
“Kill the Indian in the Child”

On cultural genocide and transitional justice in Canada Kate Korycki in an interview by Anna Zawadzka

Abstract: This is an interview with Kate Korycki on the reparations for the native population in Canada for what the Canadian government defined as “cultural genocide.” Kate Korycki was born in Warsaw and has lived in Toronto for 25 years. Until 2006 she worked for the Canadian Government in a ministry delivering federal social programs, like unemployment insurance and pensions. Her last job involved the implementation of the Common Experience Payment. This was the largest government program to offer reparations for the wrongs suffered by the indigenous population in Canada in residential schools, which were run for 150 years by the Catholic and Unitarian Churches. The schools have recently been characterized as sites of cultural genocide.

Keywords: Canada; cultural genocide; transitional justice; indigenous populations; colonialism; racism; nation.

May 2015

Anna Zawadzka: What was your job?

Kate Korycki: Before we get to your question, let’s give some thought to how we are going to refer to the people I worked with. They are given a number of different names in Canada, and those names are not easily translatable to Polish. The Canadian state, in its Indian Act, calls them “Indians.” The Indian Act is a statute dating back to 1876 – it was amended on many occasions – that establishes the mutual obligations of the state and its native population. Originally, its mission was to “civilize” the so-called Indians. At present, it grants the native people rights that other groups do not enjoy, such as the exemption from taxes for work performed in the reserves. (I will explain later that it is not as great a privilege as it appears.) The Indian Act distinguishes between status Indians and non-status Indians. The former live on reserves and have the right to do so, while the latter do not. A separate group consists of Inuit peoples, or the people inhabiting the Far North, formerly called the Eskimo, which is now considered a pejorative term. The last group encompasses Métis, or the people of mixed European-Indian origin, usually speaking French. The native peoples are named in and by the Indian Act and they frequently speak of themselves using the language of the Act – that is they call themselves “Indian” – sometimes in a defiant, sarcastic manner, sometimes not. However, a person like myself, who is not indigenous, does not feel authorized to refer to them as “Indians.” This is a name rooted in the colonial discourse, and unless it is used by those who have been (and still are) its victims, it should be avoided. Thus, eschewing the colonial

vocabulary, we turn to the language of multiculturalism, or the language of transitional justice, and use terms like the *First Nations* or *Native Canadians*. The latter is problematic in its own right in that it assumes that people so named *feel* Canadian. This is not always the case. Many native people do not recognize sovereignty of Canada. It would be a solution to say *natives in Canada*. But the word *native* has its own complicated burden.

A. Z.: In Poland we tend to use the term *indigenous* [PL.: *rdzenni*] instead of *native* [PL.: *turbylczy*] in order to avoid associations with the “savage” inhabitant of “virgin” territories described by anthropologists from “enlightened” Europe.

K. K.: In Canada, the term “native” does not have the same automatic pejorative connotation, but to avoid confusion, let’s talk of indigenous peoples in Canada. The plural form will account for their diversity and the preposition “in” will speak to their complicated self-understanding. It will also distinguish them from other citizens. Because we have the indigenous peoples *of* Canada, who recognize sovereignty of Canada; and the indigenous peoples *in* Canada, who do not recognize Canada’s sovereignty. Then there are Canadians, or people born in Canada who trace their genealogy here through generations, to whom no-one would refer as *native*, however much sense this makes semantically; and – last but not least – there are hyphenated Canadians, that is immigrants such as myself, referred to as [for example] *Polish-Canadians*.

A. Z.: What does refusing to recognize the sovereignty of Canada mean?

K. K.: Many indigenous people believe that, despite being subjected to Canadian laws, they are citizens and members of their own nations only. For them, Canada represents a colonial rule which they do not recognize and which they oppose. In doing so they are fully aware of a paradox in which opposing the rule actually legitimizes it.

Let me add that the term *nation* is understood in Canada differently than in Poland. On the one hand, the category of nation does not organize identity in such an exclusive way as it does in Poland. The Canadian *nation* is capacious and exists alongside a wide range of other axes of identification. It does not compete with a female, a tractor driver, a Buddhist, a lesbian, and a Montrealer. On the other hand, the indigenous people in Canada use the discourse of the nation in order to gain equal footing with the Canadian state. In other words, through nationhood, they seek access to political and territorial sovereignty. They transform a nation into an anti-colonial notion. In a speculative and normative way, one may claim that indigenous peoples in Canada want to forge nations in the same way that the nation is forged and deployed in Poland. They want to transform individualistic liberal categories and relationships into group categories that they select themselves. In other words, they seek nationhood to replace race as an organizing category. The discourse of nations makes the negotiating parties – the Canadian state and the indigenous people – more equal and it delimits the boundaries of belonging.

A. Z.: I would like you to talk about the history, theory and practice of compensations for the indigenous population in Canada for colonial crimes.

K. K.: This topic is undergoing a veritable “earthquake” right now. Last Friday, May 29, 2015, Beverley McLachlin, Chief Justice of Canadian Supreme Court, publicly named the relations between Canada and its indigenous population a *cultural genocide*. Four days later, our Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded its work. Its investigations provide tangible evidence that the phrase uttered by the Chief Justice was justified. McLachlin did not specify whether the genocide is a matter of the past, or whether it continues until today. Nevertheless, Canada is shaking. There are different responses and different interpretations of the term she used. We fear this term because legally, economically and symbolically, it opens Pandora’s box. It is too early to know what consequences McLachlin’s statement might have, but it seems likely that, at the very least, the statement will affect the work of the courts.

Let me give you a handful of facts as the context of this “earthquake.”

In April 2015, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – that is the national police of Canada [there is also a separate municipal police and provincial police – K. K.] – was expected to publish a second report on the death of 1,181 indigenous women. They died between 1980 and 2012. Each case was, in its time, investigated individually. This report was to look at the issue systemically. In other words, the report meant to avoid the pitfalls of analyzing violence against women, and doing so only through the lens of individual experience. Before the report was released, the media leaked that in his talks held with Indian chiefs, Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, expressed regret that the report featured statistics about the “ethnicity” of the killers. Valcourt is reported to have claimed that the report revealed that 70% of indigenous women were killed by indigenous men. This episode illustrates the clash of two categories: race and gender. The Minister feared that the report might be perceived as racist while making it so himself. He emphasized what *kind* of men raped and murdered, thereby distracting attention from the structures of violence against women.

Another case involves immigration law, which was amended in October 2014. The changes concerned the principles of bringing temporary workers from outside Canada. An owner of a Chinese restaurant obtained a permission to bring in a group of employees from overseas. His restaurant was located at a junction of three reserves where the unemployment rate ranges from 50 to 60%. But the new law says that in order to get a permission to bring in foreign workers, the unemployment rate in the area where the business is located cannot exceed 4–5%. This case revealed that in calculating the unemployment rate, Statistics Canada [the national statistical agency – Ed.] does not account for the indigenous population. As if they did not exist. As if they were not humans.

Case three. In June 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper [the equivalent of a Premier in Poland; in Canada premiers rule the provinces – K. K.] officially apologized to all indigenous peoples in Canada. He spoke the right words that marked an important moment. Yet in 2011, the same Prime Minister said that Canada did not have a colonial past. Did he forget what he apologized for? Or, maybe, the apology allowed him to forget?

So much for the context. I hope that the axes of complications are clearer now. You have to know that Canada has not developed a coherent and unambiguous policy towards its indigenous population. The numerous gestures of reconciliation have to be confronted with the reality of racism and the fact that the experiences and memory of the indigenous population are evacuated outside the national community and its story. I do not want to discount the gestures of openness, but I cannot not see the gestures of closure.

A. Z.: So, what was your job?

K. K.: In 2006, the Canadian government, the Catholic Church and the Unitarian Church, accompanied by the Assembly of First Nations, reached an agreement on residential schools. Residential schools emerged from the Victorian penal institution modeled on a child labor camp. These were correctional schools supposed to be financially neutral for the Crown [that is, they had to generate income for their own upkeep – K. K.]. They were discontinued in the 1850s in the United Kingdom, only to be established in Canada a while later. They operated for 150 years. They were run by Catholic churches (60% of schools) and Unitarian churches (40%), but they operated under the auspices of the government and with its approval. The last one was closed down in 1986. Children – often as young as four – were taken away from their families and reserves, most often without their parents’ consent. This school system did not operate with the notion of consent, of either parents or children, at its core. The children were deliberately taken far away from their homes and placed in boarding schools, where they worked and received Canadian “education.” In practice, they were punished for speaking their native languages and practicing their religions. One cannot speak of education, only about linguistic and cultural disinheritance. The schools operated under the official motto of “*to kill the Indian in the child*.” They were established for the purpose of *cultural* genocide, but the children were abused, molested, beaten and starved. They often died. Cruelty was a standard rather than an exception.

The comprehensive agreement signed in 2006 provided the right to reparations to the surviving victims of residential schools and their families; it established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and it initiated and funded a communal healing program. The largest proportion of money went towards individual compensation. A victim received \$10,000 (CAD) for the first year of a confirmed stay in a residential school and further \$3,000 (CAD) for each successive year. Even a single day of attendance counted as one year. The program was formulated to give the benefit of a doubt to victims. A total of \$1.9 billion (CAD) was dedicated to reparations, the Commission and the recovery program.

A separate compensation procedure addressed those who had fallen victim of extraordinary cruelty in boarding schools, for instance sexual abuse. They were eligible to obtain an additional compensation. Some 10,000 claims were expected here. 38,000 were received.

The relations between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) and the indigenous population in Canada are long and complicated. It was therefore important that the reparation program be administered by another government department. The task was given to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (HRSDC), where I worked. The department was the first point of contact between a citizen and federal government, where people claimed their pensions, unemployment benefits, and so on.

I was sent to northern Ontario. Ontario looks like a whale. Its tail, hugging the lake Ontario, boasts the population of 11 million people. The head of the whale, in the north, has a surface comparable to that of Spain and France combined, and a population of about 200,000. Transportation takes place mainly by plane. There are no access roads leading to many reserves scattered in the north, or they are carved in snow and ice in winter. Inhabitants of the reserves are usually poorer than other people in Canada. They are often impoverished. They cannot afford to travel. Therefore, it was my task to organize a team to reach the reserves and initiate the compensation procedure.

I hired 20 people. I made it a point that they were all native inhabitants in Canada, that they respected the people they would talk to and that they spoke the language of the victims. The last element was difficult because native languages are dying out. We were supposed to request the permission to enter the reserves because of their semi-sovereign status, to notify the local population about the campaign of collecting applications and, finally, to collect the applications and facilitate submission. As the director of the whole campaign I did not go to the field very often and my main task was to coordinate. I visited several reserves far in the north in person, where I met their chiefs. I came across the reality Canadians are not familiar with because it is completely isolated.

A. Z.: I get most horrendous associations when I hear the term *reserve*. In Poland a reserve means a territory surrounded by a chain-link fence and inhabited by specified species of wild animals. A reserve offers protection but it still is a cage, however large. What does it mean when you say: a reserve? How is it organized these days?

K. K.: The word *reserve*, or reservation, has a double meaning: it designates a territory reserved for the indigenous population but it becomes a place where they are kept away from others. There are no chain-link fences in Canada. But when the price for a ticket to fly away from a reserve is more or less the equivalent of your monthly benefit, it is as if this fence was there anyway. Your understanding of the term is not incorrect in the Canadian reality.

Before the 1960s, the indigenous people in Canada were not allowed to leave their reserves without a permission granted by an Indian Agent, who – theoretically – was to take care of them, but – in practice – monitored them and kept them in one place. They did not have voting rights, either. Inuit peoples did not even have a right to individual names, which suggests that their status was comparable to that of wild animals. Even

today, the indigenous people in Canada do not have a right to take out a mortgage, which means that their land cannot be used to insure a loan.

The colonial founding myth of reserves had two components. One was that the land was empty – therefore ripe for the taking – although it wasn't empty. Apart from that, European understanding of property was based on the cultivation of soil and intervening into and changing nature. This was buttressed by the other component of the myth: “Indians” were supposedly nomadic peoples. Sometimes they were, but not very often. Be that as it may, the Europeans perceived them as “wanderers” moving across “empty” spaces, to which they supposedly had no emotional, economic and legal attachment. When you combine these two elements, it turns out that the land belonged to nobody and people who wandered around it needed to be made Canadian.

Reserves were established on the basis of land treaties signed successively with the First Nations. The First Nations gave up rights to huge areas in return for the symbolic one dollar and the right to enjoy the protection of the Crown. These treaties were signed by exhausted and starved indigenous groups. It happened after 95% of them had perished. Let us stop for a moment to reflect on this number... 95%. Establishing the reserves made the land truly empty. Empty and ready for populating with white immigrants.

Today, people are kept on the reserves through economics: indigenous people cannot afford to leave. But they are leaving anyway. At present, most of them do not live on reserves, but are connected with them by families, background and law. Outside the reserves, the indigenous population accounts for a considerable proportion of homeless people in larger cities. In other words, today, the reserves are the place “chosen” by people to live in for two reasons: either their choice is an illusion because they have nowhere else to go, or they live on a reserve because they feel at home there. I have not spoken much about the latter option, but it is of course real.

Importantly, reserves give a right to the land and a platform for further contestation. In 1969, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau wanted to abolish the Indian Act and reshape the relations between Canada and the indigenous people. The latter categorically rejected his plan. It could be said that they rejected freedom that was being offered to them. The problem is that, given the context of highly complicated history, freedom needs to be negotiated under the right terms. To grant someone “freedom” while taking away their long fought rights and land, the land which is a base of claims to nationhood everywhere, was problematic. It was seen as unacceptable. I think this was the right decision. The Indian Act is a yoke, but it also opens the space for contestation.

A. Z.: Who is legally responsible for reserves?

K. K.: The federal government is responsible for a majority of services, such as schooling and health care, there. Each reserve also has its own chieftainship appointed by traditional procedures, which tend to be more or less democratic. Funding of local chieftainship is also ensured by the federal government.

A. Z.: Let us go back to compensations. What should one write in the application?

K. K.: The application was very simple. It was meant to identify the applicant and have him or her tell us when and where they attended a residential school. Or residential schools, as many people moved from one to another. We sent the applications to the national archives where they were verified against school records. The assumption was that the victims were telling the truth, so ambiguities and inconsistencies were interpreted in favor of the applicant. When somebody said that he attended school X and it was not confirmed in the school's records, we asked him to present a testimony of one witness.

A. Z.: How did people respond to your being present in their reserves?

K. K.: They were both hopeful and watchful, careful. I encountered several chiefs who were very hostile towards me, but they did not display that hostility to my staff, the people who collected the applications.

There was one catch in the application: once you filled it in and collected your compensation, you renounced further rights to hold the government responsible for the wrongs suffered in residential schools. We made a point of making that very clear. Local activists helped us clarify this matter. Having arrived at a reserve we would organize a special place and days dedicated to the talks and submitting the applications. Almost everybody that was eligible came. The cases when somebody had attended the school but refused to claim damages were very rare.

A. Z.: How many individuals received the compensations?

K. K.: 150,000.

A. Z.: Can you still submit the application?

K. K.: The process has been closed. It took several years, but in practice everybody who wanted to submit the application did so in the first year.

A. Z.: Were the reparations for attending residential schools a gesture of general redress for all the crimes committed against the indigenous population?

K. K.: No, the reparations were a gesture of redress for the wrongs suffered in residential schools. They did not concern the dragging land claims and the right to sovereign status. But your question goes to the heart of the transitional justice logic, which rests on individual reparation for structural violence.

The harms inflicted in residential schools concern the tragedy of children and their families and the aftermath of these tragedies: alcoholism, drugs, domestic violence, high suicide rate, child addictions to glue or gasoline, diabetes epidemics – any indicator you can think of points to communities in distress; and it concerns a reduction to a category of an “Indian,” disenfranchisement and deracination. All these harms are present on two interrelated planes: individual and communal.

Transitional justice locates itself in the individualistic discourse of human rights. This discourse is manifested in the practice of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and the practice of apologies and reparations. It directly refers to the first plane of harms and emphasizes individual suffering. It may sometimes address community losses, or structural issues, but not often. A report drafted by the famous South African TRC was founded on the same assumptions. It concluded that the apartheid in the Republic of South Africa was undertaken by 20,000 depraved whites and the outcomes of (state-sanctioned) racial segregation ended when the Commission concluded their work. It could not be further from the truth, yet it ended the subject.

The largest resources in Canada were allocated to reparations. The intention of the authors was to individualize the redress and to bring closure. This is fine as far as it goes, but it has the effect of undermining the collective claims of the First Nations because it says nothing about the collective character of crimes against them. Transitional justice mechanisms create opportunities for certain gestures, but more often than not, those gestures end the topic. Reducing three different kinds of harms to an individual loss helps us avoid a debate about the structures that generated these harms for decades. Compensation replaces the discussion about how we should talk to each other and dismisses the question of who is actually talking to whom. Is it a state speaking to a state? Or a community to another community? Or maybe a victim to the perpetrator? What are we going to do with all these lawsuits over the rights to the land and natural resources that are in the courts of justice? Transitional justice silences these questions not even making an attempt to answer them.

I think that in the symbolic realm the indigenous people in Canada face a loss. Even if they want to fight for a right to live as autonomous communities, they have to do so in a language which erases them. They are fighting for the right to “own” their land and they do so by using the language of property law. But it was precisely the language of property rights which stripped them of their former attachments to land. But this is the only language that is available. Or rather, they can choose one of the following three: transitional justice, property and nation. All three are implicated in colonialism.

A. Z.: Which of these languages is familiar to whom we may call average Canadians?

K. K.: In the symbolic realm, we respect the language of the nation. We accept that indigenous people represent 600 nations. The term *nation* assumes a link between the people, the land and self-determination or, in other words, a political structure. Today, this land means the reserves, but lawsuits are fought over much larger territories. The federal government says they are talking to an equal partner, like a sovereign to sovereign. This is not true, because the position of the indigenous population is considerably weaker. The struggle to make them equal partners is conducted in the courts, but symbolically – it has been closed. The issue has been moved in the direction of individual reparation.

A. Z.: Are there no systemic changes?

K. K.: There have been attempts. To mention the latest one, the former government signed the Kelowna Accord [Kelowna is a town in British Columbia – K. K.]. It dedicated \$5–6 billion (CAD) to education, health care and infrastructure which would allow the indigenous peoples to reach the living standard approaching the Canadian average and build a system of education that would facilitate the revival of indigenous communities. The Kelowna Accord envisioned redefined relations with the state. But the liberal government which signed the Accord lost an election, and the new conservative one refused to implement it. It offered compensations instead.

A. Z.: Is the history of exploitation and crimes against the indigenous population a Canadian skeleton in the closet which comes out from time to time?

K. K.: Yes, it is, although a definite majority of people in Canada will never stumble over this skeleton. However, there are people among us who understand the relation with the land, this land, in a different way than we do and they are seeking to find a legal language which will grasp this relation. We will have to deal with it one day.

A. Z.: Don't Canadians know the situation of the indigenous population?

K. K.: If one hasn't seen the reserves in the north – and in practical terms only their inhabitants see them and very few others – one does not know too much about the situation of one's indigenous neighbors. The inhabitants of bigger cities see that they are overrepresented among the homeless. In such large cities in the north as Thunder Bay and Kenora the large homeless community derives almost entirely from native people. From time to time, the media talk of an epidemic of suicides or a tragic underfunding of one reserve or another. Even UN reports rank Canada as one of the best countries to live in, unless you are its indigenous inhabitant. In some places native people are allowed to fish only when the white people are not permitted to do so. This highlights the problem because it leads to conflicts.

A. Z.: The Jewish skeleton in the closet and how to deal with it constitute a significant aspect of Polish identity in Poland. Do you have a similar problem in Canada?

K. K.: Not any more. And maybe not yet.

This was an enormous problem at the time of the colonial contact. Cleansing the land of people and maintaining racial stability served the purpose of building the category of a European. That category combined the proper class (owning), the right race (white), and civilization (European). According to the colonizers' logic, the indigenous people in Canada were children that needed to be civilizationally tutored by their watchful teachers from overseas.

At present, groups' identities are formed as if separately. One could paraphrase Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, saying that "Canadian collective memory is memory without 'Indians.'" In contrast to Poland, however, national identity in Canada is not hegemonic and the

evacuation from the collective memory, which hurts the excluded “Indians,” can go unnoticed by the majority. It may be “diluted” in the multitude of (non)representation. It seems to me that this situation is not stable. We are bottling many issues up. The declaration of *cultural genocide* will dislodge some of them. This will not be the ultimate opening. One opening will be followed by a closure and then by another opening. And so on.

A. Z.: Is the situation of exploitation and cruelty towards the indigenous population diagnosed as racist? Does the discourse used to discuss Canadian colonialism apply this term?

K. K.: It is perceived as racism by the indigenous population and scholars who deal with this issue. Average white Canadians fail to notice their privileged racial status but some will speak of “drunken Indians” and not see it as racist.

In Canada, race is of course the factor that organizes access to symbolic and material resources, and to power. It also has an economic dimension, as is the case across entire North America. I disagree with Marxists, though, who claim that the discourse of racial subordination is just a superstructure while economic exploitation is the base. This is more complicated than that. Race has its own analytical heft. It is true that exploitation is justified by racist logic but that exploitation is conceivable in the first place only because our imaginary is racial *a priori*.

A. Z.: Sometimes the discourse of anti-racism goes in the direction of policies that acknowledge and demand multiculturalism, while in reality this is all about economic exploitation.

K. K.: The United States in the 1960s attempted to separate race from economics. The state officially abandoned its racist policies and scrapped racist laws. Not only did it scrap racist laws, it also implemented anti-racist laws, so that one could sue one’s employer, for instance, in cases of discrimination. As a result of this dual legalistic change, legend now holds that any racism that persists is a matter of attitudes of individuals. Not only has it nothing to do with structures or the state, it is an exception rather than a rule. Since the state is no longer involved, racism became privatized, so to speak.

Apart from racism that existed in laws and racism that persists in personal attitudes, however, there is racism that is imprinted in the economy of space, among other things, represented by ghettos; or racism of structural solutions that favor one group at the expense of another one. Or racism of schools financed from local taxes that makes the schools in rich and poor districts as if from different planets. The former feature Olympic-size swimming pools, musical instruments and museum trips, the latter – leaking roofs, no heating and guard booths. Therefore racism is separated from interests only in discursive terms and not in reality.

The matter is made even more complicated by the discourse of nation, or culture, which emerges from multiculturalism. Nationhood assumes group belonging and sovereignty and it introduces to the discussion the issue of space, geography and land. This language is important and capacious but the victims did receive it from the state, so to

speak. It is therefore a language that channels emancipatory appeals in ways that the state may desire.

A. Z.: What doesn't the State provide? What price needs to be paid for entering the discourse of nation?

K. K.: Partnership in the talks. Mind you, partnership does not necessarily assume that the positions are identical. The sovereignty desired by the First Nations is not absolute. They do not want to run their own monetary, fiscal and military policies. They seek subsidiarity: "nothing about us without us." And: "the decisions that concern only us are made by us." The rights of cities are a good example here. In 1999, the Nisga people signed an agreement with the governments of Canada and British Columbia allowing the Nisga people to take control over the land and natural resources. We are talking about 2,000 hectares here.

What do nations lose when they use the discourse of nations? What we all lose. Let me use an example. A young female lawyer, a member of the indigenous population in Canada, recounted her struggle to regain her traditional language. She was surprised to learn that the word "tree," which is a noun in Polish and English, in her language refers to a series of processes and is used as a verb. A tree which is a verb gives us a new insight into relations with nature and relations inside nature. It defies Cartesian myth of the fundamental separation of nature from culture. It allows us to think differently about the exploitation of water, air, animals and people. Nation, in turn, brings us back to the language of the colonizers (and indirectly, of capitalism). This term is not rooted in the imaginary of the indigenous population, it seems to me.

A. Z.: Do indigenous people in Canada organize themselves as political subjects in terms of nations or rather around social and material issues and access to capitals?

K. K.: They combine these things. They believe that when they are treated as a sovereign nation, they will be able to discuss their living conditions. Sometimes, it translates into reminding others about their presence. Like in calls for being included in national statistics, for instance.

The language of nations can also be demobilizing, though. It demobilizes the interest of the white population, first and foremost. Canadians are affected by social catastrophes in the reserves. These problems somehow "get" to us. When confronted with the living conditions on reserves, we think they are a disgrace in an affluent country. Yet our ability for compassion is proportionate to what we think we are able to do about this disgrace. Maybe the white population feels they cannot do anything about it?

A. Z.: What does this disgrace look like?

K. K.: Let me give you two examples. The Attawapiskat reserve is located near the largest diamond mine in Canada. The mine is one side, the Hudson Bay on another, and on the third side you get 750 km of swamp that one cannot get across in the summer. Half of the houses there do not have water. Half are covered with plastic tarps because

their walls have collapsed. And Attawapiskat is in the taiga, winters there are not what they are in Poland, or even Toronto, where I live. Pikangikum is another infamous place. Plagued by violence and anarchy. The situation is so dangerous that the tribal police leave in the evening because they are afraid. Further, in Pikangikum people bury their dead in their backyard gardens. Because of this cultural practice it is impossible to lay the piping, so there is no sewage system. If we, the white Canadians, were able to keep these images in front of our eyes longer than for a second, maybe we would mobilize our government to act against the grueling poverty and violence.

A. Z.: To what extent does the access of the indigenous population to capitals depend on the condition of “becoming civilized” or, in other words, to assimilate to the image a modern white person has?

K. K.: The assimilation discourse exploded at the time of the first colonial contact. The slogan *to kill the Indian in the child* renders it rather accurately. Today assimilation is unthinkable. The notion is offensive. It has been disqualified.

But, two caveats: first, when the indigenous people in Canada claim their land rights in courts, they have to use the language of ownership and property to make the claims. Canadian law leaves no room for relating to the land in ways other than ownership (this is true even when the Crown owns the land: we the public may use it, but the Crown may sell it). There is no alternative here. This lack of alternative, this need to speak in the vocabulary of the colonial state, may be seen as a requirement to assimilate. Second, with the Canadian policy of multiculturalism, assimilation returns quietly, like a boomerang.

A. Z.: Meaning what?

K. K.: Canada is a multicultural country in sociological terms. Many people of different backgrounds and cultures live here. Canada also implements a multicultural policy. The sociological reality and government policy are often conflated in the mainstream understanding, producing a mistaken belief that multicultural policy concerns mainly, or only, immigrants. This is incorrect. The multicultural policy is concerned with the founding linguistic communities in Canada first and foremost: that is, the Francophone Quebec and the Anglophone rest. The state ensures that the Francophone minority’s culture survives, thrives even, thereby legitimating and buttressing Canadian founding nations and their two languages. In the realm of symbolism, education and economy, both these nations are treated as equal. Sometimes the expenditure on Francophone Quebec exceeds the expenditure on the Anglophones. This is done based on an understanding that minorities need extra protection from the influence of the majority.

Furthermore, the multicultural policy concerns the First Nations – the indigenous communities. It rests on the notion that there exists an equal right to own culture between the First Nations and the founding nations (the English and the French). Here we can see the first cracks in the multicultural discourse because there is no conceptual or empirical equality between the First Nations and the founding nations. The French- and

English-speaking nations are made up of former colonizers, whereas the First Nations – of those who were colonized. Therefore, their moral status is different. The expenditure, whether symbolic or material, borne to sustain the cultures of the First Nations is also different (and lower than what is expended on the founding nations).

Third, the multicultural discourse, as it relates to immigrants, assumes that they should observe Canadian law and pay taxes, but we do not demand that they change their customs. On the contrary, through multicultural policy, we designate funds to help them preserve and celebrate their cultural distinctiveness. Diversity, on this logic, enriches all of us. But the actual funds dedicated to sustain immigrant cultures are minimal. They accounted for \$1,8 mln (CAD) across the whole country in 2009–2010, out of which \$4,2 mln (CAD) was actually spent. All this when in Toronto alone, a city of over 2 million people, more than half of inhabitants were born outside Canada. This money is therefore negligible. We get declarations instead of resources.

Summing up, I believe that Canada continues to demand a *de-facto* assimilation, although it does so in a covert manner. Speaking about diversity, it actually promotes assimilation. A number of activists and scholars who are critical of multicultural policy go further and say that the language that symbolically celebrates the equality of cultures while offering an unequal financial support to them is a perfect manifestation of state-supported racism.

A. Z.: When you were working to ensure the compensations for the indigenous population in Canada, was it important at all that you were not from Canada? Was that supposed to work in your advantage, inspire trust or at least liking?

K. K.: I was perceived as a white, young and woman. These were the most important factors. Nothing else mattered.

A. Z.: Is the authenticity discourse strong in Canada? How does it operate with respect to the indigenous population?

K. K.: The indigenous population of Canada uses the discourse of authenticity and its most important aspect concerns their attitude to the land and nature. The indigenous population constructs an image of shepherds who, in contrast to capitalists, do not only exploit the environment but also care for it. They describe this quality as being inherently theirs. I have been listening to this argumentation with mixed feelings.

A. Z.: Isn't it a replication of the "savage" discourse, only this time with a plus instead of a minus?

K. K.: Yes, it is, but remember the example with the tree as a verb. Adopting the "savage" discourse (although this is never stated explicitly, and rightly so, because the "savage" was never a savage) is founded on the rejection of Western civilizational myths that were presented as truths. This is a highly valuable moment of the homegrown criticism of the unsustainable and voracious capitalist exploitation. The environmental crisis emphasizes this value. On the other hand, however, I fear essentializing of culture and identity.

A. Z.: Do history handbooks in Canada take the history of the indigenous population into account?

K. K.: The history of the indigenous population is not commonly known. When it is recounted, it describes the history of indigenous people not as “our” story, but as “their” story. History books do not mention that after the colonial encounter 95% of the indigenous populations of both Americas perished, first because of germs and diseases, later due to murders and looting. Children do not learn about this total disaster in schools, whether they are indigenous children or not. Instead of learning the past, they get the myth of shepherds. I think that it would be better for all of us to come across both the history (and our implication in it) and the myth (and its inherent critique of land exploitation).

That is why admitting to cultural genocide is a breakthrough. It does not stop at the level of individual harms and their manifestations. It moves to expand our vision of the community. History books in Canada will need to be written anew, eventually. Let us hope that including the indigenous population in the capacious concept of “us” will pave the road for their true emancipation.

*

Kate Korycki is completing her doctorate in political science at the University of Toronto. She holds an MA in Political Science from McGill University. Her broad research agenda concerns the politics of identity, belonging, and conflict. In her doctoral work she is concentrating on the politics of identity in time of transition and, more specifically, on the work of collective memory in Poland. She compares political parties’ narratives of the communist past and finds that memory a) organizes the political field, b) legitimizes the post-transition order and delegitimizes the critique of that order, c) constitutes and circulates a narrow, ethno-religious vision of national belonging.

Kate was born in Warsaw and has lived in Toronto for close to 25 years. Until 2006 she worked for the Canadian Government in a ministry delivering federal social programs, like unemployment insurance and pensions. Her last job involved the implementation of the Common Experience Payment – the largest settlement between the Canadian Government and its indigenous populations. The settlement provided reparations for the victims of the residential schools, which were run for 150 years by Catholic and Unitarian churches. The schools were recently characterized by Canadian Chief Justice and the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as the sites of cultural genocide.

Translated by Katarzyna Matschi

References

- Canadian Human Rights Commission.** (2013). *Report on equality rights of Aboriginal people*. Ottawa.
- D'Alesio, R., & Friesen, J.** (2014, October 14). Temporary foreign workers hired in area with high aboriginal unemployment. *The Globe and Mail*.
- Every G20 nation wants to be Canada, insists PM. (2009, September 25). *Reuters*.
- Fine, S.** (2015, May 28). Beverley McLachlin delivers “unparalleled” remarks over Canada’s treatment of First Nations people. *The Globe and Mail*.
- Galloway, G.** (2015, March 31). RCMP to release second report on missing aboriginal women. *The Globe and Mail*.
- Galloway, G., & Curry, B.** (2015, June 2). Truth and Reconciliation Commission to release recommendations after a five-year inquiry. *The Globe and Mail*.
- Harris, C.** (2004). How did colonialism dispossess? Comments from an edge of empire. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94(1), 165–182. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2004.09401009.x>
- Jung, C.** (2011). Canada and the legacy of the Indian residential schools: Transitional justice for indigenous people in a nontransition society. In P. Arthur (Ed.), *Identities in transition: Challenges for transitional justice in divided societies* (pp. 217–250). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jung, C.** (2014). Race, class, and ethnicity in the history of Mexican indigenous politics. In A. Eisenberg, J. Webber, G. Coulthard, & A. Boisselle (Eds.), *Recognition versus self-determination: Dilemmas of emancipatory politics* (pp. 21–46). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Kymlicka, W.** (1996). *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, C. C.** (2011). *1491: New revelations of the Americas before Columbus*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s statement of apology. (2008, June 11). *CBC News*.
- Stoler, A. L.** (2010). *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation report calls for steps to improve First Nations’ lives. (2015, June 2). *The Globe and Mail*.
- Valpy, M.** (2015, June 26). Murdered and missing aboriginal women: One family’s haunted history. *The Globe and Mail*.

**„Zabić Indianina w dziecku”.
O kulturowym ludobójstwie w Kanadzie i sprawiedliwości tranzycyjnej
z Kate Korycki rozmawia Anna Zawadzka**

Abstract: Anna Zawadzka przeprowadza wywiad z Kate Korycki na temat odszkodowań przyznanych rdzennym mieszkańcom w Kanadzie za to, co rząd kanadyjski określił mianem „kulturowego ludobójstwa”. Kate Korycki urodziła się w Warszawie i mieszka w Toronto od 25 lat. Do 2006 roku pracowała dla rządu kanadyjskiego, w ministerstwie spraw społecznych. Jej ostatnia funkcja polegała na wdrożeniu programu „Zadośćuczynienie Wspólnego Doświadczenia” (Common Experience Payment). Ten program był najszerzym gestem władz federalnych w postaci rządowych reparacji za krzywdy wyrządzone w szkołach rezydencyjnych wobec rdzennych mieszkańców w Kanadzie. Szkoły te były prowadzone przez 150 lat przez Kościół katolicki i unitariański. To właśnie działalność tych szkół została określona mianem kulturowego ludobójstwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Kanada; kulturowe ludobójstwo; sprawiedliwość tranzycyjna; rdzenni mieszkańcy; kolonializm; rasizm; naród.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License, which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited.

www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl

© The Author(s) 2016

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

DOI: 10.11649/slh.2016.006

Author: Anna Zawadzka, Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Correspondence: annazawadzka@poczta.fm

The work has been prepared at author's own expense.

Competing interests: The author has declared she has no competing interests.