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School and Cultural Assimilation: Dimensions of Assimilation Politics in Education

Abstract: In this paper a crucial issue is being discussed which emerges in the context of progressing diversity of the schooling environment, as well the whole public sphere in general, i.e. cultural assimilation. This problem is to be addressed analytically through the means of pedagogical, socio-cultural and geopolitical discourse which prevails today in many Western countries and local debates on the nature of contemporary societies. Thus, we may look at the relation between schools and assimilation processes in its complexity and reveal how individuals objectified in those processes experience various assimilation policies. The politics of assimilation is however closely related to particular forms of shaping and understanding of the category of cultural difference. That link is being investigated in many of its manifestations. This paper takes also the aim to reconstruct the most significant tendencies in the politics of multiculturalism and to highlight the role of pedagogical and educational reflexivity in that regard. The necessity of an interdisciplinary approach is here taken as an important factor not just in the debate on contemporary state and philosophy of diversity, but furthermore – a specific *signum temporis* of modern educational studies.

Keywords: diversity, multiculturalism, cultural assimilation, school, assimilation politics.

Introduction

We may all agree that educational institutions play a significant role in shaping the self not just in the psychological sense but more in a socio-cultural dimension. The individual is being transformed vastly by the schooling experience in that regard and the outcome of that process takes in particular contexts different forms. It comes not as surprise that school is considered often a place where various actions are being undertaken in order to not just contribute to the general development of the subject and its own competences or simply to deliver knowledge, but merely as a tool serving the purpose of transformation of its identity (for example in the cultural dimension). This problem is acknowledged the most in the schooling systems grounded in a specific social and ethnic context in which the relations between the selected groups are based upon a significant

demographic asymmetry and this very asymmetry influences the power relations and the particular political connections on a specific territory. The complex picture of tensions and ethnic conflicts that emerges from this had always kept its own characteristics and dynamics. In this light, the image of the school and the educational models functioning in those societies are making the object of reflection of knowledge domains and disciplines which must come forward not just the complex educational reality but also have to include factors such as the influence of regional and global geopolitics, the quickly changing intercultural relations or all the nuances coming directly from locally grounded cultural contexts. Study on school and schooling systems is clearly dependent in that matter from the application of the interdisciplinary approach. It requires the use of perspectives and research tools from sociology of education, educational ethnography, general and comparative pedagogy etc. This obvious necessity also raises several challenges for scientific disciplines such as pedagogy, sociology or political science in a theoretical and methodological dimension. In the case of an analysis of cultural change processes it seems thus also obligatory to apply an approach which will not just deliver us an insight into the particular transformation processes occurring through schools and curricula but also will deliver an answer how the assimilation and acculturation processes were occurring (and still are on some occasions) in the selected dimensions of public life and how they did influence the shape of the ongoing debates on identity. This remark is related in the first place to the contemporary societies and states in which the forming of modern national identities is a process that recalls the category of cultural difference or is linked to migration. In the USA, Canada, Australia, and countries of Central America, today these debates gain a special significance because the demographic structures of those societies include large native populations, ethnic minorities, immigrant groups or any other group that is defined through differentiation from the dominant ethnic and cultural patterns. Thus, the aim of this chapter is not just to reconstruct the historical relation between particular education systems and the assimilation policy, but rather to highlight the most significant dimensions this process is occurring and where its long-lasting effects may be seen.

Educational Domain and Assimilation

The issue of assimilation processes occurring in close relation to education is not certainly a new problem, nor a question analytically unrecognized before. As suggested above, the research conducted until now on the phenomenon of assimilation is related however in the first place to the change taking place in the

register of identity, which is understood mainly in the category of transformation of self-identification structures regarded in the language of ethnicity. The ethnic dimension remains today in the centre of social orders in which we might still observe the effects of historical processes initiated on the verge of modernity along with the expansion of Western interests beyond the boundaries of Europe. To the direct consequences of the widening of the borders of the Western world we may include thus not just the political domination over the societies inhabiting the New World, sub-Saharan Africa, or south Asia, but also the imposing over them the cultural patterns in the area of language, custom, political and social institutions which were alien to the local specific until then, or material culture and technological solutions previously absent in those societies. This hegemony was not however related to the colonial era alone. As Frantz Fanon observes in his canonic work for the postcolonial critique *Black Skin, White Masks* it prevailed in the form of mental patterns internalized by the former colonial subjects.¹ The subaltern (to use the term coined by Antonio Gramsci and popularized later by Gayatri Spivak) remained thus in its core nature an instrumentalized object to external political factors and historical processes only to be given seldomly its own voice. The emancipatory turn that took place in the second half of the twentieth century in countries like the United States for example, nevertheless let to the expression of several postulates by the representatives of native nations for the gaining of their own sovereignty and recognition.

As Charles Taylor claims, recognition has both – a normative and a psychological significance.² The act of recognition simultaneously establishes the subject, but it also gives it an emotional support that affects the action undertaken by it in a long term. The desire to gain recognition creates in this light a bondage between the act of recognition itself and identity. The latter one would be according to Taylor, an effect of the recognition of subjectivity in a personal sense. Therefore, individuals recognize and are being recognized as independent social, economic and political entities. It is also as well a group fact demanding certain level of interaction of all participants of the situations in which such a necessity occurs. As the Canadian philosopher claims, it happens because human life has fundamentally a dialogical character. The public debates taking place in this context and tackling the issue of sovereignty, selected civic rights or economic

1 F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 2008.

2 C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in: *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, C. Taylor, K. A. Appiah, J. Habermas, S. C. Rockefeller, M. Walzer, and S. Wolf (eds.), New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.

rights related to land ownership point out that the problem is today far from reaching a solution. Political recognition is thus not just a legal act, an administrative step nor an agreement between former adversaries, but it is related to the necessity of making an introspective change on a cultural and consciousness level. In that matter the history of relations between the West and the world located under the term of Orient as defined by Edward Said (i.e. not just the historical Middle East, but also everything that is placed beyond the Western realm) is a narrative that reveals many facts linking the striving for recognition with the strategies of copying the white culture by the colonial subjects with the assimilation and acculturation pressure. Therefore, we may highlight in these processes how the contents and the cultural signifiers of the non-Western way of thinking and practices were slowly dissolved in a solution which included a peculiar mix of political dominance, application of raw military force and striking violence, religiously motivated desire to convert the Other, as well more subtle, but nevertheless cruel, patterns of dismantling every single sign of cultural difference. It is not to mention that in the latter case, education and schools were often a very effective instrument of that strategy. This allows us to see cultural assimilation as a process of homogenization of the internal diversity which are normally present in every society into an ideologically constructed monoculture. To put it more simply: assimilation annihilates cultural difference as a category in the prevailing social discourse creating a unified picture of the social order.

The main question that remains to be answered in the attempt of defining assimilation through the notion of cultural difference is the understanding of this term as an operational category. By doing so, we can look at different historical cases of assimilation in a more holistic perspective, highlighting the structural and communicative aspect of intercultural relations. The art of inspiring a dialogue with the cultural Other without the a priori generalization and instrumentalization of the difference that defines otherness is an uneasy task. It requires a large doze of self-motivation in order not to fall victim to the temptation of imposing our own views linked to taming all features which seem to us irrelevant to our own self-perception. The relation between the Other and the Ego may certainly be interpreted on many levels of differentiation. It might be a difference occurring on a visual level of recognition of biological features like race or sex. It also may take form of relations based on cultural differences understood as lifestyles and customs. Finally, it may take the form of a relation emerging on a level of consciousness, in which the Other becomes a part of our own internal world and experience. It falls there into a constant convergency of acceptance and rejection, exclusion and inclusion, or movement and stability. In effect such a situation raises a certain ambivalence in the attitude towards the

aliens. This aspect of difference discourse is being spotted by Julia Kristeva. She claims that “an alien is always elsewhere, a foreigner belongs nowhere.”³ Such sort of uprooting suspending of the status of the Other gives birth to various reactions of people subjected to the mechanisms of alienation. Kristeva sees two basic scenarios for such an answer producing specific forms of otherness. The first one produces the basis for resignation and longing for what is impossible to achieve, i.e. a regaining a feeling of certainty coming from being rooted somewhere. The second one is based on the acceptance of our own otherness in a particular place and to transcend it afterwards. This attitude shapes the optimism typical for many migrants. Those migrants represent in the first place a large dose of faith in the view that their own migration isn't permanent and will end someday. As Kristeva states, today's cultural landscape is being roamed by people looking for a long-lost past or for a better future.⁴ This migration landscape makes however a topography in which cultural difference becomes immanent and present in many areas of social life, where people experiencing migration are becoming the definition of otherness present within a coherent cultural whole.

The notion of topography of otherness in the context of experience is being drawn by Bernhard Waldenfels.⁵ The German philosopher expresses the view that the attitude represented by Kristeva does not fully describe the possible forms the Other may take. According to him, if the relation combining the Other with the Ego interests us, we have to take a look in a phenomenological way not just on the pure form otherness takes, but also its origins. They may be situated in ourselves. It is not a source in a psychoanalytical sense of the term which is making the Ego and the Other equal. This mistake is done by Kristeva according to Waldenfels. It is rather about an intersubjective otherness in contrast to the intersubjective one.⁶ In this light otherness transcends also its sociological understanding as one of the components of social relations. It reaches further, to the internal mechanisms of producing otherness in the process of self-reflection. This process is structurally ordered and is linked to the category of place. An alien place is defined in a topographic meaning, whereas topography is here simultaneously a method and a sort of description presenting the points of departure between the Ego and the Other. A difference is thus revealed between a world of familiarity (*Heimwelt*) and the world of otherness (*Fremdwelt*). Such a differentiation allows

3 J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, New York: Columbia University Press 199, p. 10.

4 J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 1.

5 B. Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego*, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2002.

6 B. Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego*, pp. 20–21.

us to impose other dichotomies what in consequence creates a subjective dimension to the discourse on difference. Waldenfels attempts to nevertheless highlight a certain way out of this dichotomic thinking, suggesting that under the semiotic perspective otherness becomes ordered in three major pairs of categories: inner-outer, feature-alien and eventually familiarity-difference.⁷ It resembles in large extent a structural order of the social sphere as described by classic structuralism. Waldenfels is interested in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss only to the point where they deliver an insight into the various social modules' otherness is being put into. In the anthropological perspective otherness plays thus a role of a marker for the boundary where familiarity stops being dominant, and the field is given to the Other. It is important to note that the dialogue between the *Heimwelt* and *Fremdwelt* that occurs on their margins cannot rely solely on contrasting those two worlds, how it was done more than once. It is however required to differentiate the science speaking about the Other within a system of familiarity and its variant dealing with the Other in the context of an environment which is basically alien to us. The latter one would recall the notion of otherness drawn outside familiar categories, that is in a space in which a dominant Western discourse on difference is absent. Such a step allows us to treat difference in its own terms and is by Waldenfels given the name of xenology.

Xenology would therefore be a form of systematic recognition of the Other by doing and would be subjected to the logic of phenomenological epistemology. It would also be a specific science of otherness realized through the sheer experience of it. Xenological inquires seem to be useful in several situations related to acculturation, and in a more specific sense as well cultural assimilation. As Erving Goffmann puts it, the confrontation with otherness becomes often a quasi-cartographic activity.⁸ It causes a compulsive drawing of borders in space and bringing up the identity markers dividing particular systems of values, customs and other social practices. The 1971 experiment conducted by Henri Tajfel, Micheal C. Billig, Robert P. Bundy and Claude Flament showed perfectly how this process is being constructed and how it affects the relations between diverse groups.⁹ As the categorization processes and evaluation of group identity had been revealed during the experiment Tajfel's team came to the conclusion that

7 B. Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego*, pp. 109–110.

8 E. Goffmann, *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości*, Warszawa: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne 2005, p. 33.

9 H. Tajfel, M. G. Billig., R. P. Bundy, C. Flament, "Social categorization and intergroup behavior," in: *European Journal of Social Psychology* 1.2/1971, pp. 149–178.

the basic mechanism of creating group's self-identification is grounded in unification of the worldview shared by group's members and putting it against the worldview of a different group. The conformist attitude of its members favoured this process and influenced the decisions made by the individuals belonging to it. This observation is crucial if we want to understand how the cultural contact creates particular situations in which one group's culture is being assimilated by the other. We can assume in that regard that the clash of worldviews resulting from the contact is combined with the simultaneous processes of categorization, judgment and rejection of the cultural contents not associated with the identity pattern prevailing in the societies crossing the former boundaries. The further clash of powers, resources and the abilities to use them in order to subject the Other to our own will is a political effect of worlds colliding on the level of ontology. The assimilation of one culture by the other can be interpreted in this light as an imbalance of the abilities of one group to put its identity in the center of the dominant identity discourse. Due to that very imbalance cultural difference is being eliminated and perceived as a source of instability to the social and political status quo. On the other hand, we have to be also aware that the issue of dominance and hegemony in relation to identity is nevertheless a very complex phenomenon and must be interpreted through its means of application.

What would make thus cultural assimilation and how is it connected to the space of school? In the broadest meaning of the term under cultural assimilation we understand "a complex of processes emerging from the necessity of change and adjustment of a certain group (less often individuals) to the cultural patterns of another group with the consequence of either a full resignation from the native patterns or their deep revaluation and making them similar to the patterns of the dominant group."¹⁰ Two important premises come out directly of this definition. First, it points out the disproportion in the power relations in the beginning of the interactions between two or more societies in a situation of an intercultural contact. Second, it assumes that the predominance of that group leads inevitably to a complete dissolution of identity structures in the group subjected to the assimilation pressure. Both assumptions are however linked to the statement that assimilation processes are never a phenomenon occurring somehow autonomous, but they always remain a part of a wider process of acculturation (i.e. a process of changes caused by an intercultural exchange of content), and this comes from the immanent consequences of contact situation

10 Z. Staszczak (ed.), *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne*, Warszawa–Poznań: PWN, 1987, p. 45.

of two or more cultures. Since cultural assimilation is not a phenomenon that reveals itself in the context of wider transformation processes a key question emerges for the upcoming remarks – how the assimilation processes influence the transformation or the deterrence of native elements in the cultures exposed to those pressures? This question seems to be important in the way it raises the issue of typologies of the phenomenon described here due to the character of factors that initiate assimilation. As Leon Wasilewski points out we must differentiate between spontaneous assimilation (resulting from an unplanned meeting of cultures), and its forced variant which is scrupulously planned by one of the sides of the contact situation. In the latter case we often have to deal with an intentionally designed policy of de-nationalization and social engineering oriented at unification of cultural traits and group identity accordingly with a certain artificially created scheme. This specific kind of assimilation is linked also to the implementation of assimilation policy in particular areas of public life, institutions and in the administrative system responsible for the forming of the core base to this identity.

Schooling and Assimilation Policy: Few Examples

It is not hard to see that the key institutions that have the direct competence to the field described above are associated with schools and other educational institutions in which the identification aspect is being highlighted. Their role in the realization of assimilation policy in particular countries and historical moments was however different. Thus, a question remains open on the responsibility of schooling institutions and all the subjects engaged in assimilation practices taking place in the schooling system. The debates tackling this issue are occurring at the moment not just in countries like United States or Canada, but also in some European countries like Denmark and Norway. They are mostly referred to the problem of systematic violence, nationalistic policy, the role of the Church and sometimes also contemporary consequences of the medical experiments conducted in the not so far past. What combines the mentioned cases is the fact that the problem of assimilation is present here through various forms of forcible imposing of the patterns of the dominant culture. It means a one-sided flow of cultural content from the dominant side with a simultaneous denigration of all signs of identities which differ from it. If such a perspective on cultural assimilation is logically valid in the mentioned cases the picture wouldn't be comprehensive as a whole if we wouldn't include also a slightly different view on the matter. This view is being shared among others by Rodney Park and Ernest W. Burgess who define assimilation as “a process of

mutual combining and merging in effect of which individuals and groups due to common experiences and common history and common sharing of same socio-economic life internalize memory, feelings and attitudes of other individuals and groups.”¹¹ The situation suggested in this place is thus understood as one in which assimilation process, no matter how they are being strictly conducted and controlled by a source of cultural hegemony always leave a trace in the dominant culture as well. It leads finally to a hybridization of cultural identities due to more or less unintentional adaptation and proliferation of content of the cultures affected by assimilation pressures. This type of processes of differentiation of national identities we may observe today in the countries of Latin America, in which native cultures after 500 years of domination of European patterns gain in the last three decades on significance thanks to the indigenous revitalization movements. Thus, on this level of analysis it emerges a necessity of redefining the understanding of the notion of assimilation and again to point out a great level of diversity of forms this phenomenon takes, as well its dependency towards wider acculturation processes. It is possible that a similar move would be necessary in order to understand the notion of culture, which is central to the discussed issue.

It is quite notable that the precarious ambiguity coming from the above questions on the relations between assimilation and acculturation is clearly distinctive for contemporary debates in the field of social anthropology. This view is being shared by a Polish anthropologist Aleksander Posern-Zieliński who claims that as we should not disconnect culture from society we should not also separate assimilation from acculturation because these are the processes of change that are equal to the two basic spheres of human reality.¹² The division between those two terms and treating them as separate ideological beings occurs in effect mostly on an analytical level and is being treated in a large extent as a methodological step. That very kind of reasoning is being shared by notable researchers like Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovits for example. The latter one claims in that regard that “assimilation is sometimes a phase of acculturation,” i.e. its last stage to be precise.¹³ The a priori assumption that processes

11 R. E. Park, E. E. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Society*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1921, p. 735.

12 A. Posern-Zieliński, “Akulturacja i asymilacja – dwie strony procesu etnicznej zmiany w ujęciu antropologii i etnohistorii,” in: *Procesy akulturacji-asymilacji na pograniczu polsko-niemieckim w XIX i XX wieku*, W. Molik and R. Traba (eds.), Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 1999: pp. 61–62.

13 R. Redfield, R. Linton, M. Herskovits, “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation,” in: *American Anthropologist* 38.1/1936, pp. 149–152.

of assimilation are designed unidirectional to absorb one of the participating cultures leads us to a constatation that the effect of homogenization of identity patterns and lifestyles is a phenomenon somehow natural and occurs often. Nevertheless, reality shows us that the mentioned processes are far more complex and the cultural relations taking place between various groups more often lead to an exchange of selected elements rather than to their total absorption. From a methodological standpoint it also means that cultural assimilation is not to be identified with acculturation, but it rather starts in the moment when acculturation actually ends, and factors are being revealed leading eventually to a scenario in which the disintegration of patterns of one of the communities involved finally occurs. This situation is problematic in the cases when of contemporary multicultural societies in which the rule of cultural pluralism prevails. The revealing of assimilation tendencies in interethnic relations gives in effect birth to a deeply grounded social discontent. It is plausible then to think how assimilation policies were and still are being shaped when it comes to a clash between two or more groups striving very different goals on the plain of cultural orders. It is worth mentioning that according to a typology by Milton M. Gordon we may differentiate in this context three basic types of assimilation policies and ideologies: 1) the concept of angloconformism, 2) the melting pot concept and 3) the concept of cultural pluralism.¹⁴ It is not hard to see that in the north American context this typology might be regarded simultaneously as stages of historical transformation of the policy linked to the category of cultural difference. In other words, it presents a slow progression from traditionally understood unidirectional and politically designed assimilation towards the modern integration policy that is present today in the USA and Canada.

By pointing out the particular contexts of cultural assimilation with the cooperation of schooling systems those two countries deliver us one of the most radical examples of such engagement. The American system of Indian Boarding Schools is in this regard an exemplification having much significance. We may recall the fact that seventeenth century puritanism of the first settlers founded a certain canon of dealing with the native population of North America. The first and relatively peaceful contacts with the Indians changed with time and quickly antagonized the involved parties. Along with the American War for Independence the problem reoccurred in the official debates. The most significant in the matter seem the actions undertaken by George Washington himself

14 M. M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.

with one of his closest allies and later also the Secretary of Defense, Henry Knox. Both politicians raised the question of integration and education of Indians within the emerging at that time American state. Both also agreed in the view that if the native population could fully participate in the new society, it would be able to do so only when it would move closer to the civilizing and axiological paradigm shared by the whites. Washington and Knox formulated a plan for advancing the process of “civilizing” the Indians based on six major points. They had included: 1) application of impartial justice towards Indians, 2) regulation of rules of buying the Indian land, 3) promotion of commerce, 4) promotion of civilizing experiments conducted among native communities, 5) highlighting the role of the president in the receiving of gifts handed out to the Indians, 6) prosecution of people who violate Indian rights. This seemingly noble plan however had been quickly forgotten. The praxis of dealing with the native population in America had shown that political pragmatism had casted over the ideals of the “Founding Fathers.” The picture of the “noble savage” had been thus put aside by the representation of a blood thirsty Indian lurking for the life of the settlers occupying new territories of the ever-moving western boundaries. An important tool of this policy was the 1819 Civilization Fund Act thanks to which the federal government had moved large financial means supporting every organization and society taking care of the education of Indians, however in practice these funds were directed in most cases to missionary schools and religious communities. Knox and Washington were accompanied also by Thomas Jefferson, who in the 1803 speech made to the representatives of the Choctaw nation stated that:

I rejoice, brothers, to hear you propose to become cultivators of the earth for the maintenance of your families. Be assured you will support them better and with less labor, by raising stock and bread, and by spinning and weaving clothes, than by hunting. A little land cultivated, and a little labor, will procure more provisions than the most successful hunt; and a woman will clothe more by spinning and weaving, than a man by hunting. Compared with you, we are but as of yesterday in this land. Yet see how much more we have multiplied by industry, and the exercise of that reason which you possess in common with us. Follow then our example, brethren, and we will aid you with great pleasure.¹⁵

Jefferson’s words would later find a grim reflection in the reality of the boarding schools several decades after. The main value of those schools became hard and mostly physical labor. The institutions based on the first of such boarding

15 <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-17-1803-address-brothers-choctaw-nation>.

schools, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, had the purpose to adjust the native Americans to the life in the industrial period. The subjects taught in those schools were linked to the future workplace of their alumni. These were supposed to be large farms and factories of a rapidly developing America. The Indian was to become the element and subject of an early capitalist machinery, just as anonymous and stripped of native culture as the immigrant crossing in the same time the Atlantic from Europe and Asia. Similar to the thesis found in the analysis made by Max Weber labor was judged here within the framework of values typical to the protestant worldview. It was looked upon as a gateway to salvation shimmering on the edge of the horizon. However, the important difference to the Weberian example is made in this case by the fact that the native population in North America was subjected to a total instrumentalization in the educational process where the school functioned as a stratification tool.

In total, until the mid 1920s 357 Indian Boarding Schools functioned, where in 1925 alone an overall number of 61,000 students in various age was inscribed. The scale of the whole endeavor and the symmetric scale of abuse had been made public with the publication of the Meriam Report in 1928. Since then, the federal government took a closer look at those institutions, although the assimilationist policy present in their functioning still caused systematic outrooting and white-washing of not just the Native Americans, but also all the groups that did not fit the Anglo-Saxon pattern. The Americanization of native population assumed the taking over of the cultural traits typical to the white population not only in the educational sphere, but also it imposed the protestant values to native children. It tackled the structures of power as well as the economic sphere. The Dewey Act introduced in 1887 imposed in that regard an alien to native cultures notion of private property and at the same time making the native understanding and practice of collective management of space and natural resources invalid. The consequences of this document are felt until this very day, especially in the context of widening by the American oil companies of territory claimed as too precious to be left in the hands of the Indians. Real modern ecological, legal and social threats to the status and current situation of Native Americans come from a long lasting and complex marginalization of those communities in the structures of a Western society.

A system of boarding schools similar to the American one was created in neighboring Canada. So called residential schools sprung throughout the whole territory of the Canadian Confederation, although they were established more often in remote areas outside big cities. Financed by the Canadian state but managed in large extent by the Catholic Church those institutions became a place as isolated from the state structures as they were not really controlled by any

of state officials. Just as in the case of the American variant, residential schools did not keep any detailed books on the students taught and occasional visits by the officials usually did not see any anomalies. The angloconformistic assimilation policy conducted in the schools was based on the 1876 Indian Act (synonymous with its American counterpart), as well on previous acts like 1857 Gradual Civilization Act and 1869 Gradual Enfranchisement Act. Just like in the situation in the United States the Canadian system assumed that the educational process, starting with the physical taking of children from native families and handing them out to the residential school, will end finally not simply with the integration of the Indians with the Canadian society, but with the eradication of any signs of native identity and language in the first place. Residential education was judged back then nevertheless as an effective tool serving the purpose of cultural homogenization of the Canadian society which was increasingly diversified due to immigration in the twentieth century. Since the 1950's residential schools managed by the Church started to have financial trouble like the religious societies in charge of some of the schools ending with the filling of bankruptcy by some of them. In effect, several of those schools was overtaken by the government. The form and direction of teaching was however continued with the hope to reach the educational goals set previously. The shock to the public opinion that accompanied the speech made by one of the native alumni in the Canadian parliament that revealed the tremendous scale of abuse during the residential school period presented at the same time the indigenous perspective on the schooling experience and the consequences of application of the Canadian assimilation policy. If since the 1980's Canada is leaving the model of forced assimilation typical to residential schools, we may observe since the 2000s a significant turn in the state policy towards the native population and their uneasy relations with the white majority. The main basis of that change is being made by the process of national reconciliation and giving the indigenous groups the historical agency they deserve.

Certainly, both examples of cultural assimilation through schools do not present the whole picture of the complexity of relations between politics and education. They do however emphasize the key questions that may now be crucial in understanding the current situation and the potential directions of development of the socio-cultural relations in countries where the indigenous population, various ethnic minorities or any other groups historically subjected to assimilation gain today voice in the public debates. The inclusion of those groups and the attempt of reshaping the status quo raises further issues previously either ignored by the dominant groups or openly rejected as a subversion of the existing order of power. Today these issues form a nonlinear narrative and reach

out to the historical sources of oppression which many policies of assimilation are based on. The long lasting systematic oppression. The events at Standing Rock in 2018 and the eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2019 are only few examples of the level of discontent within those groups against the white dominance in America. The common denominator of those phenomena is being shaped by the motoric of resentment related to the troubled past and contemporary interethnic tensions. The source of those tensions is rooted in the lasting policy of forced assimilation into the white culture, where schools and the education system are being blamed as an instrument for imposing the new artificial identity on nonwhite subjects. This policy of “whitewashing” the self is quite common in the postcolonial context. As an example of this mechanism serves the so called *blanquimiento* policy practiced in Central America towards the native and non-Spanish speaking population, especially in countries like Guatemala. It also forms a deeper dimension of assimilation process when we consider the impact of the schooling experience on the psychological construction of the subaltern. The implementation of white mindset into the cognitive structures of people of color distorts in large extent the personality and contributes to a specific way of thinking as described previously by Franz Fanon. Eventually, it was also often inscribed into the colonial sensual discourse based on the notion of desire. The biopolitics of colonialism make in that regard a distinct part of a wider approach to objectification of the nonwhite citizens.

Conclusion

The above combination of various factors in reconstruction of different historical examples of assimilation processes through education opens a debate on the weight of the experience assimilation had brought with for many groups in various social contexts. The schooling experience itself might be thus regarded as an object of study and analysis delivering us an interesting insight how assimilation is being lived through by particular individuals and how this process affects not just the identity, social position but also the individual’s ability to function in the host society as a full member also in a cultural sense. The role of schooling systems in shaping this ability had been explored previously mostly in reference to the marginalization of the alumni of Indian Boarding Schools and similar institutions. Nevertheless, it seems also significant today to bring into attention the impact forced assimilation of children in those schools had on the overall construction of self as a cultural being. The enculturation into the white culture of Native Americans, migrants, Afromericans, Latinos in the United States and Canada, Aborigines in Australia, or the colonial subaltern is therefore not

simply a process of change and transformation of the existing cultural identity into something different and imposed by the oppressor, but a specific formation of human individuals taught specifically to be subjected to complex structures of power. Within those structures they are placed in areas of public life beyond their actual agency. As the pupils of Indian Boarding Schools were slowly stripped of their cultural markers (clothing, language, customs), they gained the persistent impression that Native's are basically unable to contest these actions and are condemned to play the role of the pariah in the rapidly advancing American society. The native pupils on most cases were supposed to be passive "receptables of the language of the colonizer, voiceless and powerless, "tongues" drowned in murky waters of assimilation."¹⁶

It is not surprising that being aware of these limitations some tribal elders welcomed the idea of white education in the first period of the mutual relations in colonial America.¹⁷ With the time passing, the grim perception and lastly the assumed silent acceptance for the conditions surrounding the possible social and economic field of agency of Indians in the United States was incorporated into the imagery of the native population reproduced by the white Americans. The presence of social pathologies in native reservations like high level of alcoholism, huge rate of unemployment, domestic abuse cases and other violent criminal tendencies became a constant companion of representations of the native's trapped in a circle of forceless efforts to join the white society on equal rights. The sad life story of Ira Hayes, a war hero and one of the soldiers who raised the flag on Iwo Jima is an example how this picture was distributed and implemented in the visual discourse in America until at least the 1970s. The rise of various indigenous revitalization movements and the action undertaken by native American activists in recent decades slowly contributed to the change of this unfavorable situation and today we can see how former Indian Boarding Schools turned into centers of native cultural life in many local communities. The schooling experience itself is thus referred to often as "survival" and the shadow it casted over the contemporary native identity is still discussed in public debates in United States and Canada in relation to similar outcome of the education in residential schools. Assimilation through education policy which shaped the functioning of those institutions can be interpreted in this matter as major factor for instigating modern native revival not only in the United States but also throughout the

16 A. V. Katanski, *Learning to Write "Indian:" The Boarding School Experience and American Indian Literature*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005, p. 5.

17 M. Stout, *Native American Boarding Schools*, Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012, p. xii.

world. As an effect and reaction to oppression those schools produced a specific community of people who share not just the fact of being nonwhite, nonwestern and nonprivileged victims of assimilation pressure, but rather a community of individuals with their own complicated life stories of how they experienced the boarding schools maintaining own dignity and how did they managed to live to tell the story. In this context the recent public testimonies of the survivors of the Canadian residential schools become a turning point in the access of Native Canadians to the cultural mainstream.

Catherine Ramirez is one of the scholars taking note of this assimilation paradox. She claims that the most prolific of the boarding schools – the Carlisle Industrial School – produced “more than claims to whiteness.”¹⁸ It became a hotbed for future pan-Indianism, which is based on a prolific sense of solidarity among all the Native Americans. Following Hazel Hertzberg’s arguments, Ramirez points out several examples of the mentioned form of community. An interesting aspect of the discussed problem is made here by the presence of two main components of the interaction between the receptors and implementors of assimilation pressure, i.e. difference and sameness. In consequence the process had forced the Native Americans to see the relation not just to the oppressors but also to themselves. Various native groups reacted to the schooling experience overcoming the existing tribal differences and cooperated by using similar survival strategies. As students at the Carlisle school, they formed a community. As the platform of community building served arts and crafts or writing thanks to which we can today to have a deeper look into particular student’s perception of how the boarding schools treated and mistreated the indigenous children and youth. Their time at the boarding schools became an integral part of their biographies and despite some animosities between native and non-native groups in general they shared the same position as a result of conquest and enslavement.¹⁹ It becomes quite clear that following this argument we are able to interpret the role of the notion of cultural difference in terms of intersubjectivity. The collective schooling experience of whole generations of people of color, minorities or other groups outside the dominant spectrum is often marked by receiving and resisting cultural assimilation into a white society. The historical contexts of this dichotomy of powerlessness and empowerment are nevertheless a representation of certain traits the intersubjective experience had left in the identity,

18 C. S. Ramirez, *Assimilation: An Alternative History*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2020, p. 52.

19 C. S. Ramirez, *Assimilation*, p. 53.

decision making and worldview of many alumni of such educational institutions. Glimpses of former assimilation policy visible in those areas of life still echo and are open to many local political debates on national reconciliation.

The main dimensions in which cultural assimilation remains today in relation to education are to be today reconsidered under the condition to include the above complexities in our considerations. The discussed phenomena are thus not to be seen solely as a historical fact but more as one of the factors influencing the process of reshaping the identity. The level of influence of the schooling institutions like the boarding schools described above might be certainly debated, however its presence must be acknowledged in current issues involving the indigenous population or particular minorities in the United States for example. In order to understand the point of view in ongoing legal and political activities of those groups we should have in mind that the long-lasting assimilation pressure into the white Anglo-Saxon society is regarded by many of their members as an still open wound that needs to be introduced in a greater extent into the public debate. The inclusion of particular testimonies and life stories of former students at the boarding school system builds at the same time a much larger emancipatory narrative. It addresses the diversity of the contemporary American and Canadian society in a manner which can be explored further in dimensions other than ethnic and intercultural relations. The language we speak of difference and cultural integrity today requires thus a new vocabulary of terms addressing the problem of recognition and subjectivity. In effect of such an approach Taylor's concept of recognition can be widened and transformed onto the field of various forms of difference characterizing also non ethnic groups. The deep multiculturalism that arises from that conceptual step is not founded on non-superficial signs of otherness, but refers to the basic structures of identity allowing us to see beyond ethnicity. That issue is pointed out among others by Will Kymlicka.²⁰ The Canadian scholar expresses the view that many current forms of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism present in the politics and social relations are reduced either to aesthetics or simplified visions of otherness allowed to venture into the Western cultural order. Although the so called 3S multiculturalism (saris, samosas and steel drums) is without doubt a popular approach to cultural difference in countries like Canada or United Kingdom, it reduces difference to forms like exotic cuisine or music and ignores the "difference that makes a difference" (to paraphrase Gregory Bateson). Furthermore,

20 W. Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*, Migration Policy Institute, 2012.

such superficiality covers the existing inequalities and puts this problem outside the public mainstream. As an answer to these consequences the proposed reconsideration of the way we think of and act upon difference leads inevitably to the redefinition of multiculturalism as a political doctrine. Thanks to change in that regard, we witness also another effect in understanding the concept of multiculturalism itself. There emerges a processual perspective that puts this notion foremostly in the field of human agency. Multiculturalism as agency reflects not only on the existing cultural differences between various groups making the structure of every pluralistic society these days but focuses on actions undertaken by their members with the goal to integrate these groups under a common vision of present and future shape of a much larger community of citizens. It inspires intercultural dialogue by promoting the actual contact and interactions between the groups and by doing so it also changes the nature of that contact. In effect the past assimilation approach that affected that contact is replaced with integration based on the xenological reflection on what and how differences contribute to a modern society.

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