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## **Development of residential schools for Indigenous minorities in Canada – selected problems**

**Abstract:** The article discusses the issue of the relation between education and the processes of assimilation and discrimination of Indigenous minorities (Indian and Inuit) in Canada. Particular emphasis is placed on reconstructing educational practices and the educational policy within the Canadian school system (especially destruction of the pupils' ethnic identity in residential schools). An attempt is made at examining the relationship between schooling, religion, socialisation, forced Christianisation, language policy, and the development of aboriginal minorities in Canada.

**Keywords:** education, ethnic minorities, Canada, residential schools, assimilation, discrimination.

### **Introduction**

Policies aimed at integrating ethnic minorities into the culture and rationality of the dominant communities, wishing to preserve the cultural or national unity of the state, are usually implemented using a diverse range of violence. In the process, a variety of actions attempting to deprive minorities of their own identity are involved. The policy of violence against Indigenous nations has its own specific dynamics. This is due to the fact, that in many cases these communities have been deprived of their rights to the land which they had inhabited for thousands of years, brutally pushed to the margin of culture, frequently indoctrinated and deprived of national identity by a culturally foreign education system – imposing the language,

ways of perceiving the world and values of the dominant groups, and in some cases – exterminated.

The overall picture which emerges from the history of conquest of the territories of what is now Canada, portrays the colonisers' activities as related to the increasing processes of assimilation, acculturation and destruction of Indigenous populations. In the first stages, this was connected to the use of representatives of Indigenous communities as an aid to the annexation of newly discovered territories – for example, as trading partners and guides. In subsequent stages, measures were taken to 'civilise' the Indigenous people. Over time, the brutal activities of state institutions, combined with the destructive religious influence of the Christian churches, resulted in dramatic changes in the ways in which Indigenous minorities functioned, related to the severance of their cultural ties – which was associated, in the case of numerous ethnic groups, with rejection of their own customs and beliefs and often with destruction of their culture or language – and, in some situations, with brutal extermination of the Indigenous population.

The institutions very often used as an instrument for implementing these types of policies are schools. This was also the case in the development of modern Canada. In the first stages, education was used by church institutions to impose the Christian religion. In later phases, the predominant focus was on indoctrination with state ideologies (particularly national ones).

The aim of this article is to present the selected problems related with the origin, development and functioning of residential schooling in Canada. It is an example of how instrumental, but also oppressive and destructive, was the functioning of the Canadian education system, created for children from Indigenous minorities. The main axis of the article is to show the subordinate role of institutional education in the Christianisation and state-building processes of modern Canada.

### **The origins and development of education for Indigenous minorities in Canada**

The origins of schools for Indians and Inuits in the territory of present-day Canada are connected with missionary activities. One may also state that it coincides with the beginning of European settlement in the area. As early as 1632, Father Paul Le Jeune, the head of the Jesuit Mission in New France, began his work. He made the decision to educate Indigenous people, which would introduce them to the influence of European civilisation. Upon this premise he opened a school in Quebec in 1635, for French and Indian children. It was an unsuccessful endeavour and the school was closed as early

as 1642. Another attempt was made by the Ursuline Sisters, who established a school for Indian girls in 1639 (Waller, 1965).

In 1668, Louis XIV sent a letter to bishop Laval, encouraging him to take action aimed at changing the lifestyle of Indians and making them adopt the French way of life. For this purpose, the bishop made an effort to establish a school for Indian boys. In addition, a few years later, he allocated funds for the work of three teachers to teach Indian women spinning and knitting. In other areas of modern Canada missionaries undertook educational activities as well. In 1676, the Sulpicians opened a vocational school for Indians on the Island of Montreal. In turn, members of the Order of Augustinian Recollects undertook activities among the Montagnais and Algonquin tribes of the Saguenay settlement, the lower St. Lawrence River and the Ottawa River (Waller, 1965).

In contrast to education in the United States, where there was a clear separation of church and state, the involvement of churches in schooling in Canada, as well as the role of religion in education, increased with each decade (Noonan, Hallman and Scharf, 2006).

The dynamics of the conflicts between the British and French empires also had a profound impact on both the functioning of the Indian and Eskimo tribes inhabiting these areas of the North American continent (Rusinova, 2003), as well as the development of educational institutions created for the Indigenous people. When New France was absorbed into the British Empire in 1763, the Roman Catholic Church's involvement in Indigenous education was already significant (Waller, 1965).

Meanwhile, the growing amount of interactions between the Inuit and Europeans in the north-eastern areas of the American continent was connected with the activities of the Hudson's Bay Company. Between 1670 and 1870, the Company was associated with the conquest and annexation of the Far North territories (White, Beavon, Peters and Spence, 2009). The first white teachers in the polar areas were also missionaries. The first schools in the Arctic areas began to operate around 1790 on the Labrador Peninsula – in the towns of Nain, Okak and Hopedale. They offered education in the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, with the main emphasis on religious education. By the late 1740s, many Inuit were competent in reading and some even worked as teachers. Inuktitut remained the primary language of education (Dorais, 2002).

Gradually, the influence of other churches began to emerge as well. At the same time, there was a constant competition between the various denominations for influence over Christianisation processes, and the relationship

with the Hudson's Bay Company, which held an actual monopoly over the trade and shaped the relations with the Indigenous people. This competition was particularly noticeable between the representatives of Roman Catholic and Protestant missions (McCarthy, 1995).

Competition between missionaries of different denominations translated into relations within Indian communities. Conversions to Christianity were accompanied by intra-tribal conflicts, which over time took on the appearance of permanent divisions. They were caused, among other things, by activities related with Christianisation, the essence of which was the eradication of traditional beliefs, considered pagan by the missionaries (Rusinowa, 2010).

Typically, fanatical priests were convinced of the need to Christianise the pagans they would meet on their way. For example, Protestant missionaries systematically reinforced negative images of the natives, often portraying themselves in the press as 'Indian experts'. Their aim was to contrast the image of the evil, savage Indian with the civilised man of the West. It legitimised the imperative of Christianisation of Indigenous people (with the aim of 'saving' them), while providing arguments for its proponents (Higham, 2000).

The first Protestant church schools were opened under the auspices of the Church of England Missionary Society. The missionaries made successful attempts to train Indigenous teachers, who carried on the work of teaching literacy among their fellow members of the Mohawk tribe. In 1927, schools were established in Salt Springs and Newmarket, while in 1838 a school was established in Manitowaning, which was moved to Sheguinadah in 1864 (Dorais, 2002).

The activities of the Roman Catholic Church at this time were also rapidly developing in the southern areas of Canada (Waller, 1965). In turn, in the western areas of the Northwest Territories, the development of mission schools took place around 1860, in Arctic Quebec in 1872. The main purpose of establishing mission schools was to convert Indians and Inuit to the Christian faith. In the early period, their activity was oriented almost exclusively towards reading 'sacred' texts and providing them with attitudes and values characteristic of the Christian religion. This is how the activity of the Missionary Oblates in converting the Dene Indians is characterised by M. McCarthy: 'In fulfilling their Catholic preaching mission, the Oblates taught the Dene Indians to read catechisms and songbooks. The syllabic system they adopted was ideally suited for this purpose. During their first contacts, the priests taught the syllabic alphabet to selected Dene representatives, while giving them copies of small religious booklets. In the winter

encampments, these individuals taught the other members of the tribe the ways of reading the syllabograms or use the booklets to lead and teach their own prayer groups. This type of literacy served primarily to teach Catholicism' (McCarthy, 1995).

In practice – it is fair to say – there were no curricula and the missionaries taught according to their own discretion and individual approach. In doing so, they used methods drawn from their own experience in European schools (Vick-Westgate, 2002).

In the northern areas of Canada, missionaries, in search of ways to provide religious education for Indians and the Inuit, developed a method of writing down Indigenous languages using symbols representing the individual syllables of the spoken language. The syllabic alphabet, created on the basis of English, enabled representatives of these tribes to communicate with each other through the written word. A. Vick-Westgate, characterising these processes in relation to Canadian Inuit, writes that 'an Inuktitut speaker could master the syllabic system in a matter of a few hours and transmit it to others. The Inuit incorporated the syllabic alphabet into their set of essential skills and reached a level of reading competence in nearly 90% of the population. Paradoxically, the emergence of a formal education system, mainly based on English language taught by outsiders, unfamiliar with Inuktitut, has led to a decrease in reading literacy rates in the eastern Arctic areas' (Vick-Westgate, 2002). It is worth emphasising here, however, that the main purpose of equipping Indians and Inuit with reading skills was the process of Christianisation.

With the passing of the British North America Act in 1876, the federal government had little involvement in the development of education for Indians. Reports indicated that fewer than 50 schools for Indians were in operation during the 1867-1868 school year. It was not until the passage of the first Indian Act in 1876, and the treaties signed between the federal government and Indian tribes from 1871 to 1921, that the Canadian government made a greater commitment to aboriginal education. This included, above all, more systematic funding of institutions established for representatives of Indigenous communities (Waller, 1965).

The formation of a cohesive education system for children from aboriginal minorities in Canada began in 1868, when the Canadian government decided to finance fifty-seven schools. In doing so, it is worth noting that only two of these (Mount Elgin and Mohawk) were residential institutions. It was not until 1879 that two more residential schools were established – Shingwauk and Wikwemikong in the Ontario province. However, in the



following years, the number of such schools began to increase rapidly. In 1923 there were seventy-one schools in Canada, sixteen of which were industrial schools and fifty-five boarding schools (Milloy, 2003).

In general, the actions taken with regard to Indigenous communities in Canada were very similar to those of the US. This is how I. Rusinowa characterises the actions undertaken towards Indigenous communities in Canada: 'The policy of the Canadian government towards Indigenous people, as it was in the United States, consisted of plans to civilise, protect and assimilate them. Hence, following the American model, the creation of nomadic reserves was promoted, and the surplus of the tribal lands was meant to belong to the state, which would allocate them to future white farmers coming from Europe to settle. The reserves were to be the centre for converting nomadic Indians into a settled or semi-settled population and, sometime in the future, making them full-fledged Canadian voters' (Rusinowa, 2010). Depriving the representatives of the Indigenous tribes of land and further influence over the economy on the lands they had occupied previously was also an important political objective (Thielen-Wilson, 2014).

Thus, it can be argued that from the early eighteenth century onwards, the policy of Canadian governments was aimed at assimilating Indigenous minorities with the dominant mainstream culture and rationality (Ormiston, 2002). By contrast, in the late nineteenth century, Canadian education policy towards Indigenous nations became one of the key elements in the formation and unification of the state. It was based on the set of values representing the Western civilisation, including the idea of the white race supremacy over other racial and ethnic categories. From this perspective, 'education became a key element in the assimilation-oriented politics of nineteenth-century Canada'. The essence of the functioning of education became the socialisation and formation of the younger generation in a framework of Western, capitalist and Christian values (Miller, 1987). The emerging residential schools became extremely important institutions serving this purpose.

### **The functioning of residential schooling for Indigenous minorities in Canada**

It can be argued that in the 1870s, the policy towards Indigenous minorities changed. The Dominion of Canada began to develop a more integrated educational policy. This referred, on the one hand, to a better organisation of education related to the development of school networks and, on the other hand, to the intensification of assimilation practices.

It became the aim of school inspectors and missionaries to encourage parents from Indian and Inuit communities to entrust their own children to residential schools and, in the event of non-compliance, to use coercion and forcibly remove their children and place them in such institutions. What is worth noting, was the commonly held belief among educational bureaucrats and missionaries about the necessity and legitimacy of efforts to separate children from indigenous culture. The influence of the student's family on his or her upbringing was to be minimised, as it was seen as harmful and incompatible with the values conveyed by educational institutions. To this end, residential schools were established at a considerable distance from Indian reserves and Inuit communities scattered in the far northern areas of the country. Such schools were being established consistently in the last decades of the 19th century and, with a few exceptions, continued to operate until the 1960s (Miller, 1987). However, the last residential school did not close until the 1980s.

The development of residential schools was primarily related to missionary activities (Hobart and Brant, 1966). From 1840 onwards, there was a steady increase in their number, with 54 schools in operation in 1898, 74 schools in 1920, and as many as 81 in 1946. By the mid-1940s, 46 institutions belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, 20 to the Anglican Church, 12 to the United Church of Canada and the remaining three schools to the Presbyterian Church. Between 1840 and 1980, an estimated 125,000 Indigenous minority students went through the residential school system (Thomas 2003). J. R. Miller states that during this period, 'Indian youth were sent far from the family home to "industrial schools", institutions run in accordance with the Christian creed, supported by government funds, where they were expected to learn a trade and acquire Euro-Canadian ways of life' (Miller, 1987).

The development of universal schooling began in 1920, when compulsory education was extended to all Canadian children. Previously, schooling applied only to Indians, under the Indian Act established between Indian tribes and the Canadian Crown in 1876. Consequently, the introduction of schooling for Indians became one of the policies of the Canadian federal government. It is worth to note that the Inuit never participated in any form of treaty negotiation, as was the case with the Indian tribes. However, as they were considered included in the umbrella term 'Indigenous people of Canada', they were subject to the same conditions as Indians (Thorleifsen, Larsen, 1995). Consequently, most Eskimo children began their education in residential schools. From 1920 onwards, mission schools were established through financial support from the state (Magosci, 2002).

Already at the end of the 19th century, and in the first decades of the 20th century, legal conditions were becoming increasingly strict towards children from Indigenous communities, as well as with regard to colonial education. Parents were punished for not sending their children to school. Children could be arrested for no reason and forcibly sent to school. Land and grounds could be confiscated for an emerging educational institution. The federal government's education policies entered every sphere of life of Indigenous communities, incorporating children, families, socio-cultural relations and land rights (De Leeuw, 2009).

From 1923 onwards, changes were introduced to the naming of schools. Boarding schools, in 1923, were classified as 'residential schools'. In a similar way began the classification of industrial schools, which were initially more oriented towards vocational training than boarding schools. Hence, from 1923 onwards, both types of school were replaced by the category of residential schools in government reports and statistics (Milloy, 2003).

In fact, such institutions offered education at a very low level. The education programme was based on a basic range of general subjects, with a strong emphasis on vocational ones. The aim of the education was to prepare young people from Indigenous minorities for low-prestige occupations such as a carpenter, printer, blacksmith, farmer - for boys, or a nursing assistant, hygienist, and domestic work such as a cleaner, cook, washerwoman - for girls (Miller, 1987). R. Makka and A. Fleras state in this context that 'the residential school system had a much more fundamental goal than mere education: the separation of children from their own homes and parents and their forced assimilation into mainstream society by producing a separate subclass of workers, farmers and their wives. This programme involved not only the destruction of indigenous languages and cultures, but also the eradication of the indigenous spiritual sphere and its replacement by the Christian faith, under the assumption that it was necessary to "kill the Indian inside the child"' (Makka and Fleras, 2005).

The nature of the Indian child's upbringing in residential schools was different from the nature of the one experienced by the white child in Canadian education. This was, for example, because of white educators' different perceptions of white and Indian childhood, and the need to transform Indian childhood in the process of becoming an adult - along the lines of white children. While the process of raising a white child contained all the elements of imitation in the Europeanised adult world (and, before all, natural modelling in the family and community), the process of raising an Indian child in a residential school was primarily to prevent him or her from becoming



an adult following the example of his or her own family and the Indigenous community. As S. de Leeuw puts it, 'the students in the residential school were more than just children. They were *Indigenous* children, fundamentally different within the context of residential schools, created, operated and directed by non-Indigenous adults. These residential school institutions were sites, where the transformation of Indigenous children into adults, or in fact into non-Indigenous adults, was carried out, according to the white colonial template, created with the categorical intention of shaping the de-indigenised aboriginal citizens of Canada' (De Leeuw, 2009).

The styles of education and upbringing applied to Indian children and young people in residential schools often employed typical strategies used in total, closed institutions, such as convents, the military, and prisons. One of these became the use of military drill to socialise children in residential schools (Habkirk, 2017).

This idea was taken from the general idea promoted by Minister Egerton Ryerson in the province of Upper Canada, starting in 1840. Its essence was the application of drill in all schools, with the aim of implementing discipline and maintaining social order in the emerging state. Another context for this intention was the attempt to solve the problems of adolescent youth (primarily boys) deprived of proper adult care, in working-class neighbourhoods of large Canadian cities such as Toronto or Montreal. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation were causing increasing problems among young men growing up (such as alcohol abuse, smoking and fights). To counteract these phenomena, the reformers promoted a variety of activities conducted within church organisations (such as Sunday schools), sports activities, scouting exercises or cadet corps. Through these types of activities, young people were supposed to acquire proper moral habits, civic responsibility and, on the other hand, avoid the negative effects associated with increasing urbanisation processes (Habkirk, 2017).

In the 1850s and 1860s, youth-oriented activities increasingly focused on the formation of paramilitary movements and cadet organisations, fitting into a socialisation programme based on Christian and Victorian values. This is how E. J. Habkirk describes these processes: 'Cadet corps became a way of teaching young people discipline, punctuality, dutifulness, patriotism, honour and precision. Their proponents argued that cadet programmes could interrupt the process of feminisation of young boys caused by the increasing number of female teachers in the public school system' (Habkirk, 2017).

These ideas – widely present in the education system in Canada – found a fertile ground in the increasingly widespread residential schools

for Indigenous minorities. Their programme included the introduction of subjects present in public schools and, in addition, orientation of education towards vocational subjects. After the Northwest Territories became part of Canada in 1870, Nicolas Flood Davin (lawyer, writer, politician and advisor to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald), was asked to develop a strategy for Indigenous education in Canada. For this purpose, he visited residential schools in Canada and the United States. His conclusions (Davin Report, 1879) were based on E. Ryerson's blueprint for education and his belief that leaving Indigenous communities to their own ways would result in their destruction. To achieve this, he advocated the acculturation of representatives of Indigenous communities into the Euro-Canadian way of life and thinking. This task was to be accomplished with the use of religious education and disconnection of children from parental influence. The essence of this process was supposed to be the separation of children from their home environment (Habkirk, 2017).

The use of military drill and the organisation of schools along the principles of military institutions became a common occurrence in residential schools – although one not assumed directly by Reyerson or Davin. It was usual in educational practice that school principals and administrators tended to favour this type of arrangement. Such military socialisation served to organise the school appropriately, and the introduction of a military drill facilitated the implementation of adherence to the values of the dominant cultural trend of the society (Habkirk, 2017).

The very architecture and specificity of the geographical location of these institutions was connected to the functions they were supposed to perform in relation to the representatives of Indigenous communities. S. de Leeuw, analysing the functioning of residential schools in British Columbia, notes that 'they operated on the basis of a clear message of assimilation-oriented policy: the task of residential education was to break the ties that bound children with their communities and cultures and to integrate them into the dominant community. The buildings and material structure of residential schools, in conjunction with their curricular and ideological assumptions present in pedagogical practice, were a reflection of broad colonial efforts directed at Indigenous communities. Architecturally and materially, residential schools transmitted a colonial narrative of non-Indigenous domination over First Nations representatives' (De Leeuw, 2007).

It must be pointed out that the buildings were often located in areas which contradicted the 'uncivilised wilderness' of the original socialisation sites of Indian children. They were therefore located in open spaces, which

had been previously used for agriculture. They were intended as a contrast and negation of the indigenosity associated with savagery and to confirm Euro-colonial ideas of civilisation and progress.

The architecture of residential schools in itself provided an alienating environment for children previously brought up in very different circumstances. Buildings with branching hallways and large sleeping quarters represented the lack of anonymity and reflected the control exercised by school personnel over the children. The school buildings were designed to facilitate the monitoring of pupils' movements, as well as their discipline. In practice, the open rooms and cross-plan corridors gave the personnel a full view of any movement taking place on the premises. Residential school buildings usually consisted of several buildings. The main school building and dormitories were surrounded by smaller buildings which included the chapel, rooms for teachers and staff, utility rooms (barn, stable) and homesteads for livestock. Many residential schools used pupils both for field work and for the construction of the school premises themselves.

S. de Leeuw quotes a statement by the chief of the Nuu-chah-nulth tribe, who characterises the location and rules of the schools attended by the children of his tribe as follows: 'Usually located on or near the top of a hill, they provided an imposing, disturbing and even frightening impression in the eyes of children unaccustomed to such places. The relatively large buildings of the residential school made their importance known far beyond and above any traditional local authority, including the Grand Chief of the Tribe. On their first day at the residential school, along with the trauma of being separated from their parents, the new students of the Nuu-chah-nulth tribes were forced to undergo physical conditions in these institutions, which were very different from those present in their family homes' (De Leeuw, 2007).

The students' experiences in residential institutions were therefore connected with an immense discrepancy between their own culture and the Euro-Canadian culture represented by the school staff. The culture shock was therefore present in every aspect of the Indian children's functioning in their new, foreign environment.

The comments by former residential school students also give testimony to the alienation and trauma experienced by children – uprooted from their traditional environments – in these institutions. This is how one student of the Kamloops Indian Residential School recalled the beginnings of his stay: 'When I got to Kamloops Residential School, it looked huge. I remember thinking about how I would fit in there when everything was so huge. When my father spoke to me, it seemed to me that his voice sounded muffled and

echoed. Everything there seemed alien and strange, you could smell the floor polish. As I climbed the stairs to the first floor, the lights went out and I was left in darkness. When I finally knelt down to pray, I disappeared under the bed, it was so high... I remember crying there and crying...' (De Leeuw, 2007).

Residential school timetables were planned in detail. In doing so, they reflected an order completely foreign to the ways of spending time in Indigenous communities. The daily schedule was subordinate to white ways of spending time and completely incompatible with the indigenous manners of functioning in the unit in reality. One must therefore conclude that the daily schedule itself (oriented towards the Euro-Canadian way of life) served as an element of assimilation (Barman, Hébert, McCaskill, 1986).

Subsequent phases of educational policy towards Indigenous peoples were reflected in transformations regarding the ways in which residential schools operated (Thornton and Todd, 2001). For example, the victory of the liberal option in the 1896 election laid the foundation for a reduction in funding for Indigenous minority schools. This is how J. R. Miller describes the aforementioned changes: 'from Sifton's time until unification in 1923, Ottawa took measures to reduce spending on residential schools, resulting in the closure of some institutions, a shift concerning the establishment of the so-called "new improved day schools", or ignoring the educational needs of Indian groups. This shift was the result of growing bureaucratic and political disappointment' (Miller, 1987).

The role of churches in the sphere of school management has been widely debated within government elite circles (Woods, 2013). The problems that existed in the sphere of residential education provided by various Christian denominations concerned various aspects of their functioning (Miller, 1996). This is noteworthy primarily for the competition between representatives of different denominations (resulting in written petitions, protests and demands addressed to the authorities). Moreover, the effects of the mission schools were meagre, disproportionate with relation to the invested amounts (Miller, 1987). It is also worth pointing out other – extremely controversial – aspects of the functioning of Canadian residential education. This is how R. M. Thomas describes the aforementioned phenomena: 'The leaders of residential schools have been blamed for various types of violence against students – mainly sexual abuse, psychological violence, and the destruction of students' indigenous culture. It has been found that the suffering experienced by students in residential schools caused them extreme emotional distress that lasted for years, often resulting in self-identity disorders, alcoholism and an inability to cope with adult life' (Thomas, 2003).

The development of Indigenous education in most northern areas of Canada was much weaker. In fact, in the 1930s and 1940s, no state schools for the Inuit were really in operation. The government's policy was that the organisation of state education for the Inuit was an unnecessary expense. In addition, there was a belief that the Inuit did not need education, as they should remain hunters or trappers. In fact, as late as 1946, the presumed objectives of education for the Inuit in government documents were to adapt them to the needs of the white people's economy. At the same time, state grants to financially support mission schools were scarce, and supported by political expectations of a steady reduction in such grants (McLean, 1995).

The actions in residential schools towards children placed there were undertaken on a large scale and subordinated to the civilising mission. They referred to a broad spectrum of activities and covered all spheres of children's lives. The specific nature of residential school life facilitated the implementation of the planned civilising programme.

One of the first and most visible aspects of the transformation, to which the children entering residential schools were subjected, was the change in their external appearance. First and foremost, it is important to note the great determination of the staff at residential schools to make Indian children look like white ones. This referred, among other things, to the matter of clothing – children were not allowed to wear traditional attire. Another of the activities was the standard procedure of cutting hair. Cutting children's hair referred, on the one hand, to hygiene and cleanliness. On the other hand, its purpose was a symbolic rejection of 'savagery' and identification with civilisation.

The phobias of residential school personnel against 'dirtiness', 'paganism' and civilisational inferiority of indigenous culture often took in form of bullying, coercion and punishments inflicted on the Indian children. Such actions also referred to the racial context, including the skin colour of Indian children. On many occasions, children experienced contempt for their appearance, hair or skin colour, etc. The personnel at residential schools openly flaunted the racial superiority of white people. S. de Leeuw quotes a statement by M. A. Roberts, who attended St. Mary's Indian Residential School from 1946 to 1957 – with relation to precisely this aspect of violence against children. This is how M. A. Roberts describes her experience in the bathroom while bathing: 'There were five showers, but without curtains separating them and when I was studying in the earlier years we had an older girl student to help us scrub ourselves. Then, usually a nun would stand in the doorway to check whether we were clean. I have naturally dark skin, so I was always turned back. I always had to go and wash again because the nun



thought I was dirty. I was turned back not because of the dirt but because of my darker complexion and she always stopped me' (De Leeuw, 2007).

An extremely significant element of the planned ethnic extermination was the language policy implemented towards the Indigenous communities. It was a product of the approach to the matters of Christianisation, acculturation and assimilation. In most schools established by missionaries in Canada, English language was taught. As previously mentioned, missionaries of some denominations also used indigenous languages. It must be said, however, that in the 19th century, no national policy existed in Canada regarding the use of English in the educational sphere. Decisions about the use of English in the educational sphere within Indigenous schools (including residential schools) were the domain of school leaders, dependent on educational administrators, and changed from decade to decade (Griffith, 2017).

However, one of the key actions taken against children from Indigenous communities in Canadian residential schools was to prohibit the use of their own language. M. A. Tappage's experiences at St Joseph's Mission School in British Columbia are recounted as follows: 'When they heard us talking in Shuswup, we were punished. We had to write on the blackboard a hundred times "I will not speak Indian ever again"'. Meanwhile, E. Brass from a residential school on the Peepeekisis reserve was beaten with a belt for using the language of his tribe at school. He recounts it as follows: 'The use of the Indian language was strictly forbidden and allowed only when relatives were visiting. The aim was to grasp the English language as quickly as possible; however, this also had a negative effect on Indian children by forcing them to reject their own indigenous language and providing them with a sense of inferiority' (Fontaine, 2017). As a consequence of such actions, rooted in symbolic and physical violence, many Indian children lost contact with the language of their own tribe, and the ability to communicate with their families and members of Indigenous communities. Many students of residential schools have lost their sense of cultural belonging and ethnic identity.

L. S. Fontaine draws attention to psychological, as well as physical violence present in residential schools – precisely aimed against the use of indigenous languages. For example, children were beaten with a belt for using their mother tongues. Another example is given by T. Fontaine attending the Fort Alexander Indian Residential School in Manitoba between the ages of 7 and 12: 'I accidentally said something in Ojibwe. The teacher thought I said something about her when a few boys laughed at my words. She screamed and smeared my mouth with soap... I was pushed into the room behind her

chair. It was under the stairs, leading to the second floor, which was used to store brushes and other cleaning materials. I don't remember how long I sat there, but it seemed like an eternity... Eventually, she let me out. Her first word was: "Tiens!" Listen!, coupled with a warning for me not to use my "wild" language again' (Fontaine, 2017). L. S. Fontaine points out that – like many other students – he was punished for using Ojibwe language.

Similar situations occurred in all residential schools. The aim expressed *explicite* by the teachers, and also the rest of the school personnel, was to break away from the indigenous language and switch to the language of the colonisers (English or French). At the same time, the indigenous language was discredited and ridiculed; treated in terms of 'gibberish', 'devil's language', or simply 'savage'.

To conclude this piece of reflection on selected contexts of the activities of residential schools in Canada, it is worth referring to a statement made by one representative of Indigenous communities. This is how a member of the Ojibwa tribe, T. Fontaine, assesses the effects and impact of the activities of the residential schools: 'This was the greatest deception and tragedy perpetrated on Indians and their children in Canada by the residential schools. The removal and separation of young children from their families and the manipulation of their minds to make them hate their "Indianness" was the worst abuse and the most common method used to kill the Indian in us' (Fontaine, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

It can be argued that although the history of Canadian residential schools for Indigenous minorities has gone through a number of phases (looking back to their establishment, reorganisation in 1923, until the end of their operation in the late 1960s), there was no real change in the essence of their operation (Miller, 1987). In fact, although Canadian residential schools were modelled on American educational institutions of this type, they survived longer than those in the United States (Child, 2016).

The nature of numerous aspects of the actual functioning of the residential schools provides an insight into the tremendous devastation they have had on the Indigenous population. Even in the early days of such institutions, many children would die because of illnesses, lack of care, and inadequate nutrition. The poor facilities of residential schools, combined with the violence, terror, and sexual abuse within them, caused irreversible effects on the psyche of children and young people from aboriginal communities.

In the present day, Canada apologises for the harm done to representatives of Indian and Inuit tribes. This refers to both an attempt to prosecute the perpetrators of the wrongs done to Canada's Indigenous citizens who are still alive, as well as moral and financial reparations (Roach, 2014).

The reality, however, is that no apologies or compensation can make amends to the victims (in many cases still living) of the suffering they endured in residential schools. These institutions will remain the symbols of the assimilation, discrimination and ethnic and cultural annihilation (Boffa, 2017), which took place as a part of the Christianisation and state-building processes of modern Canada.

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