Toward Peaceful Coexistence:

Indigenous-Settler Relations in the Canadian Context

Katie Stockdale

PhD Student in Philosophy

Dalhousie University

For consideration for the Mushkat Memorial Essay Prize
Abstract

The growing and increasingly global Idle No More movement is calling our attention to the ongoing conflicts between indigenous and settler Canadians. The movement has gained widespread support, but it has also been met with hostility. 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 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. Understanding collective resentments in the Canadian context reveals the true sources of the hostility that persists as a barrier to constructing positive relations, and what problems ought to be addressed before mutual tolerance and peaceful coexistence can be established.*

* A version of this paper was presented at the NASSP 29th International Social Philosophy Conference at Northeastern University, at the Dalhousie University Weekly Departmental Colloquia, and at the 2012 Dalhousie Graduate Student Conference. I am grateful for feedback I received at these events, and from a number of philosophers for reading and commenting on various drafts. Thanks especially to Chike Jeffers, Todd Calder, Ami Harbin, Richmond Campbell, Alice MacLachlan, Duncan MacIntosh, Sue Sherwin, and Jules Holroyd.
1. Introduction

In a public talk titled “Recognition, Reconciliation, and Resentment in Indigenous Politics,” Glen Coulthard (2011), 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. The problem with this account of resentment, he argued, is that it characterizes the emotion as hopelessly backwards looking focusing on an event rather than a structure as what is resented (Coulthard, 2011). Coulthard (2011) 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 (2011), is a pathway to self-determination that moves away from indigenous peoples’ dependency on the actions of colonizers for freedom and self-worth.

Right now, the growing and increasingly global Idle No More movement 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 (Idle No More, 2013). Pam Palmater (2012), 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. Although the movement has gained widespread support, it also been met with hostility, and particularly from non-indigenous Canadians. Barry Cooper (2013), 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.”
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” (Cooper, 2013).

My own views about the \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{collective} resentment that better captures the character and effects of the emotion in situations of social and political injustice.

In section two, 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 and the relationship between resentment and intolerance. In section three, 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. Section four and five explore collective
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 the problems with settler judgments like Cooper’s about *Idle No More* and the
specific situation of indigenous peoples within contemporary colonial structures. I conclude that
moving toward mutual tolerance and goodwill requires that settler Canadians face their colonial
identities, re-remember their past, and re-think the present from the lens of de-colonized settlers.

2. Expanding Resentment

Resentment, as it is currently understood in the 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 (Murphy, 1982). It signifies
that one has self-respect and that one cares about and appreciates the moral value of treating
others with goodwill; and it expresses one’s acknowledgement that others are also moral agents
deserving of respect (Murphy, 1982). So the reason for resentment is that one perceives that one
has been wronged, and the *object* of resentment is the perpetrator of that wrong.

On this view, 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 socioeconomic
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. I see no reason to exclude this anger from being ‘resentment.’ 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.

Alice MacLachlan and Margaret Urban Walker have attempted to expand current philosophical understandings of resentment to include resentments like the one I mention above. MacLachlan argues that the objects of 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 and unrewarding job (MacLachlan, 2010). Or, 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 (Walker, 2005). It is also possible to resent another person’s ‘riding free’ or profiting in excessive ways from the roles, systems, or cooperative practices that others who do not enjoy such profits comply with (Walker, 2005).

So MacLachlan and Walker think that philosophers must move beyond the standard conception of what counts as resentment to recognize the diverse objects of the emotion apart from distinct moral injuries. I want to suggest further that the objects of an individual’s resentment will uniquely reflect features of that person’s life.1 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

---

1 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. See Martha Nussbaum (2004), “Emotions as Judgements of Value and Importance,” in Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions, ed. Robert C. Solomon (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2004), 189.
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 can 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 culpable moral agents intentionally did not meet.

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 undue 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.

What’s more, in social and political contexts, resentment expresses intollerance: it protests values, practices, and social structures that the resenter perceives as unjust. And because resentment is sometimes appropriate (it is reasonable for a black person to resent, for example, a perpetrator of a racist act directed toward him), intollerance too can be appropriate. This is an interesting observation, given that we often understand tolerance as a virtue: something that we ought to cultivate. It is true that, in many cases, we ought to respond to conflicts in values, practices, and ways of life with tolerance; and I will illustrate a case in which tolerance is required later on. But we should not say of vulnerable members of society who are the victims of injustice that they should be tolerant of dominant values and practices that marginalize them. Their intollerance is appropriate, and we might refer to it as “righteous intollerance.”

In the following section, I explore a form of resentment that responds to systemic harms and injustices affecting an entire group. I call this collective resentment.

3. Collective Resentment

Collective resentment is resentment that is felt and expressed by individuals in response to a perceived threat to a collective to which they belong. 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.

---

2 There are 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: A Comment on Jose Medina’s ‘Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the Problem of Difference in Symposium on Gender, Race, and Philosophy’ 1, no. 1 2005:2. 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.
in this way. Since this woman’s resentment is based in the reason that she was the direct target of a moral injury, the resentment 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 independent from 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 same 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 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 a particular instance of violence toward another
woman that represents a broader threat to all women. It is also an expression of her righteous intolerance of patriarchal structures and values that harm women as a collective.

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 trigger 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. 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 (2005) boldly states:

As Onkwehonwe 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 (p. 114).

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. It is the kind of resentment that our broader account recognizes: resentments about past moral

---

3 Onkwehonwe means ‘the Original People.’
injuries and persistent injustices which 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 liberal political theory, neoliberal capitalist economics, presumptions of racial superiority, and false assumptions about Euroamerican cultural superiority (Alfred, 103). The colonizers themselves are also the ‘enemy,’ especially those who “refuse to accept their position and role in the unjust state, usually left-wing intellectuals” (Alfred 2005, p. 105). Alfred (2005) thinks that these settlers’ indignation is evidence of their power and privilege to judge those ‘crude colonizers’ of the past—and this, he argues, is a strategy of deflecting responsibility away from themselves.

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 non-whites and especially Onkwehonwe people, and the murders of Onkwehonwe women by white men (Alfred, 2005). The enemy is settler values, including their rejection of socialism in favour of individualism and material wealth, and their exploitation of the natural world for capitalism (Alfred, 2005). 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 behaviours (Alfred, 2005). So 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.

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. Neal McLeod describes the project as “the colonization of Indigenous Being”: imposing on ‘ancient people’ a new order and understanding of the world (McLeod 2007, 56). In “Memory, Reparation, and Relation: Starting in the Right Places,” Sue Campbell (2012) 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. 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 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, instances of racism and discrimination still take place, and indigenous-settler relations remain dominated by settler power and privilege (Regan, 2010).

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. 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.” And their resentment is an expression of indigenous Canadians’ refusal to tolerate settler values, practices, and governmental policies that are responsible for the persistent injustices affecting indigenous communities. What’s more, because they are right that such values, practices, policies do perpetuate injustice, their intolerance is righteous.5

Margaret Urban Walker (2005) 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 responsibilities (Walker 2005, 134). In other words, resentment calls upon others to give it uptake, and to act.

But seeing the social and political 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, though we must understand it as settlers’ duty and not as a ‘gift’ (Alfred, 2005). Settler Canadians must be ‘decolonized’ and admit their past wrongs, as well as the injustices they are a

---

4 Alfred’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.

5 I acknowledge that some might disagree with my claim that settler values and practices are responsible for the harms in indigenous communities. As I show later, this denial is grounded in myths and colonial attitudes that are not justified.
part of now. They must also acknowledge and affirm the rights to land, culture, and community of indigenous peoples that are inherent, autonomous, and collective (Alfred, 2005).

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 until these resentments are addressed, constructing positive relations cannot take place.

5. Settler Canadians’ Resentment

On February 18 2012, an article was published by CTV titled “Judge calls residential schools a form of genocide” which became a popular article of discussion in the comments section of the online page. 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. I want to explore these 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” (The Canadian Press, 2012).

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’ indigenous-settler relations (Regan, 2010). By denying that serious wrongdoing took place in the Indian Residential Schools, this settler contradicts the claim that there is harm being kept. 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.

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.” (The Canadian Press, 2012).

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. 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

---

6 I 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.
exemptions, free education, and income from the government 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 we perceive as unfair to us), claims that attribute genocide and violence to peaceful Canada, and being burdened with the responsibility of ‘fixing,’ all over again, the ‘Indian Problem.’ And their resentment expresses intolerance of indigenous values, forms of government, and ways of life.

Settler Canadians’ resentment arises from their history as colonizers and from their social and political position in contemporary Canada. It 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 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 (Regan, 2010). Settler Canadians still consider indigenous peoples as inferior victims who must be civilized into Western culture to become happy, prosperous members of society (Regan, 2010). 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” (Regan 2010, 106).
Settler resentment is grounded in reasons that are tied to the Peacemaker Myth. And, as Taiaiake Alfred (2005) points out, denial about the truth, which stems from the privileges they have ‘collectively’ inherited as the colonizer in their relationship to indigenous Canadians. 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 (Regan, 2010). Settlers perceive indigenous 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 independent from Canadian settler society as a whole, that is, its history, culture, law, and social structures. 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.’ Settler Canadians might also experience individual resentments toward indigenous Canadians if they feel directly threatened or harmed, but these resentments exist independent from 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.
Since settlers’ collective resentment is based in colonial attitudes of cultural superiority, their intolerance is not righteous. It perpetuates the colonial myth that indigenous Canadians should give up their ‘inferior’ ways of life in favour of superior settler ones, and maintains the unequal divide between indigenous and settler peoples. Settler Canadians must give up their colonial attitudes and accept indigenous existence as different but equal—that is, they must become tolerant of indigenous Canada—else peaceful coexistence will not be possible.

6. Conclusion

So there is a kind of emotional stalemate7: settlers cannot move forward and construct positive relations with indigenous Canadians so long as reciprocal resentments and mutual intolerance 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 individual account, which understands resentment to be 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.

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

---

7 I 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.
apologies might address indigenous Canadians’ individual resentments about their experiences in Residential Schools, but not their collective resentments kept alive by colonial structure of contemporary Canada that still threatens indigenous ways of life. They will not become tolerant of settler existence until the assimilationist project that seeks to eliminate unique indigenous ways of life in favour of forcing indigenous Canadians to adopt settler ways of life\(^8\) is 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 settler 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 de-colonized settlers. Only then will settler Canadians be in a position to peacefully tolerate indigenous existence, and for forgiveness on the part indigenous Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools to be possible.

\(^8\) I 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.
References


