



INDIAN RESIDENTIALS SCHOOLS, A CULTURAL GENOCIDE?

Mémoire individuel 2022-23

Directeur de Mémoire :
Sophie Thoma

Pierre Turquin 2eCD

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Terms Definition.....	3
Cultural genocide	3
Indian Residential Schools	3
History of the IRS	4
Assimilation.....	6
Civilizing Mission.....	6
The Assimilation policy in Canada	7
Violences.....	9
Psychological violence	9
The Departure.....	9
At school	10
Physical and sexual abuse	12
Physical violence from the staff	12
Physical violence from the students	13
Sexual abuse on students	13
Conclusion.....	15
Bibliography	17

Introduction

In the recent years, the topic of Indian Residential School has become increasingly important amongst the Canadian Society. The recovery of this national trauma, like some indigenous intellectuals are calling it, is still on going on in the present days. One big step has been reached with the official excuses from the Catholic Church through the voice of the Pope during his state visit in Summer 2022. This is not the only headline that this topic is making here in Europe. Another headline for example is that Inuit activist are asking the French State and the Catholic Church for the extradition of a French-Canadian Priest accused of sexual abuse on children of the Inuit Community in the 1960's.

I personally discovered this subject during my exchange in Canada. I took English lesson there with the other Canadians student in 11th Grade. In Ontario, the English lesson for this grade is focused on Indigenous author and Indigenous culture, so that the student learns about these communities. During the class talked a lot about this subject, since it is directly influencing the work made by the Indigenous artists. The teacher often defined this the Indian Residential School as a cultural genocide organized by the Canadian State. During this time, I have asked myself the question, as a European not directly impacted by this subject: "What is a Cultural Genocide, and can we define the Indian residential school system as a cultural genocide?" My school in Luxembourg, allows me to draft yearly research allowing me to ask myself a question and find an answer to it. So, I wanted to use my experience from my stay in Canada, so I could show what I have learned from it, and thus answer the questions I have asked myself. After discussion with my school, they accepted it as a subject and I changed my question to "*Indian Residential Schools, a cultural genocide?*"

I want to make sure that this work is not a piece of scientific literature, since I do not have the qualification necessary. I want also to acknowledge the fact that I had difficulties to access resources since the subject is not well known in Europe, leaving me with most of my sources being material accessible by everyone on the internet. An example for the difficulties to get local resources, are the books I have cited in my work *Residential Schools Righting Canada's wrongs* and *Residential Schools*. Those two books were not available in Europe and I had to order them on a Canadian website, pay import taxes and wait almost 5 months to get them.

Even with the difficulties I experienced I enjoyed writing this work and I hope that I could bring this subject in Europe. I hope that you will also enjoy this work.

Terms Definition

To fully understand and answer the question, I have asked myself, I will have to define and explain two terms. The first one being the term *cultural genocide* and the second term being *Indian Residential School*. These two terms are the key parts to understand the question.

Cultural genocide

There is no clear or internationally accepted definition of a cultural genocide. This term was presented by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 as part of the broader term genocide. However, it is not recognized as a genocide by the UN under the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGC). According to some scholars, the cultural genocide was removed under the pressure from colonial powers (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). Furthermore, the term *cultural genocide* can be replaced by the term *ethnocide*, however term is not defined by any international law and mixes ethnicity and cultural group. So, to define what is a cultural genocide, it is necessary to define by ourselves.

The term *cultural genocide* can be divided in to two words *cultural* and *genocide*. The word *cultural* is an adjective that derivates from the word *culture* and the term *cultural* is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “relating to the habits, traditions, and beliefs of a society” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Etymologically genocide is composed of two words. The first one being *genos* (Greek word for race and people) and the second one being the suffix *-caedo* (Latin for act of killing). So, the word genocide according to its etymology means: the act of killing a race. Furthermore, the UNGC mentions in it its Article 2, that the crime of genocide needs to be intentional.

However, since here the term *genocide* is mixed with the term *cultural*, we can define it as such: “the act of killing a race’s culture”, which means the eradication of the habits, traditions, and beliefs a group of people. In most cases, a cultural genocide includes the removal of cultural artefacts, such as literature or any holy relics. Furthermore, the language of a group can be forbidden in the public space and to remove the targeted culture, the people are discriminated and often forcefully assimilated into other cultural groups. Often a cultural genocide comes along an ethnic cleansing, to remove any trace of this group, but it is not the only limited use of a cultural genocide.

Indian Residential Schools

Indian Residential Schools (IRS) are boarding schools, who were specialised in the treatment of children from the Indigenous communities. In this memoire, I will mostly focus on the one established in Canada, as they are the one, I mostly heard about. Furthermore, it is to be noted that Canada is not the country that invented these schools. In Canada those were public schools, however those schools were administrated by different Christian churches. The goal behind these Schools was to assimilate the Indigenous communities in the society wanted by the British then by the Canadians expecting them: “to become subsistence farmers and labourers, remaining largely on the bottom rung of the Canadian economic ladder” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). As the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Macdonald, said in 1883 in front of the Parliament:

“When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that the Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”

(Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada, 1883, pp. 1107-1108)

The philosophy of the Indian Residential Schools can be seen as part of the vaster idea of the “civilizing mission.” (See Chapter Civilizing Mission)

History of the IRS

“Rome has not been built in a day” is a popular saying around the world. The same applies to the Indian residential schools. In this chapter we are going to see the history of the Indian Residential schools in Canada from the very first traces of such schools to the closing of the last residential school in 1997.

The creation of residential of assimilation-era began around the 1820s in Canada. However, it must be noted that the idea of educating the indigenous people to make them “civilized,” is not dating from that period. Traces of schools opened for the Indigenous community, can be found at the beginning of the colonisation of Canada by the French. These schools were often opened and run by clergymen. However, they did not find a remarkable success and disappeared around the beginning of the 18th century. The Idea can be resumed by the words of Father Andrew White, a Jesuits missionary who established a mission in the United States in 1634, who told an indigenous leader that he was there to “extend civilization and instruction to his ignorant race and show them the way to heaven” (Foley, 1878)¹.

During and even before this period, treaties were signed between the local authorities of whom were mostly British and the Indigenous communities regarding the education of Indigenous children, with notably two different philosophies in mind. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Indigenous communities viewed the treaties as “a tool to maintain cultural and political autonomy” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) and education as a “means of ensuring that their children [...] could also survive economically within a changing political and economic” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). On the other hand, the British saw “both Treaties and schools as a means of gaining control over Aboriginal lands and eradicating Aboriginal language and cultures” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The British wanted that the First Nation children would abandon their culture and that they would be assimilated in the white society, as part of the lower strata and be easily exploitable. This “mixed” assimilation policy is due to the widespread idea that the Aboriginal people were inferior to the white people and needed to the white men to thrive in the civilization.

Those policies were implemented in the *Gradual Civilisation Act* (1857) and the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* (1869), who were established before the unification of Canada. In those Acts the French and British culture was seen as superior and that Indigenous communities needed to embrace those cultures. In 1876 the Indian Act was passed by the Canadian Parliament. This act is still regulating the Indigenous Community and the involvement of the Canadian State in their live, luckily with amendments. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “the Indian Act sought to place First Nations individuals and communities, their lands, and their finances under federal government control. Real authority on a reserve rested not with the elected band chiefs and councils, whose powers were already limited and who could be dismissed by the government, but with the federally appointed Indian agents.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Furthermore, this act also founded officially Indian Residential Schools and continued the doctrine of forced assimilation.

¹The veracity of this quote should be taken with a certain amount of caution as the source I found dates from the 19th century whereas the episode reported dates from the 17th century.

In 1879, the Prime Minister Sir Macdonald commissioned a report on the American Boarding-school system for the Indigenous community. The report supported the importation of the American system and that the Indigenous children will have to be “kept constantly within the circle of civilized conditions” (Davin, 1879). He supported an increased collaboration between the Canadian State and the different

Christian Churches. However, he recommended: “Not more than four industrial boarding schools ought to be established at first.” (Davin, 1879). He also stated that “as Bands (Indigenous Tribes) become more amenable to the restraints of civilization education should be made compulsory.” (Davin, 1879). In short Davin recommended a gradual installation of Residential Schools run by the different Churches with governmental fundings. His recommendations were only implemented 4 years later, with parliament authorizing the funding of 3 schools, allowing the first one to open in December 1883 and in 1894 attendance to schools was made mandatory for all Indigenous child between 7 and 16 years. From this date on, the number of Residential Schools continued to rise until the 1960’s as seen on *Figure 1*. Up until 1969, the schools were continued to run by the different churches involved until the Department of Indian Affairs took over the schools and slowly began to close them, closing the last one in 1997. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission those schools allowed at least 150 000 Indigenous children to get an “education” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Number of residential schools and residences, 1867–1998

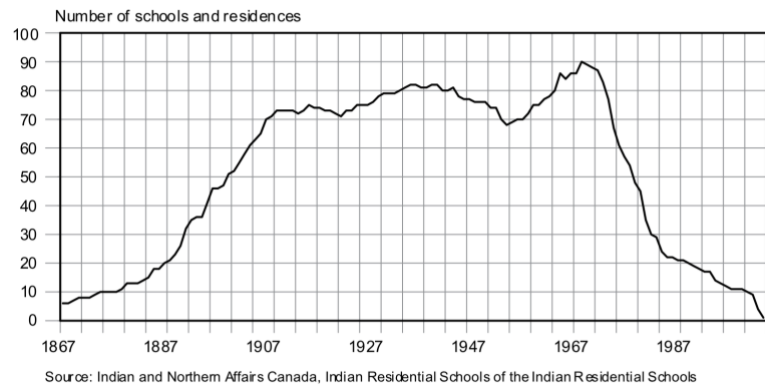


Figure 1 ([Source](#))

Assimilation

As already told before the policy on which the Indian Residential Schools were based upon is Assimilation of the Indigenous community into the more “dominant” and “civilized” white culture. The Canadian government mostly focused on the children with the idea that removing the child from his community would remove him from the influence of the Indigenous community. In practice this policy mostly translated into the Indian Residential Schools but also in other policies, such as policy of certificate of enfranchisement, with whom they could “vote federal elections, sue the government and obtain rights that were otherwise denied to them by the Indian Act” in exchange for their status (Florence, 2021). Furthermore, through the Indian Act, certain ceremonies were forbidden thus leading to certain artifacts being seized and sold to different museum.

In the eyes of the french author, Paul Niger, the policy of assimilation is the most supreme form of colonialism. According to him the policy of assimilation dates to the Roman Empire, where civil rights were only allowed if you were considered as a citizen thus “civilised.” (Niger, 1962) In his eyes assimilation can help the coloniser. It allows to keep him control over the country if he can successfully import all his “cultural” specificities (law, cultural ideas, and values) and thus create a homogenous society across his empire. However, the coloniser needs to make allies in all strata of the society to implement those “cultural” specificities (Niger, 1962). However, in most of the cases the coloniser used mostly this policy in way that favours his interest. One of the examples he gives, the coloniser used the pretext of the disparities between the Indigenous communities as a way for him to implement a system where the local colonial administrators held a lot of powers over those communities. (Niger, 1962)

However, according to Paul Niger, assimilation can also easily backfire, leaving the coloniser without any control of the area due to the creation of a counterculture to the one wanted by the coloniser. Or due to a refusal of such a new identity and culture and thus the need to return to their original culture. (Niger, 1962) One example that Paul Niger gives are the Aluku and Saramkas from the hinterlands of French Guyana, who originated from escaped or rebelling slaves. Leaving them to create their own indigenous culture, inspired from their African roots. (Niger, 1962)

Civilizing Mission

The policy of Assimilation during the 19th century was based upon the idea of “civilizing mission”. The philosophy of it is that the white man as the most “civilised” culture in the world has a moral duty of freeing them from their old and savage habits. In the words Rudyard Kipling, an English poet, it was “the white Man’s burden.” The roots of the civilising mission can be dated to the 15th century, with the catholic missions in the Spanish colonies and Portuguese colonies. The catholic priest from mostly different orders would try to convert the Indigenous communities to Christianity, while integrating some part of their local culture. Those priests also tried to educate those Indigenous communities and some priests were respected by those communities.

During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century that the ideology of the civilizing mission had a “golden age”. It was used by all the western colonial powers as an excuse for the colonisation of those countries. As example for this is *Figure 2*, an American cartoon made by Victor Gillam in 1899, entitled “The White Man’s Burden”. This cartoon was published after the beginning of the Philippine-American war, were the US annexed all the Philippines, after the disposition of the treaty of Paris concluding the American-Spanish War, despite them declaring them declaring their independence. On this cartoon we can see two white men transporting other people in wicker baskets along an arduous path to a golden statue with the word “civilization” on top of it. One of these white men is John Bull, who represents Great-Britain, and the people that represent the Zulu Nation, China, Soudan, India, Egypt. The other white man is Uncle Sam, who represent the United States and the people that he is transporting are representing Cuba and the Philippines. Meanwhile their goal is civilising those nations, which is represented by this golden statue. However, to get to this goal they will have to overcome multiple obstacle such as: “Slavery,” “Barbarism,” “Ignorance” or “Cannibalism.” This Cartoon calls directly for the Anglo-Saxon societies to carry the burden of civilising those barbaric and ignorant nations.



Figure 2 ([Source](#))

The Assimilation policy in Canada

The policy of assimilation in Canada varied across the ages and Indian Residential Schools were just one aspect of this policy, as already stated in the introduction of this chapter. The policy of assimilation can be traced back to before the creation of the Canadian State, with the British colonies and the British policies of assimilation. Under the Indian Act the statue of Indigenous was created. Under this category the Aboriginal People were given special rights, such as be exempted of taxes, however they considered as mostly second-class citizens. According to Melanie Florence if Aboriginal people wanted to buy alcohol, they had to give up their Indigenous statue (Florence, 2021). Another more recent example concerning the Innuits, from 1945 to 1970 they had to always wear around their wrist or neck a special identification tag. They only got this tag if they were registered with the Canadian Government and this registration was mandatory. This policy was implemented because the federal government wanted “to record census information, trade accounts, medical records and police records accurately in the absence of standardized name spellings and surnames” (Public History Inc, 2006). Furthermore, under the Indian Act of 1867, gave absurd powers to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, who supervised all aspect of the Indigenous communities, an example for that is the Article 6 of this Act : “In a reserve [...] no Indian shall be deemed to be lawfully in possession of one or more of such lots or part of a lot unless he or she has been or shall be located for the same by the band, with the approval of the Superintendent-General”², this meant that in order to own a piece of land you had to get the approval. Under the same article, the price was also determined by the Superintendent-General. Another point the that the Superintendent-General could control was travel from reserve to reserve. It was forbidden for everyone under the provision of Article 11 of the Indian

² Text of the Law found under: <https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9429>

Act of 1867, unless you were a member of the band or you had an authorization of the Superintendent-General, to even “occupy any road [...] running through any reserve”. This measure is clearly there to restrict the movement amongst Indigenous communities. Furthermore, according to Melanie Florence, family living on reserves had difficulties even travelling outside of the reserve, they lived in. This is due to the usage of the “Pass System”, where the Aboriginal people needed “written permission of a government employee known as the Indian Agent” (Florence, 2021) if they wanted to leave the reserve for any reason.

Concerning the cultural artefacts and cultural rituals, those were gradually forbidden. According to the book *Residential Schools* by Melanie Florence, the *Amendment to the Indian Act* of 1884 banned religious ceremonies such as potlaches and Sun Dances. (Florence, 2021) This resulted in the item and clothing used for these ceremonies, being seized from them, and sold to the most offering. One example for this is the fascinating story of the Kwakwaka'wakw sun mask, as reported by the *Globe and Mail*, who has been seized during a raid on a banned ceremony in 1921. During this raid, called the Cranmer Potlach, 750 items have been seized by the Indian Agent William Halliday. Most of those items were displayed and then given to Canadian museum. However, this mask had a different faith along other item. Those were sold Halliday to an amateur and were gradually dispersed around the world. Most of the items returned to the community in 1980's, while this mask only came back in 2019. (Marsha, 2019)

Violencesⁱ

Violence was sadly part of Indian Residential schools' system, due to intent or negligence from the educational staff or the government. Violence was present in the minds of the kids present in those school. This violence took mostly the form of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, leaving students with long lasting trauma that some continue to carry the scars up to this day. It is to be noted that not every student, attending these schools, have this kind of trauma. The experience varies for every person involved in this school and depends on the time were those people attended those schools. The violence was so incredibly present in this schools that the students that attended to those schools are called today "survivors" by the society and even by the Canadian Government through the *Indigenous Service Canada* official website³.

Psychological violence

Psychological violence is the most ordinary form that the survivors experience during their times in the Residential school system. Sometimes this psychological violence was a by-product of the physical and sexual violences, leading to climate of terror amongst the students. This climate of terror was such that, when a survivor told her story to her daughter, her daughter asked why students never rebelled, even though they outnumbered the supervisors, 250 to 4. She simply told her: "They had so much control over us that that people couldn't stop them if they tried." (Loyie, Spear, & Brissenden, 2014)

The Departure

This psychological violence often occurred even before school even began. The children were often picked up from their communities with Indian Agents or priest coming beforehand trying to "convince" the parents to let their children go there. For example, the Indian Agents and Priest often threatened the parents with important consequences if they did not let their children go. Isaac Daniels remembers the day where the Indian Agent came to his home:

"So that night we were going to bed, it was just a one-room shack we all lived in, and I heard my dad talking to my mom there, and he was kind of crying [...]. He said that, "It's either residential school for my boys, or I go to jail." He said that in Cree. So, I overheard him. So I said the next morning, we all got up, and I said, "Well, I'm going to residential school," 'cause I didn't want my dad to go to jail." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

Maureen Gloria Johnson remembers the day of her departure for the Lower Post School in British Columbia:

"I went there with a bus. They load us all up on a bus, and took us. And I remember my, my mom had a really hard time letting us kids go, and she had, she had a really hard time. She begged the priest, and the priest said it was law that we had to go, and if we didn't go, then my parents would be in trouble." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

Vitaline Elsie Jenner, coming from a loving family (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), told her story to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

"My parents were told that we had to go to the residential school. And prior to that, at times, my dad didn't make very much money, so sometimes he would go to the welfare to get, to get ration, or get

³ "All Survivors of Indian Residential Schools, regardless of Indigenous status or place of residence within Canada, are eligible to receive services from the Resolution Health Support Program" (<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581971225188/1581971250953> accessed 10/04/2023 14:10)

some monies to support twelve of us. And my parents were told that if they didn't put us in the residential school that all that would be cut off." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

It is already clear that government official and the churches putted a lot of pressure and threatened the families with physical and financial consequences. Often the departure of a member of the family resulted into a familial trauma. An example for this is Albert Marshall who asked his brother years after he was sent to an Indian Residential School about the reaction of his family. His younger brother told him that the family "said anything for days" and that the father said after a few days: "I failed as a father. I couldn't protect my child [...]" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Some children were kidnapped by the Royal Mounted Police. An example for this is the case of Howard Stacy Jones, who told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2010, that he was kidnapped by the Police in his school yard and that a member of his family witnessed it (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

This clearly shows already a very violent system, who take kids outside of their families and sent them to a faraway place. However sometimes the priests were able to convince the parents and the child to go to the residential school. As the story of Anthony Henry shows it, where a priest, fluent in Ojibway was able to convince his mother to send him to his school (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Furthermore, the priest and government official often told poor families that their children would be better off in those schools. Or the priests often picked up orphans or children, whose parents could not look after them.

At school

The psychological violence never stopped at the school. When the children arrived at the school, they were submitted to one of the most gruesome violence in their culture. The personal cut their hairs. In a lot of Indigenous communities in North America having long hair even for a boy has a lot of cultural significance, for example it can define strength, power, or virility⁴. It can also be considered as an extension of the soul and a way of having a union with the infinite⁵ and cutting those hairs has a lot of significations for those communities. "Many tribes cut their hair while grieving the death of an immediate family member, or to signify a traumatic event or a major life change."⁶ Furthermore cut hairs is never really thrown away, it is often "ceremonially burned with sage or sweetgrass, releasing the hopes, prayers, thoughts, and dreams of the owner to the Creator."⁷ This was such a shock for Campbell Papequash, who testified in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission :

"And then they cut off my beautiful hair. You know and my hair, my hair represents such a spiritual significance of my life and my spirit. [...] I cried and I see them throw my hair into a garbage can, my long, beautiful braids." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Another form of violence that was present on the school ground was simply the fact that they could not speak any word of their language. They had to speak English or French, or they would face physical punishment. Often the first-year students did not understand a single word of English and the staff could not speak any native language. This led to a culture shock that was exacerbated by the fact that the staff expected the children to speak French or English. Often leading in this situation, that Marcel Guiboche experimented:

⁴ Source: <https://www.insider.com/what-hair-signifies-in-native-american-culture-2022-11>

⁵ Source: <https://www.ancientpages.com/2019/09/19/why-do-native-americans-often-wear-long-hair/>

⁶ Source: <https://www.indiantraders.com/blog/why-do-native-americans-wear-their-hair-long.html>

⁷ Source: <https://www.indiantraders.com/blog/why-do-native-americans-wear-their-hair-long.html>

“A sister, a nun started talking to me in English and French, and yelling at me. I did not speak English, and didn’t understand what she, what she was asking. She got very upset, and started hitting me all over my body, hands, legs and back. I began to cry, yell, and became very scared, and this infuriated her more.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

Furthermore, the staff often told the students that their native language was “ugly” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) or that their culture was the “devil’s work”. (Loyie, Spear, & Brissenden, 2014). This put the children in a very difficult position, as they were told that their culture was wrong, while their parents had advised them not to forget their culture.

Another common trait amongst survivors, after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is that most of the survivors during their time in those school felt lonely and deprived of affection and approval, “despite being surrounded by dozens of children” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Furthermore, those students also “emphasized a general atmosphere of fear that permeated their school lives” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). An example for this general atmosphere of fear is the experience of Timothy Henderson for whom every day was a day of fear, not knowing if you were going to be the next victim of insults or humiliation from the staff. He also remembers never hearing a kind word during his stay in two different schools in Manitoba. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Furthermore, this general atmosphere of fear can be amplified by the emotional neglect those children experienced. According to Paul Dixon, who testified in front of Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that when the staff caught one student crying during bed time the whole dormitory was in trouble and you would have to get up as quickly as possible or else the staff would “hit you between your legs, or pull you out of bed by the hair, even if it was a top bunk” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Often, according to multiple survivors, if one child started crying then the whole dormitory would start crying, often ending in children “crying themselves to sleep” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). In the classroom students often also experienced this atmosphere of fear. Sometimes describing it as “a torment” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Some students even froze in the middle of reading or spelling, due to the fear they had. Noel Knockwood told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

“We used to stand up with a reader in our hand and we will be given, each person will be given a paragraph to read.[...] And then when it came my turn, I got up and I started to read the paragraph and I got down a little ways and I come across a word that I could not pronounce and I stopped, because I could not pronounce the word, I didn’t know what to say. [The teacher] had a long wooden pointer, they used to point to the blackboard and she had it in her hand. And she said, “Read!” And I was very frightened and scared as a young, young boy. You know, then she took that pointer and pointed it at me and said, “Read! Read! Read!”

She was shouting at me and I, I couldn’t ’cause I was afraid and she had that pointer, she came closer, then she took that pointer and I raised my hands and she broke the pointer over my arms. And in doing so, I dirtied my pants; I shit myself because of fear. And in doing so she seen what happened, and she said, “You filthy little boy. Get upstairs and go to bed.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

This is sadly not an uncommon experience amongst the testimony gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Often students linked the classroom to the beating and the fear of the beating, especially they feared the stick the teachers had.

This general atmosphere of fear amongst the students often translated in stress, due to understandable reason like moving out in a new world, that often those school represented, or the abuse that the students experienced. An example of stress amongst the students, was bedwetting

(nocturnal enuresis), which is a common sight amongst children up to the age of seven⁸ and according to the American Academy of Paediatrics bedwetting, especially secondary enuresis, can be caused by stress⁹. Often the staff would react very badly to it, sometimes physical punishing the bedwetter by rubbing their face into the wet spot (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) or putting the children in the basement of the school and telling them to wash their sheets and blankets (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Another form of psychological violence was the separation amongst family members, even amongst sibling attending the same school. Children were often placed in school far away from their families, even if they had the luck that the school was near their family home. They had a limited number of visits allowed, but those visit really brought joy to the children. One example for this is the story of Mary Courchene, whose parents “lived only a five-minute walk from the Fort Alexander school”, but could only see her for one hour a week. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

Physical and sexual abuse

Violence was omnipresent in most of the school, as already seen in the Chapter before. However, the staff did not limit themselves in creating an atmosphere of fear they also used physical violence, especially for disciplinary reasons. Some members of the staff even sexually and physically abused the children. In this part we are going to see different experiences from the survivors, who testified in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Physical violence from the staff

As stated in the small introduction of this part of my work, the staff in certain school used violence as a mean of teaching the children the discipline needed to be part of the white society. I already gave some examples in my chapter concerning psychological violence done by the staff of those school. However, it is to be noted that some of those children saw disciplinary violence for the first time in those schools, as show the testimony of Isabelle Whitford. Her father had only raised his voice before to keep his children in control. When she got beaten by the nuns for the first time, she was shocked, because she was never really exposed to this sort of violence. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). It was similar experience for Rachel Chakasim, who also violence for the first time. She told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: “I would see kids getting hit. Sometimes in the classrooms, a yardstick was being used to hit. A nun would hit us. Even though our hair was short as it is, the nuns would grab us by the hair, and throw us on the floor of the classroom.... We never knew such fear before. It was very scary.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Furthermore, according to the testimony of Ricky Kakekagumick, the staff often disciplined the children during the night. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Sometimes, after the experience of Dorothy Jane Beaulieu, the violence was exercised by the staff in a seemingly random fashion. “There’s three of us, we were washing the floor, and the water was getting dirty, you know, so I asked, I said, “Sister, can I change my water?” You know she never said nothing. She was just looking around. So again I asked her. You know the other girls changed their water. I said, “Can I change my water?” I guess I asked her too many times, and she took the pail, and threw it over my head, and just pounding me with, you know, with a mop on my, you know, while that pail was on my head, you know.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

The violence was not limited to beating, but also was able to sometimes burn the children, as the brother of Fred Brass experimented (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The staff would also

⁸ Source : <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15075-bedwetting>

⁹ Source : <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/genitourinary-tract/Pages/Nocturnal-Enuresis-in-Teens.aspx>

strap the children and whip them (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). A punishment existing, in Fort Albany School, there was a punishment called the “electric chair”. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the children were put into and “after being buckled into the chair an electric current from a hand-cranked generator was run into their bodies” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). And it was first being built as an entertainment, but it quickly became a punishment tool. This physical violence exercised by the staff left not only lifelong psychological sequel, but also physical sequels. According to Inez Dieter, her loss in hearing is due to a punishment she received when she was a teenager (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Delores Adolph also suffers a similar issue with her hearing: “The nun slapped me across the face, and, and I had too much soap in my hair, and my ears, and I was trying to get the soap out of my ears and my face, and she gave me one good slap, and, like, and all I saw was stars. And so, I didn’t know that my eardrum was broken at that, at that point. So, after a while, you know, they were getting mad because I, I couldn’t hear what they were saying” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Physical violence from the students

Violence from the staff was not the only violence the student experienced. They also experienced like some other student’s violence from the other students. Often from older students that tried to harass you or beat you up. Some former students describe it as an “jungle” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) and some students even saw the classroom as “the safest place to be in” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). This peer-to-peer violence was often aimed at the new students receiving as an initiation to the school life a beating from the older students. This is what Denis Morrison recalls from the arrival day: “It’s almost like every kid that came in, the new kid that came in, like, you almost had, that’s like being a new, they call us new fish, eh, the new fish and coming into the tank. They used to initiate you, like, they would beat the hell out of you, the other kids would. It wasn’t anybody else, it was the other kids, the older ones, eh. It’s like they, it was like the normal thing to happen. You were the one that had to get beat up now, eh, and so you, you went through the getting beat up.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). According to Clara Quisses, sometimes the older students would even threaten the younger with knife. This violence created a vicious cycle of violence were to survive you would have to be violent against the other students. Leaving some students to rely on their siblings to protect them retaliate with violence. As Daniel Nanooch quickly learned during his school years: “Everybody was fighting me, beating me up because I was alone I had no brothers ... everybody else had their brothers with them but I had nobody there to protect me. So I was fighting, I was getting beat up so when I think back as a little child in the mission, I remember all those crying for somebody to see they’re getting beat up by the nuns, or by the other kids, because they knew I was there alone so they could hit me and there was nobody to protect me.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

Sexual abuse on students

Students in those schools were sadly exposed to sexual abuse from the staff members even from a very young age. This sexual abuse often went from a hand in the pants to all full-on penetration or to even a “broomstick handle shoved up the¹⁰ ass” of a student, as witnessed by Raynie Tuckanow (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission some sexual abusers offered their victim treats and favours, like oranges or bananas, while other used violence and threats to make them comply (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Mary Vivier remembers that sexual abuse was tied with discipline in her school, with the head priest tying up children to a leaning chair in his office, removing all of their clothes and telling them while rubbing

¹⁰ The original declaration is “a broomstick handle shoved up his ass”, however I took the liberty to change the phrase to make it more coherent in the text.

them: “You shouldn’t have done that, you shouldn’t have done this.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The violence was also sometimes done by the female members of the staff. Fred Brass told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, what he experienced after he went to her to get some consoling after being beaten up: “(She) made me put my hands down her panties and made me feel her up and this went on for a long, long time. That was supposed to be the one that was supposed to comfort me and help me. But she used me in that way for her own self-gratitude” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). This sexual abuse not only came from the staff members, but also from visitors from the outside. Vitaline Elsie Jenner told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the day a bishop came to visit the school. She sat on his lap and “he was holding me,[...] and pressing me against his, his penis, and, you know, like, kind of like moving me up and down, and I could feel, like, a hardness of his penis underneath my bottom, and I didn’t know what to do.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, some abuser used religion to keep the abuse secret. Larry Roger Listener told them, that a priest said to him: “God’s going to punish you if you say anything”. This resulted in him being silent for years, due to his fear of the godly consequences. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) In the case of Elisabeth Ashini, her abuser told her: “You have to keep it to yourself, because little Jesus will be angry, he won’t be happy.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Even when the abuse was reported, the reactions from the school could vary. Sometimes the school would react immediately and fire the offender, like in the case of Norman Courchene. He told the school principal that he was abused by a supervisor on a field trip and the supervisor was fired. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) However, the students were often met with disbelief from the school officials and the staff members. One example is the testimony of Jimmy Cunningham, who told to one of the nuns that he was sexually abused. He told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: “She didn’t believe me. She strapped me for lying.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) When he reported his sexual abuse to the Head Priest, who told him “there’s nothing he could do” and he later shared the conversation he had with Jimmy. The nun then strapped Jimmy again for “doing that without her permission.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Sometimes students were also faced with disbelief from their own family. When Dorothy Jane Beaulieu told her aunt about her sexual abuse, her aunt told her: “Don’t make up stories. You’re just making it up. They work for God, and they can’t do things like that.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Often kids relied on themselves and other kids to protect themselves from the sexual abuse. Hazel Mary Anderson recalled: “Sometimes you’d get too tired to stay up at night to watch over them so nobody bothers them ‘cause these workers would, especially night workers would bother the younger kids. The younger kids’ dorms were next to the older girls’ dorms” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). On one occasion some of the students in the Edmonton School staged a protest by blocking the door of their dormitory with “dressers that were full of clothes and stuff”. When the police arrived, the students yelled at them and threw “shoes and stuff out at them”. They threw a list of demands to the principal, it included firing certain staff members who were suspected of sexual abuse by the students, better food, and their own clothes. When the student could not rely on a group of friends, he would use physical violence to defend himself as Sphenia Jones reacted when a staff member tried to abuse her one night: “I grabbed her [...] and she went flying, and then all the kids in the dormitory woke up when I started screaming. She crawled back out the door, and she didn’t come back in the dormitory for, gee, for maybe a week or two after that, right, but she never bothered me again” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Conclusion

In my opinion the Indian Residential Schools or even the whole policy of forced assimilation of the Canadian government meets the definition of the term cultural genocide. As already stated in the chapter where I give the different definition necessary to my question, cultural genocide is the act of killing a race's culture. This can be done through different means, such as removing cultural artefacts or forbidding the use of the language. The Canadian has done this to some extent to the Indigenous communities by controlling them into locations where they could be controlled, forbidding certain important ceremonies, such as the sun dance. Furthermore, by forbidding ceremonies the Canadian government seized the artefacts used by the Indigenous Communities for these ceremonies. Concerning the Indian Residential schools, even those schools during most of their existence were not directly administrated by the Canadian government, they were educating the Aboriginal Children in his name. In those schools, children were forbidden to speak their own language and their culture was not respected voluntarily or involuntarily. The fact that those schools were mostly administrated by the different churches allowed for the churches to convert the children into Christian forcing them to abandon their religion they had at home. Even if certain aspects of the violence that was present in those schools, was not expected by the Canadian government, the whole system was, according to the book *Residential Schools* citing the Presbyterian missionary Hugh McKay, designed "to educate and colonize a people against their will" (Loyie, Spear, & Brissenden, 2014). The Canadian government knew that since ages and protected himself from it. The first step being, according to David B. MacDonald and Graham Hudson, to pressure with other "settler societies" the UN to remove the cultural and logistical dimension of a genocide from the UNGC (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). In 2000 a new legislation concerning genocide was adopted by the Canadian Parliament, implemented the Statute of Rome of the International Criminal Court. This law, according to David B. MacDonald and Graham Hudson, it allows Canadian court to prosecute any person accused of genocide before and after the adoption of the statute of Rome (17 July 1998) only if it was committed outside of Canada. If it was committed on Canadian territory the court can only prosecute if it was done after the adoption of the statute of Rome (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). This law is clearly aiming to protect the Canadian State from the legal consequence of the Indian Residential Schools and its policy of assimilation. This protection is still very effective, because up to this date (April 2023) the Canadian Government has not been condemned for genocide. Nowadays the effects of the Indian Residential schools and the Assimilation Policy is still present in the Canadian society. The Canadian government only apologized for the Indian Residential School in 2008. These excuses were done by the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, in front of the House of Commons. In 2007 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was called into light to dig up the Truth about the Indian Residential Schools, working with survivors. It submitted its final report in 2015 ending its necessary work. Survivors and Indigenous communities heal their intergenerational trauma by telling their stories. Reconciliation is pursuing her slow and arduous path. To end this work I want to quote, the Indigenous author Bob Joseph, who has been asked in a Q&A: "How will people know that they've achieved reconciliation?" He simply answered: "When people are at peace with the past."¹¹ I think that these words are important to remember, because often to be complete as a society you need to accept your past, having worked with it, and learned the lesson that it taught us and it is important for the Canadian Society to work with it in order to live peacefully. As far as I know, the Canadian company is following the right path, even if it is arduous and difficult one.

¹¹ Source: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/02/06/bob-joseph-why-the-indian-act-must-go-and-canada-will-be-better-for-it.html>

Bibliography

- Cambridge Dictionary. (2023, 03 16). *CULTURAL | English meaning* . Retrieved from Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cultural>
- Davin, N. F. (1879). *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*. Ottawa: Departement of Indian Affairs. Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/cihm_03651/mode/2up
- Florence, M. (2021). *Residential Schools Righting Canada's wrongs*. Tronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd.
- Foley, H. (1878). *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*. London: Burns and Oates. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/recordsofenglish00fole/>
- House of Commons Canda. (1883). *Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada*. Ottawa: MacLean. Retrieved 03 16, 2023, from https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.9_07186_1_2/364
- Loyie, L., Spear, W. K., & Brissenden, C. (2014). *Residential Schools*. Brantford: Indigenous Education Press.
- MacDonald, D. B., & Hudson, G. (2012, June). The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, pp. 427-449. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23320978>
- Marsha, L. (2019, July 23). Almost 100 years after being seized and sold, a Kwakwaka'wakw sun mask returns to B.C. *The Globe And Mail*, unkown. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/article-a-long-journey-back-home-the-kwakwakawakw-sun-mask-witnessed-worlds/>
- Niger, P. (1962, April). L'assimilation, forme suprême du colonialisme. *Nouvelle série*, 305(4), 518-532. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24255754>
- Public History Inc. (2006). *CANADA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH INUIT, A History of Policy and Program Development*. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Retrieved from https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/ainc-inac/R3-82-2008-eng.pdf
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2015). *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2015). *The Survivors Speak*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2015). *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*., Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

ⁱ Most of the experience related in this chapter is originating from the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission mandated by the Canadian government to: "Acknowledge Residential School experiences, impact and consequences" and authorized to fulfil this mandate to: "receive statements and documents from former students, their families, communities and all other interested participants." ([Link to the complete mandate](#))