

IDENTITY AND THE QUEST OF AUTHENTICITY IN INDIGENOUS WOMEN LITERATURE

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Abstract: Identity and authenticity are the most integral agencies of the psyche of Indigenous communities which broadly contribute to the construction of their individual and social identities. Thus, these two fundamental concepts have been studied from different spectrums of psychology, philosophy, and literature. Colonialism had disastrous effects on the social systems of the colonized peoples; for the indigenous communities the drastic change in the social norms by the introduction of patriarchal systems had led to a shift in indigenous women's rights who shared a significant position in her native communities. The emergence of a new generation of talented female writers created a literary phenomenon and a sort of rebellion influencing the contemporary literary landscape in postcolonial era to overcome the brutality of everyday life. Women were placed in precarious positions and their roles were offered and defined by men. Consequently, they started to live in a new cycle of life running the risks of poverty, abuse and violence as well. Literature then has pushed itself to the front of the literary scene through a barrage of texts on silenced peoples to keep women hopes alive as a distinct race that should be respected and not devaluated through prejudices, besides being heard.

Keywords: Authenticity; Identity; Indigenous ;Literature ;Women

L'IDENTITÉ ET LA QUÊTE D'AUTHENTICITÉ DANS LA LITTÉRATURE DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES

Résumé : L'identité et l'authenticité sont les agences les plus essentielles de la psyché des communautés autochtones, qui contribuent largement à la construction de leurs identités individuelles et sociales. Ainsi, ces deux concepts fondamentaux ont été étudiés sous différents angles de la psychologie, de la philosophie et de la littérature. Le colonialisme a eu des effets désastreux sur les systèmes sociaux des peuples colonisés ; pour les communautés autochtones, le changement radical des normes sociales par l'introduction de systèmes patriarcaux a entraîné un bouleversement des droits des femmes autochtones qui occupaient une position significative dans leurs communautés d'origine. L'émergence d'une nouvelle génération de talentueuses écrivaines a créé un phénomène littéraire et une sorte de rébellion influençant le paysage littéraire contemporain de l'ère postcoloniale pour surmonter la brutalité de la vie quotidienne. Les femmes étaient placées dans des positions précaires et leurs rôles étaient proposés et définis par des hommes. Par conséquent, ils ont commencé à vivre dans un nouveau cycle de vie, courant les risques de pauvreté, d'abus et de violence également. La littérature s'est donc imposée sur la scène littéraire à travers un barrage de textes sur les peuples réduits au silence, afin de maintenir les espoirs des femmes en tant que race distincte qui mérite d'être respectée et non dévaluée par des préjugés, en plus d'être entendue.

Mots-clés : Authenticité ; Identité ; Autochtone ; Littérature ; Femmes

Introduction

Global history is replete with incidents that have had deep impact on nations' ability to exist, but the most pervasive factor has been the attempts of imperial powers to subjugate weaker or less developed peoples on all fronts, and notably the cultural one. In order to resist and reject the injustice and mistreatment of all sorts imposed through coercion, various armed and cultural uprising movements emanate. Indigenous communities were more severely pretentious by western oppression, so the creation of cultural movements was required to highlight the problems facing these downtrodden countries and to advocate for their decolonization. The present article provides details about the historical events that constitute a cornerstone in the life of indigenous communities who seek authenticity as well as the role of women literature in people's lives for a more nuanced understanding of the essence of the conflicts inside their communities which constitutes a means of opposition and an element towards minds liberation. This article's goal is then shaped by a number of objectives, including an examination of the ways in which Indigenous women authors portray authenticity and identity in their works of literature, emphasizing significant themes and narrative techniques, and analyzing the effects of historical and modern sociopolitical contexts on the formation of identity in Indigenous women writers. A more relevant aim that this article serves at its center is the investigation of how indigenous women's literature adds to larger conversations on authenticity and reinterprets conventional cultural and gender norms. Consequently, the research questions that follow are essentially phrased as follows: What strategies do female Indigenous writers use in their writing to assert and reclaim their cultural identities? And in what ways do the literary works of Indigenous women alter the prevailing conceptions of authenticity and identity? Appropriate hypotheses are developed in order to provide relevant responses to the research questions put forth. Indigenous women writers challenge traditional conceptions of identity through the use of distinctive narrative techniques that show the intricate relationship between cultural heritage and individual authenticity. And Indigenous women writers redefine and assert their identities in the face of historical and ongoing marginalization by using their literary works as instruments for political resistance and cultural preservation.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

Examining identity and the pursuit of authenticity in Indigenous women's writing necessitates examining theoretical frameworks that highlights the interaction between personal experience and cultural legacy. Feminist theory, which emphasizes gendered experiences within Indigenous contexts, and postcolonial theory, which examines the effects of colonization on self-perception and cultural expression, are two common theoretical approaches. A decolonial lens is crucial from a methodological standpoint, emphasizing the reclamation of narrative sovereignty and authenticity through the prioritization of Indigenous voices and perspectives. This method supports a nuanced understanding of how Indigenous women navigate and articulate their identities while challenging prevailing narratives.

2. Postcolonial Indigenous Women Literature

In recent decades, postcolonial literature has seen a broad and profound intention that has propelled itself to the forefront of the literary scene through an onslaught of texts on marginalized people addressing issues such as identity, gender roles, ethnicity, politics,

and interpersonal relationships, among other things. This genre of writing makes it abundantly evident that there was also other English-language writing produced during the colonial era prior to the colonized nations gaining their independence from the colonial powers that encompasses a diverse range of works of literature ranging from the late 16th to the 19th centuries reflecting various aspects of colonial life, including exploration, empire building, and the experiences of colonized peoples such as Richard Hakluyt's "The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation" (1589), Cotton Mather's "Magnalia Christi Americana" (1702), Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" (1719) and James Boswell's "The Life of Samuel Johnson" (1791). The languages and customs of the colonizers were passed down to Australia, New Zealand, India, Sub-Saharan Africa, and some Caribbean countries. This allowed these countries to create postcolonial literature, also known as "The Local Color," which discusses customs, attitudes, religion, and legends. Any literary work generated by intellectuals opposing colonialism during the times when many colonies were battling for independence or even after colonial powers had established themselves in various parts of the world is known as postcolonial literature. These works include several classic texts published between the 1950s and 1990s that highlight the difficulties and political and cultural fallout of a country's decolonization. It serves as a conduit for potential exploration into the ramifications of colonization, the interplay between English-language literature and indigenous language literature, as well as narratives emerging from various language diasporas (Ashcroft et al, 1989). To restore pride in customs and practices that were steadily undermined under colonialism, postcolonial literature aims to affirm the diversity and legitimacy of indigenous cultures. Literary criticism on and about literature is covered. In addition to taking the necessary steps to preserve indigenous cultures and traditions, this literature aims to restore a certain connection between indigenous people and their environments through description, narration, and dramatization. It also resists the stereotypes and inaccuracies that the colonizer circulated in political, educational, and social texts and settings, ultimately attempting to reshape dominant meanings.

In order to empower the dominated peoples and secure their places in the modern, globalized world, postcolonial writers who are regarded as anti-colonial freedom fighters often deal extensively with issues of subordination and exclusion through their literary works by documenting segregation, or a history of genocide, including slavery apartheid, and the mass extinction of peoples, such as the indigenous communities throughout the world. This symbolizes a process of healing that first highlights how completely different the native people are, from white community before highlighting their unique identity. Native authors often use postcolonial literature to examine the colonial era from fresh angles and with a deep sense of individuality.

By teaching the English language, which is the only means of communication for the natives to deal with the settler community or gain a certain privilege to have a place in the society otherwise, they were considered inferior and even slaves. During the colonial period, the English language was used as an instrument that enables the colonizers to spread their culture and customs. This behavior ushered in a new era marked by the rejection of all new norms imposed upon them, beginning with the abandonment of English in favor of their native tongue. Writers chose to rely on their native tongue in order to resist the wrongdoings of the colonizers and the forcible imposition of their cultures, but the abrogation movement proved to be completely ineffective as it did not facilitate communication with a larger number of settlers. Since appropriation refers to be conscious

use of English without being forced upon someone, it was therefore necessary. As a result, the native population began to use English-differently from the English speaking population by incorporating words, cultural elements or even accents.

3. Women Literature and the Healing Process

In patriarchal societies, women writers from the former colonies frequently find a broad platform for self-expression through their writing, which serves. As a tool for empowerment. The emergence of postcolonial literature was intended to counteract colonizer dominance; in fact, even though it was written during the colonial era, it is still regarded as postcolonial because of the oppositional nature of its expression. In order to depict the real oppression that minorities experience, for the sake of maintaining their identities, fighting segregation and marginalization, it typically bears various themes related to contemporary issues, such as slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, race, gender, place, and the responses to the discourses of imperial Europe, such as history, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics. It is recognized as a literature of resistance and “otherness” that is drawn from the unique local experience. The experience of being the only person of one's race or ethnicity in a large crowd can provide meaningful insights. (Young, 2001) divides white people into two groups: those who have never experienced this kind of situation and those who have, explaining the latter's window into the life of marginalization, similar to people living outside of Western context who are always on the periphery and don't receive normative validation.

Thus, postcolonial literature offers a crucial chance to respond forcefully and optimistically to a more reasonable presumption about the oppressed communities. It displays how native writers try to create harmonious cross-cultural heritage, which is meant to reflect the standards and values of their own people. One of the most influential writers in the field of rejecting universalism, Edward Said, attacked it for viewing the East as a mirror of the negative aspects of the West. Native American literary texts are typically defended by literary criticism, which also pushes writers to challenge the notion that everything that is Western is legitimate and everything that comes from other cultures is invalid. Cultural diversity, plurality, and hybridity are seen as essential components that should be addressed in literary texts that are vital hubs for participating in the fight for women's liberation, charting resistance, and advancing the achievement of individual and group liberation for women. A wide spectrum of indigenous writers use the postcolonial novel as a vital literary form to resist the systematic wrongdoings of the imperialist powers, to cut off and silence voices that might otherwise be tempted to represent the oppressed communities and, to some extent, accurately portray their sufferings. The most pertinent topics, like location and displacement that caused an identity crisis and endangered native communities, are typically covered in this type of work. It emphasizes the cultural quirks that set the natives apart from the foreign invaders as a kind of counter to falsehoods and generalizations that permeated social political and educational texts and contexts. Too many Native American women novelists challenged the presumptions that marginalize Native American identity and culture by creating literary works that both construct a clear present and evoke the past, portraying a Native American world unique to their own. It was inevitable that postcolonial novels would move from world literatures written in English to British literature produced by writers of British descent. Its topics and styles shifted from traditional novels to resistance, nationalism, diaspora, and identity construction. It also dealt with illustrating how difficult it is for immigrants to live in the postcolonial world. In a

postcolonial novel, the struggle to separate oneself from the heavy burden of colonizer and native heritage revolves around identity. As a result, postcolonial novelists attempt to reconstruct independent minds following their liberation by depicting the trauma that the colonial communities experienced in their literary works.

4. Indigenous Feminism and the Self

As a theory and cultural movement known as "Indigenous Feminism" it aims to provide equality for indigenous communities and notably women. It focuses on problems with discrimination against different cultures and colonialism. It is a subset of feminist theory that rejects the biases of the colonizer and strives for the decolonization of both men and women. Indigenous feminism emerged from a counterinsurgency that opposed applying western feminism to all women equally and effectively without taking into account their incredibly varied experiences. Indigenous feminism has a different trajectory. Because of the erasure of distinctions, this global sisterhood was perceived as an attempt at colonization. Native American women view race and gender as interconnected issues that can be discussed in various cultural contexts based on how they personally experienced them; as such, they should collaborate to achieve women's emancipation.

According to Andrea Smith, feminism is viewed by many indigenous women as an indigenous concept that has been appropriated by white women. This argument illustrates the elevated and distinguished standing that native women held within an entirely distinct social structure predicated on gender equality and respect. As a result, indigenous peoples have long been feminist. Anderson (2010) emphasizes how feminism has changed historically and is now seen as a theory that promotes social, political, and economic equality between the sexes. Previously, feminism was an ingrained social framework. Acknowledging the feminist origins of indigenous peoples would subsequently enable and facilitate their decolonization process. Indigenous literature also employs strategies of purposeful silence regarding some topics, almost as a way to maintain control. Examining the many claims that indigenous literature is the result of indigenous suffering is fascinating. Muecke (1988) rejects the romanticized idea of the "repressive hypothesis" with regard to Aboriginal literature. Even though it is debatable, he argues that authenticity is crucial to debunking the repressive theory.

The diversity of opinions that Aboriginal creative writers themselves have expressed regarding the themes, intentions, and inspirations behind their works is also worth observing. To Melissa Lucashinko, for example, indigenous writing is more of a content issue than a distinct body of work. According to Ruffo (212), protest literature primarily focused on land rights, social justice, and legal advocacy is what defines Aboriginal literature.

In addition to being a decolonization tactic intended to protest against marginalization, assimilation, and dispossession, Lee Maracle claims that indigenous writing is also a powerful means of "writing home" as opposed to merely "writing back.". The advice that "women should not position themselves 'on the same side' without any regard for the differences in power and privilege among women" (Grande, 342) has been around for a number of years. However, feminist ideology persists in promoting a pervasive "sisterhood" founded on shared female experiences, perspectives, values, and objectives. Regrettably, feminists have not provided enough attention to the distinction between and among women, nor have they taken into account the material and historical specificity of native identity. Given this, the assertion that "feminism is for everybody" seems more

hopeful or politically useful than factual. Due to the fact that aboriginal women are distinct in how they perceive and articulate oppression and share many characteristics with non-native women, feminists have been rightly accused of downplaying or ignoring the differences between and among women. For this reason, aboriginal women are increasingly involved in feminist theory and activism, advocating for an aboriginal feminism. This helps to explain why so few Native American women identify as feminist and why there are many different names for Native American movements. Some authors use terms that play on the feminist dichotomies of work and home such as “mother work,” coined by Patricia Hill Collins.

5. Individuality and Autonomy

Within nation-states, self-determination ought to be viewed as a component of respect for cultural diversity. As a result, the cultural, linguistic, and historical traits of individuals should be taken into account in any government initiative to foster citizenship. Indigenous self-determination and indigenous self-management are the foundation of gender justice for indigenous women. Regarding their own identity and the social standing of their communities, the cultural cohesion of indigenous people within their societies will undoubtedly improve in the direction of a significant improvement in their status and serve as a source of empowerment. As a result, the fight should not be against indigenous men but rather against the patriarchal systems that resulted from colonialism. Despite what the settlers claim, indigenous cultures are not the source of gender oppression. Rather, they are based on the idea that men and women should work complementary roles to preserve indigenous social and cultural heritage. Emphasizing individual and collective human rights is paramount for the advancement and well being of societies as a whole and for indigenous women specifically. This is especially true now that feminist movements and indigenous women's organizations have made great strides toward achieving the majority of the objectives they have been fighting for for decades. Consequently, the appearance of the Declaration of Indigenous Women, which contained forty points urging governments and non-state actors to adopt concrete measures to promote and reinforce new policies and programs in favor of indigenous women, was a result of international conferences about indigenous women, such as the one held in Beijing in 1995. This realization paved the way for the emergence of new spaces, like the International Indigenous Women's Forum and the Continental Network of Indigenous Women.

Conclusion

Highlighting issues such as identity, cultures, gender equality, and racism in postcolonial era remains one of the predominant challenges that merit more attention so as to get an obvious idea about oppressed native communities that struggle for surviving and maintaining their identities and cultures in an Eurocentric modern societies. Yet, indigenous literature serves as a space for reflecting the ailment of indigenous peoples who still suffer from segregation and inequality inside the so called modern societies which regard human rights as sacred. Indigenous women immediate need is to begin to heal from decades of denigration they experienced, relieving them from their grim and constant ailment owing to double discrimination as women and as aboriginal. When it is a question of women belonging to the marginalized sections, more violence is used to silence them, and resulting in a double burden of oppression which is thrust on them blindly. Hence their cries and voices are much more heartrending. But still, women oppression persists in

cultural and family levels besides economic and educational levels on the grounds of patriarchal hegemony and sexism, unfortunately.

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