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**Abstract of the PhD project:**

**Indian Residential Schools: A History of Postcolonial Acknowledgement in Canada  
(working title)**

In the 19th and 20th century, more than 150,000 native children in Canada were taken from their families and communities and sent to so-called Indian Residential Schools, where physical, sexual, and emotional abuse were commonplace, and the practice of their cultural traditions was forbidden. This school system was based primarily on ideas of the British colonial power and several missionary societies regarding the education of native children, and later the aggressive assimilation policy of the Canadian government's Indian Affairs Department. This department officially encouraged the growth of this school system as a valuable agent in a wider policy of civilizing Native Peoples – comprising the First Nations, the Inuit and Métis – and assimilating them into the European-Canadian society. The schools were largely operated by churches and funded by the Canadian government.

Since the late 20th century, when a greater recognition was emerging pertaining to the painful legacy of residential schools, several initiatives such as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) have been established to address the colonial injustice inflicted on native children in terms of the loss of languages and culture. The PhD project deals with the contemporary history of the Canadian reconciliation process, paying particular regard to indigenous peoples' perspectives. More specifically, the dissertation focuses on the understanding the Indian Residential School survivors have about coming to terms with colonial and postcolonial abuses, and the demands they bring forward with a view to reconciliation initiatives. In addition, the study analyzes how far indigenous pressure groups were involved in the genesis and work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and how strong their voice was in shaping its agenda. The existing historical research literature that deals with the issue of residential schools focuses mostly on the actual administration and operation of the schools as well as on the history of specific schools rather than on the truth and reconciliation process itself. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the issue of reconciliation with residential school survivors by considering working processes towards reconciliation that have been undertaken by the Canadian government, churches, national indigenous organizations, and survivor groups. These parties have been involved in the negotiations of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), which established a compensation package for the victims and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The project connects approaches from Transitional Justice, Social History, and Postcolonial Studies, and is based on archival and interview research, especially with survivor groups who have been engaged in the truth commission's work, settlement agreement, and, more widely, the reconciliation process. Moreover, the research project takes into account transnational transfers of knowledge about redressing legacies of human rights abuses, and their significance for the national decision-making process in Canada to establish a truth commission.