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Cree Nations in Canada

(Bakalářská práce)

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1. Introduction

In this bachelor thesis I decided to describe the Cree Nations in Canada. I chose this topic with the aim to acquire better understanding of the past and current situation of the First Nations. History of American continent is full of violence and injustice. The age of colonization connoted the end of many uncommon cultures. Original inhabitants were oppressed and in many cases killed by the European settlers. Extraordinary civilizations like Mayas were exterminated, preventing recognition of their exceptional cultures. Other civilizations managed to survive but usually with large losses. They live till today on the small portions of their former lands. Their relationship with the Europeans is not without problems and raises many questions.

Indians are usually perceived from different perspectives. Some see them as backward savages, others as poor victims of mistreating. The real situation is not however that unambiguous and requires a deeper study. In my work I deal with the Cree Nations since their early history. I depict their original culture, traditions and way of life for further analysis of changes caused by the European settlement. In history of Crees I will focus on the relations with the Europeans and their role in the changing culture of the Cree Nations. I will also analyze some significant events in the Cree history and determine their impact on the Cree. Next I will pay special attention to the assimilation policies of Canada, their appropriateness and possible problems arising from their implementation. Last chapter describes the current situation of the Cree Nations. The main objective of this thesis is to offer an unbiased perspective on the impacts of the European intervention into the Cree society and the implications of individual measures leading to the current situation of the Cree Nations.

2. General information about Cree Nations

2.1. Basic characteristics

In the first part of my work I would like to focus on the main characteristics of the Cree Nations and their way of life before they encountered the European settlers. In the centre of my attention will be their religion because of its importance in their everyday lives. Information gathered in this chapter will serve me as source data for my future evaluation of the current state of the Cree.

The name of the tribe comes probably from the French word *Kristeneaux* by which the French named a small Cree band. The Cree also refer to themselves as *Ininiw*, which means “person”, *Nehiyawak*, meaning “those who speak the same language” or *Atheneuwuck*, meaning “people”. In the 16th century there were approximately 20,000 Cree living in Canada.¹

The Cree are one of the largest groups of Native Americans in North America and the largest group of First Nations in Canada. There are approximately 200,000 Cree people today living in communities throughout Canada. This number includes only the registered Cree, the real number might be therefore even higher. A group of Cree also live in the northern United States, where they share a reservation with the Ojibwa. Majority of the Cree bands live in the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and eastern Quebec.²

There are over 135 different bands of Cree Indians within Canada, some of which live without any contact with other bands.³

There are many divisions of the Cree tribes, according to their location or dialect. These divisions are however only tentative as some of these sections consist of autonomous groups.⁴

¹ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1300.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

² Intercontinental cry, “Cree,” <http://intercontinentalcry.org/peoples/cree/>

³ The American Indian Heritage Foundation, “Cree Indians,” The American Indian Heritage Foundation, <http://www.indians.org/articles/cree-indians.html#&panel1-2>

⁴ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1300.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

2.2. Language

Cree language belongs to the Algonquian language family. We can distinguish five major Cree dialects: Plains/Western Cree, Woodlands/Northern Cree, Swampy/Central Cree, Moose Cree and James Bay/Eastern Cree. There are large differences between individual dialects and some linguists consider them distinct languages. The dialects are however largely mutually intelligible. Universally the dialects of neighbouring bands are analogous and the differences grow with the growing distance of the bands. The most divergent is Eastern Cree. Cree is a polysynthetic language which uses special syllabary. The Consonant are represented by shapes which are rotated in four directions to represent vowels. The word order is fairly free. Cree language heavily influenced two other languages. First of them is Michif, which is a Metis creole that combines Cree verbs and French nouns. The second largely influenced language is Severn Ojibway also called Oji-Cree, which also uses Cree syllabary. The Cree language is one of the most influential of Native American languages.⁵

2.3. Way of life

All Cree bands are connected by the language and certain traditions, their way of life however differs according to their environment.

The Cree who lived mostly on barren grounds lived together in bands as they relied mostly on the caribou, which could be hunted more efficiently by a group than by individuals. The Woods Cree, who resided the forests lived usually isolated. Each family spent the winter hunting in its own territory.⁶

In the summer season they gathered with other families around the lakes or streams for councils and ceremonies. The families lived in wooden lodges covered with bark and animal skins. The lodges were able to shelter large Cree families of ten or more people. They also used special sweat lodges to cure the sick, menstrual lodges and ceremonial lodges.⁷

⁵ Native Languages of the Americas, “ Native Languages of the Americas: Cree,” Native Languages of the Americas, <http://www.native-languages.org/cree.htm>

⁶ Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969), 290-291.

⁷ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1302.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

In tribal councils were individual bands represented by their leaders. The councils met on specific occasions and made decisions concerning war, territorial movements and other matters.⁸

As a means of transport the Cree used snowshoes and birch bark canoes. The Plains Cree who resided in the south hunted buffalo. For housing they used portable tipis made of hides.⁹

Cree clothing usually consisted of caribou and buffalo hides. Some of them were decorated by beadwork or painted figures. Special importance had winter moccasins made of buffalo skin which helped the Cree to stay warm in the winter and were also used in wedding ceremonies as a gift from the bride to her future husband.¹⁰

The Cree also embroidered moose hair, feather and porcupine quill, carved wood items and used body tattooing. Women usually tattooed only their face and men their entire body.¹¹

The Cree bands were usually small and consisted of several families. Each Cree band had a chief, a leading man who distinguished himself in war. After his death he was usually succeeded by his son. Theft was rare among the Cree. Murder was usually avenged by relatives. Important decisions were discussed by the chief with the council of leading men. The leaders spoke in order of age of prestige, the most respected spoke last. The chief then made the final decision.¹²

Family life of the Cree differs significantly from the traditional notion of a family.

Polygamy and wife-exchange were commonly permitted, however adultery by the wife was severely punished. Cree were free to move among the bands and marry outside

⁸ Ross, Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moor, *A cultural geography of North American Indians* (Boulder : Westview Press, 1987), 51.

⁹ Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes, Third Edition* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2006), 81.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰ Galafilm productions, "Traditional Dress," Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_dress.html

¹¹ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1302.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹² Galafilm productions, "Community," Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_community.html

their tribe. Many Cree women married European trappers and traders who arrived in North America. The children with this mixed ancestry were called “Métis”.¹³

Polygamy was among others implied by the unbalanced division of labour. Generally the men were responsible for hunting while the women took care of the rest. Their activities included skinning of animals, cleaning hides, making weapons etc. In favor of polygamy spoke also the diminishment of male population caused by the acquisition of firearms.¹⁴

A marriage was perceived more as an agreement between two families than an affair of two individuals. This attitude is confirmed by a fact that a widow was generally obliged to marry her husband’s unmarried brother and he was obliged to care for her and her children.¹⁵

Relations inside the band were also very close. Extended families lived together under one roof, aunts and uncles were taken as mothers and fathers. The elders were perceived as grandmothers and grandfathers and all widows and orphans were always sheltered by the group.¹⁶

Every married couple could separate without any difficulties. If twins were born, one of them (preferably a girl) was always killed. Otherwise the Cree treated their children with affection and physical punishments were not used.¹⁷

Instead of punishment the Cree used ridicule and praise. When a young boy was going to his first war party, he was given a derogatory and he had to prove his bravery by stealing a horse or killing an enemy to acquire a better name. The women took an important part in the ridiculing, especially the young man’s fiancée.¹⁸

Wars between whole tribes were uncommon, generally only smaller conflicts took place with small groups of people being involved. Cree traditional enemies were the neighboring Eskimo and Athapaskans to whom the Cree usually stole their possessions

¹³ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1301-1302.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁴ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 16-17.

¹⁵ Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969), 230.

¹⁶ Galafilm productions, “ Community,” Galafilm productions,

http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_community.html

¹⁷ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), strana?1301

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁸ Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969), 383-384.

and women. After the European settlement and acquisition of firearms the clashes became larger, more frequent and more deadly.¹⁹

Next Cree enemy was the Blackfoot tribe. On the other hand the Cree had a long lasting alliance with the Assiniboin with whom they shared their lands and traded frequently. The Natives did not understand the land ownership as the Europeans do. Rights of the group were superior to those of individuals.²⁰

The Cree naturally helped each other in time of crisis, hungry families were allowed to hunt in neighboring territories, the hides however always stayed with the owner of territory.²¹

On the other hand the old and sick were often killed or abandoned. The dead were nevertheless treated with respect. They were either buried in the ground or on the scaffold and remembered in the annual feast of the dead.²²

2.4. Religion

The sub-arctic mythology reflects the uncertainty of human life in the harsh conditions. All nations had many myths and legends about all the aspects of life. There were myths about the creation of all things in the world, creation of the Sun, the Moon, the stars and the wind. The myths were not told just for amusement, they represented a valuable source of knowledge. The myths and legends explained how should people behave, how should be the nature treated. They taught people to respect the nature and all its creation.²³

The central figure of the ancient world was the Raven, also called Wisakedjaka. He was very inconsistent, described as the creator, transformer, manipulator of the nature force, but also as a coward, thief and gourmand. Allegedly he created the first people from stone, but when he realized they were immortal, he created them again but this time from dust, so they became mortal. There are no rituals connected with the Raven, moreover there is no evidence that he was considered as god, he definitely cannot be

¹⁹ Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969), 313-320.

²⁰ Ross, Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moor, *A cultural geography of North American Indians* (Boulder : Westview Press, 1987), 73.

²¹ Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969), 273-274.

²² Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), strana?1301-1302

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

²³ Colin F. Taylor et al., *Mýty a legendy Indiánů Severní Ameriky* (Praha : Volvox Globator, 1995), 97-99.

compared to the christian conception of god.²⁴

Another important figure is Kice Manito who is the ruler of all creation, which came from his will. He was a distant mysterious and omniscient entity. Kice Manito played no role in any of the traditional myths and is never embodied by anyone or anything during the rituals and ceremonies. He is in contradiction with many myths about the creation of world by the Raven. Relativism is however typical for Subarctic culture. There were also many smaller manitos, intermediaries between humans and Kice Manito, who possessed every living thing. Every animal species and every plant had its spirit or patron, who looked after them. To have a successful hunt, the hunters had to gain favor of the particular patron of the game.²⁵

At birth, a strong spirit force called the ahtca-k entered human body and left it at death. This spirit could temporarily leave the body during visions. After death the spirit travelled into so called Oskaskog-Wask or Green Grass World, where all people lived happily. The spirit of disease and vicious animals and plants was called Matci-Manito. With the christianization he became similar to Christian devil.²⁶

The Cree spirituality was closely bound with the nature. They believed that the spirits reside in everything natural. Some places in the nature like waterfalls, lakes or old trees were believed to have special powers and were treated as sacred. The soil was considered as a source of power and was also treated with respect. It was used by shamans during the ceremonies to heal the sick or for coloring of the body. Shamans were highly respected members of the society as they were able to talk with the spirits. Shamans had visions which enabled them to heal the sick, predict the weather, determine the position of the game or to foretell the future. Both men and women could become shamans. The Cree celebrated the midwinter, weddings, the first kill of young boys, first menstruation of young girls, arrival of the salmon and many other occasions. The celebrations were usually included dancing, gambling, competing in strength and dexterity. There were no permanent temples for the ceremonies, the Cree used temporary penthouses which were torn down after the ceremony.²⁷

²⁴ Colin F. Taylor et al., *Mýty a legendy Indiánů Severní Ameriky* (Praha : Volvox Globator, 1995), 98-101.

²⁵ Colin F. Taylor et al., *Mýty a legendy Indiánů Severní Ameriky* (Praha : Volvox Globator, 1995), 100-101.

²⁶ Galafilm productions, "Cree Religion," Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_religion.html

²⁷ Colin F. Taylor et al., *Mýty a legendy Indiánů Severní Ameriky* (Praha : Volvox Globator, 1995), 104-108.

A special religious and social event was the Sun Dance, which was held annually and also on special occasions. During this event people prayed to the spirits to grant them special favours. Many people gathered so they could join their distant families and old friends in celebrations. The Sun Dance also helped to settle quarrells between individual people.²⁸

One of the important traditions was the Vision Quest, which had to be completed by most young boys. The Vision Quest usually took place in an isolated area. The boy was left alone without food or water for a few days and he prayed until he had a vision of spirit helpers. These spirits endowed him with special gifts and knowledge to help him in his life. The greatest gift of all was the ability to cure the sick. A person who had received such gift became a shaman.²⁹

2.5. Hunting

Hunting was a vital part of the Cree life. Cree hunted caribou, moose, rabbits, beavers and also squirells, porcupine and muskrats. Fishing was also common. Bears were hunted only exceptionally and usually for the fat. As the Cree spirituality was connected with the nature, the Cree had special rules and rituals for the treating of the kill. They were grateful to the nature for providing them with food and every killed animal was treated with respect. The hunters never boasted about their kill and some animals were so respected that they were never spoken of directly.³⁰

Joe Friday from Woods Cree band expressed his attitude towards hunting in the following words:

*“I never kill a bird or other animal without feeling bad inside. All true hunters must have that feeling that prevents them from killing just for killing’s sake. There’s no fun in just destroying life, and the Great Spirit puts that shadow in your heart when you destroy his creatures.”*³¹

²⁸ Galafilm productions, “Cree Religion,” Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_religion.html

²⁹ Galafilm productions, “Cree Religion,” Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_religion.html

³⁰ Colin F. Taylor et al., *Mýty a legendy Indiánů Severní Ameriky* (Praha : Volvox Globator, 1995), 106.

³¹ Donna Hightower Langston, *The Native American World* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 33. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

The Cree attitude towards the nature differs significantly from the attitude of the Europeans, who came into North America with a vision of profit. The intense connection of the Cree people with the nature is undeniable.

Killing of a bear was always followed by a ritual in which he was given an offering of tobacco on his chest, small bits of his meat were thrown into the fire to ensure success in future hunt. The head and forepaws were painted, wrapped in the birch bark and tied to a tree in remembrance. The antlers of moose and caribou were also decorated and displayed on the trees. Bones of the water animals were returned to the water with a wish of rebirth. The Cree kept some animal parts as amulets and trophies. A necklace made of bear claws was believed to have healing power and was worn only by the most respected men.³²

2.6. Significant leaders

Like any other nation, Crees had some notable leaders who fought for freedom of their people. On the following lines I decided to depict the lives of the most notable Cree chiefs whose legacy should not be forgotten.

Piapot (Hole in the Sioux) was born in 1816. When he was a small boy, he was captured by a band of Sioux. He lived with them for fourteen years until he was rescued. After becoming a chief, he wanted a large reservation in the Cypress Hills area and he kept negotiating the terms of treaties with Canadian government. Piapot was never satisfied with the outcome and all his life he was fighting for recognition of Aboriginal rights.³³

Big Bear (Mistihui'muskwa), chief of Plains Cree, was born about 1825 in Saskatchewan. He refused to convert to christianity and he led the last resistance to the dispersal of the Cree on reserves. Facing poverty and starvation, he eventually signed the treaty. After a revolt of the young warriors under his leadership, he was found guilty of treason-felony and imprisoned for three years. He was released early due to poor health and died in the following year.³⁴

³² Colin F. Taylor et al., *Mýty a legendy Indiánů Severní Ameriky* (Praha : Volvox Globator, 1995), 107.

³³ Rob Nestor, "Piapot," The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/piapot_1816-1908.html

³⁴ Galafilm productions, "Big Bear," Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/sp_bigbear.html

Poundmaker (Pitikwahanapiwiyin), born in 1842, was a Plains Cree chief known as a peacemaker and defender of his people. In 1876 he made the Canadian government incorporate a provision of famine relief into Treaty Number 6. When the government failed to meet its obligations, Poundmaker's band put up a war lodge. That was followed by the Battle of Cut Knife led by Fine Day. To prevent further bloodshed Poundmaker surrendered and was accused of treason-felony and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. He was released early because of his poor health.³⁵

Fine Day was a skilled warrior, hunter and powerful shaman. As a warchief of Plains Cree, he defeated the Canadian Army at Cut Knife Hill. His warriors charged the Canadian Army from many different directions which made them believe that they numbered 500, when they were barely 50 warriors.³⁶

2.7. Summary

All the information gathered in this chapter suggest that the Cree were profoundly religious nation with a strong bond to the nature. The nature around them was perceived as a generous source of all things necessary for their living. The Cree lived in harmony with their environment and respected the natural order of things. Though the Cree may seem impecunious and backward to a civilized man, they always remained grateful for the gifts of nature and treated them with respect. Moreover they acted as one family, always willing to help anyone in need. Such attitude is rather unusual in modern society. I also decided to depict some distinctive patterns of their family life because of their disagreement with the common notion of a family. Though I do not agree with all of their habits, after a closer examination I find their way of life natural. Only the strong survive in the nature and the Cree followed this pattern, forming a self-sufficient and well functioning society.

³⁵ Galafilm productions, "Poundmaker," Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/sp_poundmaker.html

³⁶ Galafilm productions, "Fine Day," Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/sp_fineday.html

3. History of the Cree Nations

The history of the Cree is connected with the history of all First Nations in Canada and also with the history of the Canadian state itself. Before any deeper examination of the history of Cree I would like to outline the early history of First Nations in Canada and their role in the formation of Canadian state. Though some events mentioned below did not directly include the Cree, they affected them as well as other Nations and shaped their future, making them the people they are today.

3.1. Early history

Before the arrival of Europeans, First Nations were self-sufficient, using the natural resources to satisfy their material and spiritual needs. They are usually divided according to their geographic location to Woodland First Nations living in the east, Iroquoian First Nations in the south, Plains First Nations, who inhabited the Prairies, Plateau First Nations, Pacific Coast First Nations and the First Nations of the Mackenzie and Yukon River Basins.³⁷

Their numbers at the time of European contact are estimated to approximately 350 000 Natives.³⁸

We cannot tell with any accuracy how and when the ancestors of the First Nations settled the North America. There are many theories on this subject, the most widely accepted is the Bering Strait theory. This theory states that the settlement begun with the arrival of nomadic bands from Siberia across the Bering Strait during the last ice age. The crossing was possible due to lower sea level, which made the land in the Bering Strait exposed. The exact time is not known, growing archeological evidence is continually pushing the estimated date further back. Present estimation suggests that the American continent was first settled 40 000 years ago.³⁹

Around the year 1000 A.D. the Vikings crossed the Atlantic Ocean and settled Greenland. The Vikings were coming to Canada repeatedly but hostile Inuits (Eskimos) prevented them from establishing permanent settlements on the mainland. In the 14th

³⁷ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, "First Nations in Canada," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307460755710/1307460872523>

³⁸ Frank Trovato, "Aboriginal People, Demography," The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/native-people-demography>

³⁹ Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes, Third Edition* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2006), 239-240. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

century Norway suffered a plague outbreak which signified the end of the Viking voyages to North America. In the 15th century Portugal, Spain, France and England began to contemplate crossing the Atlantic Ocean. In 1492 Christopher Columbus, Italian navigator in the service of Spain, discovered the new continent, assuming that he found a new route to India. He was soon followed by other explorers. In 1497 John Cabot reached the Newfoundland, declaring it property of the British Crown. French exploration began in 1534 when Jacques Cartier reached North America. Cartier travelled inland and traded with the Natives. The Natives were very friendly and hospitable and he brought two of them with him to France to teach them French and to use them as companions on the following expeditions.⁴⁰

3.2. Role of the First Nations in the formation of Canadian state

17th century marked the beginning of competition between the French and the English. In the beginning of 17th century the French established Port Royal in present New Scotia, the first farmstead on the Canadian soil. The first permanent settlement named Jamestown was established by the English in 1607 in southeast Virginia. The French followed them by the establishment of permanent settlement in Quebec. The French focused mostly on the fur trade in cooperation with the Natives, especially with Algonquians. The English later on allied with the Iroquios, who were enemies of the Algonquians.⁴¹

The Natives evidently played an important role in the fur trade. They were very precious allies and assistants who helped the Europeans adapt to the new environment.

In the 17th century began the christianization of the Native tribes by French Jesuits. Besides the new religion, the European colonists brought with them many diseases to which the Natives were not immune. In 1688 fights brought out between the French and the English over the North American continent. Though the English had support of the Iroquios, most of the Native Tribes supported the French. The contest was escalated by the Seven Years' War in 1756. France lost all land claims in North America by signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763.⁴²

The European settlement had apparently a negative effect on the Native people. Besides all the illnesses brought by the settlers, the Europeans used the Natives to pursue their

⁴⁰ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 21-25.

⁴¹ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 24-29.

⁴² Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 33-37.

commercial and military interests and by such action they strengthened animosity between the Native Tribes.

The conditions worsened for the Natives under the British rule as the British were much less generous than the French used to be. New colonists were pouring into the country and the Natives were being pushed away from their territories. Though some treaties were signed concerning the acquisition of lands from the Natives, the British usually failed to pay for these lands. In 1763 started the Pontiac's Rebellion, led by Pontiac, the chief of the Ottawa tribe. To suppress the rebellion the British used among others biological weapons in form of gifts infected by smallpox. The rebellion was defeated by the British in 1764. As an official response to the extrusion of Natives was issued the Royal Proclamation which acknowledged their land rights. This however did not stop further influx of settlers into their territories.⁴³

A different approach towards the Natives can be seen on the side of the French and the British. The British failure to keep their promises demonstrates their negligent attitude towards the Natives. The usage of biological weapons however does not need to represent the official attitude of the Crown, more likely could be an error of its local representatives.

In the last half of 18th century the thirteen colonies, who wanted to break from the British rule, began the American Revolution. This revolution affected also the Natives, who perceived it as a threat. Some Native tribes supported the British, while others supported the Americans. American Revolutionary War ended in 1783 by the signing of the Treaty of Paris which officially acknowledged the independence of the thirteen colonies. The treaty however did not include any mention of the Natives or their land rights.⁴⁴

Once again were the Natives dragged into a conflict of the Europeans, who were fighting for lands which used to be Native territories. The fact that the Natives were not mentioned in the treaty suggests that their interests were unimportant to both parties involved.

The recognition of the United States of America had a great impact on the relationship of the Natives and British Crown as some 30,000 refugees from the American colonies

⁴³ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 43-44.

⁴⁴ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 47-49.

moved to the remaining British colonies. The British however still considered the Natives as important military allies and the Natives fought with them against the American invasion during the War of 1812. When the war was over, new colonists were pouring in, demanding more and more lands. The Natives were no longer needed and their relationship with the British Crown began to shift.⁴⁵

„Not only had military threats to the colonies faded with the end of the War of 1812, but the colonial militia was able to draw on the ever-growing settler population to meet the colony's defensive needs. In the decades following the War of 1812, British administrators therefore began to regard First Nations as dependents, rather than allies.“⁴⁶

Sudden ability of the British to defend their interests made their alliances with the Natives unimportant and unnecessary.

This change of attitude had an immense impact on the following legal action concerning the Natives. The British began to perceive the Natives as inferior and felt obliged to teach them Christianity and agriculture. The Natives were encouraged to leave their traditional lifeways and to adopt British way of life. Though such attempts did not prove to be efficient, the endeavour to civilize the Natives remained in the Indian policy for the next 150 years. Many treaties were signed which displaced the Natives into reserves, much smaller than their former territories. Compensations for such displacement were hardly sufficient. The Natives were oppressed and suffered in pitiful living conditions. Yet many of them joined the army in both World Wars. The late 1940s marked the beginning of social and political changes which would start a new era for the First Nations.⁴⁷

The history of Native tribes in Canada is full of incomprehension and mistreating. The attitude of the British caused without a doubt much damage to the Native culture. The British repeatedly failed to keep their promises made to the Natives, yet the Natives still supported them in their battles. Such action shows their determination to get along with the British and to prove that the Natives deserve to be treated fairly.

⁴⁵ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, “First Nations in Canada,” Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307460755710/1307460872523>

⁴⁶ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, “First Nations in Canada,” Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307460755710/1307460872523>

⁴⁷ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, “First Nations in Canada,” Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307460755710/1307460872523>

3.3. History of the Cree Nations

It is not an easy task to unify the history of the Cree Nations because they inhabited such a large territory. Though the Cree bands are bound together by their culture and language, the history of individual bands differs. However history of the Cree Nations contains some events that affected all of the Cree or at least their majority. In this chapter I would like to summarize history of Crees, the most significant events will be further examined in the next chapter.

Crees have been living in their territory for at least 4,000 years. In the sixteenth century there were about 20,000 Crees. In 1610 arrived the british Henry Hudson exploration and Crees encountered Europeans for the first time. Around 1670 the first trade forts were built. Since the beginning of colonization Crees accepted Europeans very well. They regularly intermarried with French and Scottish traders which resulted in the mixed race called Métis. Later on Métis developed their own culture.⁴⁸

In the May 2, 1670 the Hudson's Bay Company was established under British rule and it was given control of a large area called Rupert's Land, which was approximately equal to one third of present Canada. Crees played an important role in local fur trade. They served as skilled guides and trappers and main suppliers of pelts. Crees cooperated both with the French and the English and they traded pelts for guns, ammunition, axes and food. Crees also played a role of middlemen as they established treaties with other First Nations.⁴⁹

The acquisition of firearms from the Europeans gave Crees an advantage over other tribes. Strengthened also by the completion of an alliance with the Assiniboines, Cree tribes expanded almost to the Arctic Sea, the Rocky Mountains, and the Red River region. In the Great Plains Cree adopted much of classic Plains culture, including teepee housing and nomadic way of life due to their dependence on the buffalo.⁵⁰

The cooperation seems to be profitable for all participating sides, the Cree obtained new weapons which would make their hunting more effective. However the consequences of

⁴⁸ Donna Hightower Langston, *The Native American World* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 169-170. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁴⁹ CANADIAN Geographic, "A brief history of Crees," CANADIAN Geographic, <http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/nd05/indepth/history.asp>

⁵⁰ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1302. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

this cooperation were much more extensive and affected all areas of their lives and put the circumstances in the area out of natural ballance.

In the late 18th century was formed the british North West Company in Montréal, a new competition for current monopoly of Hudson Bay Company. Both of these companies collaborated with the Cree hunters and with the Métis. Through the excellent knowledge of the environment, Crees served as guides, porters, trappers and hunters. Obtained pelts the Crees exchanged for various goods. Europeans were aware of the advantages of cooperation with the Natives and many employees of above mentioned companies married Cree or Métis women. These women accompanied them on their travels and provided considerable help in trade. In the 19th century were the trade Posts of North West Company inhabited inter alia by approximately thousand Cree and Métis women and their children.⁵¹

Crees were gradually becoming dependent on non-Native goods and trading became their main focus. It heavily affected their culture and lifestyle. Many of their customs changed or vanished during this period.⁵²

The fur trade had obviously an immense impact on the Cree way of life. The Cree used to hunt for living, now they were hunting to exchange their kill for goods. The way of life which served them for centuries began to be pushed away. The new goods from the Europeans seemed to enrich their lives and make them easier, their benefits are however questionable as they stood at the beginning of the Natives' dependence on the Europeans. Openness toward the Europeans definitely brought Crees many advantages, however it also implicated faster disappearing of traditions.

In the early 1780 smallpox epidemic greatly reduced the population of the Cree and other tribes, especially in the Hudson Bay area. Survivors had to face frequent raids of enemies and at the same time also the first problems with alcohol addiction among the Crees occurred.⁵³

„Furthermore, the Crees' strong trade position led to over trapping as well as the depletion of the moose and caribou herds by the early nineteenth century. Although the

⁵¹ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 99-100.

⁵² Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1302-1303.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁵³ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1302-1303.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

effects were partially offset by the Indians' growing dependence on items of non-Native manufacture, these trends combined to shrink the Indians' land base."⁵⁴

It is apparent that the Cree were not prepared for the European culture and its vices. The animals they used to hunt for centuries were suddenly disappearing thanks to the expansion of fur trade. Though the Europeans gave Crees an opportunity to expand and seize new territories, the overall impact of their cooperation seems rather unfavorable for the Crees.

In 1821 the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company united under the Hudson's Bay Company name. In that period many Crees decided to leave their traditional lives and to move closer to trade posts.⁵⁵

A second devastating smallpox epidemic struck Crees in 1837. Spread of the disease was accelerated by nescience of way of contagion and sociable way of life of the Natives. Though the epidemic was disastrous, Crees were helped by the Hudson Bay Company which provided them with a vaccine. Other tribes were left to their fate which resulted in the Cree being the largest tribe in the prairies. Europeas brought many other diseases including diphtheria, mumps, whooping cough and influenza. Natives were not immune to these diseases and they were dying by thousands. In 1870 due to a shortage of vaccine measles killed 35 000 Natives and Métis.⁵⁶

Benefits resulting from the cooperation with Europeans are becoming outbalanced by the negative effects of the European settlement. Though the Hudson Bay Company provided the Cree with a vaccine, the vaccine would not be necessary if the Europeans had not brought the contagion. When the Hudson Bay provided the Cree with medical assistance while excluding all the other tribes, they again disrupted the balance between individual tribes in the area.

In the middle of the nineteenth century began an intense missionary activity which suppressed the traditional spirituality of Native tribes. These activities resulted in elimination of almost all traditional religions. By the middle of the twentieth century

⁵⁴ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1303.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁵⁵ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1302-1303.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁵⁶ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 104-105.

had most Indians accepted Christian faith, though many bands retained some of their old beliefs and customs.⁵⁷

The imposition of the Christian religion showed no respect for the Native culture and traditions. As the Crees had a unique religion based on living in harmony with the nature, the christian religion, brought from a different continent and from a completely different culture must have been abstruse and confusing. The Crees were perceived as inferior people who need to be saved and transformed into proper Christians. The humiliation and denial of their religion connoted loss of their identity.

In the year 1871 were signed Treaty 1 and 2, the first two of Numbered treaties between the Aboriginal people of Canada and the Canadian government. In all of eleven treaties groups of Natives relinquished titles to their territories in exchange for reserved land under specific conditions.⁵⁸

The year 1885 was marked by the North-West Rebellion, an uprising of the Métis and the Western Cree to protect their land rights. This rebellion led by Louis Riel of Métis ancestry included series of armed conflicts with casualties on both sides, starting with the battle of Duck Lake and ending with the Battle of Loon Lake, resulting in the defeat of the Métis and Cree.⁵⁹

In 1971 was first announced the James Bay I hydroelectric project in northern Quebec, which intended to provide power to Canadian and U.S. communities. The Crees unsuccessfully lobbied against the project because it meant flooding of approximately 7,500 square miles of their traditional territory. Their lobbying was more succesful in 1994 when they publically protested against the James Bay II project, also called the Great Whale Project, which would have flooded 2,000 square miles.⁶⁰

In the beginning of 20th century Crees lost their land and were removed to reserves under control of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. The main goal of this unit was to assimilate the Natives and to help them merge with the white society. Many

⁵⁷ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 1303.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁵⁸ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 550 -552.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁵⁹ Goldi Productions Ltd., "The North West Resistance – 1885," Canada's First Peoples,

http://firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_metis/fp_metis_background.html

⁶⁰ Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes, Third Edition* (New York: Checmark Books, 2006), 83.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

forms of education were introduced but they were not very successful. Natives were enforced to leave their traditional way of life and their religious rituals were prohibited. Cree children were taken from their families and sent to missionary schools to be converted to christianity. Men were forced to replace trapping and hunting with farming which was considered womens work, extremely degrading for a Cree man. All these forcible changes led to extirpation and demoralization of the Cree. Many of them sought solace in alcohol which had a fatal effect on their population. Extensive government measures did not succeed and only an inconsiderable number of Natives was assimilated. On the reserves Crees lived in miserable conditions facing diseases, alcoholism and starvation without any hope for a change for the better. Some of the chiefs resisted and attempted to save their tribes. Colonel F.O.Loft, mohawk chief from Ontario, began to organize League of Indians of Canada which was striving for the survival of Native tribes and protection of their rights. He was followed by many others, including Cree Anglican parson Edward Ahenakew. This endeavour was also supported by missionaries and the Natives who converted to Christianity. Further organizations defending Natives rights were formed bringing a gleam of hope to devastated Native tribes of Canada.⁶¹

The history of the Cree is very similar to the history of other Natives in Canada. Initial cooperation with the Europeans was later replaced by forced Christianization, oppression and extrusion of culture. The far-reaching consequences of such actions are undeniable. The British transformed self-sufficient tribes with genuine culture into piteous people dependent on the goodwill of the government.

⁶¹ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2000), 196-197.

4. Significant conflicts

In this chapter I will look into the most significant conflicts of the Cree with the Europeans. These conflicts had a profound effect on the Cree and changed their relationship with the government.

4.1. The North-West Rebellion

The North-West Rebellion was the largest Canadian Indian war. The central figure of this rebellion was Luis Riel, Métis leader who fought for recognition of Métis and Indian land rights. He was an experienced leader as he previously led the Métis in the Red River rebellion, in which the Cree did not participate. The North-West Rebellion was an outcome of many grievances against the Cree and the Métis people.⁶²

During the 1870s were the Natives pressured to sign treaties that imparted rights to their home land to the Government of Canada. In return they were promised food, education, medical assistance and further support. The government however failed to keep its promises. By the year 1880 the buffalo became almost extinct. This fact combining with the Cree's nescience of farming resulted in starvation of the Plains Cree. At the same time smallpox was spreading in the west. The Canadian government did not provide adequate famine relief nor a vaccine and the rations were even cut back. All pleas for help were unanswered.⁶³

The Plains Cree signed the treaties to ensure the future for their tribes. They exchanged their land for promises of the government and were betrayed. Their people starved and suffered illnesses brought from Europe with noone there to help them.

The Cree chief Big Bear expressed his disappointment in an Indian council held at Duck Lake in 1884 as follows:

“I have been trying to seize the promises the whites made to me; I have been grasping but I cannot find them. What they have promised me straight away, I have not yet seen the half of it. ”⁶⁴

⁶² Goldi Productions Ltd., “The North West Resistance – 1885,” Canada's First Peoples, http://firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_metis/fp_metis_background.html

⁶³ Goldi Productions Ltd., “The North West Resistance – 1885,” Canada's First Peoples, http://firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_metis/fp_metis_background.html

⁶⁴ Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes, Third Edition* (New York: Chechmark Books, 2006), 83. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

Attitude of the government was evidently perplexing for Big Bear who entrusted his people to the Crown and was left empty handed. His words connote a great discontent and a sense of betrayal.

Another fact leading to the rebellion was the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway which brought more white settlers who were ignorant of Natives and Métis land rights. A Cree chief Piapot sabotaged the construction of railway by removing the survey stakes for a stretch of 30 miles. Few months later he camped with his band right in the path of the planned railway. They were driven away without any bloodshed.⁶⁵

The Natives and the Métis were constantly pushed off their lands, the Métis tried to address the Government in this matter but they were ignored. As a result they decided to bring back Luis Riel, who lived in exile in the USA and to make him leader of the resistance. Luis Riel returned to Canada and prompted dissatisfied tribes to unite and demand recognition of their rights. He wrote a petition which asserted Métis rights and sent it to the Government.⁶⁶

The petition required confirmation of lands, formation of provinces, establishment of schools and hospitals and provision of support for the Métis.⁶⁷

Because the petition was once again ignored, Louis Riel settled a provisional government. Moreover he formed an army of 400 men led by Jr. Gabriel Dumont which occupied trading post at Dutch Lake. On March 26, 1885 North West Mounted Police attempted to regain the trading post. This attempt resulted in 5 Métis and 10 government troops being killed. Riel called off any further bloodshed. Once again Riel urged Natives to join him in resistance and Crees decided to participate.⁶⁸

It is important to remember that the Cree were in a desperate condition because of their trust in the government. The rebellion was an opportunity to stand up for their rights.

⁶⁵ Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian, Third edition* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), 202.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁶⁶ Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian, Third edition* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), 202-203.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁶⁷ Donna Hightower Langston, *The Native American World* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 414. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁶⁸ Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian, Third edition* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), 203.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

In March 1885 Cree chief Poundmaker with approximately 200 warriors attacked the settlement of Battleford. They ransacked and burned down buildings and killed one settler. In the April 1885 Big Bear with the same amount of warriors attacked the settlement of Frog Lake in the North Saskatchewan. They captured 13 settlers. Big Bear tried to prevent a massacre but he was disobeyed by the young war chief Wandering Spirit who shot one of the prisoners. Other warriors joined in, killing 8 more settlers. Government responded by raising of the North West Field Force led by Colonel William Otter. This army of 8,000 men was able to move westward thanks to the Canadian Pacific Railway.⁶⁹

A desperate condition asks for desperate actions and the Cree unleashed their anger. Though their rage was justified, they got it out of control which resulted into an unnecessary massacre.

On May 2, 1885 Colonel Otter and his men attacked Poundmaker's camp at Cut Knife Creek. The Cree counterattacked under the leadership of war chief Fine Day and forced Otter to retreat to Battleford. Poundmaker stopped his people from attacking retreating troops. Otter lost 8 men, Crees lost 6. In May 9, 1885 an army under General Middleton attacked Métis at Batoche. The Métis resisted for three days, then they surrendered. The Rebellion ended on June 3 at Loon Lake, where the Mounted Police killed 4 of the retreating Cree men, one of them was a prominent Woods Cree chief.⁷⁰

After the Métis surrendered, there was not much hope among the remaining rebels. On May 26 Poundmaker and his tribe also surrendered to General Middleton at Battleford. The soldiers were not able to find Big Bear until he surrendered to the Mounted Police on July 2 at Fort Carlton. Luis Riel was charged with high treason and hanged at Regina in November 16, 1885. Gabriel Dumont fled to the USA. Poundmaker and Big Bear were sentenced to 3 years in jail.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian, Third edition* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), 203-204.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁷⁰ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, "North-West Rebellion," The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/northwest-rebellion>

⁷¹ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, "North-West Rebellion," The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/northwest-rebellion>

At his trial in 1885 Big Bear spoke as follows:

*“I am old and ugly, but I have tried to do good. Pity the children of my tribe. Pity the old and helpless of my people. I speak with a single tongue; and because Big Bear has always been the friend of the white man, send out and pardon and give them help. I have spoken.”*⁷²

In this statement Big Bear expressed his concerns about the future of his people. His words also confirm his positive attitude towards Europeans, proving that he meant no harm to the Europeans. His deeds were caused by the government’s failure to keep its promises, which resulted in the poor condition of his people.

Both Big Bear and Poundmaker were released early. They died soon after as broken men.⁷³

Many Crees were arrested and charged of treason and felony. Cree warriors including war chief Wandering Spirit were hanged at Battlefort on November 27. It is important to mention that not all groups of Crees participated in the rebellion. While the Plains Cree played an important role in the rebellion, the neighbouring Woods Cree did not take a part.⁷⁴

The North-West rebellion was a big defeat for the Cree people. They joined the rebellion because of the government’s failure to keep its promises. They were the ones aggrieved, yet they were treated as war criminals. There is enough evidence that the chiefs tried to prevent any massacre. All they wanted was a fair treatment of their people. They nevertheless failed to stop their vengeful warriors from senseless killing of settlers. Question is, what course of action would make the government keep its promises. As all the attempts to address the government in this matter failed, the rebellion appears as the last effort of a desperate nation to have their rights recognized. The North West rebellion proved and strengthened government’s supremacy over the Cree people. This defeat sent a clear message about the government’s intentions and attitude towards the Natives.

⁷² Galafilm productions, “Big Bear,” Galafilm productions,
http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/sp_bigbear.html

⁷³ Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian, Third edition* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), 204.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁷⁴ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, “North-West Rebellion,” *The CANADIAN Encyclopedia*,
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/northwest-rebellion>

4.2. The James Bay Project

In 1960s provincial officials of Quebec began to research the region's hydroelectric potential. The James Bay hydroelectric project was announced in 1971. It required blockage and diversion of certain rivers within the James Bay drainage basin. Another object of the project was a development of all resources in this territory, including forestry, mining and tourism.⁷⁵

Though many researches were held in the area, one fact was surprisingly overlooked. The fact, that the area was inhabited by the Natives.

„Provincial officials failed to consult with the 10,000 Crees and 5,000 Inuits who occupied the area, people who discovered through media reports that their homeland was destined to be flooded.“⁷⁶

Such an attitude is unaccountable, one must ask what would have happened to the Natives if they had not found out what was happening in their lands. Such news must had caused a great horror to the James Bay Cree and it required quick action.

The Cree leaders promptly responded and developed a political strategy they hoped would stop the project. They formed Quebec Association of Indians which petitioned the Quebec Superior Court for an injunction that would stop all construction in the region. The injunction was granted but it was reversed few days later. The Crees continuously lobbied to have their land claims recognized. To unify the negotiations the Cree formed the Grand Council of the Cree, an organization consisting of one chief and leaders of the eight Cree communities. However no decision were made by the council without previous consultation with the people from the community.⁷⁷

As the attempts to stop the project failed, the Cree tried to negotiate the best possible terms for their people.

In 1975 was signed The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) which represented the first treaty in Canada's modern treaty period. This treaty provided the

⁷⁵ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 565.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁷⁶ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 565.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁷⁷ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 565.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

Cree with a compensation package worth \$225 million to be paid during following twenty years. The agreement defined Native rights and recognized Aboriginal self-government, settled Native land claims and established regional land use regimes. Quebec also established and partly funded Cree school board which had right to adopt educational programs that would be culturally appropriate for the Cree. The province was required to monitor the environmental and social impact of the project.⁷⁸

Implementation of the agreement was however uneven and many problems occurred during the process. Both Cree and Inuit leaders addressed the government to meet the obligations determined by JBNQA. A review of the implementation process was approved in 1982 but many problems stayed unresolved and Native leaders kept lobbying federal and provincial officials. An agreement between the Inuit and the government was reached in 1990.⁷⁹

The Crees did not come to terms with the Québec government until 2002.⁸⁰

The James Bay Project had two phases. Phase 1 included diversion of three rivers to dammed reservoirs on the La Grande River and construction of power stations La Grande 2-4. Another five power stations were constructed in the second phase. Altogether the James Bay Project diverted and dammed 9 rivers and flooded an area of 11 500 km².⁸¹

„The flooding also created mercury contamination in fish, as mercury was released from rotting vegetation in the reservoirs, and contributed to the deaths of an estimated 10 000 caribou.“⁸²

Such an interference cannot do without large changes of the environment. The Natives living in the area probably could not foresee the magnitude of changes which were about to take place in their lives.

⁷⁸ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 565-567.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁷⁹ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 567.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁸⁰ James Marsh, “James Bay Project,” *The CANADIAN Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/james-bay-project>

⁸¹ James Marsh, “James Bay Project,” *The CANADIAN Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/james-bay-project>

⁸² James Marsh, “James Bay Project,” *The CANADIAN Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/james-bay-project>

4.2.1. Great Whale Project

In 1989 Hydro-Quebec proposed an additional project on the Great Whale River.⁸³

After the negative experience with the first project, the Cree immediately took a strong opposition. Having a new young leadership The Grand Council decided for a different strategy. Realizing that the legal battle did not involve most of the Cree people and was not very successful, they decided to make everybody part of the campaign and to bring the issue into the public. A portion of the electricity created by the Great Whale Project was meant to be sold to the United States for much higher prices to provide revenue for the project. The Crees planned to endanger the project by making the USA cancel their agreements with Hydro-Quebec. The Cree's began their nonviolent campaigns both in Canada and the USA. In both countries the Grand Council formed partnerships with environmental groups like Greenpeace, Sierra Club and the Audubon Society. The Grand Council also organized educational campaigns spreading awareness about the Cree, moreover they encouraged students to lobby for their college to withdraw from Hydro-Quebec. Posters and T-shirts were distributed as well as film about forestry industry and Quebec hydroelectric development projects. This strategy proved to be very successful as the number of supporters was growing and USA companies were cancelling their contracts.⁸⁴

The biggest action began in 1990 when the Grand Council built a 24 foot long boat and paddled to New York City. Events were held along the way which received great interest from the local press. The expedition arrived in New York City on Earth Day and spoke to the public in Times Square at the Earth Day Concert. High level of publicity of the campaign ensured them a meeting with New York City's mayor which resulted in mayor's approval of a cancellation of New York's contract with Hydro-Quebec. Other politicians followed his example and in 1992 was the contract between New York and Hydro-Quebec cancelled. After New York's cancellation other states

⁸³ James Marsh, "James Bay Project," The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/james-bay-project>

⁸⁴ Max Rennebohm ed., "The Cree campaign against the James Bay hydroelectric project, 1989-1994," Global Nonviolent Action Database, <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/cree-campaign-against-james-bay-hydroelectric-project-1989-1994>

also cancelled or reduced their contract which inflicted Hydro-Quebec's financial problems.⁸⁵

In 1994 was the Great Whale Project indefinitely postponed due to lack of financial resources and persistent pressure from public and environmental groups. The Cree campaign had succeeded thanks to their innovative thinking and support of wide public.⁸⁶

The cancellation of the Great Whale project was an important victory for the Cree. It was for the first time that they were able to defend their interests. By their innovative conception they proved that they are able to adapt to the existing conditions and are ready to fight for their rights effectively. All the previous defeats have taught them that they cannot rely on the government's word and that a legal action does not have much effect. By the successful cancellation of the Great Whale Project the Cree demonstrated that their spirit had not been broken and that their nation is ready to uphold its rights.

„ In 2001, the Cree negotiated with the Quebecois government and signed an agreement allowing construction of the third phase of the project. The agreement, however, was on the Cree's terms. They demanded that it be built in such a way as to protect their lands, and that it create jobs for their people. Cree communities were able to vote on the project, and defend their agency in the determination of their land.“⁸⁷

A significant shift of attitude can be noticed as the Cree changed their position from abused people to those who make decisions about their future. The successful cancellation of the Great Whale Project strengthened the confidence of the Cree and helped them to promote their interests in the following phase of the project.

4.2.2. Social and ecological impact of James Bay Project

Though the Cree were able to stop the Great Whale Project and affect further construction, the first phase of the project already flooded their territories and the Cree began to feel the immense impact the project had on their lives. Because their way of

⁸⁵ Max Rennebohm ed., "The Cree campaign against the James Bay hydroelectric project, 1989-1994," Global Nonviolent Action Database, <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/cree-campaign-against-james-bay-hydroelectric-project-1989-1994>

⁸⁶ Max Rennebohm ed., "The Cree campaign against the James Bay hydroelectric project, 1989-1994," Global Nonviolent Action Database, <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/cree-campaign-against-james-bay-hydroelectric-project-1989-1994>

⁸⁷ Max Rennebohm ed., "The Cree campaign against the James Bay hydroelectric project, 1989-1994," Global Nonviolent Action Database, <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/cree-campaign-against-james-bay-hydroelectric-project-1989-1994>

life was always very closely bound with the nature, destruction of their natural environment had a disastrous social impact on the Cree people.

The Grand Council of the Cree claims that the James Bay project was build without any previous research on the environment and social condition in the area. Therefore it is very problematic to determine the impact of the project. However the James Bay Cree know exactly how tremendous changes took place in their territory. One of the most notable results of the project is a sharp decline of fishery due to mercury contamination. Many Cree families and also pregnant women stopped eating fish out of fear for their health. Such a change represents a significant dietary shift with many healt implications. By the diversion of certain rivers the project also dried up wetlands along the lower part of the rivers which used to be inhabited by many animals. This resulted in the diminishment of animals which used to make a living of the Cree. This was also accompanied by the diminishment of forest due to timber industry. Because of the dam Cree also lost many sources of fresh water and were forced to buy expensive water from store.⁸⁸

Clarence Gull from the village of Waswanipi described the impact of the project in the following words:

“ I have seen the damage logging companies have done to our land, and as the tree line fades the animals disappear with it. This has had a devastating effect on the people. They have come to destroy the forest, the wild life and the people. The white man is taking away from us any opportunity for any development that we might have done for ourselves as a nation, but most importantly for our children.”⁸⁹

In this statement he underlined the fact, that the James Bay Cree were uprooted. As their invironment was destroyed, they have lost their self-sufficiency.

Relocation of the Cree into new houses brought problems with large montly payments for mortgages, which forced the Cree to leave behind their traditional way of life and engage in wage employment. The newly build modern Cree villages were facing serious social problems caused by the uprooting of their nation. With the high costs of living began the decline of Cree’s sharing ethic, which used to form the basis of their culture. Traditions were disappearing while suicides and problems with alcohol addiction

⁸⁸ Grand Council of the Crees, “ Social Impact on the Crees of James Bay Project,” Grand Council of the Crees, <http://www.gcc.ca/archive/article.php?id=38>

⁸⁹ Grand Council of the Crees, “ Social Impact on the Crees of James Bay Project,” Grand Council of the Crees, <http://www.gcc.ca/archive/article.php?id=38>

became everyday reality. To make things even worse, the government failed to provide the Cree with compensation promised in the The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, including implementation of economic development, education, housing, road construction.⁹⁰

Though the Cree came to an agreement with the government many years later, its benefits for the Cree are at least questionable. The James Bay Project had without a doubt a far-reaching negative impact on the life of Crees. They were uprooted from their natural environment which used to provide them with all that was necessary for their living. Water and fish were poisoned, animals were forced to relocate, trees were cut down. All their sources of subsistence were destroyed which made them dependent on the government. It is also important to realize the role of the nature in the religion of the Cree. The nature was not only a source of food, it was a source of wisdom, subject of all the Cree traditions, beliefs and legends. As the Cree way of life was gone, so were their traditions. In return they were provided with houses with electricity and water systems which might seem to improve their living conditions. They however put them into position of debtors unable to keep up with high monthly payments. The new expensive housing directed all their attention to making of money. In this aspect served The James Bay Project as a very effective instrument which helped the Cree experience the modern way of life. Nevertheless I personally believe that the actions taken by the government were once again highly inappropriate and caused an irreversible damage to the James Bay Cree.

⁹⁰ Grand Council of the Crees, “ Social Impact on the Crees of James Bay Project,” Grand Council of the Crees, <http://www.gcc.ca/archive/article.php?id=38>

5. Assimilation policy

In this chapter I would like to analyze the most significant or controversial assimilation policies which were implemented in order to culturize and assimilate the Native Tribes into modern society.

5.1. Early assimilation policy

Canadian Indian policy had two divergent goals; to protect and to assimilate the Natives, with a bigger emphasis on the assimilation. The efforts to protect the Natives only underlined the differences between the Natives and European Canadians and therefore hindered assimilation.⁹¹

The first document protecting the rights of the Natives was the Royal Proclamation of 1763 issued by King George III after the British conquest of North America. The Proclamation confirmed position of Natives and their land rights by banning all white settlement in their remaining traditional territories. Native lands could be sold only with their consent and bought exclusively by appointed Crown representatives. However regulation of European expansion was almost impossible.⁹²

In 1867 was issued the British North America Act, which constituted the Dominion of Canada. It provided the government with sole jurisdiction in all issues concerned with the Natives.⁹³

5.2. Numbered Treaties

The development of the treaty system in Canada was not as much concerned with the Aboriginal rights as it was with the possible costs of continual conflicts with Aborigines. US government spent over \$20 million a year to fight Plains Indians during the 1870s. For the entire budget of the Canadian government would not be able to cover

⁹¹ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 178-179.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁹² Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 638-640. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁹³ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 178.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

these costs, they decided for a peaceful agreement. However for the Aboriginals was the entering of agreements far from optional as they were left with very limited choices.⁹⁴

“It was generally made clear to them that non-native newcomers would soon be taking control of most of their lands whether or not treaty deals were reached.”⁹⁵

This evidence proves that the Natives were under pressure and that they were forced by the circumstances to sign the treaties.

As their natural environment was continually shrinking and food sources disappearing, some Natives understood the treaties as the last possible means of survival for their tribes. Not all Native groups found these agreements with the Crown beneficial, but the government was prepared for such situation.⁹⁶

“The strategy was gradually to isolate the most conservative groups, who eventually would accept the terms of treaties once the outcome they held out for the Aboriginal people was made to appear as inevitable.”⁹⁷

This approach suggests that the government was not concerned with the needs of the Natives. Its main goal was to relocate the Natives at the lowest possible price. The government obviously took advantage of the poor condition of the Natives to make negotiations easier.

The government first signed treaties with the Aboriginal groups longing for help and security for its people. Generally speaking, Native leaders who accepted Christian faith were most open to negotiations. Missionaries and Métis played an important role in negotiation as the middlemen between the Aboriginals and the Crown.

Treaties 1 and 2, signed in 1871, were an agreement between the the Canadian government and Swampy Cree and Chippewa (Ojibwa) tribes, living in southern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan. In exchange for giving up their territory of

⁹⁴ Anthony J. Hall, “Aboriginal Treaties,” The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/indian-treaties>

⁹⁵ Anthony J. Hall, “Aboriginal Treaties,” The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/indian-treaties>

⁹⁶ Anthony J. Hall, “Aboriginal Treaties,” The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/indian-treaties>

⁹⁷ Anthony J. Hall, “Aboriginal Treaties,” The CANADIAN Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/indian-treaties>

52,400 square miles were the Cree and Chippewa promised a reserve providing 160 acres for each family of five and a school on each reserve.⁹⁸

Each Aboriginal person was given three dollars and an annuity of three dollars per person. The treaty lacked any mention of provisions for hunting and fishing rights, agricultural implements, livestock and clothing. All these provisions were promised verbally but not included in the written treaty.⁹⁹

Problems arose soon after the signing of the treaties, specifically concerning the verbal promises of the government which were not delivered. The Natives demanded agricultural supplies but they could not find the person responsible for delivery of these implements. The government was not able to solve this problem until 1875 when a written Memorandum was attached to the treaties, ensuring implementation of former promises. The Memorandum provided the Natives with special clothing for Chiefs, livestock and a plow and harrow for each settler who cultivated the land. The government admitted that there had been an misunderstanding and raised the annuity to 5 dollars per person per year. The hunting and fishing provisions were never instituted.¹⁰⁰

The government initial failure to provide provisions led to confusion and discontent among the Natives during the implementation of the treaties. This experience however led to a greater care to include all promises in the subsequent written treaties and all parts of the treaties to be fully explained and understood. Despite the deficiencies the Treaty 1 and 2 provided a standard according to which were the following Numbered Treaties completed.¹⁰¹

Unintentional omission of the provisions in the treaties does not seem very probable. The Natives however stood up for their rights and demanded fulfillment of the verbal promises. This reaction forced the government to reconsider its attitude and to treat the Natives more fairly.

⁹⁸ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 550 -551. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

⁹⁹ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 376. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰⁰ Wayne E. Daugherty, "Treaty Research Report Treaty One and Treaty Two (1871)," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028660/1100100028662#>

¹⁰¹ Wayne E. Daugherty, "Treaty Research Report Treaty One and Treaty Two (1871)," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028660/1100100028662#>

Next treaty concerning the Crees was Treaty 4, signed in 1874 by the Saulteaux (Ojibwa), Cree and Assiniboine Indians who surrendered 75,000 square miles of their territory in southern Saskatchewan. The Natives had a great interest in negotiations as they were facing an uncertain future. Tense negotiations lasted for almost a week, however negotiating of the treaty itself were smooth and took less than one day. The first five days were spent in tense dispute between the participating tribes over the status of the Hudson's Bay Company and the land concerned. After six days of disputes, treaty terms were finally discussed. Natives were willing to accept terms similar to preceding treaties, which encompassed one square mile for each family of five, establishment of schools, annuity payments, livestock and farming equipment and access to hunting and fishing. A number of other Native groups joined Treaty 4 over the next year.¹⁰²

In 1875 was signed Treaty 5, concerning Swampy Cree and the Saulteaux living in present-day province of Manitoba. This time was the initiative on the side of Natives who petitioned the government for a treaty to ensure protection of their future. The Natives were mostly concerned about the expanding commercial trapping and timber industry. As their land had a limited agricultural potential, the government attitude towards the treaty was rather reluctant. Eventually the government decided to sign the treaty. Negotiations were very brief, with only minimal attention paid to the questions and concerns of the Natives which resulted in some misunderstandings. Terms of the treaty were also much less generous than those of previous treaties. Another Northern Native groups joined the treaty in the following years.¹⁰³

Once again are proved the motives of the government, which treated the Natives according to the land they resided. Natives inhabiting unattractive area were treated in a negligent manner and received much smaller compensation for their land.

Treaty 6 was signed in 1876 by Wood Cree and Plains Cree tribes, including Poundmaker's band in central Alberta and Saskatchewan. Big Bear's bands refused to sign until 1884 when they negotiated better terms.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 379. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰³ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 380-381. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰⁴ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 551. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

Once again was the initiative on the side of Natives, which was caused mostly by the diminishment of buffalo and increasing numbers of settlers in the area. Treaty terms were almost similar as those of previous treaties.¹⁰⁵

Treaty 6 as the only one of Numbered Treaties mentioned medical care for the Natives. The government's failure in meeting the obligations made by treaty was one of the factors leading to the North-West Rebellion in 1885.¹⁰⁶

In 1899 was signed Treaty 8 with Beaver Cree and Chipewyan concerning parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan, The Northwest Territories and British Columbia. Treaty 9 was signed by the Ojibwa of north central Ontario in 1905 and by the Cree in 1929. The remaining territory of northern Saskatchewan was relinquished by the Cree and other Native groups in 1906 under Treaty 10.¹⁰⁷

Numbered Treaties represent an important milestone in the Canadian assimilation policy. They entailed the official displacement of the lands inhabited by Natives to the hands of government. Individual tribes were treated according to the importance of the land they inhabited. The approach of the government was improper and even the Natives from the most valuable localities received only little compensation for the territories they imparted.

5.3. The Indian Act of 1876

The Indian Act issued by the government in 1876 had a profound impact on the lives of Canadian Natives. The Indian Act introduces a definition of status Indian, defines their rights and regulates most aspects of their lives on reserves. Traditional forms of governance were replaced by band council, an elected system of local government. This band council had to leave all final decisions concerning Natives to the government. The reserves were not owned by the Natives but were held in trust by the government.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 382. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰⁶ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 551. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰⁷ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 551-552. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹⁰⁸ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 668. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

“The Indian Act was enacted to provide the political and legal force necessary to bring about the cultural and social changes that would lead to the inevitable assimilation of aboriginal peoples into European Canadian society.”¹⁰⁹

The Indian Act did not respect Native traditions and intervened largely into the Native society. The chiefs used to make decisions based on the people’s opinions and presented the major authority among the Natives. By the Indian Act they lost all their power to the government, an alien authority which was hardly interested in the needs of the Natives. The Indian Act significantly deepened the Native dependence on the government as it made them unable to decide for themselves.

The Indian Act also established rules by which would a status Indian become enfranchised from his status. A status Indian women were automatically enfranchised by marrying non-status men, their children were also not considered Indian. Moreover was the status lost by entering of professions or earning of university degrees. Amendments added to the Indian Act in 1884 and 1895 banned Natives traditional potlaches and sun dances. In 1927 another amendment prohibited preservation of lawyers to pursue Natives land claims. The last major amendment in 1951 abolished the laws prohibiting Native ceremonies and pursuit of land claims.¹¹⁰

“Difference was something to be overcome on the road to homogeneity. Until that goal was reached one was kept outside, to be invited into full membership when certain criteria were met.”¹¹¹

Efforts to assimilate the Natives into modern society are undeniable in the Indian Act, the Act exhibits pronounce impatience and insensitivity towards the Natives.

Indian Act enabled to any status man to exchange the status of his wife, children and himself for Canadian citizenship and a parcel of land. However only a few Natives chose to surrender their status voluntarily. The question of Indian status divided the Natives into two groups. Some of them saw the status distinction as an opportunity to

¹⁰⁹ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 668. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹¹⁰ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 668. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹¹¹ Alan C. Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 91.

discrimination, while others perceived the status as a way to have their aboriginal rights recognized.¹¹²

Though the life on reserves was far from ideal, it was all that was left for the Natives and the idea of leaving the reserve connotes uncertainty. Many families lived in bands as one big family and leaving of reserve would therefore mean losing of their relatives.

Though the Indian Act affected lives of the Natives radically, they have sustained their cultures and continue to fight for their right of self-governance. Assimilation, which was the main goal of the Indian Act was not accomplished.¹¹³

5.4. Residential schools

The Natives were from the start perceived as inferior and savage by European settlers and the Europeans felt a certain responsibility of saving them by proper education. Canada followed the example of USA and in 1880s the government began to establish an extensive system of residential schools across Canada, all of them administered by churches. The Aboriginal children were forcibly separated from their families for extensive periods of time, they were forbidden to speak their mother languages or to acknowledge their culture. The aim of these schools was to assimilate Aboriginal children into modern society by adopting Christianity and English or French language and by systematic undermining of their culture.¹¹⁴

This system somehow seems to lack any trace of humanity or comprehension. After the Europeans stole the Native lands, they decided to take their children and destroy their culture.

In 1875 Bishop Vital Grandin expressed the purpose of residential schools as follows:

*“We instill in them a pronounced distaste for the native life so that they will be humiliated when reminded of their origin. When they graduate from our institutions, the children have lost everything Native except their blood.”*¹¹⁵

¹¹² Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 180.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹¹³ Donald E. Fixico ed., *Treaties with American Indians* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 668.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹¹⁴ Erin Hanson, “The Residential School System,” indigenous foundations,

<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html>

¹¹⁵ Galafilm productions, “Cree Religion,” Galafilm productions,

http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_religion.html

Such an attitude shows a great disrespect to the Native culture. The idea of humiliation of the Native origin is incompatible with eligible educational activities.

Education provided by residential schools was insufficient, usually only up to grade five, with focus on training for manual labour in agriculture, industry and domestic work. Attendance became mandatory in 1920 under the Indian Act.¹¹⁶

Indian agents on Native reserves were given the authority to invade homes of the Natives and take the children by force to residential schools. If the parents did not cooperate, they were threatened with imprisonment. More than 100,000 Natives attended residential schools until the 1980.¹¹⁷

Residential schools had devastating effects on the Aboriginals, many languages and cultures disappeared and many families were disrupted. Student suffered physical, emotional and also sexual abuse from the residential school staff.¹¹⁸

Survivors of the residential schools revealed the horrors which they had to undertake in these institutions. Children were often severely beaten with whips and rods, chained and locked in closets and basements. Some children tried to escape and were found frozen or dead of exposure.¹¹⁹

“Students who wet their beds had urine rubbed in their faces, and those who spoke the Blackfoot language had their heads shaven.”¹²⁰

These inhumane techniques must have left deep scars in the hearts of Natives, and also on their bodies. Such brutality strongly contrasts with the peaceful life the Cree children used to have with their families, where physical punishment was unknown.

¹¹⁶ Erin Hanson, “The Residential School System,” indigenous foundations, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html>

¹¹⁷ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 98-99. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹¹⁸ Erin Hanson, “The Residential School System,” indigenous foundations, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html>

¹¹⁹ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 98-100. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹²⁰ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 98. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

Due to the critical state of First Nations was appointed the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. In 1996 they issued an extensive study on the many abusements of the Natives in the Canadian history, including the abuses of the residential schools. This document brought a wave of lawsuits for individual compensation. Many Canadian were schocked by the sexual abuses which took place in residential schools.¹²¹

“Their sense of disgust was hardly alleviated by the fact that many of the abuses took place at the hands of priests, nuns, and other clerics. The Royal Commission found that abuse was systemic, not occasional or accidental. Thousands of Native young people are said to have died in the schools, and thousands more were scarred for life by physical and sexual abuse.”¹²²

Such a revelation must had been a tremendous shock for all the Canadians who had at least a bit of humanity in them. The fact, that the sexual abuse was systematic and done by clerics is absolutely outrageous and sickening.

“A 1989 study sponsored by the Native Women’s Association of the Northwest Territories found that eight out of ten girls under the age of eight had been victims of sexual abuse, and 50 percent of boys the same age had been sexually molested as well.”¹²³

These numbers are absolutely shocking and demonstrate the far reaching impact on the Native population. Presence of psychological consequences is unquestionable.

The government began to close residential schools in 1970s, the last school was closed in 1996. For the purpose of providing compensation, the government identified 131 residential schools, including only schools funded by the government. The full number of residential schools was presumably higher.¹²⁴

In 1998 the United Church of Canada officially apologized for the physical and sexual abuse in the residential schools it had operated. This apology was made after the

¹²¹ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 99.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹²² Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 99.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹²³ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 101.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹²⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Residential School Locations,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=12>

revelation of evidence that the church officials were aware of the abuse and did not stop it.¹²⁵

By 2002 more than 19,000 Natives claimed some form of compensation from the government. By 2006 the government had paid more than \$50 million for individual compensation.¹²⁶

In 2007 was formalized a compensation package of \$1.9-billion to all living aboriginals forced to attend residential schools. The compensation was followed by official apologies from Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Churches involved.¹²⁷

Because of the intent to annihilate Aboriginal cultures and to prohibit their transmission to next generations, the residential school system is commonly regarded as a form of cultural genocide.¹²⁸

The residential schools are probably the most expressive evidence of the wrongs and cruelty committed on the Native Tribes. I believe that this system had the most devastating effect from all the measures applied on the Cree and Natives in general and I absolutely agree with the label of cultural genocide. The children who got through this torment could not possibly return to the way of life of their ancestors without facing tremendous difficulties. The family ties must had been broken and the hearts of children filled with pain.

No apology or amount of cash can ever expiate the suffering of the Native children. Abuse of residential schools is unforgivable and forever imprinted in the lives of those who survived it. The fact that the First Nations managed to live through this genocide and to retain their culture and religion is more than astonishing and proves the great strength of their spirit.

¹²⁵ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 101.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹²⁶ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 101.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹²⁷ J.R. Miller, "Residential Schools," *The CANADIAN Encyclopedia*,
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/residential-schools>

¹²⁸ Erin Hanson, "The Residential School System," indigenous foundations,
<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html>

5.5. White Paper

As the time passed, it was becoming obvious that the Natives had failed to assimilate, were frequently victims of discrimination and were economically and socially behind the Canadians. In 1969 was issued the White Paper, a policy statement of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who intended to put an end to this undesirable situation.¹²⁹

“Separate treatment, originally conceived as a transitional arrangement preparing Indians for entry into the majority society, had backfired. By keeping Indians apart from other Canadians, it had kept them behind.”¹³⁰

The system of reserves clearly did not work in favor of assimilation. The Natives were isolated on their reserves and the majority of them was not willing to leave the reserves and join the modern society.

The Natives perceived reserves as their ethnic homeland and migrants who left the reserves still retain ties with their community.¹³¹

The White Paper suggested elimination of legal distinction between the Natives and other Canadians. The Indian Act was to be repealed as well as the Federal Indian Branch. Services for the Natives would be provided by federal and provincial governments, as were for other citizens. The importance of treaties between the government and the Natives was minimized. Trudeau found the treaties incompatible with common citizenship and asserted focus on the present, while ignoring past injustices.¹³²

Other key points of the White Paper included recognition of Native culture, transfer of land control to the Native people, government support of the economic development for Natives. The Natives however feared that they would lose their special rights and status and protested against the White Paper.¹³³

¹²⁹ Carole A. Barrett ed., *American Indian History* (Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 2003), 587.

http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

¹³⁰ Alan C. Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 51.

¹³¹ Ross, Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moor, *A cultural geography of North American Indians* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 107.

¹³² Alan C. Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 51.

¹³³ Onion Lake Cree Nation, “Red and White Paper,” Onion Lake Cree Nation, <http://www.onionlake.ca/userfiles/white%20and%20red.pdf>

Though the White Paper was discussed with Native leaders before its issuance, their opinions were disregarded. The Indian Association of Alberta, lead by a Cree spokesperson Harold Cardinal, responded by issuance of document named Citizens Plus, also known as Red Paper. This document countered proposals of the White Paper and referred to the earlier independent study called Hawthorn Report. This study concluded that the Natives were disadvantaged and that all forced assimilation should be ended. He suggested that the Natives should be treated as “citizens plus” and provided with resources and opportunities. Apart from the Red Paper, Cardinal Harold openly criticized the government in his book *The Unjust Society*. The Natives were almost unanimous in their resistance to the White Paper which resulted in its withdrawal.¹³⁴

The White Paper was a very audacious and unfortunate proposal. Its attempt to forget the past injustices could not be possibly acceptable for the Natives. Moreover the Natives still waited for the government to deliver its promises made by the treaties. By annulment of these treaties would be all forgotten, which would be very convenient for the government but not for the Natives. It is becoming obvious that the Natives learned from the past and became more united in their efforts. Though they were disadvantaged and lived in poor conditions, they were able to fight against injustice and to assert their rights.

In 1980 was issued the Constitution Act, which defined who were the Native people of Canada and recognized their aboriginal and treaty rights. This act moreover included the Inuit and Métis people into Aborigines.¹³⁵

In 1985 was passed Bill C-31 which represented a significant change of the Indian Act. It removed discriminatory provision against women and made possible reinstatement of Indians who lost their status in the past. Moreover the bands were given the competence to define their own membership rules. The bill returned status to more than 22,000 Natives.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ indigenous foundations, “The White Paper 1969,” indigenous foundations, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-white-paper-1969.html>

¹³⁵ Erin Hanson, “ Constitution Act, 1982 Section 35,” indigenous foundations, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/constitution-act-1982-section-35.html>

¹³⁶ Bruce E. Johansen and Barry M. Pritzker, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 538-539. http://softarchive.net/blogs/tungkon/the_world_of_north_american_indians_books.948443.html

Though there were many missteps in the Canadian assimilation policy, the Natives in Canada were treated better than Natives in the USA. Canadian government tried to redress past injustices, which was not very common in the USA.¹³⁷

Different approach of these two countries could be attributed to the fact, that the USA had military power to enforce its intentions. Canada on the other hand was at the beginning dependend on the help of Natives which shaped their further attitude towards them. Canadian assimilation policies have undergone many changes and I believe these changes were for the better. Initial nescient and usually negligent attitude of the government caused many discrepancies and great dissatisfaction of the Natives. After many unsuccessfull attempts the Natives learned how to promote their interests and began to set a new course of the policies. They have proven that their cultural heritage is valuable and they are not willing to abandon it. Gradually are the Natives becoming involved in the policies which shape their position in the society. The Natives are given an oppportunity to make decisions about the future of their people, an oppportunity which was denied from them for a long time.

¹³⁷ Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969), 535.

6. Cree Nations Today

As I have already mentioned, condition of the Cree was not very auspicious in the 20th century. They were removed to reserves, where they lived in poor conditions, facing diseases, starvation and alcohol addiction. In this chapter I will look into the most important indicators of well being of the Cree Nations. Because some specific numbers concerning the Cree are not available and many facts are almost similar for all tribes, I will among others use overall numbers including all First Nations in Canada.

6.1. Population on and off reserves

There are more than 2,300 Indian reserves in Canada with total area of over 3 million hectares. 1,4 million hectares are forested, providing resources for economic opportunities, employment and for social and spiritual needs. Native involvement in forest and environmental management is increasing continually.¹³⁸

In 2011 were in Canada registered 617 bands with total population of 868,206 people. 401,609 Natives lived off reserves. Numbers of bands are continually rising and the Native population grows. Proportion of the Natives living on and off reserves varies according to region. The smallest population of Natives is in Yukon, the largest can be found in Ontario. In Ontario also resides the largest band consisting of more than 24,000 people. This band includes six various nations under the name of Six Nations of the Grand River. The largest Cree band was in 2011 the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation residing in Saskatchewan with the population of 9,154. Another large Cree bands are located in Manitoba and Alberta with population about 7,000 people.

Cree reserves can be found in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Proportion of the Cree living on and off reserves differs according to the region and community. In Quebec lives the majority of all five communities on reserves and this trend is similar in other regions. Exception is the Saskatchewan region where majority of communities live off reserves.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ AAANativeArts, "Indian reserves located throughout Canada," AAANativeArts, http://www.aaanativearts.com/canadian_reserves251-300.htm

¹³⁹ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, "Registered Indian population by Sex and Residence 2011," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ-AI/STAGING/texte-text/rs_st_pubs_rip2011_pdf_1349278787966_eng.pdf

6.2. Language

In 2011 were in Canada reported over 60 Aboriginal languages of 12 language families. Almost 213,500 people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue, majority of them speak it at home. The most numerous is the Algonquian language family. The most widespread is the Cree language which is used as a mother tongue by 83, 475 people.¹⁴⁰

This makes Cree language one of the most important Native languages and ensures its survival. Cree children are usually raised bilingually or in Cree, learning English or French as a second language.¹⁴¹

6.3. Education

Today Native students attend both band-operated schools or provincially operated schools. Education of the First Nations is greatly funded by the government, in 2010-2011 the government provided First Nations with approximately \$1.51 billion to support elementary and secondary education. Another \$304 million was provided for construction and maintenance of schools on reserves. Support of elementary and secondary schools for the Natives off reserves is provided by provincial and territorial school system. Government also provides a number of educational programs and supports post-secondary education of the Natives.¹⁴²

An example of band-operated schooling is the Cree School Board which was established in James Bay area in 1975. The Cree School Board educates the Cree children in its own way, protecting the Cree language and culture. It chooses its curriculum, teachers and textbooks, moreover it has a special school calendar, adapted to cultural activities of each community. Aim of this institution is to convey Cree traditions to the students and to prepare them for modern world. Today the Board provides education at the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels.¹⁴³

In 2006 more than four in ten Natives aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary qualification, 20% had a high school diploma and 38% had less than high school. 27% had university

¹⁴⁰ Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal languages in Canada," Statistics Canada, http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_3-eng.pdf

¹⁴¹ Native Languages of the Americas, "Native Languages of the Americas: Cree," Native Languages of the Americas, <http://www.native-languages.org/cree.htm>

¹⁴² Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, "Education," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033601/1100100033605>

¹⁴³ Cree School Board, "History," Cree School Board, <http://www.cscree.qc.ca/index.php/history?showall=1>

degree in Education, 24% had college diploma in Business, Management and Marketing. Other fields of study were Health Professions, Family and Consumer Sciences, Social Service Professions etc. The Natives living off reserves had generally higher level of educational attainment compared to the Natives living on reserves.¹⁴⁴

It is not easy to compare band-operated and provincially operated schooling. The band-operated schools definitely put more emphasis on Cree traditions and values, students of provincial schools have however better results and therefore bigger chance of finding employment.

6.4. Housing

On-reserve housing of the First Nations is partly sponsored by the government, represented by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Though the government does not cover the full cost of housing, it provides the Natives with assistance and an average investment of \$155 million. Over the past five years the government supported construction of more than 1,700 house and renovation of about 3,100 existing houses. Moreover government provides funding through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.¹⁴⁵

Even though the support of government is considerable, the housing on reserves is still in critical state. In 2011 was reported need of 35,000 new houses to meet the current demand. Almost a half of all existing houses on reserves need a major repair. Rates of overcrowding are very high on reserves, some houses are inhabited by three generations. Houses on reserves are substandard and they deteriorate quickly because of poor construction. Low incomes prevent the Natives from larger investments in their housing. Situation is very critical in the Cree community of Attawapiskat near the James Bay. This community has 1,800 residents and only about 300 houses. Some people live in tents and provisory sheds. Their school was shut because of soil contamination and they have been waiting for a new one since 2000. The government

¹⁴⁴ Statistics Canada, “Educational Portrait of Canada, 2006 Census,” Statistics Canada, <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-560/pdf/97-560-XIE2006001.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, “First Nation Housing,” Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010715/1100100010719>

spent additional sums of money to enhance their situation, these amounts however still seem insufficient.¹⁴⁶

Thousand of Natives living on reserves are still without indoor plumbing, a quarter of Natives rely on water systems that pose health risks. Though the government has spend over \$3 billion on native housing and on water and sewage systems since 2006, their support does not keep up with need.¹⁴⁷

Housing conditions on reserves are without a doubt deep below standards. Yet I do not believe that only the government is to blame. The government provides Natives with annual contributions and moreover deals with their acute needs. Though the provisions might not be sufficient, the great effort of the government is undeniable. I personally think that the problem is in rapidly growing population of the Natives and their dependence on the government.

6.5. Health

First nations have generally shorter life expectancy than other Canadians. Moreover they face high rates of chronic diseases. Compared to non-Aboriginal population have Aboriginals much higher rates of heart diseases, type 2 diabetes and tuberculosis infections. Health Canada, federal department, strives to reduce and prevent diseases among the Natives and provides them with health care services.¹⁴⁸

The increase of diabetes among Natives was caused mostly by rapid changes in their lifestyles, including socio-cultural and environmental changes. Factors leading to diabetes are overweight, obesity and smoking all of which are rampant among Natives.¹⁴⁹

Many health problems arise in connection with bad water quality and improper sanitation. These problems include infections, skin rashes and gastrointestinal illnesses. Infections also spread more easily in the unhygienic conditions. Improper water quality

¹⁴⁶ CBCnews, "First Nations housing in dire need of overhaul," CBCnews, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/11/25/f-native-housing.html>

¹⁴⁷ CBCnews, "Shacks and sloop pails: infrastructure crisis on native reserves," CBCnews, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/11/24/f-first-nations-infrastructure.html>

¹⁴⁸ Health Canada, "First Nations & Inuit Health," Health Canada, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/diseases-maladies/index-eng.php>

¹⁴⁹ Public Health Agency of Canada, "Diabetes in Canada: Facts and figures from a public health perspective," Public Health Agency of Canada, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/publications/diabetes-diabete/facts-figures-faits-chiffres-2011/chap6-eng.php>

caused in 2005 an outbreak of E. coli in the Kachechewan Cree community in Ontario.¹⁵⁰

Radical changes had evidently a negative impact on the Cree. Widespread obesity can be explained by change of lifestyle and also by significant change of Cree diet.

6.6. Employment

Employment of the Natives is also supported by the government, which tries to increase the Native participation in the labour market. Under the Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative government provides resources and tools that should motivate employers to employ the Natives. Moreover the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has committed to 50% Aboriginal hiring policy.¹⁵¹

The government also supports Aboriginals through First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy which helps youth to develop skill, gain work experience and develop careers. This program has an annual budget of \$24 million.¹⁵²

Between 2001 and 2006 were the unemployment rates of First Nations dropping, while the employment rates were rising. In 2006 was the employment rate of First Nations adults (aged 25 to 54) 60,5%. There was also a considerable difference between the Natives residing on and off reserves. 51,9% of Natives living on reserves were employed in 2006 compared to 66,3% living off reserves. The gap between Native and non-Aboriginal employment rates dropped to 15,8 %. The unemployment rates dropped between 2001 and 2006 from 20,3% to 16,3%, unemployment rates of Natives living off reserves dropped to 12,3%.¹⁵³

The labour market downturn which began in 2008, caused a slight decline of Aboriginal employment which continued to 2010.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ CBCnews, "Clean running water still a luxury on many native reserves," CBCnews, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/11/28/f-first-nations-water.html>

¹⁵¹ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, "Aboriginal Employment," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033790/1348508851503>

¹⁵² Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, "First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy," Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033607/1100100033608>

¹⁵³ Statistics Canada, "Canada's Changing Labour Force, 2006 Census," Statistics Canada, <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-559/pdf/97-559-XIE2006001.pdf>

¹⁵⁴ Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal People and the Labour Market: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2008-2010," Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-588-x/71-588-x2011003-eng.pdf>

Incomes of individual community varies according to their location. Though some communities have income from natural resources or commercial ventures, others struggle with high unemployment.¹⁵⁵

As an example of utilization of resources can serve tourism industry developed by Cree communities in Quebec region. These communities offer various activities, including hunting, fishing and snowmobiling. Moreover can tourists experience the Cree culture and union with nature through traditional ceremonies, story telling and many other activities.¹⁵⁶

Though the location plays a significant role in self-sufficiency and prosperity of communities, I believe that their individual approach is also important. Leaders of communities should encourage their people to be self-sufficient and to educate themselves, instead of simple waiting for the help of government.

6.7. Traditions and religion

Today can be the Cree religion described as a fusion of traditional Cree religion with Christianity. Many Cree attend both church services and traditional Cree ceremonies. Some Cree also continue to use traditional healing practices apart from non-native medicine.¹⁵⁷

Many Cree communities cherish their traditions and strive to incorporate them in their lives. They carry out their traditional ceremonies and share their knowledge in order to preserve their culture for future generations.¹⁵⁸

The Cree traditions appear to have a good chance of survival as the Cree people are aware of the importance of their culture. Their culture defines them as people and helps them renew their identity in the modern world. There are significant differences between individual Cree communities. Some of them are prosperous while other are in decline. I believe that their situation is at least partly influenced by their approach towards the changed circumstances. Thought the government made many bad decision

¹⁵⁵ CBCnews, “ Shacks and slop pails: infrastructure crisis on native reserves,” CBCnews, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/11/24/f-first-nations-infrastructure.html>

¹⁵⁶ Eeyou Istchee Tourism, “ Welcome to Eeyou Istchee Tourism,” Eeyou Istchee Tourism, <http://www.creetourism.ca/>

¹⁵⁷ Galafilm productions, “ Cree Religion,” Galafilm productions, http://www.galafilm.com/chiefs/htmlen/cree/lc_religion.html

¹⁵⁸ Eeyou Istchee Tourism, “ Cree Culture,” Eeyou Istchee Tourism, <http://www.discovereeyouistchee.ca/cree-culture/traditions.shtml>

which negatively affected the Cree, current policy supports them by all possible means. I believe that perpetual support does not solve the problem and the Cree and Natives in general should gradually regain their self-sufficiency.

7. Conclusion

Before the Cree encountered the Europeans, they lived in harmony with nature, which provided resources for their living and social and spiritual needs. Cree religion respected the natural order of things and was closely bound with their environment. Cree communities functioned as big families, where people cooperated and helped each other in time of need. These bands were self-sufficient and well functioning.

After the arrival of the European settlers, the Cree played a key role in the fur trade. They served as guides and hunters and helped the Europeans adapt to the hostile environment. In return for their services, the Cree obtained various goods, including axes and firearms. This gave the Cree an advantage over other tribes and caused their territorial expansion. The benefits of the cooperation with the Europeans were however soon outbalanced by its disadvantages. These included growing dependence of Crees on the goods, alcohol addiction and various contagions brought from Europe. Because the Natives were not immune to these diseases, their population was decimated. The trade also had a far reaching impact on the culture and lifestyle of the Cree. As hunting became their main focus, it supplanted many of their customs and traditions. Moreover the excessive hunting led to overtrapping and depletion of some animal species. Cree culture was further undermined by the intense missionary activity. All these factors led to a major change of the Cree culture and lifestyle and some of these changes were irreversible.

As more settlers were arriving, the Crown began to conclude contracts with the Natives. By these contracts the Cree imparted their land to the Crown in exchange for small reserves, low annuity payments and other provisions. Reserves were supposed to serve as transitional measures for the prospective assimilation. These treaties were disadvantageous for the Cree but they did not have other options. Many tribes were starving due to excessive hunting and were forced by the circumstances to sign the treaties. The aim of the contracts was to displace the Natives at the lowest possible cost, needs of the Natives were not relevant. The government failed to deliver many of its promises which caused great discontent among the Cree. This failure of the government led to the North-West Rebellion, an uprising of Métis and Cree people who fought for the recognition of their rights. This rebellion was suppressed and the Cree involved

were treated as war criminals. As the result the Cree felt betrayed, lost trust in the government and hope of fair treatment.

Another provision intending assimilation was the system of residential schools established by the government and administered by churches. These schools forcibly separated Cree children from their parent for extensive periods of time and forced them to adopt Christianity and reject their original religion and culture. The children suffered physical, emotional and even sexual abuse from the school staff. After its revelation to the public the government and churches apologized and provided the victims with financial compensation. The system of residential schools functioned for 16 years and caused irreparable damage to the Cree. Survivors of the residential schools had usually psychological problems for the rest of their lives. Residential schools broke family ties and alienated Cree children from their culture. This system attempted to annihilate Cree culture and prohibit its transmission to next generations. The negative impact of the residential school on the Cree people was immense and I consider this system to be the biggest injustice committed on the Crees.

Other assimilation policies had also controversial character and represented forced assimilation. The Indian Act of 1876 gave the government power to define rights of the Cree people and to regulate their lives on reserves. Moreover this Act banned some traditional ceremonies. The Natives began to assert their rights and many amendments were added to the Act, making it more acceptable. Another policy statement which raised a great discontent was the White Paper which intended to repeal all Native treaties and to eliminate the legal distinction between the Natives and other Canadian citizens. The Natives feared that they would loose their identity and would be assimilated into the society. Intense protests, in which the Cree played an important role, lead to the withdrawal of the White Paper. It is important to notice that the Cree gradually found a way to assert their interests. Their previous failures had taught them how to pursue their goals.

As a great example of Cree persistence can serve the construction of James Bay Project. This hydro project flooded large territory inhabited by Crees and contaminated the water. Though the Cree were not able to stop the first phase of the project, they changed their approach from legal action to publicity which resulted in the cancellation of additional construction. This inventive approach provided them with support of wide

public, which made their opposition much stronger. Moreover the Cree began to establish various organizations which united them and strengthened the effect of their requests and requirements. The Cree proved that they are able to adapt to existing circumstances and are determined to fight for their rights by all possible means. The first phase of the project was however carried out and had an extensive social and ecological impact on the Cree in James Bay area. It deprived them of their natural environment, which used to be source of their self-sufficiency. As all fish were poisoned and animals moved away, the Cree undergone a significant dietary shift with many health implications. Relocation of the Cree into expensive mortgaged houses provided by the government lead to further uprooting of the Cree culture and way of life. Though the Cree received financial compensation, it did not help to restore their self-sufficiency. The measures taken by the government did not prove to be adequate nor effective.

Generally speaking, the Cree gradually became involved in decisions concerning their future. Their persistence lead to the successive change of the government's policies from ones aimed at assimilation to the ones protecting the Cree interests. Eventually the approach of government became very supportive and protective. Today majority of the Cree Nations still resides on reserves and receive considerable annual payments. The government supports their housing, education, health services and employment. Yet the conditions on reserves are usually deep below standards. Houses on reserves are overcrowded and usually need a major repair, many houses lack plumbing and some water systems pose health risks. I came to the conclusion that the main problem is in rapidly growing population of the Cree and their substantive dependence on the government. It is almost impossible to ensure standard living conditions on the reserves and I personally think that if the Crees want such conditions, they should leave the reserves. Reserves can serve them as ethnic homelands and a link to their traditional way of life. Their ancestors were able to build their own houses, which were ordinarily overcrowded and had no water systems. If the contemporary Cree want to follow this path, they should settle for existing conditions.

Some communities on reserves are however in good condition, usually those who make their income from natural resources or commercial ventures. They achieved this result due to their own endeavour and activity. These communities moreover maintain their traditions and share their knowledge and language with young generations, ensuring preservation of their cultural heritage. The Cree living off reserves have higher

employment rates than those living on reserves, both groups are however still below average. The Cree living off reserves have also generally higher level of education than Crees living on reserves.

I came to the conclusion that despite all the interventions of the government, the Cree are very likely to preserve their language and culture for future generations. Though many measures of the government were inappropriate and caused much damage, I believe that the expiation of past injustices should not cover all future generations. Gradual renewal of self-sufficiency is fundamental for the Cree living both on and off reserves.

Resumé

V této práci jsem se zabývala národem Kríjů, který je nejpočetnějším domorodým národem v Kanadě. Cílem mé práce bylo zanalyzovat podstatné vlivy a skutečnosti které formovaly společnost Kríjů od příchodu Evropanů až do současnosti. V první části práce jsem popsala význačné rysy původního způsobu života Kríjů, se zaměřením na jejich náboženství a celkové vnímání světa. Zjistila jsem, že příroda hrála zcela zásadní roli v náboženství Kríjů i v jejich každodenním životě. Informace shromážděné v této kapitole jsem následně použila k posouzení dopadů Evropské kolonizace a jednotlivých vládních opatření na životní styl a kulturu Kríjů. V další kapitole jsem shrnula kromě historie kmene Krí i společnou historii všech domorodých kmenů v Kanadě. V centru mého zájmu byla především měnící se povaha vztahů domorodých kmenů s přistěhovalci z Evropy. Význačné události z historie a jejich dopady na Kríje jsem blíže prozkoumala v následné kapitole. Další část mé práce jsem věnovala asimilační politice uplatňované na domorodých kmenech Kanady. Zaměřila jsem se na její nejvýznamější a nejkontroverznější nástroje a zhodnotila jejich záměry, vhodnost užití a význam pro další vývoj vztahů státu s původními obyvateli. V poslední kapitole jsem analyzovala současnou situaci Kríjů. Zaměřila jsem se na jejich úroveň bydlení, vzdělání, zaměstnanost a také na stav jejich kultury.

Došla jsem k závěru, že ze strany přistěhovalců a státu došlo k mnohým pochybením a křivdám vůči národu Kríjů. Přestože některá pochybení byla spáchána nevědomě, měla dalekosáhlé důsledky na další vývoj tohoto národa. Kríové však postupně přišli způsob jak prosazovat svá práva a začali znovu rozhodovat o své budoucnosti. V současné politice uplatňované vůči původním obyvatelům je zřetelná snaha ochránit jejich kulturu a odčinit minulost. Tuto politiku však shledávám příliš ochrannou a neproduktivní, neboť mnozí Kríjové žijící v rezervacích jsou výrazně závislí na podpoře státu. Tato podpora navíc nedokáže ani zdaleka uspokojit potřeby rychle rostoucí Kríjské populace. Jako symbol úspěchu vnímám kmeny, které vedou své obyvatele k soběstačnosti a současně dokáží zachovat původní tradice a kulturu pro budoucí generace.

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Annotation

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This bachelor thesis deals with the Cree Nations in Canada, their way of life before and after they encountered Europeans. The first chapter examines their original way of life, following historical context gives the evidence of changing relationship with Europeans. Further I focus on assimilation policies and their impact on the Cree way of life. In the end I analyze their current situation with focus on housing, health, education, employment and culture.

Anotace

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Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá národem Kríjů a vlivem Evropanů na jejich způsob života. První kapitola popisuje původní způsob života Kríjů, následující historický přehled dokumentuje měnící se vztah Kríjů s Evropany. Dále je pozornost věnována asimilační politice státu a jejím dopadům na způsob života Kríjů. Poslední kapitola analyzuje současný stav Kríjů, se zaměřením na bydlení, zdraví, vzdělání, zaměstnanost a kulturu.