

**Queens, Princesses, Miss and Majorettes:
Construction of femininity among Quebec Native Women (20th-21st centuries)**

The Indian princess is a Native woman stereotype, vigorously denounced by First Nations feminists (Acoose, 1992). But to see the number of Miss and Princesses competitions that exist among Natives in Canada and the United States, one wonders how far Natives have incorporated elements of a multifaceted myth, where the Princess is the holy, the aristocrat, the leader and the object of desire. This paper focuses on the contests taking place in Native communities in Quebec since the early 1950s, as well as experiences two corps of majorettes, who lead parades among their communities in the 1960s. Indeed, the majorettes, as we shall see, shared with the princesses the duty of representing moral values such as discipline, within a framework that was originally Catholic and / or citizen-based.

In the social construction of Native womanhood, and in a context in which Native women are the most vulnerable population of Canada, I hypothesize that Princess and Miss competitions are the preservation of a particular authentic Native identity (Schroeder, 2004), an instrument of creativity and cultural contestation (Glenister Roberts, 2005), a hope "for new models of meaning in communication" (Glenister Roberts, 2002). In fact, I would go even further and argue that these events provide access to leadership for Native women, and that they recognize the role women have in transmitting culture and values. In societies deemed culturally egalitarian but in which the *Indian Act* introduced profound inequalities, these roles given to women are part of the slow development of a Native feminism. This ideology suggests that women are special and formalize even essentialize the role of each gender from in a ritual perspective in order to affirm a feminine power. The historical perspective also shows that competitions and the majorettes corps were originally copied from North American contests. Since then, many popular Miss contests have disappeared in Quebec, as well as majorettes; by contrast, the election of Miss Native has developed and been popularised in schools or at pow-wows. These feminine activities originally demonstrated the adoption of Euro-Canadians values, but this is no longer the case. Using ethnohistorical and field data collected among Anishnabek and Innu communities from 2007 to 2009, I argue that these competitions both reinforce boundaries between bands, who become competitors, but also promote a strengthening of a national identity.

Bibliography

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