

Collective Resentment

Katie Stockdale

Abstract: Resentment, as it is currently understood in the philosophical literature, is *individual*. That is, it is anger about a moral injury done to oneself. But in some cases, resentment responds not to direct moral injuries, but to systemic harms and injustices. The purpose of this paper is to move beyond individualistic conceptions of resentment to develop an account of *collective* resentment that better captures the character and effects of the emotion in these cases. I use the example of indigenous and settler Canadians' reciprocal resentments in response to the Indian Residential Schools and continuing political disagreements as an example of a context in which understanding collective resentment is important.

Keywords: emotion; resentment; politics; colonialism; injustice

1. Introduction

In a 2011 public talk titled "Recognition, Reconciliation, and Resentment in Indigenous Politics," Glen Coulthard, indigenous political scientist and assistant professor of First Nations Studies at the University of British Columbia, challenged the conception of resentment as a slave-like condition of the weak and pitiful left to fester and simmer rather than turn into action.¹ The problem with this account of resentment, he argued, is that it characterizes the emotion as hopelessly backward-looking, focusing on an event rather than a structure as what is resented. Coulthard claimed that the resentment of indigenous peoples is defensible and righteous; and they should resent, specifically, colonialism and the institutions and people implicit in its reproduction. Resentment, to Coulthard, is a pathway to self-determination that moves away from indigenous peoples' dependency on the actions of colonizers for freedom and self-worth.²

Right now, the growing and increasingly global political movement

¹Glen Coulthard, "Recognition, Reconciliation, and Resentment in Indigenous Politics," Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, November 16, 2011.

²Ibid.

known as *Idle No More* is apparently answering Coulthard's call to action. The movement began in response to Bill C-45: a bill that proposes changes to the Indian Act that will reduce the level of First Nations consent required in the process of surrendering Indian Reserve Lands.³ Pam Palmater, Mi'kmaq lawyer, professor, and Chair of Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, has explained that the broader aim of *Idle No More* is to shift the relationship between settlers and indigenous peoples so that indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction over their own lives is acknowledged.⁴ Although the movement has gained widespread support, it also been met with hostility, and particularly from nonindigenous Canadians. Barry Cooper, professor of political science at the University of Calgary, argued that First Nations' claims constitute a "political pathology" that is based in complaints and assumptions that have "no basis in reality."⁵ And interestingly, their "self-delusion is more than ideology, because it combines the lowest emotions—guilt, fear and resentment—with the most exalted aspirations to rectify injustice."⁶

My own views about the *Idle No More* movement are in disagreement with Cooper's, but I share his interest in the role of resentment in this particular social and political context. This paper seeks to illustrate the ways in which indigenous peoples' fight against continuing colonization and settler responses can be understood as expressions of resentment that dominate indigenous-settler relations, a reality that, in Canada, traces back to the Indian Residential Schools. But what indigenous Canadians are *resentful* about are not always direct harms that some identifiable member of settler society is responsible for. Indigenous Canadians are resentful because of the systemic harms and injustices that continue to marginalize *all* indigenous Canadians, and the ongoing threat to indigenous lands and their ways of life. Understanding this form of resentment is at odds with the contemporary philosophical literature that understands the emotion as a kind of anger directed toward a perpetrator of a distinct moral injury. The purpose of this paper is to move beyond individualistic conceptions of resentment to develop an account of *collective* resentment that better captures the character and effects of the emotion in situations of social and political injustice. I use the Canadian context as an example of a context in which understanding collective resentments is important.

³Ibid.

⁴Andy Radia, "AFR Runner-up Pam Palmater accuses PM of trying to break up communities," *Yahoo! News*, December 27, 2012, <http://ca.news.yahoo.com/blogs/canada-politics/yahoo-exclusive-afn-runner-pam-palmater-accuses-pm-144833734.html>.

⁵Barry Cooper, "Aboriginals have no claim to sovereignty," *The Vancouver Sun*, January 26, 2013, <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/news/Aboriginals+have+claim+sovereignty/7876897/story.html#ixzz2JBolRosN>.

⁶Ibid.

In section 2, I draw upon literature on resentment to discuss the individualistic conception of the emotion and recent attempts to expand philosophical understandings of resentment to include resentments that respond to social and political structures in addition to distinct moral injuries. I then explore the kinds of resentment that this broader understanding recognizes, pointing out the relationship between the causes, reasons for, and objects of the emotion. In section 3, I argue that there is a kind of resentment that is distinct from individual resentment in that it is grounded in different reasons. I call this collective resentment. Sections 4 and 5 explore the different kinds of resentment in context, and in particular, the resentments of indigenous and settler Canadians in response to the Indian Residential Schools. The analysis of collective resentment in the Canadian context uncovers problems with settler judgments like Cooper's about *Idle No More* and the specific situation of indigenous peoples within contemporary colonial structures. I conclude by expanding upon the moral and practical significance of taking collective resentments seriously.

2. Expanding Resentment

Resentment, as it is currently understood in the philosophical literature, is *individual*. That is, it is anger about one's perception that some moral injury was done to oneself. This conception of resentment comes from Jeffrie G. Murphy's account of the emotion in his "Forgiveness and Resentment." On Murphy's view, resentment is a kind of anger or hatred directed toward another person who is responsible for perpetrating a moral injury or harm.⁷ It signifies that one has self-respect and that one cares about and appreciates morality in general; and it expresses one's acknowledgment that others are also moral agents deserving of respect.⁸ So in resenting, you stand up for the judgments that you ought not to be wronged, that you respect the moral value that people ought to treat others with goodwill, and that you care about or value the opinion of the agent who has wronged you. The reason for resentment is that one perceives that one has been wronged, and the *object* of resentment is the perpetrator *of* that wrong.

Resentment, on this view, is individual because it requires anger to be about a moral injury done to *you* in order for your anger to be resentment. In Murphy's terms, one must have the appropriate moral *standing*

⁷Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7 (1982): 503-16, p. 506.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 505.

to experience resentment. He states: “I do not have *standing* to resent or forgive you unless I have myself been the victim of your wrongdoing.”⁹ So a marginalized member of society who is angry about her social position but who cannot articulate her anger as a response to a moral injury intentionally inflicted on her by another person cannot be said to experience resentment. But it seems perfectly reasonable to feel *resentment* about being a marginalized member of society. A person of low socio-economic status might not be able to point to a specific incident that is responsible for his becoming poor, but he can certainly feel angry about the fact that other members of society enjoy millions of dollars spent on vacations, designer clothing, and large homes while he struggles to feed his children. This person’s anger is resentment because it is anger in response to a perceived injustice that affects *him*, an injustice that the resentment calls attention to as something that should be undone.

So Murphy’s account is unfortunately limited; it cannot make sense of resentments that are responses to systemic harms and injustices. Alice MacLachlan and Margaret Urban Walker have attempted to expand current philosophical understandings of resentment to include resentments like the ones I mention above. MacLachlan argues that the objects of our resentment are not only distinct moral injuries, but also *circumstances*. For example, one can resent needing care and the vulnerability that goes along with it, finding oneself with a painful disease, or having a difficult or unrewarding job.¹⁰ It is also possible to resent the culmination of events over time, such things as practices that marginalize women in a patriarchal society—and these things are not reducible to specific acts of wrongdoing.¹¹

Moreover, as Walker argues, resentment’s anger can be expressed toward individuals other than the wrongdoer who are in a position to reaffirm the standards underlying the resenter’s anger, and ratify the judgment that he or she has been wronged or that a normative expectation has been violated.¹² So the object of resentment, according to Walker, need not be a perpetrator of a moral injury. It can be those who, by their acts of omission, fail to stand up for the victim of harm. Walker notes that it is also possible to resent another person’s “riding free” or profiting in excessive ways from the roles, systems, or cooperative practices that

⁹Ibid., p. 506.

¹⁰Alice MacLachlan, “Unreasonable Resentments,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41 (2010): 422-41, p. 428.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²See Margaret Urban Walker, “Resentment and Assurance,” chap. 4 in *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 135.

others who do not enjoy such profits comply with.¹³ She worries that describing the objects of resentment as “harmful and insulting treatment intentionally inflicted” brings to mind images of abusive and disrespectful treatment, pushing aside the pervasiveness of resentment in everyday life.¹⁴

So MacLachlan and Walker think that philosophers must move beyond the standard conception of what counts as resentment to recognize the diverse objects of resentment apart from distinct moral injuries. I want to suggest further that the objects of an individual’s resentment will uniquely reflect features of a person’s life.¹⁵ Martha Nussbaum has suggested something similar. In “Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance,” she points out that emotions are “localized” in the sense that their objects are seen as important for the role they play in our own lives.¹ For example, the object of grief will be the death of a loved one: Nussbaum grieved the death of her mother, the *object* of her emotion, but my grief’s object might be a failed relationship or my grandfather’s death. Or, one mentally ill person might resent his doctor for not taking him seriously; another might resent his family for having him diagnosed as a child; one might even resent the pharmaceutical industry for shaping the norm that psychotropic drugs are the most appropriate form of treatment for mental disorders in North America. The reason is that people’s lives are different. The objects of an individual’s resentment can depend on whom she comes into contact with, her life history, and her social and economic position.

Not only can resentment’s objects be more diverse than Murphy’s account recognizes, one’s reason for resenting might go beyond the judgment that one has been directly wronged by a moral injury. The *reasons* for resentment in cases of broader social and political resentments will often be tied to social vulnerability and experiences of injustice. For example, *women* might experience feelings of resentment because they are vulnerable to domestic violence, paid less than men for work, are denied reproductive rights, and so on. *Mentally ill* individuals might experience resentment because of being stigmatized as “crazy” or “unstable,” or being denied decision-making capabilities about their own lives and medical treatment. Individuals can therefore resent for the reason that they occupy marginalized positions in society even if these resentments cannot be articulated as an expression of a moral demand that cul-

¹³Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁵Martha Nussbaum, “Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance,” in Robert C. Solomon (ed.), *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 12, p. 189.

pable moral agents intentionally did not meet.

Resentment also expresses individuals' norms and beliefs. For example, I might think that the norm that women "ask for it" when they are subject to sexual exploitation is harmful, and if I am the victim of sexual violence my resentment will express my attitude toward that norm. I might also believe that men and women ought to be treated equally in the workplace, and if I am not treated this way, my resentment will express this belief. These are legitimate reasons for resentment, reasons that are more diverse than the specific moral reasons (i.e., respect for oneself, moral values, and others) that Murphy identifies. More generally, when individuals or groups fail to abide by certain expectations held by other individuals or groups, resentment ensues.

But importantly, what triggers resentment is not always bound up with one's reason for experiencing it. For example, hearing a man's claim that women should never have an abortion might trigger my feelings of resentment, even though the reason for my resentment is that women are often denied reproductive rights. Or, a mentally ill person might feel resentment when he overhears someone making a joke about "crazy schizophrenics" even though the reason for his resentment is that mentally ill people are stigmatized and vulnerable targets of discrimination. In cases in which the trigger and reason for resentment diverge, it is possible that the person whose resentment came about already *had* the emotion. That is to say, the mentally ill person's resentment toward the person who makes an insensitive joke might have been triggered by the telling of the joke, but that resentment is a part of a more complex causal background that is bound up with his reason for experiencing it: the reason that he, as a mentally ill person, is stigmatized and a vulnerable target of discrimination. So the trigger of resentment and the reason for resentment are not always equivalent. Sometimes, understanding resentment requires understanding the background conditions of a person's life, conditions that are reflected in the *reasons* for that person's resentment.

So to be resentment, the anger need not have as its object a perpetrator of moral injury, and it need not be about a distinct moral injury to oneself. These are sufficient conditions for an anger to be resentment, but they are not *necessary* conditions. Resentment, it seems, is a kind of anger that expresses one's perception that he or she has been wronged, treated unfairly, or is the victim of unfortunate circumstances. The emotion expresses that one does not deserve to be in such a position, and calls upon others to undo the injustice. Resentment is therefore *personal* in a way that anger is not. I can be *angry* about an act of racism against a black man that I hear about in the newspaper, but I cannot be resentful;

as a white woman, I cannot interpret the wrong as a slight against *me* in any way.

But the project of moving beyond accounts like Murphy's to understand broader social and political resentments raises the question of whether individualistic conceptions of resentment can make sense of what the emotion is expressing in situations of perceived injustice. Often, one's membership within a socially vulnerable *group* is what these resentments are about: being marginalized *because of* being a woman or a mentally ill person. I think that understanding these resentments as individual cannot adequately capture what grounds them in certain cases. In the following section, I develop an account of collective resentment that is distinct from individual resentment in that it is grounded in different *reasons*.

3. Collective Resentment

I am prepared to accept that the concept of collective resentment is perhaps even more counterintuitive and metaphysically troubling than notions of collective intention and collective responsibility. I *am* arguing that in collective resentment the resentment belongs to the *group*, not merely the individuals that constitute it. I am *not*, however, arguing that a collective can have an emotional experience independently of members of the collective.¹⁶ Rather, collective resentment is resentment that is felt and expressed by individuals in response to a perceived threat to a collective to which they belong.¹⁷ In collective resentment, the reasons for resentment are reasons for a *collective*, not an individual victim of mistreatment. To illustrate this, suppose a woman is a victim of sexual violence and she feels resentment toward the perpetrator. Her resentment is triggered by the fact of "being the target of sexual violence," and the reason she would appeal to in explaining her resentment is the *reason that* she was victimized in this way. Since this woman's resentment is based in the reason that she was the direct target of a moral injury, the resent-

¹⁶I am not denying that this is a possibility, and the question of whether a collective can resent itself is an interesting and important question. But I do not address it here.

¹⁷There is no "essence" of women such that all women have the essential properties that constitute a "woman." But we do identify with this social category, and I want to argue with Marilyn Frye that social categories "serve as loci of political solidarity and coalition." See Marilyn Frye, "Category Skepticism and its Cure: Commentary on Medina's 'Identity Trouble'," *Symposia on Gender, Race, and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2005), p. 2. So I would like to acknowledge the problem that there will be tough cases, cases in which it is unclear just how to define the collectives that we are talking about. But I set this issue aside to show why we must talk about collectives to understand resentments in social and political contexts.

ment can be accommodated within the standard individual account.

Now suppose this woman appeals to a *second* reason for resentment. She says: "I resent not only that *I* was a victim of sexual violence, but also living in a patriarchal society in which women are vulnerable to sexual violence and oppression." While the first reason the woman appealed to is a reason for *only* her as the victim of sexual violence, the second reason is a reason for *all* women in virtue of their membership within a collective that is vulnerable to sexual exploitation in a patriarchal society; and resentment grounded in *this* reason does not make sense independently of the collective "women." So in the first case, the woman feels the standard kind of resentment: resentment that responds to a distinct moral injury intentionally inflicted. In the second case, the woman not only experiences this kind of resentment; she also resents because of her perception of a threat to the collective "women" whose members face the possibility of being victims of sexual violence.

Now suppose another woman who hears of this case feels resentment. This woman has not been a victim of sexual violence; she cannot appeal to the *first* reason—that of being the object of sexual violence—to explain or justify her resentment. But she *can* appeal to the second reason the victim gave in explaining her resentments. She can say, specifically, that although she has not been victimized herself she resents this instance of victimization because she too is a woman vulnerable to sexual violence, and *no* woman ought to be in a position to be treated in such a way. The second woman's resentment is collective because although she was not herself victimized, and cannot interpret the instance of victimization as a wrong done to her that would ground her individual resentment, she is a member of a collective that is disproportionately vulnerable to sexual violence and oppression; and her resentment is a response to the particular instance of violence toward another woman that represents a broader threat to *all* women.

But now we might ask whether a man who feels anger toward the perpetrator of sexual violence can genuinely *resent* in this case. There is a question of whether men who do not subject women to sexual exploitation, who do not endorse attitudes like "women ask for it" or "women are objects of sexual gratification" can resent other men who exploit women in such a way. I think, though, that we must be careful about what sorts of injuries done to others we can take personally in a way that makes our angers "resentments." For example, it seems too strong to say that a man can resent a perpetrator of sexual violence who victimized his friend's relative that he has never met. The man might disapprove of the offender's behavior and even feel angry about it. But his anger is not resentment; and this is because the injury done to the friend's relative is not

one that he can take personally in a way that would ground resentment. That is to say, he is not *connected* to the victim in a way that injuries done to her feel like slights against *him*—ones that he can take personally by virtue of the nature of his relationship with the victim. The sort of connection I am imagining is one in which the victim is part of the resenter's life, affects who he is, and whom without he would not be the same.

But I think that the anger of a man whose wife, sister, or close female friend is the victim of sexual violence *can* be accurately called “resentment” insofar as he is connected to his loved one in such a way that the injury done to her feels like a slight against him. This is not because he is the *victim*, or thinks that the wrong was done to *him*, but for the reason that his loved one is a *part* of him and his life in the ways suggested above, not just a person he stands in relation to. The resentment is not collective based in the reason of “being a member of a collective that is vulnerable to sexual violence and oppression”; rather, it is *individual*, based in the reason that someone he cares about deeply and shares himself with was subject to sexual violence.

There will also be cases in which men who *have* been victims of sexual violence respond with anger when they hear about other cases of victimization. These men can have *individual* resentments grounded in the reason of “being the victim of sexual violence.” But they cannot appeal to the reason “being disproportionately vulnerable to sexual violence and oppression *because* of being a woman in a patriarchal society” to explain their resentment. Only women's resentment in the case of sexual violence can be *collective*.

Other men who are not close to victims of sexual violence and those who have not themselves been victims of sexual violence might have shameful resentment, resentment based in reasons that have to do with the “image” of men that the perpetrator represents that affects his own identity as a man living in a patriarchal society. This raises the interesting question of whether there might be such a thing as reflexive collective resentment,¹⁸ or collective resentment that is felt and expressed toward individuals of one's own collective based in a perceived threat to the *identity* of the collective. In this case, the man might experience reflexive collective resentment that is expressed by his saying things like, “the perpetrator of sexual violence reproduces the image of *all men* as aggressive, violent, disrespectful people who think that women are the objects of our sexual gratification. I *resent* him for this.” The possibility of reflexive collective resentment is perhaps another kind of resentment

¹⁸Thanks to Alice MacLachlan for suggesting this term.

that is worth exploring. But I will set this case aside and focus instead on the standard case of collective resentment.

It is important to note that even if there is such a thing as reflexive collective resentment, this would be very different from the collective resentment of women in this case, resentment that expresses women's perception that there is a threat to all women who are vulnerable to sexual violence and oppression in a patriarchal society. So one cannot experience collective resentment because of a perceived threat to a collective that one does not belong to. When other parties react emotionally, and in particular *angrily*, for the reason that they see a threat to a collective to which they do *not* belong (not a threat to oneself, a loved one, or a collective to which they *do* belong), they are experiencing a kind of anger that is not resentment. It is disapprobation of some action or event, but not an expression of the angry party's own personal connection to the mistreatment, injustice, or offense.

Resentment, then, can be individual or collective. And the presence of one kind of resentment does not mean that there is not also the presence of another kind of resentment. It is perfectly consistent to hold both that individuals can resent because they perceive that they have been threatened or harmed, *and* that they experience collective resentment (as in the case of the woman who was subject to sexual exploitation and appealed to both reasons). But these resentments are different, and in an important way, because each guides us toward different reasons that ground them. And as we will see, understanding whether reasons are for individuals or collectives is crucial for making sense of what the emotion is expressing in social and political contexts, and what things ought to be addressed if the resentments are to receive an appropriate response.

There is another interesting feature of collective resentment. In *collective* resentment, each member of the collective need not have the emotion. We might say that the social context characteristically causes individuals of a collective to experience resentment because of their common experiences *in* that social context, but that the social context will not cause everyone in the group to feel resentment. We could account for this in many ways based on the diversity of life histories, values, and commitments of individuals even within a common group. In some cases, we might also be able to say that individuals who are members of a collective and do not resent are subject to being criticized as having a rational failing of some sort. But this is a task that would have to involve careful consideration of all of the relevant details, and to criticize individuals for not resenting because of a threat to a collective to which they belong we first need to understand collective resentment.

The important point is that the concept of collective resentment does

not entail that all members of the collective experience it. Collective resentment is resentment that is felt and expressed by individuals and is grounded in reasons that *could* be reasons for all members of the collective. In the following section, I begin to explore collective resentment in context, drawing upon indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred's "Colonial Stains On Our Existence" to illustrate what indigenous Canadians' collective resentment looks like.

4. Indigenous Canadians' Resentment

Alfred boldly states:

As Onkwehonwe¹⁹ who are committed to the Original Teachings, there is not supposed to be any space between the principles we hold and the practice of our lives. This is the very meaning of integrity: having the mental toughness and emotional strength to stand up for what we believe is right. The Challenge is to master, not conquer, fear and to engage in the constant fight to resist both the corrupting effects of the financial, sensual, and psychological weapons used by the colonial authorities to undermine Onkwehonwe people and the corrosive effect on the Onkwehonwe mind and soul of Euroamerican culture and society.²⁰

If resentment is a kind of defense or protest that communicates what we feel entitled to, then Alfred's words express resentment. They reflect underlying beliefs about what indigenous peoples feel is right, and the judgment that settler Canadians have *violated* indigenous peoples. His discussion is not merely an expression of anger, because anger does not entail that one has been personally harmed or that a collective to which one belongs has been harmed. It is the kind of resentment that MacLachlan's and Walker's broader accounts recognize: resentments about past moral injuries *and* persistent injustices that settler Canadians as perpetrators have the power to address.

Alfred identifies the "enemy" of indigenous Canadians, or what I have called the *objects* of resentment, in many different ways. He explains that the enemy of indigenous peoples' struggle is monotheistic religiosity, liberal political theory, neoliberal capitalist economics, presumptions of racial superiority, and false assumptions about Euroamerican cultural superiority.²¹ Thus religion, social and political structures, and settlers' beliefs are *objects* of indigenous Canadians' resentment. The colonizers themselves are also the "enemy," especially those

¹⁹“Onkwehonwe” means “The Original People.”

²⁰Taiaiake Alfred, “Colonial Stains on Our Existence,” in *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), p. 114.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 103.

who “refuse to accept their position and role in the unjust state, usually left-wing intellectuals.”²² These are the settlers who express indignation toward historical injustices with a special focus on those of foreign countries, and whose indignation does not turn into action. Alfred thinks that their indignation is evidence of settlers’ power and privilege to judge those “crude colonizers” of the past—and this, he argues, is a strategy of deflecting responsibility away from themselves.²³

The enemy is also myths about Canada’s superiority over the United States based on its healthcare system, and assumptions about its non-violent history. It is the false stereotypes about Onkwehonwe people and the glorified “pioneer spirit” portrayed on television and in film, the specific acts of police brutality against nonwhites and especially Onkwehonwe people, and the murders of Onkwehonwe women by white men.²⁴ The enemy is settler values, including their rejection of socialism in favor of individualism and material wealth, the norm that selfishness and competitiveness are good, and their exploitation of the natural world for capitalism.²⁵ It is also the language settlers use, and in particular the term “aboriginal,” which has been imposed on indigenous Canadians by settlers as a blanket term that displaces authentic indigenous identities, beliefs, and behaviors.²⁶

These are just some of the examples of the “enemy” of indigenous Canadians that Alfred identifies. If settlers are ever to understand the resentments of indigenous Canadians, the standard account of resentment will not do. The *objects* of Alfred’s resentment include liberalism, capitalist values, settler Canadians themselves, settlers’ indignation, myths about Canada, stereotypes of indigenous Canadians, distinct moral injuries, and more. Our common understanding that indigenous Canadians resent the perpetrators of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in Residential Schools does not even come close to affirming Alfred’s claims. He resents for the reason that the entire social and political structure of settler society does not allow indigenous spirituality, cultures, and ways of living to thrive.

As Walker tells us, resentment “arises to meet a threat.”²⁷ The resentment expressed by Alfred challenges the idea that indigenous ways of living are primitive ways of the past without a place in the modern world. So the past injustices that targeted indigenous children in the Indian Res-

²²Ibid., p. 105.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 106.

²⁵Ibid., p. 109.

²⁶Ibid., p. 126.

²⁷Walker, *Moral Repair*, p. 125.

idential Schools persist as *present* injustices that take the form not only of distinct moral injuries like physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, but of ignorance and a refusal to change the social structures that marginalize indigenous Canadians now.

In assessing the resentment of indigenous Canadians, we must remember what the assimilationist project involved; what the goal of settler Canadians really was in sending indigenous children to Residential Schools. Cree scholar Neal McLeod describes the project as “the colonization of Indigenous Being”: imposing on “ancient people” a new order and understanding of the world.²⁸ Sue Campbell explains that one motivation behind targeting indigenous children was that they were “vulnerable rememberers” who could be socialized to *forget* their associations, traditions, languages, and authentic identities.²⁹ The target of harm was *indigenous existence*, not merely individuals. This includes cultures, traditions, languages, spiritualities, and sovereignties of all indigenous groups *in addition to* the particular indigenous children abused in the schools. And although the Indian Residential School System has ended, the threat to indigenous existence persists. Paulette Regan, Director of Research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, discusses many ways in which institutions continue to marginalize indigenous peoples. For example, our commitment to the Westernized idea of a superior “one law for all” means that indigenous Canadians are *still* deprived of self-governance,³⁰ instances of racism and discrimination still take place,³¹ and indigenous-settler relations remain dominated by settler power and privilege.³²

I think that reducing the resentments of indigenous Canadians like Alfred’s to the particular resentments of individuals is to eliminate as “reasonable” the reasons grounding collective indigenous resentment: the assimilationist project of manipulating not only the identities of indigenous children, but of annihilating whole cultures, traditions, languages, and spiritualities. These could not be reasons for resentment *at all* without a collective to which unique cultures, traditions, languages, and

²⁸Neal McLeod, “Spatial and Spiritual Exile,” in *Cree Native Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), p. 6.

²⁹Sue Campbell, “Memory, Reparation, and Relation: Starting in the Right Places,” in Jocelyn Downie and Jennifer J. Llewellyn (eds.), *Being Relational: Reflections on Relational Theory and Health Law and Policy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), p. 139.

³⁰Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), p. 106.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 112.

spiritualities belong. So it only makes sense to say that indigenous Canadians resent because they perceive a threat to them as a collective. They might say, for example, “I resent the colonial structure of contemporary Canada for threatening *our* cultures, traditions, and ways of life.”³³

Further, Glen Coulthard in his talk from the introduction and Taiaiake Alfred above use language that seems consistent with my description of their resentment as not only individual, but also *collective*. Each scholar calls upon indigenous Canadians to recognize the importance of the claims communicated by their resentment. Coulthard argues that all indigenous peoples should resent colonialism and the institutions and people implicit in its reproduction; and these are some of the “enemies” of indigenous peoples, according to Alfred, and what I have interpreted as some of the *objects* of indigenous resentment. Coulthard’s claim that other indigenous Canadians should join him in his resentment implies that the emotion is not only appropriately felt by individual indigenous Canadians who have been directly harmed by colonizers, but rather, there are reasons for all indigenous Canadians in virtue of being a member of the collective “indigenous Canadians” to respond with resentment. And for those indigenous Canadians who don’t resent, Alfred is challenging them to see the grounds for it: for them to come to see colonizers and settler society as the enemy, and to channel or use this judgment to demand change.

I do not mean to deny the authentic indigenous identities unique to various indigenous groups. Just as in individual resentment in which the objects of individuals’ resentment will be different because of their own life histories, social or geographical position, beliefs, values, and so forth, so too will the objects of indigenous’ groups resentments differ—based on their own cultures, geographic locations, unique traditions, and so on. But there does exist a collective—*indigenous Canadians*—which unites the various indigenous groups by the fact of being “indigenous to Canada.” And this is the target of injustice by colonizers who sought to annihilate *all of them* with their assimilationist agenda.

Walker reminds us that resentment “invites a response.” The emotion calls upon others “bidding them to recognize the existence or possibility of a kind of relationship, the kind in which parties are responsible to each other,” and, specifically, invites responses from individuals and the community to affirm that the resenter is in the scope of their responsibili-

³³Alfred’s collective resentment does not reflect the attitudes of all individual members of the collective. That is to say, Alfred’s resentment signifies *his own perception* that there is a threat to the collective to which he belongs. His resentment does not entail that all indigenous Canadians share that perception.

ties.³⁴ In other words, resentment calls upon others to give it uptake, and to act.

But seeing the collective resentments of indigenous Canadians might be terrifying for the settler Canadian struggling to understand her role in the conflict. There is a danger that indigenous expressions of resentment will silence settlers, and make them doubt that our shared social world is one in which indigenous and settler Canadians can peacefully coexist. The “enemies” of indigenous Canadians are not something all settlers believe they have the resources or even capacity to address, even if they wanted to. But Alfred suggests that justice can be done, but we must understand it as settlers’ duty and not as a “gift.” Settler Canadians must be “decolonized” and admit their past wrongs, as well as the injustices they are a part of now. They must acknowledge and affirm the rights to land, culture, and community of indigenous peoples that are inherent, autonomous, and *collective*.³⁵

Since resentment communicates a judgment and invites a response from particular individuals or groups, it is necessarily *relational*; its presence involves others, and depends on them to affirm its legitimacy. In the Canadian context, indigenous resentment calls upon settler Canadians to affirm their inherent rights, take responsibility for past moral injuries, and actively undermine the threat to indigenous existence through action. But the presence of resentment in the Canadian context is not limited to the resentments of indigenous Canadians; *settler* Canadians have responded to the aftermath of the Residential Schools with all kinds of resentment. The reciprocal resentments of indigenous and settler Canadians have resulted in a kind of emotional stalemate, and I think that until these resentments are addressed, constructing positive relations cannot take place.

5. Settler Canadians’ Resentment

MacLachlan suggests that settler Canadians resent hearing stories about treatment in Residential Schools, being held responsible for the past harms and injustices that continue to marginalize indigenous Canadians, and claims about Canada that conflict with its reputation as a nonviolent peacemaking nation.³⁶ She cites an online comment on a blog entry titled “For Many Aboriginal Children, Residential Schools Were a Positive Experience.” On February 18, 2012, an article was published by CTV,

³⁴Walker, *Moral Repair*, p. 134.

³⁵Alfred, *Wasáse*, p. 113.

³⁶MacLachlan, “Unreasonable Resentments,” p. 430.

titled “Judge calls residential schools a form of genocide,” that became a popular article of discussion in the comments section of the online page. Some settler Canadians agreed with the article to some degree, but most did not. And the comments that stood against Justice and Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Murray Sinclair’s major claim, that the Residential School System was an act of genocide, are loaded with *resentments* that were triggered by Justice Sinclair’s statement. So I will follow MacLachlan in her strategy of citing recent Internet posts by settler Canadians to illustrate what settler resentment looks like.

Steevo: “Keep pickin’ the scab so it never heals. Good job truth & reconciliation committee. Genocide? Hardly. Besides, what was the alternative? No education, at all? Believe the Church was only entity willing to take this one on ... Living next to a native community as I do, talking to local elders about their experiences, none had anything bad to say until this T&R committee started up. Only THEN did the fantastic stories appear! Money does that to people. Doesn’t matter what ethnic origin you may be.”³⁷

This comment accuses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of worsening the situation of indigenous Canadians by keeping the harm alive, and denies that the Commission has a legitimate purpose—which is to facilitate truth telling and reconciliation, to make recommendations to the government based on its findings, and to “restore”³⁸ indigenous-settler relations.³⁹ By denying that serious wrongdoing took place in the Indian Residential Schools, this settler contradicts the claim that there is harm being kept alive at all. This comment also expresses denial that indigenous Canadians even have a story to tell, and accuses them of being motivated by *material greed* to come forward with their stories. The objects of this settler Canadian’s resentment are both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and indigenous Canadians themselves.

bc wayne: “The natives do not have the patent on hard luck stories. The taxpayers eventually came out the losers in this situation. For as long as the grass grows and the sun shines we will be on the hook for the welfare of the natives.”⁴⁰

³⁷Comment on The Canadian Press, “Judge calls residential schools an act of genocide,” *CTV News*, February 18, 2012, <http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Canada/20120218/commission-chairman-residential-schools-120218/>.

³⁸I put this word in quotations because it is a misnomer. Our goal is not to restore relations with indigenous Canadians. This suggests that we should go back to the “way things were”; but surely we should not. Our goal is to move toward forming or *constructing* positive relations—and this requires not looking to some past state in our relationship for guidance, since there was no time at which our relationship was good or even adequate. It was and is a relationship between a colonizer and colonized, dominated by power, privilege, and oppression.

³⁹Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, p. 7.

⁴⁰Comment on The Canadian Press, “Judge calls residential schools a form of genocide,” *CTV News*.

This comment expresses a refusal to affirm the legitimacy of indigenous peoples' stories, and blatantly denies the existence of serious past and persistent injustices. It also expresses resentment toward indigenous peoples because of the social assistance they receive, and the blame settler Canadians have been forced to endure for the Residential Schools and for devastation in indigenous communities.

Hal Wood: "What is Native culture? I bet none of the people on the commission and probably the natives themselves cannot describe it. A people that cannot adapt will never succeed. Trying to drag the new generation of natives into the past just repeats history."⁴¹

This comment denies that indigenous Canadians even *have* recognizable cultures, and claims that they do not even know what they mean when they appeal to them. It also expresses colonial attitudes of racial and cultural superiority, and argues that addressing the past necessarily implies reliving it. This settler Canadian resents the claim that indigenous Canadians have authentic identities, indigenous peoples for refusing to *assimilate*, and the entire project of addressing historical injustices.

I acknowledge that my method of quoting settler Canadians' recent comments about the Indian Residential Schools does not perfectly represent the resentments of settler Canadians, nor does it express the attitudes of *all* settler Canadians. But this method provides insights into the attitudes that are alive in settler society today, and I suspect that expressions of these attitudes can be easily found elsewhere. As a settler Canadian, I can testify that these expressions of resentment are common in settler circles, where we are quick to point out the tax exemptions, free education, and income from the government that indigenous peoples receive. We are also quick to draw conclusions about "where that money is going" when we peer into indigenous communities and count the stereotypes of drug and alcohol abuse, theft, violence, and devastation. In other words, we are quick to *judge*, often accusatively, and to *compare*, citing what we think is "free riding" of indigenous peoples in Canada in contrast to settler Canadians who are hard-working citizens contributing to the capitalist economy.

So settler Canadians resent. The objects of their resentment are indigenous groups, the government (when it enacts policies that they perceive as unfair to *them*), claims that attribute genocide and violence to peaceful Canada, and being burdened with the responsibility of "fixing," all over again, the "Indian Problem."

Settler Canadians' resentment arises from their history as colonizers and from their social and political position in contemporary Canada. It

⁴¹Ibid.

also arises from settlers' shared memories of the Indian Residential Schools. In a chapter titled "The Peacemaker Myth," in her *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Paulette Regan deconstructs the myths and norms underlying what I have called settler Canadians' resentment. She explains that most settler Canadians do not describe their relationship with indigenous peoples as violent, and they take pride in their belief that Canada is the peacemaking counterpart to the United States when it comes to indigenous-settler relations.⁴² Settler Canadians still consider indigenous peoples as inferior victims who must be civilized into Western culture to become happy, prosperous members of society.⁴³ Regan contends that when we face indigenous peoples' "accusations of genocide, racism, political non-recognition, and theft of land and resources, we comfort ourselves with the peacemaker myth ... [that] assuages a fear that our real identity is not peacemaker but perpetrator."⁴⁴

When the history of the Indian Residential Schools is interpreted in this way, it is not surprising that settlers experience resentment. If settlers *really are* peaceful, benevolent Canadians who want what's best for indigenous groups, and acknowledge the distinct abuses suffered by indigenous Canadians in Residential Schools for whom they feel sympathy, and if their beliefs and memories are accurate, then of course settlers will resent indigenous Canadians for being called upon to "give" them more. But as Regan has elegantly argued, the identity of settlers as "peacemakers" when it comes to indigenous-settler relations is a *myth*. She explains that the Schools did not make indigenous peoples happy and prosperous. The assimilationist project gave rise to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, systemic racism, poverty, cultural domination, poor health and education outcomes, domestic violence, economic disadvantage, addiction, high rates of youth suicide, and unjust settler power and privilege.⁴⁵ But some settlers blame the victim, and they resent.

Settler resentment is grounded in reasons that are tied to the Peacemaker Myth, and, as Alfred points out, to *denial* about the truth, which stems from the privileges they have "collectively" inherited as the colonizer in their relationship to indigenous Canadians.⁴⁶ It is also *collective*: the reasons underlying collective settler resentment cannot be pulled apart from the whole of settler society, which is characterized by cultural imperialism, capitalist economics, and Western law.⁴⁷ Settlers perceive indige-

⁴²Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, p. 83.

⁴³Ibid., 86.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 106.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁶Alfred, *Wasáse*, p. 107.

⁴⁷Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, pp. 94, 106.

nous peoples as *inferior* in their cultures, traditions, and ways of government. So what triggers settlers' resentment is not only or perhaps ever personal encounters with indigenous Canadians that might give rise to their individual resentments; rather, what often causes settlers' resentment is identifying with the collective "settlers," which is the powerful and privileged group in a colonial relationship, a position of power and privilege that is perceived as threatened by indigenous peoples and their ways of life.

The reasons that settler Canadians could appeal to in explaining or justifying their collective resentments do not make sense independently of Canadian settler society as a whole, that is, its history, culture, law, and social structures; and so the reasons for settler resentment are reasons that could be reasons for all settlers in virtue of being members of the *collective* "settlers." Settler Canadians interpret indigenous demands for political recognition as a threat to *settler society*—they resent indigenous Canadians for "getting in the way of" the superior and economically prosperous Canada burdened with the "Indian Problem." Alfred identifies what I have called settler collective resentment in his discussion of colonialism. He states:

If the mere idea of difference threatens colonial societies and the liberal state in an existential sense, the capacity to act on collective differences is definitely seen as a very real threat to be suppressed.⁴⁸

And again:

Myths of national identity and prejudicial attachments to colonial structures and symbols as the guarantors of social peace and "national unity" are sacred and always remained unexamined and unquestioned. This leads to a political climate in which radical notions of justice are seen as a threat to the very existence of countries supposedly seeking to transcend the legacy of colonialism.⁴⁹

So when settlers express resentment, their reason for resenting is often that they perceive that indigenous peoples and their ways of life threaten settler society. Settler Canadians might also experience individual resentments toward indigenous Canadians if they feel directly threatened or harmed, but these resentments exist independently of their collective resentments. Reducing settler collective resentments to individual resentments of each settler means that indigenous peoples are always a threat to settler Canadians personally, and never to settler society as a whole. But the truth is the opposite: for most settlers, indigenous peoples are not a threat to them personally; they are a threat (from the colonizer's lens) to *settler society*.

⁴⁸ Alfred, *Wasáse*, p. 112.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

6. Conclusion

So there is kind of emotional stalemate:⁵⁰ settlers cannot move forward and construct positive relations with indigenous Canadians so long as reciprocal resentments continue to dominate the political landscape. But by moving beyond conceptions of individual resentment toward a theory of collective resentment, we can better understand what the emotion is expressing in situations of perceived injustice, and this applies to indigenous-settler relations in the Canadian context. Following MacLachlan and Walker, the resentments of indigenous and settler Canadians cannot be accommodated within the standard moral account, which understands resentment as a response to a distinct moral injury that communicates one's self-respect and moral values. These resentments are motivated by broader social and political considerations such as cultural imperialism, conflicting understandings of history, and moral and legal disagreements. So they are not only about distinct moral injuries such as abuse in Residential Schools, but about *circumstances* in which indigenous peoples resent still being the "colonized" in a colonial relationship, and settlers resent the inherent rights of indigenous peoples because they perceive them as unfair.

Understanding the different kinds of resentment is crucial if we are to recognize all of the reasons grounding our emotional experiences, and if the resentments are to receive an appropriate response. For example, monetary compensation for past harms and government apologies might address indigenous Canadians' individual resentments about their experiences in Residential Schools, but not their *collective* resentments kept alive by the colonial structure of contemporary Canada that still threatens indigenous ways of life. In order to adequately address indigenous Canadians' collective resentments, the assimilationist project that seeks to eliminate unique indigenous ways of life in favor of forcing indigenous Canadians to adopt *settler* ways of life⁵¹ must be put to an end. But settler Canadians' resentments also deserve a response. We must consider whether settlers' resentments too are justified. But we have seen that sett-

⁵⁰I use this phrase figuratively to illustrate a fundamental breakage in our relations with indigenous peoples. I do not mean to suggest that progress has not been made. There have been steps forward, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a major step toward restorative justice. The stalemate I am imagining is an *emotional* stalemate at the level of collectives. Individual acts of reparations have been done, and some settlers' attitudes have changed. But the longstanding conflicts between indigenous and settler perceptions of the historical and present injustices persist.

⁵¹I have argued in this paper that there *are* in fact injustices that target indigenous Canadians and threaten their ways of life. Since this is a legitimate reason for resentment, indigenous Canadians' collective resentments grounded in this reason are justified.

ler collective resentment is based in a perceived threat to settler society that arises from *myths* about Canada as a peacemaking nation when it comes to indigenous-settler relations, and *false beliefs* about colonizers as moral superiors who tried their very best to civilize primitive human beings into their world. Insofar as these are bad reasons for resentment, settler Canadians' collective resentments are not justified. They ought to relinquish them, and doing so requires them to face their colonial identities, re-remember their past, and re-think the present from the lens of decolonized settlers. Only then will settler Canadians be in a position to respond appropriately to indigenous Canadians' resentments, and *forgiveness* on the part of indigenous Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools be possible.

The worldwide collective protest against the continuing colonization of indigenous peoples is evidence that there remains a clear divide between indigenous and settler peoples, a separation that can only be mended by addressing the systemic harms and injustices that continue to marginalize indigenous groups in Canada and elsewhere. Collective resentment calls our attention to just *what* the disagreement and emotional hostility is about: colonialism is not in the *past*, but remains as a present force that affects our attitudes toward one another as colonizers and the colonized. Uncovering the sources of political anger—that is, perceived threats not only to individuals but to *collectives*—is crucial if we are to understand what maintains the divide between these groups. To do so, we must move beyond individualistic conceptions of resentment to understand collective resentment, which better captures the character and effects of the emotion in situations of social and political injustice.⁵²

Department of Philosophy, Dalhousie University
katie.stockdale@dal.ca

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