored by mainstream society.

2. Campbell's Evading from Dilemma

Maria introduces to her journey of life from desperation to recovery, illustrates the cultural background and indigenous survival situation at the same time. *Halfbreed* as the minor indigenous group existing in the mainstream culture of white, undergoes tough survival process and carries sharpen conflicts with outside world or the trendy of the whole society. Thus, the group of halfbreed confronts with the danger of failing culture and spirit. Indispensable discriminations from main society is targeted

towards halfbreed, which make halfbreed living died inside for frustration and desperation in life. Because they can never get rid of impoverishment, be belittled by either white or government also intense their life pressure, and kill their will. Samely, Maria Campbell who lives both under the identities of Halfbreed and female has suffered more, and with the stubborn life she grows up from crack. She has had the common confusions with other halfbreed when Maria sank into the everlasting tragedy of life, and even once wanted give up life for without faith. Actually, all the miseries she meets with can be contributed to Campbell's survival environment and sufferings in whole life.

2.1. Campbell's Abandonment of Halfbreed Life

Maria's escape can be obviously seen from her decisions to marry with Darrel, though it is betrays her willing. However, only in this way does she escape from poor life. Especially, Campbell compares Smoky with Darrel in the aspect of richness before get married, and chooses white man Darrel instead of halfbreed man Smoky. According to Maria's attention towards Darrel, people know that why she chooses him. 'I found my man a couple of weeks later. He came into the store one evening and spent nearly an hour talking to me. I could tell by her expensive clothes and new car that he could afford to keep us all.' Thus, here that Campbell's escape from halfbreed to white partly because of their survival stress, and partly because of their own wills begging for the whites' recognition. As Maria describes that 'I knew that if I wanted anything better for myself and family other than an orphanage, foster home, or mud shack, I had through with it.' And Maria regards this marriage as an opportunity to change her life, so she must grabs it. As it is shown 'I was only concerned with getting married as fast as I could, before changed his mind about the prospects of inheriting six children.' Consequently, the results of Maria's marriage is tragic out of people's expects, and she escapes from poor to rich through marrying with white man. But she can never escape from the halfbreed's nightmare that lives a poor life, and abused by husband.

When Campbell is a little girl, she has a dream to live better life. Exactly, her dream is that she can change her poor halfbreed life into sufficient life the same as white's. However, Maria does not only achieve it, but she also loses herself. It can be seen from her monologue 'Someday my brothers and sisters will each have a toothbrush and they'll brush their teeth every day and we'll have a bowl of fruit on the table all the time and, Cheechum, they'll be able to do anything they want and go anywhere, and every day we'll have a glass of milk and cookies and talk about what they want to do. There will be no more mud shacks and they'll walk with their heads high and not be afraid.' At that moment, Cheechum just said sadly that Maria will have it. Because what Maria seek for these things are just symbols of white ideals of success, it is unavailable to Campbell. Here, Campbell sees that dreams of living better life as excuse to escape from poor halfbreed to rich whites. Because she does not understand that poverty and richness just the form of differences between them. Then she will around in falsely around for what she called dream just the escaping in material.

2.2. Campbell's Evasion of Gender Inequality

Maria is abused both in physically and orally, and it makes her isolated in marriage. In mentally, Campbell is excluded, and then she always has no choice to go. As people can see that Maria is driven out home by Darrel because of Smoky, she said that 'I had no choice but to go home with the baby to Darrel.' When Maria is driven at the second time by Darrel's oldest sister, has the same words as that the first time 'I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do. I walked around for most of the day with Lisa.' And when Darrel said that he wanted Maria and Lisa to come back with him, Maria replied yes. At that moment, Maria just thinking as following 'I knew Darrel would leave me again, and if I left Lisa here, how on earth would I ever get back to get her?' Thus, Maria has no rights to decide where she will go and what she can do, in other words, she is desolate in mental as the results of hits and abusing both from surviving and marriage. Here the reason is that halfbreed identity makes Maria's position low in marriage, so she suffered a lot.

Over all, Campbell's marriage is a nightmare in her life, It is also her first try to step in white world, but she failed. Campbell has no choice to begin and end her marriage, sometimes because she will survive for taking care of Lisa. That she always has been driven results in Maria's sufferings, what she has received from marriage is attacking words and abusive treatment, and all these are her sufferings in marriage. However, It is just beginning of Campbell's suffered life. Later, out of marriage Maria will suffered all kinds painful memories in the process of surviving.

The escape for Campbell like a circle has no end, when she thinks that she will escape from poverty, as a result, she is always living in poverty and confusion. As it is shown that she with Darrel goes to

Vancouver seeing how wonderful a big city is, it is her dream. But finally they just lives in a grimy old block apartment, and they are poor than before. In other word, Although Maria and Darrel come to big city, they are just forbidden in the poor and dirty street. So it seems to be a starts of their poor life, and even worse than before.

In a conclusion, Campbell's escape from halfbreed to whites just for better material life, however, it is like an endless circle that Campbell lives in the circle of poverty and depression. Every time she tries to escape, but fails finally. Because escape from poverty is not a key to solve the problems that halfbreed are confronting, what Maria or other halfbreed called dream never escapes from white's hood. For the reason, Halfbreed have nothing belonging to themselves, and even the dream that bases on white's material life.

3. Campbell's Return to Halfbreed

Halfbreed never change their identities, because the history provides with a suffocating survival environment in which they could do nothing spiritually but struggling for surviving. So a good life for them just surviving, if there is something hopeful that must be a better life in material they could have than before. For this reason, Campbell starts to seek for dream that she could earn money for family members could enjoy a better life, and she just want to achieve it by escaping from white world. At last, she failed. Because Maria's seeking is blind, and without the supports of spirit. In a word, Maria is lost herself in the way of escaping. Besides, When people face difficulties, they always have two kinds of attitudes: one is withdrawing, the other is overcoming. Here, Campbell choses the former, which is obvious in novel as her escaping from perspective of material life and spiritual life. At beginning, Campbell just want to escape the poor life that halfbreed live, but she failed finally. Because what she valued material life can neither change one's social existing nor guide people in life. Instead, the spiritual elements can. However, In novel Campbell is always confused about herself, but has no courage to confront with difficulties. In fact, she has no ideas when she was lost in material life. Consequently, that Campbell escapes in material and spiritual leads to her disorder.

3.1. Campbell's Reconstruction of Self Identity

Maria always feels ashamed when she decides to leave her people, and suffers conflict of her inside. In this sense, people know that Maria has a tendency to return. After Maria marrying with Darrel, she once showed her ashamed as following, ' I couldn't go to her because I was ashamed. Everything had gone so wrong.' Maria has realized that she goes wrongly, and wants to return, but she ashamed that she could back to before. On the one hand, When Maria has courage to face who she is and what she is doing, she will know where she should go. The point is that Maria should challenge difficulties instead of escaping, and the important point of it is that Maria decides to lay off drugs. According to Maria people know her convert in emotion that she said ' I felt no emotion about anything and because I felt this way I knew I could lay off drugs. I really didn't need an escape anymore. I had nothing to escape from.' Once Maria escape partly because of survival pressure, and partly because of losing her identity. Drinking and addicting drugs just is her way to hide herself for the reason that she reluctant to face sufferings in reality. Here, Maria said that he didn't need escape anymore, which means that she knows what she will do next.

On the other hand, Maria becomes positive towards life, and she begins to forwardly find a common job in restaurant and make friends who can give her energy. It implies that Maria could dominant herself to do what she decides to do, and openly showing from her protecting little Indian boys from whites' verbally abusive in restaurant. At that moment, It triggers Maria's angers towards whites at the same time, she also comprehends the reason why Indian is gutless when faced with whites. Because they are always controlled by whites spiritually and materially. For the reason, white man knowing that halfbreed are weak and subject to whites, and even easily to be defeated. Exactly, It is Maria understands it , so she believes that' If they had only fought back, instead of giving up, these things would never have happened.'

Campbell changes her way of thinking since she find herself, and know the crisis that halfbreed meet with. First of all, Maria's life has changed, and she actively participates in the halfbreed community, and attends to lots of meetings for halfbreed's rights. At the same time, Maria knows many famous halfbreed who are full with power and energy, and make efforts in fighting for halfbreed's justice. Such as Eugene Steinhauer and Stan Daniels. Then the other change is that halfbreed are united now instead of fighting with each other. For example, when Maria participates in the research project to research the Native people who live in the Saddle Lake Reserve in central Alberta, She never finish it untill she and other halfbreed sponsor gather to deal with. It symbolizes that halfbreed will alive around the world in future.

3.2. *Campbell's Regain of Halfbreed Happiness*

Maria successfully find her identity but just find where she wants to return is as horrible as before, and she depicts her people on the street that 'There were children running everywhere; babies crying with nobody to care for them. A man was beating his wife behind a building, while little children looked on as though it was all quite normal. The only bar in town was full of people so drunk they couldn't walk.' Many years later, Halfbreed still lives in empty and despairing state. Maria frustrated at d people's degeneration. Actually, Maria's anger just shows her concerns about her people for they just escaping terrible life instead of trying to resolve the problems. So Maria initiates to explore the way she will take to save halfbreed people.

Then Maria makes efforts to help them by doing lots of things, for example, Maria realizes that white system has done much bitter thing over halfbreed, then she writes letters to encourage prisoners. Maria can be seen as the hope to those prisoners who are depressed about life. Maria does not only help more and more halfbreed find themselves healing them, but also reconstruct people's soul in spiritual. there is a man whom Maria writes to him for two years, finally he is released and come to thank Maria before returning home to build his life.

Thus, Maria deliver her caring to halfbreed who needs help, and she emphasizes that halfbreed and Indian should be respected as others in the world. According to Maria, It is remarkable blue that both halfbreed and whites have to know the 'white blanket'. It seems to be a beautiful help to Indians and halfbreed by the government, but actually, the blanket will not bring warmth to people but make people more and more reliant on it until they lose their souls. It is just like what Maria tells to Marion that 'Forget about being a white man's Indian, and make some real money.' Maria points out that halfbreed do not need blanket, it warns that halfbreed finding themselves is the best way to win a respectable life.

4. Reflection on Campbell's Escape and Return

4.1. *Halfbreed's Awakening Inside*

There were many halfbreed once died inside after suffered long time terrible life. They lost hopes towards life for living in endless poverty and troubles, and then halfbreedthe white system has done much bitter thing over halfbreed, then she writes letters to encourage prisoners. Maria can be seen as the hope to those prisoners who are depressed about life. Maria does not only help more and more halfbreed find themselves healing them, but also reconstructing people's souls is spiritual. there is a man whom Maria writes to him for two years, finally, he is released and come to thank Maria before returning home to build his life.

They are unaware of what they are doing, because they do not have emotion. Here, Maria is a typical example when she feels desperate, she has tried to suicide, kill her child Simultaneously. Suddenly, she seemed to wake up and realize what she was doing, and stop to do such stupid things. Readers can read her awakening from her words, 'I was sick at what I had done.' So Maria realizes that she should be irresponsible to her children and herself, then she make a decision that 'I was determined to straighten myself out, and to stop drinking, and to get off the pills.' From died inside to awakening inside, Maria spend almost whole life to explore its cause, but awaken inside in the twinkling of an eye. It is same as the decision that Maria makes to give up to make her second baby abortion. Although her life will become more difficult while the second baby is born, Maria determines to have this baby. Something inside makes Maria believes he can do these though it is difficult.

Maria is still drinking, but not like before just for escaping from reality. And she gradually awaken just as she says that 'I could stop using drugs and alcohol but I could never achieve the serenity and peace of mind that these people have found. I continued going to meetings, as it was the road to release, but paid little attention to what went on.' Now, Maria never escape but face with her conflicts and convert into action to fight for Halfbreed's rights by attending meetings. Similarly, Because Maria always worried about her people, doing such things is the only way to resolve it.

In a conclusion, with the help of others Maria find herself including her identity as a halfbreed and her passions towards halfbreed. So she return to her halfbreed group psychologically and spiritually, In psychological, whenever and whatever she is that everything could reminds Maria of her people, because she worried about halfbreed people. In spiritually, Maria awaken to understand what she should do to improve halfbreed's life. Thus, Maria find herself, meanwhile, she find a way for her people.

4.2. *Halfbreed's Unity in Group*

Halfbreed does not only tell Campbell's personal life, but it also records history of Metis. It is obvious to read the historic injustices toward Metis people both from white and Canadian government. Halfbreed settles and forms their own ways of life, and swears that 'they won't opposed to the Canadian government and wouldn't abandon their council as soon as the Territories acquired a true government and was able to establish law and order.' that is to say they live as minority receives without attentions from mainstream society-Canadian government. Canadian government would not allow them to do like this way, because that halfbreed in their eyes just can be seen threatens to Canadian government authority till 1870s and 1880s, it bursts out. Firstly, it can be seen that Canadian government doesn't recognize halfbreed as the part of main society, so they ignore halfbreed's requests for land rights. As people can see from the following historic moments that the land acts in Canadian just is set for Canadian instead of halfbreed. 'Our people believed the lands acts discriminated against them, stating that they had to live on the land and wait three years before filing a claim.' Thus, there is the Battle of Duck Lake and the Riel Rebellion happening in halfbreed's history for struggling for recognizing identity by mainstream. However, halfbreed failed finally, being treated unequally, they don't only ask what they want, but they also are charged with treason.

Secondly, Canadian government intense halfbreed's survival conditions for making profits from immigrants. In the late 1920s, immigrants invade halfbreed's land, and intensifies the environmental degradation. For example, 'By this time the lakes were drying up and the fur and game had almost disappeared.' Thus, halfbreed have to broke land at the same time, they worried about that they may lost their land. 'Otherwise the land was confiscated by Land Improvement District authorities.' In fact, halfbreed has no choice in the ways of making their living, but determined by Canadian authorities. Thirdly, halfbreed survive under the environment of everlasting poverty, the reason is that they have no rights given by Canadian government. As it can be seen from 'the homesteads were reclaimed by the authorities and offered to the immigrants.', It makes halfbreed run off by immigrants-new owners just as 'Road Allowance people'. It means that the road for halfbreed is never-ending and full of frustrations and heart-break. Moreover, Canadian government never ends their discriminations towards halfbreed. For example, what Alex Vandal calls the CCF horses that government gives a new name for remedy halfbreed is ridiculous. The wardens and the Mounties as the representative of government just as usual rob meat and whisky from halfbreed. It intensifies the halfbreed's impoverishment. So halfbreed suffered long-time torments from surviving, which results of government's harsh prescriptions on them.

In addition, Halfbreed bears discriminations from whites just because they are born with lower blood contrasting to whites. That is why people can see that halfbreed has been excluded by whites even in their young ages. When Maria went to school, she realized that her people were treated as 'special' from different diets between whites and halfbreed like that 'Whites had white or brown bread, boiled eggs, apples, cookies, and jars of milk.' 'We took bannock for lunch, spread with land and filled with wild meat, and if there was no meat we had cold potatoes and salt and pepper, or else whole roasted gophers with stage dressing.'

Next, Halfbreed as people who blends with whites and Indians' blood is abused by whites for the reason that a group of halfbreed itself is not united. As it depicts that Maria's father once tried his best to fight for halfbreed's privilege, but when he failed, none of halfbreed visit Campbell's home. As Cheechum described 'They laugh with whites because it is the first time in their lives that the white man has talked to them like men.' Halfbreed follow the whites but not his own people, so they can easily be divided, then the whole halfbreed groups can be defeated by any groups.

In all, Halfbreed has been suffered long-time survival dilemma, which contributes to the pressure coming from government and white society. Halfbreed lives between them facing endless poverty and spirit hitting. For the one thing, it reflects halfbreed's fights between themselves, for another thing this discrimination towards halfbreed roots in deeply.

5. Conclusion

Maria Campbell tells her story in plain but energetic words, and she suffers a lot. So all the sufferings she meets with contributes to such tough survival environment. As time goes by, that Maria begins to escape her identity as halfbreed for seeking a better life in material, following it she steps into whites' world. But Maria fails, and loses self in the circle of halfbreed' depression. Finally, with the help from others, Maria is recovery and find herself successfully, and she also help her people rebuild life. From

Maria's escape to return to halfbreed, people understand it is an exact process for Maria to find herself, and to build ethnic spirit. Therefore, it is important for halfbreed to walk out from whites' influence, and find themselves to be united.

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