

Teaching reconciliation by educating non- Indigenous communities

Christophe Premat (Stockholm University, Centre for Canadian Studies)

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Decolonizing the mind and the history

- Current debate in many countries: what does decolonial thinking mean? Do we have a theoretical turn in postcolonial studies? Does it imply to revise the common knowledge of the past? (Mignolo et al. 2018; Yates 2020)
- The paradox: does the reconciliation contribute to a recognition of the different communities? Is there a risk that decolonial thinking separates instead of reaching a reconciliation?
- Specific Canadian approach: protecting the cultural rights of minorities (which were majorities in the past)



Cultures of survival

- “Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of **survival** and **supplementarity**” (Bhabha 1994: 175). Different perception of culture as entertainment, aesthetic interest and culture as an expression of a deep **necessity**.
- The discrete erasure of cultures is a scandal *per se*.



Who pays for it?

- “No one actually needs to be punished for this racist culture. We should instead serve the community good food for the spirit. I am constantly telling Québécois and other peoples who descend from colonizers that it is not their **fault**. The fault lies with those who created this country on a foundation of **racism and discrimination**, and the government leaders who have perpetuated this system. That’s a proven fact. We, the Indigenous Peoples, have known this from the beginning. We had seen it in our oracles and our camp fires at night, long before the arrival of the ‘**White man**’ on the continent” (Ellis-Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 13).



Breaking the inflation of postcolonial discourses

- Necessity to listen to the history of the First Nations, their voice, their literature
- Plutarch, *De auditu* (English translation of 1927), https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/De_auditu*.html
- Methodology: finding in my own culture the resources that make me understand what is expressed in other cultures (Jullien 2016). The notion of “in-between” and distance between cultures. Adjustment between the readers and the authorial voice of the First Nations



Creating a methodology of empathy

- “Now the person who comes to a dinner is bound to eat what is set before him and not to ask for anything else or to be critical; so he who comes to a feast of reason, it if be on a specified subject, must feel bound to listen to the speaker in silence” (Plutarch 1927, § 10)
- Notion of **hospitality** (the guest has specific rights but he/she is also committed to the scene of hospitality).
- We need to break the logocentrism and the multiplication of discourses (fragmental utterances) (Derrida, Caputo 2021: 109)



Research question

- How do we **listen to** the voice of the First Nations?
- Not hearing but listening



Methodological frame

- Formulating a discrete “politics of recognition” (Taylor 1994)
- Nonviolent communication: restoring empathy
- Welcoming the voice of the Other (Rosenberg 2003)
- Not a victimization, just a way of investigating silence as a powerful resource for listening
- “Certain ways of communicating alienate us from our natural state of compassion” (Rosenberg 2003: 15). Feeling of pity in Rousseau as a dynamics of **empathy**
- “Analyses of others are actually expressions of our needs and values” (Rosenberg 2003: 16)



Methodological frame

- « There must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition or equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other » (Taylor 1994: 72). Pragmatic approach to go over political and cultural antinomies.
- « Classifying and judging people promotes violence » (Rosenberg 2003: 18)
- Paradox: how do we proceed scientifically if there is a risk to increase a violent distance between communities?



Answer

- Engaging scholars in creating the conditions of a dialogue
- Engaging scholars in the elaboration of *mediations* (Faget 2010)
- Emphasizing the recognition of the others
- “When we stay with empathy, we allow speakers to touch deeper levels of themselves” (Rosenberg 2003: 102)
- The power of literature: creating this existential posture.
“We need empathy to give empathy” (Rosenberg 2003: 103)
- Empirical case study: dialogue between Deni Ellis Béchard and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine (correspondence)



The correspondence between Deni Ellis Béchard and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine

- Analysis of the editorial peritext
- The subtitle "A conversation on race and reconciliation"
- English translation of a book which was published originally in French, *Kuei, je te salue* (2016). The book was reedited in French in 2021 by Écosociété (Montréal)
- Denis Ellis Béchard was born in 1974 and grew up between Canada and the United States. He is a famous reporter and journalist who investigated these questions of cultural dialogue
- The book was translated into English by Deni Ellis Béchard and Howard Scott



Analysis of the editorial peritext

- “These letters were written in the fall of 2015. They are dedicated to all the Indigenous women and girls who have gone **missing** and been murdered in the last thirty years or more, to the **resilient** Indigenous women of Val-d’Or, to the survivors of the Canadian Indian residential schools, who are stronger than time and **dispossession**, as well as to **future generations**, so that the words can be spoken and open up a way toward **dialogue** between First Nations and Québécois, and between all the other peoples who need it” (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: editorial peritext).



Introduction to the correspondence

- “In composing these letters, we knew that our words would be painful, and that we would have to allow ourselves the space to explore and test ideas through writing. Each letter influenced the one that followed, and the process of exchanging ideas, memories, and interpretations continuously shifted our path. The result was a fluid conversation that could have continued indefinitely, and in many ways, it has – in our friendship as well as in our individual work” (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 1)
- Real dialogue and not a dialogue with an imaginary correspondent



Exchange on reconciliation with 26 letters

- **Kuei** Natasha (1) / **Kuei kuei** my friend (2)/ **Kuei, kuei**, once again (3) / My dear Deni (4) / **Kuei, kuei**, nuitsheuakan (5)/ **Kuei, kuei**, nuitsheuakan (6) / Dear friend, niminu-uitsheuakan (7) / **Kuei** Deni (8) / Dear Natasha (9) / **Kuei**, Deni (10) / Dear Maikaniss (11) / Dear Deni (12) / **Kuei**, nuitsheuakan (13) / **Kuei**, nuitsheuakan (14) / **Kuei**, Maikaniss (15) / My dear Deni (16) / Good evening, Maikaniss (17) / **Kuei, kuei**, Deni (18) / **Kuei**, nuitsheuakan (19) / **Kuei**, my dear Deni (20) / Dear Natasha (21) / My dear Deni, nuitsheuakan (22) / **Kuei**, nuitsheuakan (23) / **Kuei, kuei**, Deni (24) / **Kuei** Natasha (25) / Deni (26)



A fantastic ritornello

- It creates a phenomenon of *reprises*
- The dialogue is based on the discovery of the former letter
- Focus on the language and translation
- "Among us, we commonly say 'niaut' for 'goodbye'. In Mani-utenam and beyond, continuing north on the Quebec Route 138, you mostly hear 'iame'. And to say 'See you soon', in the sense 'We will see each other soon', we say 'Iame uenapissish', which I translate literally as 'Goodbye, for a little time'" (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 12)



Listening other voices

- “And for the racists reading the paper – those who feel justified in their negative perceptions of Indigenous Peoples – the article simply confirmed their beliefs without adding new information or perspectives. I don’t expect everyone to be in agreement, only that we **accept to listen to different voices** without **recourse to reductive generalizations**. It’s for this reason that we are writing, Natasha: to break the **barrier of silence**. Maybe *silence* isn’t the perfect word, since it’s more the voices of one people that are overwhelming and smothering that of the other” (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 15).
- “Empathize with silence by listening for the feelings and needs behind it” (Rosenberg 2003: 124)



Empathy: instauring a posture of listening

- Plutarch “Now a man sitting as a judge in court is bound to listen without regard either to enmity or favour, but in sober judgement with regard to justice; but at scholarly lectures no law and no oath **prohibits** us from receiving the lecturer with goodwill”.
- Many references to the “Whites” and the reported discourses. How they describe the “Indians”.
- “Kuei Deni, *Nin* means ‘me’. *Nin tshia*, ‘I am’. I am and I speak. I write to you. Me, Natasha. **‘They walked like Indians.’** I love **that image**. This phrase, this designation recalls the stories and legends that inhabit the imaginary and cultural territory of Quebec like something distant and otherworldly” (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 35)



Listening: reconnecting the readers to the First Nations

- Presentation of the culture of the Innus (couple, way of thinking...)
- Scenography of reconciliation: the Québécois have an ancient heritage with these First Nations. The communities are much close to each other.
- “Personally I believe that a lot of Québécois have no idea of their ancient heritage. I don’t mean Indigenous heritage. Well, maybe yes, in the sense of the French word *autochtone*, which means ‘sprung from the land itself’. I want to mainly talk about the heritage of the territory itself” (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 36).



Listening and not accusing

- Discourse analysis (tendency to identify *abject* discourses, racist discourses in the conversation) (Kristeva 1982). Events of the Oka crisis in 1990 in Montreal (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 47)
- We move slowly from reported discourses to an inclusion of the other's history.
- How can people do to recognize this part of their history?
- Sharing the history
- "Expressing our vulnerability can help resolve conflicts" (Rosenberg 2003: 40)



Listening is not empowering or refilling a discourse.

- Classical perspective in dialogues of reconciliation (Examples: French-German joint history book to mix the points of views). Correspondence between Deni/Natasha evolves from how the First Nations are perceived to a presentation of this culture
- Use of positive language (Rosenberg 2003: 69)
- “Empathy: emptying our mind and listening with our whole being” (Rosenberg 2003: 91)
- Role of literature determining in restoring a necessary empathy. Less discourse, more fiction. “Intellectual understanding blocks empathy” (Rosenberg 2003: 93)



The ritornello as a series of reprises

- Chorus / improvisations. *Ars conversationis*
- Re-membering the history of the others. Explanation of the word "re-membering" (Premat, Sule 2016)
- Other examples in other contexts (Etty Hillesum) (Smelik et al. 2018)
- Non-violent communication, some principles
- "Paraphrase only when it contributes to greater compassion and understanding" (Rosenberg 2003: 98).
- Empathy creates safety as we are connected



A methodology for the classroom

- Practical exercises are included at the end of the dialogue with possible activities for the classroom.
- Pedagogical design of this dialogue.
- “Questions for Young People. Exercise 1 Discussion in the classroom on the topic of racism. Objective: Introduce the issue of racism in the classroom (definition, behaviours, solutions, etc.) and discuss it in order to initiate an exchange of letters between students from two different communities. To do this exercise, the students are asked, first of all, to form small groups in order to begin discussions. The exchange then continues with the whole class, focusing on potential solutions to fight racism” (Béchar, Kanapé Fontaine 2018: 154). **Other group activities**



Conclusions

- Recreating the other without exoticism by **listening** and keeping our own voice silent
- Adopting a methodology of empathy to resist to the categorization
- Investigating the cultural diversity to resist the crazy global order
- Finding in language and literature sustainable resources to create a dialogue
- **Intercultural journey** where the reader gets closer to the First Nations (Incorporation of the Other). Construction of a mediation (Faget 2010)



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