Decolonizing the Mind: Intellectual Colonialism in Canadian Indigenous Residential Schooling

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Abstract

The present study draws on Canadian literature and the contributions of indigenous poets to the discipline, aiming to generate an indigenous voice in contemporary times. The present study aims to examine contemporary Indigenous Canadian poetry as a site of resistance to intellectual colonialism, which was produced through the residential school system. Using qualitative textual analysis, the paper analyses selected poems by Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie to demonstrate how Indigenous poets reclaim silenced histories and reconstruct cultural identity through decolonial expression. In order to engage with the decolonial narrative, Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'O's *Decolonizing the Mind* have been adapted as the comparative decolonial framework to examine processes of cultural erasure, linguistic dispossession, and epistemic violence within a Canadian settler-colonial context. By foregrounding Indigenous poetic voices and survivor narratives, the article argues that contemporary Indigenous poetry functions as a counter-discursive space that challenges colonial knowledge systems and reasserts Indigenous ways of knowing within Canadian literature.

Key Words: *Contemporary Indigenous Poetry, Decolonising the Mind, Residential Schools, Cultural Erasure, Intellectual Colonialism.*

Introduction

The residential school system that was found in Canada represents one of the most systematic attempts at cultural and intellectual erasure in settler-colonial history the world had ever seen. These institutions were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and functioned not merely as sites of physical displacement but as mechanisms of epistemic control, aimed at severing Indigenous children from their languages, histories, and worldviews. The residential schools sought to reshape Indigenous subjectivity in accordance with colonial norms by enforcing linguistic appropriation and reworking of the coloniser's language, by embedding their native language, memory, and epistemologies within English, transforming it into a counter-discurvise space. This process of epistemic domination resonates with what Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya conceptualised as the "enslavement of minds," in his lecture "Swaraj in Ideas," which he described as one of the most destructive repercussions of colonialism overall (104). He highlighted that enslavement of the mind is a condition in which the colonised subject's mode of thinking is reshaped. In the process, it developed a sense of inferiority, the erasing of memories and cultures, an alien conceptual vocabulary, and a hegemonic worldview from which to view the world. There are various colonising expeditions in the history of Canada. There have been settlers, as well as dominators, in the Canadian history of colonisation. The colonisation of the mind, however, is distinctive from the colonisation of the land. When a mind is enslaved, it tends to follow the rules that are presented to it. Indigenous communities residing in the land that is now called Canada used to have their own language, oral literature, histories, cultures, and beliefs. Colonisation brought enslavement of not only the land upon the indigenous communities and the First Nations, but it also brought the colonisation of the mind through the establishment of the Residential Schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Children belonging to the First Nations and the indigenous communities were sent to residential schools. The system forcefully removed children from their families for long periods of time and prohibited them from acknowledging their indigenous background and culture or from speaking their own languages.

Residential schools systematically sabotaged indigenous, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures across Canada, which had a great impact on the communities, causing family breakdowns that lasted for generations. They also contributed to the general loss of language and culture, as well as the severing of ties that allowed Indigenous cultures the ability to teach and sustain their identity. The mind that was colonised by the residential schools still

tries to understand its roots and heritage that has not only been wiped out from their minds but also from history as much as possible. Canadian Indigenous authors have tried to appropriate their culture and their heritage in their literature as much as possible, which is visible through various authors like Thomas King, Richard Wagamese, Cherie Dimaline, Gregory Scofield, Alootook Ipellie, Rita Joe, and David A. Groulx. While presenting their readers with narratives regarding the brutalities of the residential schools, they simultaneously attempt to connect back with their roots. The colonisation that the British and the French had done of both the mind and the land has been the major focus of the contemporary First Nations and the Indigenous Canadian authors.

The research focuses mainly on the representation of Indigenous voices that have been affected by the Residential Schools, which was a colonial agenda of the Settlers. The Residential schools aimed to "kill the Indian in the child", as claimed by Bryanne Young in *Killing the Indian in the Child* (1). The objective of the current study is to bring the Indigenous and oppressed voices to the forefront and highlight the contribution that contemporary poets, as well as the survivors of the Residential School System, have made to bring a decolonial narrative of Canadian Literature. Postcolonial Theory aims to manipulate and alter the master's tools in order to allow the oppressed to build their own narratives and break free from the clutches of the master. While Indigenous experiences of settler colonialism in Canada differ historically from African and Caribbean colonial contexts, theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o provide critical tools for analysing the psychological, linguistic, and epistemic dimensions of colonial domination. This study employs their work not as direct historical parallels but as transnational analytical frameworks that elucidate how colonial education produces cultural alienation and how language becomes a site of resistance. Indigenous writers, like Chinua Achebe in the African context, appropriate the coloniser's language to articulate counter-narratives that challenge imposed hierarchies of knowledge. Using the master's tool, the language that was enforced on them, like Chinua Achebe, the indigenous writers have created literature that not only talks about the indigenous communities but also tries to create awareness and appropriate their cultural identities into their fiction and poetry. Hence, the research questions that are to be scrutinised and answered are: How did Canada's residential school system function as a mechanism of intellectual colonialism by disrupting Indigenous epistemologies, language transmission, and cultural continuity? How do Rita Joe's and Alootook Ipellie's selected poems represent the harms of residential schooling (e.g., linguistic dispossession, cultural alienation, epistemic violence) and enact decolonial resistance? What does this poetic

resistance contribute to contemporary Indigenous Canadian literature as a counter-discursive/decolonial space? All the above-mentioned questions refer to one singular question that is at the heart of this research: How does contemporary Indigenous Canadian poetry function as a decolonial counter-discourse against the epistemic and cultural harms produced through residential schooling?

One of the factors that prompted these research questions concerning the decolonial narrative of Indigenous authors in response to Residential schools was that most of the research studies that have taken place when it comes to Canadian literature tend to focus on the identity of the Canadian, rather than of the indigenous as well. Even when talking about the First Nations and the indigenous communities, the literature tends to fictionalise their culture and heritage. There is seldom any focus on the effects of the Residential schools in research studies. The majority of the focus tends to lie in bringing the Canadian postcolonial identity to the surface. The present study, focusing on a few contemporary Indigenous poets like Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie, explores how colonial influence through Residential Schools has been countered and projected in contemporary literature in order to decolonise the narrative of Canadian Literature and present an authentic narrative of indigenous communities. To decolonise means to change the way indigenous people see themselves as well as the way non-Indigenous people see indigenous people. The poets Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie make up the primary source of the present study. Rita Joe's poems, *I lost my talk,* and *Keskmsi*, and Alootook Ipellie's *How Noisy They Seem* and *Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border* are the subject of this study.

The reasons behind choosing these poets are multiple. Firstly, both poets belong to indigenous communities. Rita Joe is a Mi'kmaq poet, often referred to as the poet laureate of the Mi'kmaq people. She was known for her powerful poetry that spoke about Indigenous identity and the legacy of residential schools in Canada. Alootook Ipellie was an Inuit poet, as well as a translator, illustrator, reporter, and writer. Ipellie's work is laced with complexities of identity and the journey of realisation of what it means to be Inuit in contemporary times. Another reason for choosing these poets and their selected poetry is the lack of research studies done on these poets. Since the termination of the Residential Schools, there has been an abundance of research studies. However, there has been a lack of research that focuses mainly on the effect of these schools and their impact on indigenous history in academia.

The limited number of academic research studies on Canadian decolonial literature has been focused exclusively on the education sector. Canadian Indigenous poetry or Fiction rarely gets to be the topic of research since it is considered to be a part of Canadian Literature, representing Canada, rather than a separate piece that is exclusively written for the representation of the Indigenous communities. The majority of the studies have focused on the issue of Residential Schools and the trauma that is generated because of them. There is a vast literature based only on autobiographies by the survivors of the schools as well. They narrate their experiences of daily life at the school. The book, *They Came for the Children: Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools,* by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, is filled with the experiences of different survivors. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada explains in the book, what happened at Canadian residential schools was harrowing and shameful to everyone involved, including those who attended them and their families. Due to the lack of care at the facilities, Aboriginal and Indigenous children were at constant risk because they were not allowed to express their culture. Some pupils even claim that they were prevented from seeing their families for an extended period of time (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1). Furthermore, the schools were run by nuns, priests, and other members of the religious community, which meant that the Aboriginal pupils were deprived of their right to display their culture and instead reinforced the principles of Christianity (2).

There are many writers who talk about their experiences in residential schools. Isabelle Knockwood's autobiography *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*, also touches on the subject of the residential school system. Letters written by her and those written by other survivors are also included in the collection. They were written by kids who attended the school, hence presenting very clear-cut imagery of the treatment that the children had to deal with.

There are also research studies that focus on decolonial narratives in Canadian indigenous literature. Aubrey Jean Hanson, in her research study, "Teaching Indigenous Literatures for Decolonisation: Challenging Learning, Learning to Challenge," examines the colonial context and how it had a major impact on the learning of the indigenous literature in contemporary society. She concurred that when indigenous literature is taught in classrooms at schools, there emerges a decolonial narrative emerges. Tasha Beeds, a Cree critic, also talks about the importance of decolonisation. In her research essay, "Remembering the poetics of ancient sound kistêsinâw / wîsahkêcâhk's maskihkiy," Beads

talks about the importance of "the poetics of ancient sounds" (70) and claims that many indigenous writers have "'re-fused' traditional European-based literary constructs and boxes with nêhiyawiwin (Cree-ness). In kistêsinâw/wîsahkêcâhk's style, they re-Cree-ate English with nêhiyaw-itâpisiniwin (Cree way of seeing/world view), shape-shifting English textual bodies" (Beeds 61). Beeds expresses an awareness that Indigenous literature arises from specific communities, each with its own ontological, epistemological, linguistic, and aesthetic systems. Hence, to understand it, one needs to understand the culture of indigenous communities. Since the majority of teachers have studied in a Eurocentric curriculum, they are not fully able to accept and understand the indigenous culture because it is foreign to them. This inability to understand leads to "re-Cree-ate" the coloniser's language, laced with indigenous vocabulary, so that the indigenous communities that have been marginalised can talk back to the white man.

Similarly, Petra Fachinger (2018), in her article "Writing 'Home': The Healing Power of Métis Storytelling" in Cherie Dimaline's *Red Rooms* and *The Girl Who Grew a Galaxy*, talks about the contemporary indigenous literature and how it serves "two transformative functions —healing indigenous people and advancing social justice in secular society" (Episkenew 15). The Canadian Indigenous literature has become a notion of "returning home"—that is, reconnecting with land, language, culture, and community," (146). Indigenous writers engage in the decolonial narrative through "looking back" or "return to ourselves," a process of "self-recognition," through which they talk back to the colonial power (146-147).

Looking at the research studies conducted before on the decolonial narrative of the Canadian Indigenous literature, one finds multiple studies arguing about the influence of the colonisation on the natives, focusing on the sociopolitical effects of colonisation, rather than a close reading of the indigenous texts themselves (Hanson 4; Episkenew 208-209). However, there are relatively fewer studies conducted on the literature itself belonging to the indigenous writers. Hence, this research regards it as a significant gap in the learning of Canadian Indigenous literature and how it is affecting the contemporary discourses that take place.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative textual analysis of the selected poetry of Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie. By employing textual analysis, indigenous poetry is examined to highlight the decolonial resistance through language, memory, and cultural identity. The poems are analysed through close reading, focusing on the word usage,

imagery, narrative voice, code switching, and usage of metaphors of loss, borders, and reclamation. The key concepts are drawn from Fanon and Ngugi, such as cultural alienation, colonial internalisation, which serve as a guide in the interpretation of the texts that are selected. The scope of the analysis is delimited to a study of the poetry's thematic content, with particular emphasis placed on the categorisation of themes identified in the poetry under consideration in order to identify the demarcations that take place through poetic devices, in order to raise indigenous voices against colonisation. The Categorisation of the thematic content and the demarcations that are blurred by the poets are scrutinised through the critically acclaimed critics and writers, Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Ngugi wa Thiong'O's *Decolonising the Mind.*

Contesting the White Man's Burden

In this study, postcolonial and decolonial theory have been employed as a comparative analytical framework to examine how colonial education provided at the residential schools operates as a system of epistemic domination. While the historical conditions and colonialism that took place in places like Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia differ from Indigenous settler colonialism in Canada, the conceptual tools that were developed by theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o remain analytically productive for understanding how colonial power functions through language, education, and cultural representation. This study draws on these thinkers to illuminate how intellectual colonialism manifests within distinct colonial formations.

The present study focuses on the repercussions of colonialism on Canadian Indigenous communities by looking at selected poetry of Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie. There are still some effects of political colonialism on the earth today, even though most of its apparent manifestations have faded away by the year 2000. Thus, criticism of colonialism has turned its focus to the more subtle and long-lasting aspects of the colonial system itself. The 'colonisation of the mind' is one of the most prevalent colonial domination that still operates today. One of its most damaging effects on society is what Gayatri Spivak describes as "epistemic violence," which is the process through which Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and worldviews are systematically disqualified and rendered illegible within colonial frameworks of meaning. Identifying and combating this type of "epistemic violence" is unquestionably a challenge for philosophers everywhere (Spivak 280). Postcolonial thinkers have taken on not only the analysis of this phenomenon but also the development of techniques for effectively opposing and ideally removing colonialism's most detrimental

component–the taking of possession and control of the minds of its victims. In Canadian settler colonies, this epistemic violence does not just function through coercion but also through institutions such as residential schooling, where Indigenous languages were punished, and oral traditions were delegitimised.

Frantz Fanon argues that colonial domination rests on the false assumption that European concepts, values, and cultural norms possess universal applicability. Colonial powers presented their epistemic frameworks as neutral and civilizational, masking their historical and cultural specificity. The colonial relationship, according to Franz Fanon, produced the mistaken idea that concepts can go to other areas of the world, from Europe to outside Europe, as if they do not bear the cultural markers of their historical origin. The colonisers believed, according to Fanon, that the conceptual schemas of Europe, as well as its normative ideals, applied to the entire world, which was a lie that was promoted by the European Union (Fanon 315-316). The colonised people, through their acceptance of their beliefs, established an idiom and a language that was strange to them, because they had either abandoned or allowed their own schema to deteriorate. They may have had a darker complexion, but they had begun to wear white masks to conceal their identities. Europe was able to project images of itself into other parts of the world by providing these peoples whom it believed to be inferior, with a conceptual language and training them in cultural practices that were seen to be the hallmark of civilised peoples in the first place. This was the burden that the white man had to bear during the colonial encounter. Although Fanon theorised this condition in the context of French colonialism, his insights are particularly relevant to understanding how residential schooling in Canada imposed Euro-Christian epistemologies upon Indigenous children, systematically delegitimising Indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and worldviews.

Despite this clear repudiation of colonialism, its continuation in the form of neo-colonialism has continued to alter the landscape of modern Indigenous communities, and this is not just because of elite collusion, but also because of enslavement to colonialism and its re-presentation of their histories degraded, dehumanised and permeated the psyche of the colonised. Fanon foresaw this threat more than sixty years ago when he was writing his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. An explicit goal of Fanon's writings was to "liberate the man of colour from himself," from the inferiority complex that he dubbed the "epidermalisation of this inferiority," in his book *Black Skin White Masks* (220). According to Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*, colonised peoples "in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the

death and burial of its local cultural originality" have always found it simple to embrace the language and culture of the colonial power (18). In the colonised individuals, colonialism penetrates to the core of their identity. As an outspoken opponent of colonialism, Fanon firmly believes that the struggle for independence must be linked to the fight against "cultural" colonisation, its causes, and consequences on the minds of the natives.

Decolonisation does not free its colonised subjects from the bounds of colonisation, particularly those sustained through the colonial education system. Rather, it is a mere disguise by the former colonial powers functioning through an elite bourgeoisie of the former colonialists, who were interested in retaining close links with the former colonial powers. Ngugi Wa Thiongo, in his book *Decolonising the Mind,* writes about the colonial experience and how a colonised individual can decolonise their mind. Ngugi discusses how indigenous and other racialised colonised communities were also subjected to systematic denigration during the colonial era, when he talks about BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour), which were subjected to a systematic denigration during the colonial era that went far beyond setting aesthetic standards. In his book, he gives the example of Kenya:

> In schools and universities, our Kenyan languages–that is, the languages of the many nationalities which make up Kenya–were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, under-development, humiliation and punishment. We who went through that school system were meant to graduate with a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment.

By severing language from everyday use and educational legitimacy, residential schooling produced what Ngũgĩ describes as colonial alienation: a simultaneous detachment from one's cultural reality and forced affiliation with an imposed worldview, a condition which can be seen in indigenous poetry through their usage of metaphors of loss, silence, and fractured identities. In colonial education, the goal was to make the conquered people despise and reject their own cultures. Children were chastised for using "local vernacular" when they were in school because they were being taught in European languages. When children belonging to Indigenous communities and First Nations were sent to boarding schools to "treat the Indian issue" and "acclimate" them to "civilisation," they were forced to give up their languages and cultures, making them "civilised" in the process too. For Thiong'o, the danger of the colonial education system was its influence over perception, the way individuals who had been subjected to its spell saw the world. Thiong'o believed that to decolonise one's mind, one needed to reconnect with one's roots, which is only possible

through colonial alienation. According to Thiong'o, two forms of colonial alienation are interconnected: (1) detachment from the reality around them, and (2) affiliation with what is most foreign to one's surroundings. This colonial alienation begins with the disassociation of a language from its use in educational environments.

According to Thiong'O, a native language should be allowed to evolve because, through language, different facets of society are exchanged. Moreover, by writing for the colonised, the native writers will help the local tongues evolve and take the "unassailable" position that the coloniser's language currently has and be able to present the colonial influence in their literature (Thiong'o 9). Hence, the current study focuses on Canadian Indigenous poetry as a method of talking back to the coloniser and raising their silenced voices and aims to fill the gaps that are present in previous studies on the matter. Although Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes from the Kenyan colonial experience, his critique of colonial education systems offers a compelling lens for examining Canadian residential schools, where Indigenous children were similarly punished for speaking their languages and trained to associate their cultures with shame and inferiority. Consequently, this study examines Canadian Indigenous poetry as a decolonial counter-discursive practice through which poets reclaim silenced histories, reassert linguistic and cultural agency, and contest the epistemic authority of colonial institutions that sought to erase Indigenous identities.

Canadian Indigenous Poetry as a Decolonial Answer

Canadian Indigenous poetry functions not merely as cultural expression but as a deliberate decolonial practice, reclaiming epistemic authority over language, identity, and history. Through their poetry, poets like Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie resist the legacy of residential schools, using literary form to confront intellectual colonialism and to restore voices suppressed by settler-colonial structures.

Canadian Indigenous poetry is a rich genre of Canadian Literature. It is laced with different aspects of culture and identity as its themes. *I Lost My Talk* by Rita Joe discusses one of the difficulties readers and Natives encounter in reading and understanding English-language Aboriginal literature. The poem serves as a vehicle through which the poet expresses her displeasure with the colonisers through her use of language. In terms of Aboriginal poetry, the poem serves as an introduction because the core issue is about the loss of language, culture, and identity, and voice in residential schools, which affects all indigenous cultures. The poem "I lost my Talk" documents the poet's mild but resolute

rebellion against the disempowering consequences of the Shubenacadie residential school in Nova Scotia, which poses a twofold threat: the institution is controlled by colonists, who strip the poetess of her Aboriginal language and teach the settlers' language. When she says she lost her "talk," Joe is referring towards her language, as well as her cultural identity and her world views. The "Shubenacadie" residential school took away" her identity, and moulded her into something translucent and a shell of what she once was. Joe's repeated insistence on having lost her "talk" reflects the epistemic violence enacted by residential schooling, where language loss signified the erasure of Indigenous knowledge rather than mere linguistic displacement.

Immediately following the opening statement, the readers are confronted with the invaders' attempt to eliminate the Natives, as well as their rich and diverse cultures, which include their mother tongues. Schools mould a child's ideologies and teach them the ways of the world systematically. However, at "Shubenacadie school," rather than teaching with care, they "snatched" her ideals from her (5). The mention of the spoken language "speak like you" should be interpreted metaphorically as a reference to a lifestyle that is drastically distinct from the written culture that was being imposed by the Residential Schools (6). The oral traditions are "taken away" with the intention of silencing the Natives' ability to communicate their emotions, feelings, and thoughts and rendering them incapable of communicating not only through their mother tongue but also through the language of the coloniser. The forceful snatching of cultural identity leaves a shell of a person behind, who "speak like you / I think as you / I create like you," losing their hold on their beliefs. Language and culture, which constitute her identity, have been "scrambled" up in the process (9). They are not lost, but the system of residential schools has buried them.

The biggest dilemma that was faced by the survivors of the Residential schools was to distinguish between the two cultures that were imposed on them for years. There were "two ways" that they communicated. They knew both their indigenous language as well as the colonial language; however, the colonial "way was more powerful" (12). By claiming the colonial language to be more powerful than her indigenous one, Joe acknowledges that legislation like that which promoted Residential Schools and the Indian Act made the English and European worlds more "powerful" (12).

Notably, Rita Joe uses the word "speak" four times in the poem, even though she alludes to the phrase multiple times throughout. Her own voice, however, does not appear until the end of the poem when she begins to compose her monologue. The poet appears to

be making a point about the continuity of conversation through the written word, and so she makes an affirmation that her culture will survive despite significant disturbances. The poem seems to be underlining the irreparable loss that has occurred to the spoken form of the poet's mother tongue. When she speaks, the speaker appears to be embarrassed by what the colonists are attempting to communicate to her in their own language. The poet's humble gesture with which she reclaims her voice at the end of the poem, even though the poem is written in the colonisers' language: "Let me find my talk/ so I can teach you about me", demonstrates her strength to transcend the limitations of the colonisers' language. Those lines can be seen as proof that the poet is sincerely concerned with recovering her long-lost native language. The poet's anguish to recover and restore her lost mother tongue is evident in the tone of the poem, which is self-assertive even though the poem emphasises loss, disempowerment, and victimisation throughout the poem.

Similarly, her poem *Keskmsi* also acts as a medium that expresses her culture after surviving the Residential School system. The title itself means "ahead of myself," which can be considered to refer to Joe's identity, an identity that she has not realised as of yet. Her true identity awaits her in her future. The current identity, which is laced with colonial influence, will no longer be an imposing fact. The poem begins with Joe narrating her journey to the residential school when she was seven years old. Her teacher is "talking," speaking a language that she is unable to understand, a phenomenon that has already been discussed in her *poem I Lost My Talk* (Joe 3). The first stanza also addresses Joe's disorder and her lack of self-identification in the colonial teaching setting. When the narrator "print small words, the ones I know," it highlights how things in memory are the only remnants of the past cultural identity left for the indigenous communities.

By portraying her teacher as her oppressor and the eraser of her native identity in the second stanza, the poem directly tackles Joe's experience in Canadian Residential educational institutions. When the teacher asks the narrator, "Where did you find these?" it is a statement that reflects his surprise at her recalling her native culture (Joe 13). The idea behind the residential schools was to "kill the Indian inside the child," and bring forth a "civilised," and "refined" version of the natives. When the narrator points at herself, her head and her heart, it emphasises the cultural mark that remains present inside the natives. What she wrote may be a "jumble of words," but they still contain her native culture's reflection (Joe 17).

The last stanza of the poem is a lament by the poet. A lament over what she has lost, and what she yearns to achieve. The narrator did not have an identity at the beginning of the poem since it was taken away from her at the residential schools; however, at the end, she has "Caught up with myself," and is relearning who she once was. Her tool is her poetry. To maintain Mi'kmaq tradition, Joe's poetry gives the Mi'kmaq perspective on their social, cultural and political past. Her usage of vocabulary and phrases from the Mi'kmaq language also helps to preserve the culture. The poem's usage of the Mi'kmaq language allows it to be understood by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences when it is paired with English. In this way, Joe can balance the relationship and move toward equality by allowing individuals of the oppressor side to hear her voice as an Aboriginal. Her usage of both the Aboriginal language as well as the coloniser's language helps her to talk back to her oppressors and generate a narrative that talks for the ones whose voices the colonisers had extinguished.

While Joe's poetry emphasises reclaiming linguistic and cultural identity, Alootook Ipellie's work demonstrates how memory and imagery preserve Indigenous knowledge across generations. His poems confront the erasure imposed by residential schools, documenting both the losses and the enduring cultural traces that survive despite colonial suppression. The function of the Residential Schools was to eradicate the "Indian" out of the natives. It was to create a copy of themselves that had no previous ideology influencing them. The poem, *How Noisy They Seem* by Alootook Ipellie, highlights the Inuit's cultural background and how they reflect on the ancient traditions even in current times. Despite frivolous attempts by the colonisers to eradicate the native culture and identity, it remains alive in the minds and "memories" of the Indigenous communities.

The poem *How Noisy They Seem* expresses both the destruction as well as preservation of the traditions of the nation through the memory of the Inuit people's past lives. Ippelie begins his poem by stating that he saw a "picture" in a book, which "spoke of many memories of when I was still a child." (Ipellie 2). The "pictures" that awakened the poet's recollection maintained the nation's history, but as a product of technical advancement, they also symbolised, to some extent, a contemporary civilisation that forced the Inuit to renounce their country and traditional way of life. The "picture" also seems to imply that the culture and history that are present in the photograph are only histories now, stressing that the Inuit culture that he saw in his young years has not been a part of contemporary times. Rather, it is only present in photographs and memories now. Just like Thiong'O believed

that to decolonise one's mind, one needed to reconnect with one's roots and past, Ipellie does the same through the image from the past.

Residential Schools had a drastic impact on the minds of the survivors. As Ipellie (1992) summarised in his essay, "The Colonisation of the Arctic,"

> Seen through the eyes of "civilisation," the good that these purveyors of trade and religion did is incalculable. But the exploited Inuit saw their once-strong traditional culture left to disintegrate and flounder. For countless generations, the Inuit had had an iron grip on their culture; it took less than one generation for it to be put through the government's "cultural mill," never to be melded back to its original form. (1992: 46)

The cultural identity that was once a source of pride for the natives was nothing but a blurred memory left in either thoughts or pictures. The words like "didn't know," "thought to myself," and "probably," show the uncertainty left behind by the coloniser's influence on the natives (Ipellie 13,15). There is estrangement present in the contemporary natives for the nomadic life of their ancestors. The "chill" that Ipellie felt while recalling "the hidden beauty of the land" was not just based on reminiscences of childhood, while "Looking at two Inuit boys playing with their sleigh," it can be assumed to be influenced by his need to remember the past and present it to present subjects so that they are still connected to their colonial past (Ipellie 9).

There are various contrasts present in the poem that reflect Ipellie's perspective on the influence of colonisation on the native culture. The strongest one that runs throughout the poem is between the "noisy" times of the past and the "silent" life of the present. The title itself refers towards the past of the native, and how "noisy" they were, with life overflowing; however, in the postcolonial times, as seen through the gaze of the narrator, in the "feeling of silence," while looking at the photograph, one can only reminisce about the untraceable past (Ipellie 20). Through these pictures, one can bring the voice back to the Indigenous communities, making them relearn what they lost.

Similarly, in the poem, *Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border*, Ipellie represents the ongoing liminality of Indigenous survivors, caught between imposed Western norms and ancestral knowledge. The speaker, who is most likely the poet himself, asserts in the first few lines that his life "is never easy" (1). The metaphor of "invisible border" signals both the

psychological and social constraints created by colonial education. These invisible borders can be read as the residue of epistemic violence, making the rupture between the indigenous epistemologies and the Western ideals that were imposed on the natives. Every day, he must cross an invisible border, with one foot on each side. These two sides reflect his birth and his forced schooling in a Western education system, respectively. Residential Schools had a big impact on how the survivors looked at their surroundings. The narrator feels like an "illegitimate child," who is rejected by his family because they have lost their cultural identity by appropriating the coloniser's teaching. Despite there being no fault of the survivors of the Western education system, the natives are still shunned and rejected from both sides. From their native culture for not being true to their aboriginal roots, and by the western culture for not being "civilised," or "white" enough.

In the fourth stanza of the poem, the narrator states that he is "Inuk" and was not asked to be born this way. Neither was asked for permission when he was "forced / to learn an alien culture / With an alien language," (Ipellie 22-24). The coloniser took the speaker's free will and imposed their teaching on him. The border has "become so wide" due to colonisation and its repercussions, that the narrator is stuck in the middle. He is stuck in the middle with only himself and "forced to invent / A brand new dance step," (Ipellie 40-41). By "dance step", the speaker may be referring to different manners through which he can try and exert his agency since he is

> "…left to fend for myself
> Walking in two different worlds
> Trying my best to make sense
> Of two opposing cultures
> Which are unable to integrate
> Lest they swallow one another whole" (Ipellie 47-52)

The narrator understands that the manner he is compelled to live is not his fault, but it doesn't make life any easier. The two opposing cultures will never integrate or give space to each other to co-exist. The speaker wonders if ever a time will come when "invisible border / Cease to be," but by looking at the poem in its entirety, it can be assumed that the colonial and native ideologies will never coincide. They will remain separate through invisible borders, and it will be up to the individuals to navigate through them while simultaneously trying and become the makers of their own "world."

Conclusion

The objective of the present research study was to explore the decolonial narrative present in the contemporary indigenous literature in order to foreground the native's experience of the Residential Schools. By delimiting the research study to only the poetry of Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie, the analysis was conducted in a coherent and compact manner. As for the research questions that were at the centre, it could be seen through this research that even after decades of freedom from the Residential School System, the indigenous writers like Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie still felt its repercussions in their literature during the contemporary times. Their work illustrates the struggle of living between imposed colonial culture and ancestral knowledge, exemplified in Ipellie's "invisible borders," where dual cultural realities shape both identity and literary expression. Through this, the poetry enacts what Fanon identifies as the reclamation of selfhood from the colonised mind.

Through the strategic incorporation of Indigenous language and cultural knowledge into English, Joe and Ipellie produce a decolonial discourse that challenges the epistemic authority of the coloniser's language. Their focus remained on educating their fellow natives through different languages since vast native cultural knowledge of indigenous cultures was lost during the forced education of natives. As Thing'o said in his book, *Decolonising the Mind,* the colonised subject should make the native language "unassailable" through their usage. Rita Joe and Alootook Ipellie, through appropriation of their native language and culture in the language of the coloniser in the shape of their poetry, generated a decolonial discourse that acts as a mainframe to reclaim the indigenous identity that was lost due to colonisation of the minds through Residential Schools.

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