

**Spurious Prosperity of the Exploited in Lee Maracle's  
*Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel***

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**Abstract**

Indigenous people are independent cultural groups inextricably depending on their lands and natural resources and they claim them to be their own. They are experts in sharing and preserving their ancestral land ties from generation to generation. However their preserved indigeneity is exploited by the unlawful intensions of the Europeans. Lee Maracle, an indigenous writer of Canada, in her debut novel *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, mainly focuses on the lives of the First Nations people of Canada. This paper unravels how the chronological events like European discovery, colonial expansion, implemented government policies, shifted cultivation, population explosion, commercial exchange, diversified economies and individual ownership are exposed by Lee Maracle and the hidden agenda of the Europeans. The paper attempts to analyse *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* to uncover the divulging information about Canada whose natives are tormented and exploited by European colonisers in terms of advancement and prosperity.

**Keywords:** First Nations people, Indigenous colonisation, monopoly, exploitation, forbidden rights.

Before the arrival of the colonizers, the Native People of Americas lived a self sufficient life totally depending on the resources of their own land with the cognitive content of caring, protecting and nurturing their environmental resources from generation to generation. This generational bond within their group and with their environment is implicitly disturbed and distracted by the hypocritical attitude of Europeans settlers. Earlier the white settlers entered the land with attractive lies, but later they developed a new world order that has given no right to the natives who belong to the land. Lee Maracle in *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* truly exposes the colonizer's indiscretions and the devastated lives of the Native people of North America due to colonization and how the colonizers pretend all their unlawful intensions as positive aspects in their history.

The pretensions of the colonizers can be further explored with an understanding of Indigenous history. The sequence of cultural stages in the history of “Indigenous Americans began with the arrival of bands of hunters from Siberia who followed migratory animals, as believed by most scientists” (Boehm et al 40-41). These early people or Paleo-Indians entered the Americas during the Ice Age and became the natives to that specific region. The Native people of Americas are the earliest inhabitants who have experienced different stages of ethnic practices. Their practices include hunting, aquaculture, agriculture, farming, monumental architecture, sculpture, and geology. Before the settlement of the early colonists in the Americas, the natives travelled in the groups to remote areas of their land in order to hunt and fish for their survival.

The Native people of Canada are very popular in fishing because they practice fishing in their land with certain laws, restrictions and controls like who can fish, when to fish and where to fish. This probably helps the ocean to preserve, care and increase the fish production. Also the Natives of Canada mainly rely on fish for their living; therefore they ultimately fish for their need and not for any achievement of commercial target. In the novel *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* the protagonist’s father “started fishing off the docks in the Steveston, which was about 20 miles from home” (4). Here Bobbi’s father follows the Native laws that are exhilarated by the ancestors and they enjoyed their practices till they have their native land under their control. Barraclough and Overy in their *Complete History of the World* disclose the practice of fishing as the life sustaining source of the west coast of North: “Along the west coast of North America and the southeast coast of South America, fishing was to remain a mainstay” (44). The Native Americans remained isolated and enjoyed their own way of life and sustainable survival techniques before the discovery of the continent by the Europeans.

These sustainable practices and life styles that marked the oldest civilization of America has been gradually disrupted. During the age of discovery, the America was explored and colonized by the Europeans. Richard Overy in his *Complete History of the World* colonial history of settlement as, “Jamestown, Virginia (1607), Quebec (1608), the Mayflower communities of Massachusetts Bay (1620), and New Amsterdam (1626) represent the first success in establishing European colonies in North America” (178). Consequently the waves of the European empires formally constituted and established their colonies in America to claim the land, natural resources, human capital and political boundaries. Also the Europeans’ establishment in Americas especially in Canada widely affects the legal system of Canada. The constitution of Canada contains the legal system of Canadian laws, part of which is inherited as Common Law from Britain, as French Civil Law from France and Indigenous law from various Native places. On the contrary, the

government policies devised by the Europeans and the settlers' colonization in America altered the lives and cultural styles of the Native people.

The Euro-American government's rules and regulations brought massive changes in the life style of the Natives. At first, the government and their constitution provided enormous stability. For instance, the indigenous people of Canada have been given a special status under Canadian law and they are considered the traditional fishery. The traditional fishery is a label given to the people or the group belonging to the coastal region of Canada who practice fishing. In section 35 of the Canadian constitution, the government has given a collective right to the indigenous harvesters to harvest fish for their need, social and ceremonial purposes. In addition to that the native fishers have also followed certain native laws and techniques to regulate the productive system such as spot for fishing, who can fish, how to fish and when to fish. But all these rights have been taken away by the same government as Lee highlights in the novel *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* that the "Government said they were going to take away Indian trapping and fishing rights and put them on welfare" (12). This shows how the Europeans slowly devised laws to make the indigenous people of Canada lose their control over their lands. Similarly, their Aboriginal right has come to an end by Stephen Harper's racially divided fisheries programs, ". . . sport fishermen being allowed to fish ll year round while they were being prohibited from doing commercial net fishing" (110). Stephen Harper, a Canadian politician who has served as 22<sup>nd</sup> prime minister of Canada. During his reign he has brought this fisheries program that has forbidden the natives from fishing but it encourages the non-natives settlers to fish without any prohibition or restriction.

The restrictions and prohibitions are made mandatory only for the Natives but not for the colonizers. Lee mentions this restriction of the government in *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* as follows, "They kept passing this illegal legislation restricting Indian fishing rights, then harassing people with game wardens, state troopers, court actions and so on" (111). The state of Washington plays an illegal role by arresting natives, "for commercial fishing, put them through county and the state courts and then drop the charges as soon as the case was appealed to the federal court" (110). The ruling of the federal Supreme Court recognizes the treaty rights of the natives whereas the government violates the law to exercise control over the Natives.

Similarly the Europeans take advantage in studying the geographical setup of the Natives to devastate the Native's farming and to launch their enterprise in Canada. At the end of Ice Age, the Natives established their first settlements in Americas and relied on non-migratory prey, migratory wild fowl and on seasonal farming. The Canadian people of

Americas are good at agricultural farming. The agricultural practices in Canada include cultivation of maize, potatoes, beans, squash, sunflower, fruits vegetables and so on. In *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, Lee portrays a native family that they, “depended solely on their crops” (3). They proclaim, through the land “We cultivated a half-acre of land nearby and planted a garden in the small orchard that was there . . . after that we all we did was tend the orchard and harvest the cherries and other fruit” (19). The traditional ecological knowledge and the experiences of the natives help them produce good and healthy food from their land. Moreover the Canadian land is more sustainable for all kinds of agricultural resources therefore the natives of Canada cultivate and harvest to live a healthy life but not to earn high profit.

Targeting the profit of field production in Canada, the Europeans employed many techniques in agricultural production by using the land knowledge of the indigenous along with European agricultural and domestication procedures. Thus the development in maximizing production by European settlers influenced the native Canadian people to practice shifted cultivation. In the meantime to extinguish the agricultural practices of Canada, the Europeans started producing all the agricultural products from their European continents. As per their plan the natives almost stopped practicing their native ways and they started using European strategies. Simultaneously the Europeans immigrate to Canada large in numbers that increased the population in Canada and the impact was so tremendous that the transformation in agriculture practices and the population explosion result in food crisis. Overy writes: “However, although agriculture was highly productive, the city could not be supported entirely locally, so huge quantities of food, clothing and ritual goods had to be levied and transported from far afield” (164). The migration of Europeans and the dislocation of large population from other countries were the cause for food insufficiency in Canada.

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, America fell for insufficiency whereas Britain and other minor countries in North America enjoyed agricultural revolution by gathering the knowledge of the North Americans. The adaptation of Native agriculture methods by Europeans and the increase in the level of productivity caused the rapid growth of European economy. Overy records the European’s farming adaption in the following words: “Except in Britain and the Netherlands, most improvements came from the introduction of new, more productive crops, mainly from America” (178). The European settlers transformed the lands of the Natives as suitable for the European farmers to settle down, reproduce and form their European homeland in the Natives’ land.

Food insufficiency in Americas was a trap schemed by the Europeans to get control over the native people. In *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, Bobbi’s mother overwhelms her feelings

“Why are we so poor when we work so hard?” . . . we never seemed to have anything to eat” (12). Though the natives worked hard, they are able to afford their food with the money they earned. As per the prediction of the Europeans, the native people living in Canada faced scarcity of food and in order to recover themselves from their situation the people of Canada relied on the productions imported from Europe to America. Woolford, in his article on “Canadian Aboriginal Genocide” writes “the trade continued through much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, creating a symbiotic relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal trappers and traders” (83). The collective need of the people recognizes the occupation of commercial exchange in them and fulfils their requirements but it develops economic dependence. As a result of trade, Canada slowly becomes a part of British Empire. The European companies claimed the vast areas of the Native Americas and took away their land rights from them. While, the original land owners of the native people became the workers for the Europeans later through their trade they import the production from European continents and stopped the Natives, from practicing their indigenous ways. The prevention of Aboriginal people from working disrupts their earning that created financial insecurity and also affected the Native’s standard of living. This poverty struggle among the Natives further leads them to practise things that are not in their heritage which is delineated in Lee’s novel *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebels*: “. . . Indians were forced to steal in the first place because they were oppressed, couldn’t get jobs and so forth” (123). The criminal mind of the Europeans shattered the life style of the Natives and forced the natives to rob for their survival from their own land.

The Europeans’ strategic control over natives in all aspect induced the latter to trespass in order to survive. In the law of the Europeans the acts involving violence, assault, theft, drunkenness and using unauthorized weapon in public are considered as criminal acts. And the charges against such criminal acts are instituted on the basis of legal terms of the Europeans. In reality, the law is biased towards the natives. Though the natives do not voluntarily commit crimes, they are pushed to such extends to tarnish their behaviour. Lee in *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* writes on the victimization of the natives: “. . .we ought to be killed for merely being accused of drunkenness and criminality by white officialdom” (xiv). The laws of the Europeans have given legal protections to the natives in words but they do not protect them when they are in need. Instead the Europeans construe the behaviour of the native people to make them victim and punish the Natives vulnerably.

Above all, the Europeans exported the African people as slaves to Europe and then traded them to America as slave workers. During the period between 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Europeans expanded their empire in Africa and traded slaves. In response to this inhuman

practice, Overy writes: "...above all, slaves to work the mines and the plantations of the Americas ...slaves were exported first to Europe and then to the Americas" (182). Thus, increasing the number of workers and the native's feeble resistance to the Europeans' aggression promoted the Europeans to gain diversified economies and trade. Thus, the development of the Natives was seriously inhibited and affected by the presence of the Europeans.

Besides those atrocities the Europeans continue to plunder the natural resources of Canada. Canada is a land well known for its wealthy natural resources. The natural resources in Canada include coal, iron ore, uranium diamonds, copper, potash, nickel, zinc, natural gas, forest, water and gold. Therefore to achieve an excessive economic growth in Europe, the Europeans plundered and exploited the natural resources of the Americas, predominantly from Canada they extracted fossil fuels, and subsoil minerals to increase their economical status. In the novel *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, Bobbi explains the Europeans' profitable approach "Strip-mining, uranium production, gas and oil extraction, mega-hydro projects, clear cutting, over-fishing, chemical disfiguring of the soil, tampering with foodstuffs are all carried out in the interest of profit" (xv). The main advantageous factor for Europeans is economic development. To increase the Europeans' sophistication, they plundered the natural resources of Canada to increase their economical power. But it was a great exploitation that results in severe economic loss for the Native people.

The European practices have distorted the eco-centric life system of the natives. In the article "Gender and Indigenous Peoples" of United Nations Office of Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, uncovers the mastermind of the Europeans in the following brief note: "...practices such as monoculture cash crop production, use of genetically modified seeds and mineral extraction lead to environmental contamination and threaten indigenous peoples' ecosystems" (23). With these treacherous practices the Europeans powered themselves to destroy the Native communities and constantly threaten them by destroying their natural resources.

Slowly achieving the dominance, the Europeans necessitated the removal of real owners from their native lands because the Europeans believed that the removal of Native Americans from their ancestral land would be in resonance with their colonial policies and help them enjoy individual ownership. After taking control, they forced the natives to rely on reservations, later denied their citizenship and further imposed policies to prohibit the ownership of the Natives. The Europeans did not stop with that but continue to consume every Native asset including their grave yards, which Lee exposes in her novel *Bobbi Lee*:

“What it is when the mayor of a foreign town can come into your backyard and propose to play golf on the graves of your dead? (xvi). The Europeans planned to build a luxury condos and a golf ground in the ancestral graveyard of the Canadian people. The burial vault is an important place kept as a public property to bury the dead people. Each and every grave in the graveyard is considered a monument which commemorates the memory of each person. The graveyard of the Native people became another target of the Europeans in order to uproot any evidence of Native culture.

These scoundrel actions of Europeans are marked by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in the article “Decolonizing Methodologies Research And Indigenous Peoples” *Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory* that profoundly explicits the systematic colonization and desolation of the Europeans in the Natives land. In the words of author the “...colonial officials, artists, entrepreneurs and settlers, who cut a devastating swathe, and left a permanent wound, on the societies and communities who occupied the lands named and claimed under imperialism” (21). The devastations of the Europeans have brought an unhealed wound in the Natives. Nunpa, a Native of Minnesota, writes that the advent of “western Europeans has brought the United States, the rest of the Americas, and the world to the brink of ecological destruction” (13). The Europeans’ logical destruction approach remains as a powerful obstacle to obstruct the indigenous people in terms of health, poverty and economy.

Lee’s *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* thus portrays the European’s arrival and their unlawful intensions in destroying Canada in the name of advancement. At first the Europeans intrude and involve themselves in the indigenous land of Canada as an ally but in the name of revolution and advancement the Europeans trap the indigenous people by ending up the Native rights with government policies, impoverishing the agricultural labourer by transforming their fertile soil, inflict population explosion to cause food insufficiency, exporting agriculture goods from Europe as trade to halt the natives from working, victimizing the landless poorer as criminal to take rigid control over them. With this dominance the settlers exploit their natural resources to uproot and destroy the indiginity of the people of Canada. The dominance and the expansion of the White settler in Canada during the early modern period transformed the biosphere and the livelihood of the Native people. Thus the European’s discovery of Canada destroyed the prosperity of the Native people as well as their earth-centred life system.

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