The Legitimacy of Resentment

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August 2023

A thesis submitted to McGill University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstracts

English

In the wake of injustice, resentment is a common emotion experienced by human beings. However, it has been criticized for being an irrational, self-tormenting and nihilistic emotion that inspires dangerous acts of vengeance. Because of its associations with destruction and revenge it is not uncommon for the resentful agent to be deemed vain and pathological. In contrast, proponents of resentment argue that it is an apt response to injustice, because the resentful victim repudiates the wrongs they have suffered while affirming their self-worth. Nevertheless, defenders of resentment recognize that certain forms of the emotion may not always be defensible, especially when expressed through malicious or spiteful behaviour. Given that resentment can motivate undesirable behaviour, even in response to injustice, its normative value remains unclear. My thesis argues that treating the resentment of victims as illegitimate enables injustice by undermining their resistance to wrongdoing. Therefore, recognizing resentment as a legitimate response is important to ensure that the grievances of victims are taken seriously rather than ignored.

Français

À la suite d’une injustice, le ressentiment est une émotion commune vécue par les êtres humains. Cependant, il a été critiqué pour être une émotion irrationnelle, auto-tourmentante et nihiliste qui inspire des actes dangereux de vengeance. En raison de ses associations avec la destruction et la vengeance, il n'est pas rare que l'agent plein de ressentiment soit jugé vaniteux et pathologique. En revanche, les partisans du ressentiment soutiennent qu'il s'agit d'une réponse appropriée à l'injustice, car la victime répudie les torts qu'elle a subis tout en affirmant sa valeur personnelle. Néanmoins, les partisans du ressentiment reconnaissent que certaines formes de l'émotion peuvent ne pas toujours être défendables, en particulier lorsqu'elles s'expriment par un comportement malveillant. Étant donné que le ressentiment peut motiver un comportement indésirable, même en réponse à une injustice, sa valeur normative reste floue. Ma thèse soutient que traiter le ressentiment des victimes comme illégitime permet l'injustice en sapant leur résistance aux actes répréhensibles. Par conséquent, il est important de reconnaître le ressentiment comme une réponse légitime pour s'assurer que les griefs des victimes sont pris au sérieux plutôt qu'ignorés.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to begin by thanking Professor Abizadeh for supervising this thesis. Over the last year, you have encouraged me to write in a more analytically precise manner and have taught me to examine complex ideas with greater care and rigor. This thesis would not have been possible without your guidance and support, and you have helped me become a better political theorist.

Thank you, Professor Levy, for examining this thesis and for coordinating the Research Group on Constitutional Studies Student Fellowship. Being an RGCS student fellow has easily been one of the greatest experiences I've had throughout my time at McGill. Participating in the weekly reading group and attending the RGCS lecture series have been wonderful opportunities that encouraged me to think deeply about complex issues in political theory.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to all the McGill faculty members who I have learned from by participating in your seminars. Thank you for expanding the ways in which I think of my research interests and for making McGill such an exciting intellectual environment.

Finally, thank you to my close family and friends. I owe a large part of my academic accomplishments to your unwavering encouragement and belief in my potential.

Introduction

In the wake of conflict and injustice, resentment is a common emotion experienced by human beings. However, it has been criticized for being an irrational, self-tormenting and nihilistic emotion that inspires dangerous acts of vengeance. Because of its associations with destruction and revenge, it is not uncommon for the resentful agent to be deemed vain and pathological. In contrast, proponents of resentment argue that it is an apt response to injustice, because the resentful victim repudiates the wrongs they have suffered while affirming their self-worth. Nevertheless, defenders of resentment recognize that certain forms of the emotion may not always be defensible, especially when expressed through malicious or spiteful behaviour. Given that resentment can motivate undesirable behaviour, even in response to injustice, its normative value remains unclear. My thesis argues that treating the resentment of victims as illegitimate enables injustice by undermining their resistance to wrongdoing. Therefore, recognizing resentment as a legitimate response is important to ensure that the grievances of victims are taken seriously rather than ignored.

In Section 1, I engage in a conceptual analysis of resentment and demonstrate its role as a reactive attitude that conveys blame to wrongdoers for failing to uphold their moral obligations. Although much of the academic literature on moral responsibility and reactive attitudes discusses resentment in the context of interactional wrongs, I demonstrate the distinct characteristics of resentment in response to structural injustice**.** Additionally, I analyze the distinctions between resentment and a similar moral anger: indignation, demonstrating that the former is a far more personal emotion experienced from the standpoint of victims. Insofar as resentment is a personal anger felt by victims, section 2 argues that resentment is an affirmation of one's self-worth and a protest of the injustices that one has suffered. I then examine the tendency to disproportionately

delegitimize the resentment of members from marginalized groups and demonstrate how this reinforces oppressive interpersonal relations and structural injustice.

In section 3, I address criticisms of resentment that suggest it is a vengeful and destructive emotion that motivates resentful agents to engage in wrongdoing. I challenge the notion that resentment typically represents a concern with one's hierarchical status having been diminished by the actions of another person. Rather, I argue that the resentment of victims often reflects an affirmation of their equal moral worth as persons. Additionally, I contest the notion that resentment is harmful for victims insofar as it encourages them to nihilistically dwell on their victimhood.

Despite my defense of resentment, I do not claim that all resentments are equally legitimate. As such, section 4 analyzes the differences between apt and inapt resentments. I argue that apt resentments may have undesirable, counterproductive or morally ambiguous consequences but should not be misconstrued as instances of inapt resentments. Finally, section 5 considers objections that claim forgiveness and reconciliation are better alternatives to resentment insofar as it more beneficial for both victims and perpetrators. In response, I demonstrate that victims should not be expected to forego their resentments when perpetrators have not demonstrated that they repudiate their wrongdoings. Expectations to do otherwise pressure victims to affirm injustice.

1 - What is Resentment?

Resentment is an emotion, specifically a form of anger, that a person experiences in response to a perceived slight that they have suffered. As an emotion, it is a cognitive state that constitutes one's internal thoughts, perceptions, and evaluations of a given situation, and is often

accompanied by visceral sensations.[1] Resentment is certainly a form of anger, but anger on its own does not fully encapsulate it as an emotion. Resentment is unique because it always references an alleged injustice to oneself and is therefore directed towards a moral agent(s) who has engaged in wrongdoing. In contrast, it is still possible for one to direct anger towards something that is not a moral agent, such as an inanimate object.[2] For instance, one may experience anger towards a piece of malfunctioning technology, but it would be incorrect to describe this as an expression of resentment. Rather, resentment must be directed to an agent who can act in accordance with moral reasons (or who can be assumed to do so) and thus be blamed for engaging in wrongdoing.

P. F. Strawson has classified resentment as one of the paradigmatic reactive attitudes that mediate our interpersonal relations with those whom we identify as morally responsible agents.[3] As a reactive attitude, it expresses blame and the standards that agents hold as morally legitimate in their interactions with other members of the moral community. In this sense, directing reactive attitudes towards another person is to recognize them as a morally responsible agent who can determine their actions according to moral reasons. R. Jay Wallace expands on Strawson's account of moral responsibility by arguing that blaming someone constitutes a deep moral assessment that relies on reactive attitudes such as resentment, indignation, and guilt.[4] To blame a wrongdoer is therefore to be susceptible to the reactive attitudes or to believe that they would be a justified response when one has violated their moral obligations.[5] Resentment is thus an expression of one's desire to hold others accountable for the injustices they have committed and

[1] My analysis of resentment assumes a cognitivist theory of the emotions, which emphasizes their intentionality. Emotions are always *about* something. Thus, resentment is constituted by evaluations, judgements, and concepts, such as one's understanding of their own worth, justice and morality.
[2] Arash Abizadeh, *Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 184.
[3] Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 2008), 6-8.
[4] R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 75.
[5] Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 76.

is often expressed through sanctioning behaviour. Nevertheless, resentment occurs in response to a *perception* of injustice and cannot by itself reveal whether an action was truly wrong.[6]

Indeed, the literature on reactive attitudes has primarily portrayed resentment as an emotion that pertains to instances of interactional wrongdoings; scenarios in which one agent inflicts a moral injury onto another one. According to Catherine Lu, interactional injustice "involves determining whether or not a wrong has occurred; whether or not someone has suffered an injury; who is responsible or accountable for the wrong or injury and what measures are appropriate for settling accounts between the parties involved."[7] Therefore, interactional injustices are instances in which there is a clear perpetrator(s) who has directly inflicted a moral injury onto a specific person(s). While there are certainly plenty of cases in which an agent might feel resentment in response to these forms of injustice, much of the literature on reactive attitudes has undertheorized the role of resentment in relation to structural injustice. As such, a lack of attention has been focused on how resentment may emerge in response to injustices that cannot be reduced to moments and acts of wrongdoing directly caused by perpetrators who can be clearly identified. I will therefore demonstrate the distinct features of resentment towards structural injustices, which the most vulnerable members of society are particularly inclined to feel.

As claimed by Iris Marion Young, structural injustices do not involve direct acts of wrong between perpetrators and victims but are outcomes of a multitude of unjust social processes that are often morally and legally accepted, but still put "large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their

[6] By the same token, it cannot determine how agents should behave in response to injustice or the contents of how an agent should be held accountable.
[7] Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 33-34.

capabilities."[8] For example, in the USA, public schools are funded by property taxes; a system that disproportionately leave schools in impoverished Black communities underfunded. Thus, white middle-class families, who do not explicitly engage in racist actions, may still prefer to live in a wealthier area where they can send their children to better funded schools. Nevertheless, their actions contribute to large scale social practices of racial segregation and the underfunding of schools in Black communities thereby reinforcing the socio-economic disadvantages the overwhelmingly impact Black Americans. The white family has not engaged in a direct act of wrongdoing, and it is unclear that they can be truly blamed for engaging in the practices that produce structural racism. However, insofar as a multitude of agents engage in the social practices that produce structural injustice, Young argues those same agents have a shared responsibility to engage in collective action to transform unjust structures.[9] Therefore, the white family, among others who engage in similar actions, would have a shared responsibility to end the practices that reinforce structural racism.

An agent feels resentment in response to injustice, but since not all injustices can be described as interactional wrongs, resentment should not be understood exclusively under interactional terms. I therefore argue that Young's notions of structural injustice and shared responsibility provide a framework to understand how one might legitimately feel and express resentment outside of interactional wrongdoing. Insofar as structural injustices persist, a victim may not be resentful in response to a specific agent(s) directly harming them, but in response to the perpetuation of the structural conditions from which they suffer. The object of their resentment is not a specific act of wrongdoing, but the multitude of social processes that reinforce their vulnerability to systemic threats of domination and deprivation. Thus, it is not an

[8] Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52.
[9] Young, 109.

expression of blame toward any specific individual. Instead, resentment for structural injustice is warranted when it expresses blame to multiple anonymous agents for failing to uphold their shared responsibilities to engage in collective action to end structural injustice. Furthermore, given that structural injustices consist of social practices that impact groups of people, structural victimhood is not an individual phenomenon. Therefore, a racialized person who suffers from structural racism experiences resentment as a member of a collective group that has been victimized on a structural level. In the case of interactional wrongdoing, the victim is resentful in response to an action that specifically targets them as an individual. On the other hand, the victim who is resentful towards a structural injustice might not be angry only for themselves but also for other members of the structurally marginalized group of which they are part of.

Of course, it should be remarked that Young herself argues resentment should be avoided under contexts of structural injustice. This is because she claims her notion of collective responsibility to end structural injustices is a forward rather than backwards looking form of responsibility. She therefore argues victims of structural injustice should not ascribe blame, and by implication, express resentment under such contexts, because the social nature of structural injustices renders it difficult to effectively blame wrongdoers. Young therefore claims resentment in response to structural injustice is counterproductive, because "it is difficult to make blame "stick" to anyone in particular, because almost everyone is involved."[10] Since the social processes that produce structural injustice are never traced to a sole individual, she remarks that blame-oriented language is likely to make agents defensive and shift the blame onto others, which is "particularly easy because others in fact do participate by their actions in the processes that produce unjust outcomes."[11] According to Young, collective responsibility should

[10] Young, 117.
[11] Young, 117.

be oriented towards creating a better future, but this becomes obscured by counterproductive expressions of resentment that ascribe blame towards the indirect collective actions of multiple agents.[12] For Young, expressions of resentment towards structural injustice are likely to discourage agents from taking the grievances of victims seriously and to engage in their collective responsibilities to end structural injustices.

Although I do not disagree that resentment towards structural injustice has the potential to be met with defensive responses among the accused, this has no bearing on resentment's legitimacy under such contexts. Even if expressions of resentment are counterproductive to achieving this goal (which is an empirical claim that should itself not be taken for granted), resentment should at least be recognized as a legitimate response to structural injustice. In fact, the backward-looking ascription of blame expressed by resentment is still applicable to structural injustice, despite Young's emphasis on the forward-looking dimensions of collective responsibility. As argued by Robert E Goodin and Christian Barry, Young's exclusively forward-looking approach to collective responsibility is morally incoherent given that agents cannot possibly have a "stringent responsibility to undertake some course of conduct, but that they cannot be blamed should they fail to do so."[13] To be a morally responsible agent is to be held to expectations regarding one's moral obligations which also entails that a person can be faulted for violating those expected obligations.[14] By the same token, if agents have a collective responsibility to transform unjust structures, then it must also be possible to blame them for failing to take the necessary actions to remedy structural injustice.

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[12] Young, 117.
[13] Robert E Goodin and Christian Barry, "Responsibility for Structural Injustice: A Third Thought," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 20, no. 4 (2021): 342, https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X211027257.
[14] Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 66.

Insofar as structural injustices continue to persist, the resentment of victims conveys backward-looking collective blame to agents for not adequately upholding their shared responsibility to end unjust social processes. Nevertheless, Young is correct to claim that under contexts of structural injustice, resentment should not be a matter of identifying blameworthy individuals and expressing a desire to hold specific persons liable to sanctions. Indeed, there is often no way to directly identify those who have engaged in structural wrongdoing and identifying specific individuals obscures the social and indirect aspects of structural injustice. However, it is still reasonable for a victim to express blame and thus direct their resentment towards multiple anonymous agents that are nearly impossible to identify. Negative reactive attitudes emerge when a person perceives themselves to have suffered from injustice, but this does not necessarily entail that wrongdoers must be identifiable. Insofar as a victim perceives themselves to have suffered from injustice, they may very well feel resentment despite not knowing the identity of the persons who have caused or enabled the injustice.[15] In this sense, expressions of structural resentment are especially prone to take the form of social protest where victims do not direct their anger to any specific individual's action but engage in a public repudiation of the unjust collective practices that persist in society.

I have analyzed resentment's role as a reactive attitude and have demonstrated how it may emerge in response to both interactional and structural injustices. However, it is also important to distinguish resentment from another reactive attitude that shares its basic properties: indignation. Like resentment, indignation is a form of moral anger that conveys blame in response to a perceived wrong, but it has been described as taking a more impersonal and objective stance when evaluating injustice. For instance, Strawson claims resentment is an

[15] This does not only pertain to structural wrongs, but also applies to interactional wrongs. For example, you might not know the identity of someone who has stolen from you, but still feel resentment towards them.

inherently personal reactive attitude, whereas indignation is an emotion that is felt vicariously in response to an injustice done to others.[16] The vicarious properties of indignation have also been affirmed by Stephen Darwall, who claims it is an emotion perceived from the standpoint of the moral community, while resentment is perceived from the standpoint of the wronged.[17] In this sense, the indignant agent is not a victim of injustice but directs their anger towards the wrongdoer(s) for violating the obligations that are demanded by members of the moral community. Insofar as the indignant agent is a member of the moral community, their anger can be understood as personal only in a very indirect way that is not comparable to the resentful agent. Resentment is therefore typically understood as a deeply personal emotion felt by victims, while indignation is an emotion that one primarily feels on behalf of victims.

The conventional understanding of resentment and indignation assumes a clear line that distinguishes one's reactive attitudes as personal or impersonal, but Jean Hampton remarks that this can be obscured under a few circumstances. For example, she claims parents may experience resentment on behalf of their children who have suffered a moral injury but argues that this only proves the resentment's personal dimensions. Hampton claims resentment is only possible under such conditions because parents often regard their children as an extension of themselves.[18] Although the parents have not suffered any direct harm, they may nevertheless perceive themselves as victims to some extent insofar as they closely identify with their children. In this sense, what may initially appear as a vicarious feeling of indignation is in fact a personal reactive attitude that is felt when one perceives themselves to have been personally impacted, and by implication, victimized by wrongdoing.

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[16] Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment,* 15.
[17] Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 74.
[18] Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 56.

Indeed, the notion that resentment may be experienced on behalf of a person with whom one closely identifies with is very relevant under the contexts of injustices with significant socio-political relevance. For example, the anger that a Black person feels in response to an incident of racist political brutality inflicted upon another Black person may be characterized as vicarious given that they are angry on behalf of an injustice suffered by another individual. However, it would be incorrect to classify their anger as indignation rather than resentment given that their reactive attitude is not entirely impersonal; at least, not in the same way that a white person's anger might be in response to the same incident. Insofar as the immediate victim of police brutality was harmed based on their racial identity, another Black person might view this incident as reinforcing broader practices of racist police violence that they are also vulnerable to. Under this scenario, their anger has a strong personal dimension given that it emerges in response to an injustice that specifically targets persons who share their specific racial identity.

In fact, recognizing the validity of resentment towards structural injustice can help clarify why their anger under such cases is not entirely impersonal. Insofar as that instance of police brutality is indicative of structural anti-Black racism, other Black people may rightfully view this incident as constitutive of the collective social practices that they are victimized by. In contrast, the angry white person does not have a basis to make any claims to victimhood, interactional or structural, in relation to the wrongdoing and is therefore expressing a vicarious anger on behalf of the actual victim(s). In this sense, one's anger may appear as indignation on behalf of another person, when in fact it is not entirely vicarious, but a response to a phenomenon that they are also victimized by on a structural level. The above example demonstrates that one's claim to victimhood is what renders resentment as a personal rather than impersonal protest of wrongdoing.

2 - Resentment, Self-Respect, and Social Protest

Resentment is a personal protest of having one's moral demands violated. Therefore, Jeffrie Murphy claims it should be understood as an affirmation of a victim's self-worth. According to Murphy, a person who does not feel resentment upon suffering injustice is "almost necessarily a person lacking in self-respect."[19] When a victim expresses resentment, they are repudiating the wrongs they have suffered while proclaiming that they have experienced disrespectful treatment that undermines their moral value as a person. On Murphy's account, to not experience resentment is to be complicit in one's own victimization, which indicates a lack of one's own sense of worth. Nevertheless, resentment, and anger more broadly, is an emotion that has been criticized throughout the history of political though and philosophy. In ancient times, Seneca criticized anger for being a dangerous and irrational emotion that leaves one in state of brief insanity.[20] Contemporary critics of moral anger such as Martha Nussbaum argue that it motivates vengeance in response to injustice and that this is not only dangerous, but also illogical, since payback will not restore what a victim has lost.[21] Nussbaum further suggests it is an emotion that tends to be exhibited by persons with a vain sense of superiority to others. She therefore claims it is often society's most powerful and privileged who are inclined to feel anger, because their sense of entitlement renders them easily offended by the actions of others.[22]

The above objections to anger and resentment are important to take seriously (I shall address them in a subsequent section of this essay), but the literature on reactive attitudes demonstrates why resentment ought to be treated as a legitimate emotion that is important for

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[19] Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 16.
[20] Seneca, "Of Anger," in *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. Robert Kaster and Martha Nussbaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[21] Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.
[22] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, 40.

upholding justice. My contention with the conventional criticisms of resentment is that the tendency to undermine it as a legitimate response to wrongdoing can enable injustice by silencing the critiques of victims. Dismissing their resentment can undermine the validity of their affirmation of self-worth and therefore suggest that they deserved the moral injury inflicted upon them. Furthermore, pressuring agents to not feel or express resentment in response to injustice can prevent them from publicly addressing their grievances and demanding social and political transformations to end the wrongs from which they suffer. Delegitimizing resentment can perpetuate injustice by reinforcing the vulnerability and marginalization of victims.

The relationship between resentment and the affirmation of one's self-worth and respect can be explained by what Stephen Darwall describes as the second-person standpoint. According to Darwall, the normative force underlying moral obligation and accountability are derived from the second-person standpoint which presupposes a common perspective between addresser and addressee to make and acknowledge moral demands.[23] As such, to make a claim on another person's conduct presupposes the addresser's authority to do so and gives the addressee reasons, specifically second-person reasons, to accept the addresser's demands. These second-person reasons refer to the addresser's second-person authority to make such demands; therefore, the addressee complies with the demand insofar as they accept those reasons and thus recognize the addresser's second person authority.[24] As such, to violate one's second-person demands is to disrespect them by undermining their authority to hold others accountable to their moral obligations.

[23] Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.
[24] Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 8.

However, Darwall claims the expression of reactive attitudes like resentment can reinforce and re-establish the relations of respect that have been undermined by a moral injury.[25] For instance, when person A inflicts a moral injury onto person B, person A disrespects person B by undercutting the moral demands that person B has the second-person authority to make. Person B's expression of resentment therefore aims to reinforce the respect they are owed by protesting the moral injury and demanding that person A acknowledge their wrong and be held accountable. According to Darwall, being held accountable may simply involve being the object of a reactive attitude or to acknowledge one's guilt and therefore does not always require any act of retribution.

Resentment is a second-person address that demands wrongdoers recognize and respect the victim's second-person authority to hold perpetrators accountable to the moral demands that were violated. Nevertheless, Darwall claims the addresser must assume the addressee's competence to accept the reasons for the demand and to determine their actions accordingly. In assuming the addressee's second-person competence, the addresser implicitly recognizes the former as a free and rational agent who has the authority to obligate themselves to follow the exact same demand (and to blame themselves when they have violated their moral obligations). Therefore, the second-person standpoint presupposes the equal competence and authority between the addresser and addressee to acknowledge and make moral demands**.** This demonstrates their shared standing as free and rational agents and thereby indicates that they are accountable to each other as equal persons. According to Darwall, second person demands, including expressions of resentment, implicitly show respect to the addressee by recognizing them as members of the moral community of mutually accountable persons. Contrary to the

[25] Darwall, 61.

notion that resentment is motivated by a vain desire to display one's superiority to others, Darwall demonstrates how resentment is important for maintaining egalitarian relations of mutual accountability.

The second-person standpoint also demonstrates how delegitimizing the resentment of victims can reinforce the disrespect they have suffered. Undermining the resentment of victims disrespects them by suggesting that they do not have second-person authority to hold wrongdoers accountable for their moral infractions. This is especially pernicious under the contexts of political and systemic oppression in which members of marginalized groups are not viewed as equal moral agents that members of dominant groups are accountable towards. As claimed by Allison Jaggar, under the conditions of oppressive hierarchies, there is a tendency to delegitimize emotional responses that challenge unjust behaviours and practices. Under these conditions, she remarks that the emotional responses that are deemed socially appropriate are determined by norms and values that tend to benefit the members of dominant groups.[26] For instance, anger is often viewed as socially acceptable when expressed by white men given that they are socially recognized as having the authority to make demands onto others. On the other hand, the moral anger felt by women and racialized persons will often be deemed illegitimate insofar as they are expected to be subservient rather than demanding. In particular, their anger in response to their oppression will often be delegitimized because it represents moral demands that explicitly criticize oppressive hierarchies. In this sense, the tendency to undermine the resentment of victims under those scenarios is to reinforce the notion that members of dominant groups are not accountable to the demands of members from marginalized groups. It suggests that marginalized

[26] Alison Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 155.

persons do not have the second-person authority to engage in moral protests in the wake of injustice, thereby reinforcing the conditions of their oppression.

Disproportionately delegitimizing the resentment of marginalized persons reinforces their social or political exclusion from a moral community of mutually accountable agents. It implies their perceived inferiority by undermining their authority to make second person demands onto members the dominant group who are recognized as having such an authority among each other. In this sense, their resentment often constitutes a demand to be recognized as a member of the moral community by asserting their equal second-person authority to hold others accountable, an authority that they have been historically deprived of. To undermine the resentment of members from marginalized groups delegitimizes their second-person authority to make moral demands, which can leave them vulnerable to continued abuses. If they are not recognized as equal moral agents that members of the dominant group are accountable towards, abuses towards them will continue to be treated as legitimate. In this sense, the resentment of the marginalized often challenges these exclusionary and oppressive relations and thus seeks to establish conditions in which they are treated as members with an equal-second person standing to make demands onto members of the dominant group. Their resentment therefore conveys the respect they are owed as persons who are equal to other members of the moral community.

When a person feels resentment in response to an act of injustice that targets them due to their vulnerable status as a member of a marginalized group, they are demanding to be recognized as a member of the moral community. However, not all resentments felt by the marginalized can be *reduced* to their seeking to be recognized as a member of the moral community. Under the context of structural injustice, it is often the case that members of historically oppressed groups are formally recognized as persons with an equal authority to make

moral demands onto others. For example, they may be bearers of equal constitutional rights and minority rights and are often protected by anti-discrimination laws.[27] In this sense, there is an extent to which they may be recognized as members of the moral community that other persons, including those from historically dominant groups, are accountable towards. However, as mentioned previously, structural injustices are constitutive of social practices that are often deemed morally and legally acceptable. Therefore, a phenomenon like structural racism continues to persist despite legal protections that result in fewer instances of racial discrimination. Although structural injustices are related to a history of exclusionary relations, they are often constitutive of social norms and practices that harm and degrade members of the moral community rather than norms that exclude them altogether.

When the object of a person's resentment is structural injustice, they are expressing the repudiation of unjust social processes that are often taken for granted as acceptable practices in our daily lives. Under such contexts, an agent's resentment can be understood as a collective second person address directed towards multiple anonymous agents, in which the addresser demands them to recognize their shared responsibilities to end the structural injustice that they contribute to.[28] In this sense, Alice Maclachlan remarks that resentments towards structural injustices are especially vulnerable to being dismissed for being unreasonable. Insofar as conceptions of injustice are typically viewed from an interactional framework,[29] one's resentment can be deemed irrational if they cannot reference a single event/act of wrongdoing or

[27] Of course, these rights can be violated frequently and therefore indicate that several members of society do not recognize marginalized victims as equal members of the moral community. When a marginalized person demands that their rights be respected, then they are certainly demanding to be recognized as members of the moral community.
[28] Nevertheless, the addresser does not need to be literally capable of addressing all their addressees nor is it required for them to know the identities of everyone they are addressing. For instance, social protestors will enter a public forum to make normative claims on the conduct of several or perhaps all members of society despite not literally being able to know or address all these persons.
[29] Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics,* 89.

a specific agent to blame. From this perspective, a victim's resentment may be viewed as an overreaction or a completely illegitimate response towards an injustice that does not truly exist. For example, a white person may very well view a racialized person as someone who they are accountable towards and become puzzled that they are being accused of contributing to structural racism when they have not engaged in any direct act of racism. As such, MacLachlan emphasizes the epistemic value of resentment, because it can address aspects of the world that are not reflected under standard conceptual frameworks, especially when those concepts are linked to oppression.[30] On the other hand, undermining resentment under such contexts can reinforce their suffering insofar as it indicative of an unwillingness to recognize structural injustice as a valid problem in the first place. It therefore enables the perpetuation of structural injustice by suggesting that one is not a victim unless they directly suffer from an action that subordinates them to the unaccountable will of another person.

Resentment among members of marginalized groups ultimately expresses the repudiation of a multitude of different types of injustices that leave them subject to unjust hierarchies and social conditions. The resentful victim seeks respect from wrongdoers by calling for the recognition of their standing to demand to be treated as a person with equal moral worth and to live under structurally just background conditions. To delegitimize their resentment is to silence their critiques of injustice and to perpetuate the social norms that pressure the marginalized to comply with their oppression.

3 – Critics of Resentment

I have defended resentment's role as an emotion that protests injustice and affirms one's sense of self-worth and respect, but these are also some of the reasons for why it is criticized. As

[30] Alice MacLachlan, "Unreasonable Resentments," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010): 433, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2010.01508.x.

mentioned previously, the defensive and righteous qualities of resentment are often treated as a potential problem insofar as they can motivate destructive and irrational behaviour. Most of the major objections to resentment are expressed by Jean Hampton, who formulates a robust criticism against the emotion. Her major concern is that resentment inspires a precarious sense of righteous defensiveness that motivates vengeful behaviour. Although the resentful agent protests a perceived moral slight, Hampton suggests that resentment often turns an agent into a wrongdoer themselves.

According to Hampton, resentment is intrinsically tied to one's conception of their own personal worth and is thus stimulated by a sense of one's moral value having been (1) demeaned and (2) diminished. To be demeaned, according to Hampton, is to be treated in a manner lower than what one believes is justified based on their perception of their own moral value as a person.[31] On the other hand, to be diminished is to believe or fear that one's moral value has actually been lowered by the actions of another person.[32] In this sense, an agent might believe that the action of another person has "done something to change one's moral value, so that the action quite literally degrades one."[33] Not only does the resentful agent believe they have been treated inappropriately based on a conception of their self-worth, but they also start to question whether their moral value was as high as they once assumed. For Hampton, the belief that one has been diminished is what establishes resentment as a personal defense, because an agent is preoccupied with affirming their sense of worth due to the fear that it has literally been lowered.[34]

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[31] Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 53.
[32] Hampton, 49.
[33] Hampton, 51.
[34] Hampton, 55.

On the other hand, she contrasts the personal defense of resentment from indignation, which she claims is an impersonal protest towards a perceived wrong. This distinction initially appears consistent with my conceptual analysis of the two reactive attitudes, but Hampton provides a different explanation for it. Since indignation is an impersonal reactive attitude, she argues that a person might feel it on behalf of another person being wronged,[35] but unlike other scholars, Hampton claims indignation is often felt by victims in response to suffering a moral wrong. According to Hampton, "indignant victims only experience being demeaned,"[36] therefore they are not insecure about their moral value having been literally lowered but are angry that they have been treated in a manner they perceive is beneath them. She therefore claims their anger "does not focus on any fears they have about what the action has shown to be true about their value. Thus, unlike resentment, this anger is not intended as a personal anger, and the protest it involves is not intended as a personal defense."[37] Hampton claims the indignant agent is protesting the wrongdoer's moral mistake rather than defending a fact about themselves, therefore she classifies it as an impersonal reactive attitude.[38] On the other hand, it is the resentful agent's insecurity in their self-worth that renders it a personal protest for Hampton, because the agent is fundamentally preoccupied with proving something about themselves to others.

Hampton's distinction between resentment and indignation is important for her critiques of the former, as she argues that the insecurity of being diminished (which is exclusive to resentment) is indicative of an inegalitarian theory of human worth in which humans may rank very different from each other. According to Hampton, egalitarian conceptions of human worth

[35] Hampton, 56.
[36] Hampton, 57.
[37] Hampton, 56.
[38] Hampton, 56.

presuppose that it is not possible for an individual's intrinsic moral value as a person to be diminished.[39] This is because egalitarian theories suggest that a given person must always be ranked as having an equal moral value to all other persons, since if an individual's moral value could be lowered (or increased) relative to others, that individual would evidently no longer be ranked equally to them.[40] Insofar as resentment is inspired by the insecure belief that one has been *diminished* by the actions of another person; Hampton claims the resentful agent assumes a hierarchical conception of human worth. Due to the resentful agent's insecure preoccupation with having been downranked by the action of another person, she argues there is a tendency for the resentful agent to engage in vengeful behaviour to regain their sense of rank. She is concerned that the resentful agent will come to believe that "her own fall was the means by which another elevated himself relative to her." Therefore, the resentful agent will attempt to reverse this dynamic and regain their sense of rank by retributively diminishing their opponent.[41] To re-establish their rank relative to others, Hampton suggests that the resentful agent often seeks mastery over the person who wronged them by engaging in vengeful actions that could potentially be violent.

Although I do not disagree, that under certain circumstances, resentment may represent a hierarchical concern with down-ranking and motivate harmful acts of vengeance, Hampton exaggerates this as the norm. Her conceptualization of resentment as a personal defense is consistent with my own definition, but she incorrectly suggests that the personal dimension of resentment demonstrates that an agent assumes a hierarchical sense of human worth. To begin, Hampton fallaciously claims that for resentment to be a personal defense, the resentful agent

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[39] Hampton, 48.
[40] However, the belief that one has been diminished would not presuppose an inegalitarian conception of human worth if the lowering of one's moral value implied that the values of all other persons have simultaneously been reduced to the same degree. Nevertheless, this is not the point that Hampton is making.
[41] Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 67.

must believe their intrinsic moral value has been diminished rather than simply demeaned. She remarks that believing one's moral value has been demeaned rather than diminished represents an *impersonal* protest and is therefore not an instance of resentment. However, this is incorrect. A person can engage in a personal protest without believing that their intrinsic moral value has literally been lowered.

Even if a person, who upon suffering a moral injury, does not insecurely believe themselves to have literally lost their intrinsic moral value, they are ultimately protesting an injustice done specifically to themselves. In this sense, they are not simply protesting a moral mistake but are fundamentally engaging in a personal defense. Take for instance, a racialized person who experiences anger in response to a hate crime. They may very well be confident in their equal human worth relative to other persons and not believe that they have literally lost their intrinsic moral value, but nevertheless feel anger in response to the injustice. This should not be identified as an impersonal instance of indignation, given that they are protesting a wrong that targets them uniquely as a member of a marginalized group. Under such cases, they have very good reason to not just be upset with the moral mistake that another person has made, but to also be preoccupied with engaging in a public defense of their personal worth. Unless they can be assured that their equal human worth is recognized by others, they may fear that they will continue to be vulnerable to injustice, a salient concern for those who have been historically treated as inferior. In this sense, there is no basis to infer that the personal defense of one's self-worth, in which they seek public recognition from others, assumes the belief in having been diminished and by implication, a hierarchical notion of moral worth. An agent can be confident in their equal value to others while engaging in a deeply personal defense that their self-worth has been demeaned upon suffering injustice.

Relatedly, Hampton's claim that resentment represents a fear of being downranked and is thus indicative of a person holding an inegalitarian theory of human value conflates conceptions of moral value with social value under certain circumstances. In the case mentioned above, a person might believe that all persons are of equal moral worth relative to each other, but fear that the action of another person has degraded the victim's *social value*. Therefore, they might believe they have been diminished in the sense that their social value has literally been lowered, while believing that it is impossible for their intrinsic moral worth as a person to be lowered. Insofar as they are perceived as having low social worth by others, they are resentful that their inferior social status enables others to treat them in a way that undermines their worth as an equal moral agent. Thus, a person's resentment can represent a fear of having been downranked in terms of social status, but this does not necessarily mean that they desire to harm other persons to regain a lost sense of superiority. Often, the resentments of the marginalized express a desire that their social status in society be elevated to a level that ensures they are treated as a moral agent that is equal to others. This is significant, because if resentment does not inherently reflect a hierarchical conception of moral value, it can no longer be assumed that it is likely to motivate a competitive desire to dominate other persons to regain one's sense of diminished worth. Insofar as the resentful agent is truly committed to the belief that all persons are equal moral agents, they would not be preoccupied with subjecting others to their arbitrary will to regain their lost sense of moral superiority.

Furthermore, Hampton's characterization of resentment as a vengeful emotion that represents a concern with being downranked can enable the undermining of the resentful agent's claim to victimhood. If the resentful agent is understood as someone who is insecure about their hierarchical sense of rank, it could often be assumed that they have not suffered a serious moral

injury but are instead angry that someone has insulted their vain sense of worth. Although Hampton herself does not suggest that one is no longer a victim because they experience resentment, her conception of resentment can enable the superficial delegitimizing of one's victimhood based on their resentment. This is particularly troublesome under oppressive conditions, in which demands for equality among the marginalized are often misconstrued by dominant groups as demands for special privileges and superiority. In this sense, Hampton's conception of resentment risks reinforcing the tendency to delegitimize the anger of the marginalized, thereby silencing their criticisms and protecting an unjust status quo.

I have demonstrated the problems with Hampton's conception of resentment as a vain, destructive and vengeful emotion, but other critics have primarily focused on how resentment can leave victims worse-off. For example, Wendy Brown argues contemporary social antagonisms are often motivated by feelings of resentment that are expressed through a form of identity politics in which the marginalized define themselves by their suffering in opposition to an idealized white middle class.[42] Brown criticizes this dynamic insofar as it motivates the marginalized to relieve their suffering through resentful identity politics, in which they direct their anger to society's most privileged. However, she claims resentment is an aimless emotion given that it will not restore the resentful agent's well-being and will instead leave them with a tormented psyche.

Brown's critique of resentment is primarily based on Friedrich Nietzsche's conception of slave morality and *ressentiment*. Slave morality, according to Nietzsche, is an outcome of the weak harboring self-hate and envy towards the strong, and to cope with their mediocrity, define themselves as good and the strong as evil. For Nietzsche, slave morality prevents one from

[42] Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments," *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993): 398.

engaging in life-affirming goals, and instead reflects the vengeful spirit of ressentiment that seeks retributive harm against the strong whom the weak have deemed to be the source of their oppression.[43] From the Nietzschean standpoint, the weak have idealized their victimhood by treating it as a sign of their morality and have incorrectly attributed blame to the strong.

Unlike Nietzsche, Brown does not denigrate the weak, nor does she deny that the oppressed have incorrectly attributed blame towards the more powerful. However, she argues that identity formed around resentment tends to become obsessed with its victimhood and understand itself through what it opposes rather than what it wants to achieve.[44] Instead of engaging in the life-affirming process of ending their victimhood, Brown suggests that resentful identity politics can encourage victims to essentialize it. Political identity formed around resentment and suffering thus leads to a situation where the oppressed are not able to conceive of a world in which they are not victims. Her criticisms demonstrate that resentment can often manifest into a backward-looking and nihilistic style of politics that encourages the marginalized to dwell on their victimhood. As such, Brown's arguments reflect a concern that resentment can be self-destructive for the agents who experience it; therefore, she is skeptical of political approaches motivated by it. On this account, resentment is not only harmful for the resentful agent but is unlikely to motivate the collective actions that are necessary to redress the conditions that that they are victimized by.

Although my central argument has been against the tendency to delegitimize the resentment of victims, I am not arguing that victims ought to dwell on their suffering through an extended harboring of resentment. However, I do argue that the resentment of victims challenges

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[43] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 1887, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 127.
[44] Brown, "Wounded Attachments," 406.

the obsession and essentialism of victimhood for which Brown expresses concern. When understood as an expression of anger towards demeaning treatment, resentment often reflects a repudiation of one's victimhood rather than an essentialization of it. As claimed by Arne Johan Vetlesen, when one has been made a victim, resentment often expresses a desire for them to retain their human dignity prior to the wrongdoing they faced.[45] Contrary to Brown's argument that resentment leads to victims not being able to imagine a world free from their oppression, Vetlesen demonstrates that resentment can have the opposite effect. Resentment emerges from the standpoint that victimhood is not ennobling and is derived from a desire to conceive of a world in which one is no longer victimized. In this sense, resentment need not lead to a nihilistic essentialism of one's victimhood but expresses a motivation for agents to build better interpersonal relations and structural conditions.

4 - Resentment Gone Wrong

I have demonstrated how critiques of resentments often exaggerate the vengeful and harmful dimensions of resentment. Indeed, these conceptions of resentment contribute to the tendency to delegitimize and dismiss the legitimacy of a victim's resentment, which as I have argued, perpetuates injustice by silencing their repudiation of wrongdoing. However, despite my defense of resentment, I am not arguing that there are no valid reasons to criticize it either. Although resentment is often an affirmation of a victim's self-worth and expresses a repudiation of the injustices they suffer, there are certainly instances in which a person's resentment should be criticized. As such, this section will identify the distinctions between apt and inapt resentments; those that are motivated by good reasons and those that are not.

[45] Arne Vetlesen, "A Case for Resentment: Jean Améry Versus Primo Levi," *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 1 (2006): 43, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830500485908.

What renders resentment as either apt or inapt? Even the strongest defenders of resentment argue that not all resentments are equal. For instance, Jeffrie Murphy presents a dichotomy between Nietzschean *Ressentiment* and resentment proper to distinguish between the forms of the emotion that should be commended and criticized.[46] While resentment proper is righteous and justified for Murphy, *ressentiment* is the morally reprehensible version of the emotion that seeks vengeance against those who have been deemed the source of one's suffering. The implication of this dichotomy is that the person who feels resentment proper is primarily affirming their self-respect, whereas the person who feels *ressentiment* irrationally obsesses over their sense of victimhood and seeks to vindictively harm others to relieve their suffering.

Indeed, Murphy's account of *ressentiment* largely resembles the resentment that Hampton and Brown express concern over, whereas resentment proper is indicative of the reactive attitude that I have been defending. Despite their conceptual differences, resentment and *ressentiment* should not misconstrued as entirely distinct emotions. In fact, Stephen Dolgert argues that those who appeal to the resentment/r*essentiment* dichotomy tend to create a distinction without difference as both concepts pertain to the anger one feels in response to a perceived wrong that they have suffered.[47] Therefore, resentment is not a fundamentally different emotion from *ressentiment*, because they both express the same feeling and basic evaluation of a given situation (i.e. anger in the wake of believing oneself to have suffered a moral injury). Nevertheless, Dolgert remarks that it is often suggested that what distinguishes resentment from *ressentiment* is that the latter expresses a desire for vengeance. However, he argues that this is not entirely correct given that what is typically recognized as resentment proper often espouses a

[46] Jeffrie Murphy, "Moral Epistemology, the Retributive Emotions, and the "Clumsy Moral Philosophy" of Jesus Christ," in *The Passions of Law*, ed. Susan Bandes (New York: New York University Press), 152.
[47] Stefan Dolgert, "The Praise of Ressentiment: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Donald Trump," *New Political Science* 38, no. 3 (2016): 36. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2016.1189030.36.

punitive element as well.[48] For example, the resentful victim may very well desire that the perpetrator who harmed them be punished for their wrongdoing through legal sanctions; a desire that is commonly seen as morally legitimate insofar as it ensures that justice is served. While the desire for this form of punishment is distinct from the desire to engage in extra-legal retaliation, it is nevertheless common for the resentful agent to want their wrongdoers to be sanctioned for their actions. Thus, resentment proper is by no means a non-punitive sentiment.

It is important to distinguish apt and inapt cases of resentment, but the resentment/*ressentiment* dichotomy risks oversimplifying apt resentments as a relatively uncontentious emotion, while portraying *ressentiment* as its unruly opposite. As claimed by Amia Srinivasan, anger in response to a moral wrong is a form of "communication, a way of publicly marking moral disvalue, calling for the shared negative appreciation of others."[49] In this sense, expressions of resentment tend to be disruptive and confrontational insofar as the resentful agent seeks that others recognize they have been wronged and demands that the wrongdoer be held accountable. Even when resentment is most justified, its confrontational properties tend to aggravate conflict. While there are valuable conceptual distinctions to draw between resentment and *ressentiment*, both concepts relate to feelings of having been wronged and a retributive desire to hold others accountable.

To not recognize the overlapping features between resentment and *ressentiment* can too easily enable the silencing of apt resentments, because a resentful agent appears too unruly, vindictive and consumed by their victimhood; traits that are typically associated with Nietzschean *ressentiment.* As I will demonstrate in the next section, it is often society's most

[48] Dolgert, "The Praise of Ressentiment," 36.
[49] Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2018): 132, https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12130.

vulnerable that are inclined to act in a way that can be interpreted as exhibiting irrational and destructive resentments, when their resentments are truly apt. Furthermore, this is not to say that an excessive desire for vengeance and an obsession with one's victimhood are not phenomena worthy of criticisms. However, criticisms of traits associated with *ressentiment* tend to be more centered on the ways in which one expresses their resentment, rather than whether a person has a good reason to be resentful. Regardless of whether their resentment is apt or inapt, a resentful agent may very well express their grievances in a loud, confrontational and retributive manner.

Taking these factors into consideration, I will now analyze the distinctions between what renders resentment apt or inapt. Amia Srinivasan gives a relatively straightforward answer to this problem: since the object of moral anger (resentment included) is a moral violation, the primary condition for one's anger to be apt is that it is directed to a genuine moral wrong.[50] She thus argues that for anger to be apt, a person must have a good reason to be angry. In this sense, a person who has not suffered a genuine moral wrong does not have a rational basis for their resentment to be deemed legitimate. Similarly, R Jay Wallace argues that a person aptly resents a person when their "objective violation of moral requirements reflects a failure to take those requirements seriously, as bases for the regulation of their own conduct."[51] In this sense, one's resentment would be inapt if the person they directed their resentment towards has not intentionally done anything wrong; under such cases, there is no reason to believe they do not take their moral requirements seriously. For instance, it might be apt to resent someone who intentionally steps on my foot, but it would be inapt to resent someone, who upon being shoved by another person, accidentally steps on my foot. In the latter case, they have not demonstrated

[50] Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 129.
[51] R. Jay Wallace, "Trust, Anger, Resentment, Forgiveness: On Blame and Its Reasons," *European Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (2019): 539, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12485.

that they are not taking their moral requirements seriously insofar as they have not intentionally refused to regulate their conduct in accordance with my moral expectations.

Examining the reasons for one's resentment is the primary basis for determining whether they are aptly resentful, but it is often suggested that the intensity and proportionality of one's anger/resentment is also relevant for evaluating whether it is apt. Srinivasan argues that apt angers should generally be proportionate to the reason for their anger. For instance, a person who becomes consumed in an intense lifelong resentment upon having their outfit ridiculed by another person might have a reason to be resentful, but their anger is disproportionate to the slight they suffered. However, Srinivasan also claims that the demands for proportionality ought to be understood in a manner similar to the demands of knowledge; "just as one can know all sorts of things without being a perfect reasoner, one can be aptly angry without always perfectly targeting and proportioning one's anger."[52] In this sense, the proportionality of one's resentment is relevant for determining its aptness, but being overly preoccupied with perfect proportionality can often obscure rather than clarify the aptness of resentment.

In fact, determining the right amount of resentment in response to a given injustice can be rather subjective and unclear when a person is a victim of oppressive social structures. For instance, intense resentments triggered by a singular act of wrongdoing could initially appear as an overreaction, but then appear more reasonable when considering that the wrongdoing is indicative of larger oppressive social practices that a person continuously suffers from. A racialized person might express strong feelings of resentment in response to another person's unintentional, yet racially insensitive comment. Their anger is not solely indicative of that one specific comment, but the structural racism that is enabled and reproduced by that comment.

[52] Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 130.

Nevertheless, a critic might argue that this racialized person's resentment towards structural racism is disproportionately directed towards a single agent that cannot be individually blamed for causing a structural problem. However, in the above scenario, it is not evident that the racialized person is disproportionately resentful towards the other agent for causing structural racism. The racist comment might *trigger* the expression of broader resentments towards structural racism, but that does not mean that the resentful agent is accusing the other person of being exceptionally responsible for the perpetuation of structural racism.[53] While it is possible that the racialized person is mistargeting their resentment to some degree, it can also be difficult to completely insulate others from one's anger when they are in the same physical space. When a person expresses anger while in proximity to others, it can often be difficult for them to ensure that their anger perfectly targets its true source. Likewise, since it is impossible to identify all agents who are failing to uphold their shared responsibilities to end structural injustice, there is an inherent difficulty in proportionally directing one's resentment to all the right agents. However, expecting that a person should always have a completely measured response to structural injustice can obscure the fact that they are protesting a complex, yet genuine injustice.

In this sense, I argue that when evaluating the aptness of the resentments that pertain to a person's marginalization, the standard for proportionality should especially be lowered, given the difficulties of measuring such a factor. Being overly preoccupied with the intensity of one's resentment can undermine the fact that some form of resentment is justified in the first place. Metaphysically, proportionality is relevant for determining the degree to which one's resentment is apt, but practically speaking, our epistemic capacity to measure such a factor is limited,

[53] Similarly, it is possible that a friend of yours informs you that someone has stolen from you, which results in you becoming angry. Your friend informing you of this incident triggers your anger, but that does not mean that you are angry at your friend or accusing them of doing anything wrong (assuming that you are not being overtly hostile to them).

particular in reference to the resentments commonly felt by the marginalized. Furthermore, preoccupations with resentment's proportionality can also be weaponized as a form of tone policing that undermines legitimate criticisms by appealing to the excessive intensity of a person's resentment. Thus, attempts to measure the proportionality of one's resentment are vulnerable to misconstruing plenty of apt resentments as inapt.

In this sense, the primary criteria to judge the aptness of one's resentments, particularly among the marginalized, ought to be based on an evaluation of the reasons for why a person is resentful. While Wallace's notion of apt resentments is largely consistent with this, there is a caveat to his theory that should be addressed. It is possible that a person willfully violates another person's moral expectations, but those expectations are themselves invalid in the first place. For instance, a person might believe that they are morally entitled to demand that another person be subject to their arbitrary will and become resentful when that person rejects their illegitimate demands or repudiates such relations. In this sense, a person might become resentful when another person refuses to comply with degrading or unreasonable demands, because they believe that their superior status warrants the other person's absolute compliance. Srinivasan's account of apt resentment helps demonstrate why this case of resentment would still remain inapt: the resentful agent under such a context is not actually a victim of wrongdoing and therefore cannot be said to suffer a genuine moral violation. Rather than protesting a wrongdoing, that person's resentment is indicative of their desire to uphold relations in which they can subject another moral agent to their arbitrary will. This resentful person still believes themselves to have suffered a moral slight and thus might identify as a victim to some extent, but they still do not have a good reason to be resentful.

As such, resentment is commonly inapt when a person becomes angry upon incorrectly deeming themselves to have suffered a moral injury. This might be due to ignorance (i.e., I was mistaken that you wronged me) or can be derived from more reprehensible evaluations of a given situation. It is particularly fitting to deem a person's resentment inapt when it is indicative of their desire to uphold relations of domination and oppression. For the purposes of analyzing inapt resentments, I refer to domination as a phenomenon in which a person is subject to the unconstrained power of another person.[54] While there are ongoing conceptual debates surrounding the properties of domination, neo-republican scholars generally argue that persons are dominated if another person has the capacity to arbitrarily interfere in their life. Interference is typically understood as being arbitrary insofar as an agent is able to subject another person to their will in an unconstrained way that disregards the other person's interests. [55] On the other hand, I refer to oppression as a phenomenon that pertains to structural injustice, in which people suffer not from the intentions and power of a specific tyrannical agent, but rather from the ongoing social processes and practices of every day of life.[56] To sum up, the desire to uphold relations of domination would be one in which a person seeks to maintain interpersonal relations in which they can arbitrarily subject another person to their will, whereas to maintain oppression is to perpetuate structures that place certain groups of people under a state of deprivation, social marginalization and vulnerability.[57]

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[54] Rafeeq Hasan, "Republicanism and Structural Domination," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2021): 292, doi: 10.1111/papq.12337.
[55] Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22.
[56] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 41.
[57] It should be noted that there are growing debates around the structural dimensions of domination. Typically, domination has been understood as an interactional phenomenon whereas structural wrongs are more accurately described as cases of oppression. While some argue that oppressive structures enable domination, others such as Rafeeq Hasan argue that structures constitute domination (see: Hasan, Rafeeq. "Republicanism and Structural Domination." Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 102, no. 2 (2021): 292–319). It is beyond the scope of this essay to weigh in on these debates. However, for analytical purposes, I distinguish resentments that reinforce domination from those that reinforce oppression, because certain resentments are more explicitly concerned with being able to subject one person to another's will in the context of

Nevertheless, it could be argued that the potential for resentment to reflect a desire to uphold relations of domination contradicts my previous account of resentment as a second-person address. As mentioned previously, Stephen Darwall argues that insofar as resentment is a second-person address, the resentful addresser must presuppose that their addressee is an equal moral agent that they are mutually accountable towards. This is because the second-person standpoint presupposes the equal competence and authority between the addresser and addressee to acknowledge and make the same moral demands (recall, that the addresser presupposes the addressee has the authority to obligate themselves to follow the same demands made by the addresser). In this sense, when person A is resentful towards person B, Person A must presuppose that person B has an equal second-person authority to make claims on person A's conduct. Thus, person A must assume that person B is not someone that can be subject to person A's arbitrary will, insofar as they recognize that they are accountable to the moral demands of Person B. By implication, when person A addresses person B in a second-personal way, they are presupposing that it would be illegitimate to dominate person B given that domination is the capacity to subject someone to another's arbitrary will.

However, according to Darwall, the addresser must only presuppose the addressee's equal second-person standing on an *implicit* level. Therefore, it is possible that a person addresses someone in a second-personal way, while *explicitly* believing that their addressee is exclusively accountable to the addresser, but not vice-versa. Darwall refers to this as a self-conceited "fantasy about one's second-personal status. It is the conceit that one has a standing to make claims and demands on others that others do not have."[58] However, Darwall argues that

interpersonal conflicts (i.e., domination), whereas other resentments emerge in response to changing social structures that undermine a person's privileged status in society (i.e., oppression).

[58] Stephen Darwall, "Respect and the Second-Person Standpoint," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78, no. 2 (2004): 52, https://doi.org/10.2307/3219724.

this belief is self-undermining because it contradicts the implicit presupposition of a second-person address that suggests the addresser and addressee are mutually accountable to each other as equal moral agents.[59] As such, the person who holds a self-conceited fantasy of their second-personal status experiences cognitive dissonance insofar as their explicit beliefs contradict the implicit assumptions that are made when addressing someone in a second-personal way. By the same token, it is possible that a person might become resentful when another person challenges their conceited sense of authority to make unrestrained second-personal demands onto other persons. While their resentment might demonstrate an implicit recognition of their addressee as an equal moral agent, the explicit reason for their resentment is because someone has challenged their asymmetrical second-person authority to subject others to their arbitrary demands.

By the same token, people who are dehumanized and viewed as non-moral agents are often subject to excessive punitive sentiments that paradoxically presuppose their moral agency. David Livingstone Smith refers to this as the "paradox of dehumanization," in which persons who are characterized as monsters or non-human animals are simultaneously described and treated in ways that logically apply to human persons only.[60] For instance, Smith remarks that genocide victims are often described as cockroaches or vermin, but claims "that one does not seek to humiliate a coackroach"[61] and notes that "Nazis thought of Jews as vermin in human form, but there was no Auschwitz consecrated to the torture of real vermin."[62] Smith therefore argues there is generally an implicit recognition of these victims' humanity, and by implication rationality and moral agency, despite their oppressors claiming the opposite.[63]

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[59] Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2006. 135.
[60] David Livingstone Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization," *Social Theory and Practice* 42, no. 2 (2016): 417.
[61] Smith, "Paradox of Dehumanization," 417.
[62] Smith, 429.
[63] Smith, 417. According to his theory of dehumanization, this paradox occurs when there is (1) a desire to harm others accompanied with inhibitions to do so; and (2) a person or group of people are deemed inhuman to disable inhibitions

A person might view themselves as holding certain social status that has given them a standing to make unrestrained second person demands onto another group that has been dehumanized. As such, the person from the dominant group implicitly treats the dehumanized person as a morally responsible agent and thus capable of being held accountable for violating the demands that the former makes. In fact, Mich Ciurria argues that instead of being recognized as equal moral agents, members from marginalized groups are often excluded from the moral community, while paradoxically being viewed as "culpable evildoers and enemies, apt for resentment."[64] Evidently, their dehumanization by dominant groups indicates their exclusion from the moral community of mutually accountable agents. Despite, their dehumanization they are also deemed hyper responsible insofar as those who dominate them subject them to excessive and unrestrained normative demands. When the marginalized fail to meet these expectations, they will often be subject to resentment and severe punishments for their so-called moral violations. Under such contexts, their resentments reinforce relations in which the person from the dominant group can make unrestrained claims on a marginalized person's conduct, whereas that person is incapable of making claims on the former.

Indeed, this dynamic is demonstrated in Frederick Douglass' autobiographical slave narrative *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in which he shows how Black slaves were both dehumanized and frequently subject to inapt resentments that reinforced relations of domination. Throughout his narrative, Douglass emphasizes how chattel slavery was predicated on the dehumanization of slaves. His account of the dehumanization of Black slaves is perhaps most evident when he describes how slave children were fed by eating from wooden trays on the floor

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against harming them. However, he claims there is a caveat to this process: despite the desire to dehumanize these persons, it is cognitively difficult to truly view other humans as nonhuman, therefore dehumanization results in persons being viewed and treated as simultaneously human and non-human (see, Smith, 436.)

[64] Mich Ciurria, "Responsibility's Double Binds: The Reactive Attitudes in Conditions of Oppression," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 40, no. 1 (2023): 41, doi: 10.1111/japp.12604.

upon being called like pigs by their overseers.[65] Despite this dehumanizing treatment, Douglass also describes how slaves were constantly subject to punitive treatments that presupposed their status as morally responsible agents. He provides countless accounts of slaves being brutally punished for disobeying the commands of their slaveholders and for being imprudent; an offense he claims could be committed for multiple reasons such as: "in the tone of answer; in answering at all; in not answering, in the expression of countenance, in the motion of the head."[66] According to Douglass, to offend the arbitrary demands of slaveholders and overseers would frequently elicit in them a deep anger that resulted in severe floggings. In particular, he provides an account of a young women held in slavery who upon being brutally beaten by a plantation overseer, attempted to complain to her slaveholder; to which "he sternly told her, in an angry tone, he "believed she deserved every bit of it."[67]

This treatment suggests that slaves were often subject to a form of anger that coincides with them being blamed, and consequently punished, for not determining their actions in accordance with the demands of their slaveholders and overseers. Indeed, the slaveholder's claim that the young woman *deserved* to be flogged suggests that punishment was not viewed as an instrumental means to condition the behaviour of slaves (at least not entirely). Instead, it indicates she was being blamed for her so-called normative failures. Therefore, the slaveholder's appeal to just deserts demonstrates that he must have implicitly recognized his slaves as moral agents. As such, the anger directed to slaves under such contexts are instances of them displaying

[65]Douglass, Frederick. *Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave; My Bondage and My Freedom; Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 208.
[66] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave; My Bondage and My Freedom; Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 180.
[67] Douglass, 173.

reactive attitudes rather than objective attitudes.[68] Indeed, slaveholders became resentful towards their slaves when the former perceived the latter to have failed to take their normative requirements seriously. Evidently, these resentments are inapt insofar as slaveholders frequently became angry in response to actions that are not truly moral violations. The fact that slaves were subject to resentment and punishment simply for the tone of their voice indicates that slaveholders displayed reactive attitudes when they perceived slaves as not being sufficiently subservient to the will of their masters.

I have demonstrated how resentment can represent a desire to uphold relations of domination, particularly in the context of the dominated being explicitly viewed as inhuman or as a non-moral agent. However, it is also important to recognize that inapt resentments can express a desire to uphold relations of domination, even when the resentful agent does in fact view the person they are resentful towards as a moral agent that they are accountable towards (perhaps not equally accountable towards, but at least to some extent). In this case, a person might become resentful when they believe that their superior authority has been undermined, while also believing that they can reasonably expect another moral agent to accept their authority as legitimate.

For instance, Darwall mentions how in a just society of moral equals, a sergeant within a citizen's army might address a private in a second-personal way that appeals to relations of superior authority. Insofar as the sergeant has legitimately acquired their status (perhaps due to their competence and experience), Darwall claims they can quite reasonably expect the private to accept their demands and still recognize them as an equal moral agent.[69] While this relation

[68] Recall that, according to Strawson, objective attitudes are displayed to those who are deemed incapable of regulating their conduct in accordance with moral expectations, whereas reactive attitudes like resentment are directed only to responsible and potentially blameworthy moral agents.
[69] Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint,* 270.

presupposes an unequal standing to make certain demands, the sergeant also recognizes their addressee as an equal moral agent that is freely determining themselves according to second-person reasons.[70] However, Darwall also mentions that it is possible for an addresser to follow this same internal logic even under contexts of domination. For instance, he claims that in contemporary times, it is generally recognized that no one could rationally accept being subject to a condition of involuntary servitude, but that "it is surely possible for someone to believe otherwise."[71] For example, a person might believe that if a nation has defended itself against a war of conquest, imprisoned soldiers of a defeated army could legitimately be rendered involuntary servants as punishment for the invasion. As such, the servant's superior might become resentful if the servant does not comply with their demands. However, this would be a case of inapt resentment insofar as it represents a desire to uphold relations of domination. While the superior believes that it would be reasonable for the servant, as an equal moral agent, to freely accept the former's demands and determine themselves accordingly, the superior is ultimately mistaken that this relation of involuntary servitude is legitimate.

The notion that resentments can be inapt even when a person directs them towards a person they explicitly view as another moral agent is significant, because it demonstrates that inapt resentments can be felt under plenty of ordinary interactions that are taken for granted as morally and legally legitimate. In this sense, resentments are not inapt only in the context of a person supporting the most extreme forms of domination based on the outright dehumanization of others.[72] Throughout history, plenty of asymmetrical relations of social power and authority have been deemed reasonable and morally legitimate. Indeed, the husband who resents his wife

[70] By the same token, the sergeant recognizes that outside of the sergeant-private relationship, there are plenty of demands that they cannot reasonably expect the private to comply with. For instance, the sergeant would not demand the private to do domestic chores at the sergeant's home.
[71] Drawall, *The Second-Person Standpoint,* 270.
[72] This is not to say that these types of resentments are not a significant cause for concern in contemporary society.

for not abiding by patriarchal gender norms or the employer who resents the employee for refusing to work long hours of overtime may still view the person they resent as a moral agent. However, they might believe it is reasonable that the other person comply with their demands due to natural differences between genders or because the employee has freely agreed to enter a labour contract.[73] Additionally, they will often recognize that they are still accountable to a significant number of demands of the persons over whom they have power (for instance, the boss could very well recognize that they cannot physically harm the employee). In this sense, it is possible that the resentful agent views the person they are resentful towards as a moral agent despite their resentments still being inapt.

Similarly, many people who feel inapt resentments could believe themselves to be victims rather than beneficiaries of oppressive structures. Indeed, Wendy Brown argues that some of the resentments that are most commonplace in society are felt by members from socially powerful groups that increasingly feel disempowered in response to social and political changes.[74] Their resentments are often directed to members from marginalized groups insofar as they are identified as the persons who have contributed to their perceived victimization. For instance, a white person might become resentful in response to affirmative action programs or calls for reparations, believing that they are truly disadvantage and harmed by these phenomena. While their resentments could certainly be related to a desire to make unrestrained claims on the conduct of the marginalized, this does not always need to be the case. They might appeal to conditions of formal equality between themselves and historically marginalized groups to

[73] A person appealing to natural difference between genders might suggest that a man who dominates a woman, believes that the latter is moral agent, but a second-rate/inferior moral agent. However, it is conceivable that patriarchal forms of domination are compatible with a man viewing the women they dominate as an equal moral agent. For instance, the husband might believe it is reasonable to expect his wife to abide by patriarchal norms because she agreed, as a self-determining rational agent, to comply with these claims by entering a marriage contract.

[74] Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 174.

suggest that they are not contemporary beneficiaries of social privileges and are thus being oppressed by the aforementioned measures. Insofar as members from dominant groups believe themselves to suffer from deprivation and vulnerability due to changing social and political norms, practices, and conditions, they might in fact understand themselves (inaccurately) as victims of structural injustice. Nevertheless, their resentment ultimately represents a rejection of structural changes that empower marginalized members of society. In this case, their resentments are inapt insofar as they are not suffering a moral violation but are in fact expressing a demand to maintain oppressive structures.

In fact, Wendy Brown applies a Nietzschean analysis of this dynamic, which she refers to as *ressentiment* in response to lost entitlements, a sentiment increasingly felt by white men in contemporary Western societies.[75] Brown argues that insofar as disaffected members from dominant groups view themselves as victimized by the marginalized, there is a tendency for them to deem their perceived source of pain and suffering as "evil," while deeming their social power and entitlement as good. She remarks that since these structural changes to society are derived from demands among the marginalized to be socially empowered as equals, the resentments felt by members of dominant groups reflect a denouncement of these calls for equality.[76] Indeed, Brown acknowledges that plenty of white men have found themselves in an increased state of isolation, material precarity and vulnerability in response to the "neoliberalization of everyday life."[77] However, the tendency for them to direct their resentments towards women, immigrants and racialized persons demonstrates that they are not in fact protesting the actual injustice that has produced their suffering. Despite the potentially genuine

[75] Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism,* 179.
[76] Brown, 179.
[77] Brown, 175.

belief in their victimization and their serious grievances against wealth inequality and material insecurity, their resentments are ultimately defending the maintenance of oppressive social conditions.

5 - The Complexities of Apt Resentments

I have demonstrated the differences between apt and inapt resentments; resentments motivated by good reasons and those that are not. In particular, I have analyzed how inapt resentments often express a desire to uphold relations of domination and oppression (in contrast, apt resentments will often repudiate these phenomena). However, it is also important to address some of the ways in which apt resentments can become misconstrued as inapt, particularly when expressed by the marginalized. In the same way that inapt resentments may be socially recognized as apt, the demands of the marginalized are likely to deviate from dominant moral frameworks and thus be deemed unreasonable and illegitimate. [78]As such, the claims of the most vulnerable are prone to not being viewed as real moral violations. Thus, some of the most legitimate resentments will on the surface appear unreasonable when unjust background conditions are taken for granted as normal in society.

The vulnerability of apt resentments being misconstrued as inapt is a particularly salient concern, since the marginalized are prone to engage in actions that they would not engage in if they lived under just background conditions. This is demonstrated by Lisa Tessman, who argues that the path towards liberation often entails the cultivation of burdened virtues; actions and dispositions that are virtuous insofar they are oriented towards the morally praiseworthy end of resisting oppression, but burdened because they are costly to the person who engages in these

[78] As mentioned previously, when there is a tendency to recognize injustice only under an interactional framework, resentments towards structural injustices may be deemed unreasonable, given that victims cannot identify a specific wrongdoer that has harmed them. From this perspective, a person's resentment may be viewed as a completely illegitimate response towards an injustice that does not truly exist.

actions.[79] When struggling against oppression and domination, she remarks that persons often encounter moral dilemmas in which the are no good choices.[80] Tessman explains this by referencing Aristotle's example of a person being pressured by a tyrant to engage in a base action to save their parents or children.[81] A person under this scenario engages in a "mixed act" given that, under the circumstances, they voluntarily choose a specific action that they would not choose otherwise.[82] Similarly, Tessman suggests that when the laws and/or law enforcement are corrupt and when groups of people live under a state of vulnerability and are socially marginalized, a person faces constraints that pressures them to resist injustice by choosing behaviours that they would not ideally engage in and that might result in social backlash. She further remarks that burdened virtues often involve victims developing an angry disposition, because it expresses a refusal to accept one's subordinate social position.[83]

Nevertheless, Tessman's account of moral anger and mixed actions demonstrates how one's resentments can motivate one to engage in actions that they would not ordinarily engage in under non-oppressive conditions. These types of actions can vary in degree. For instance, a resentful agent might protest wrongdoing in ways that subvert norms of civility to be intentionally disruptive and ensure that their grievances are recognized by others.[84] In other cases, resentful agents might engage in disruptive forms of civil disobedience by breaking certain

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[79] Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 108. These behaviours are burdensome insofar as the person who is pressured to engage in them risk facing legal and social sanctions or internal feelings of guilt for having done certain actions.

[80] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues,* 108.

[81] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K Thomson (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 50.

[82] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues,* 110.

[83] Nevertheless, Tessman claims that burdened virtues can still become morally objectionable when one's anger motivates mixed actions that become (1) excessive and (2) misdirected and harm the wrong targets. Therefore, while she recognizes the necessity for victims of oppression to deviate from ideal sets of actions, Tessman does not claim resisters should ignore moral principles altogether. See: Tessman, 120.

[84] Take for instance, Americans protesting in front of the homes supreme court justices in response to the overturning of *roe v wade*. Indeed, these are tactics that might deviate from norms of civility but are a form of protest that people are resorting to in response to increasingly oppressive anti-abortion laws.

laws (that are not themselves unjust) to protest an injustice that they suffer from.[85] These might not be ideal forms of protest (notwithstanding that any form of protest is itself not ideal), but are ways of ensuring that one's grievances are recognized in an unjust society. These resentments might be deemed inapt by mainstream society insofar as their grievances are not socially recognized as legitimate, but also because critics argue that their resentment-inspired actions are indicative of morally objectionable motives. Members of the dominant groups (or their sympathisers) might argue that the protesters' disobedience of the law or intimidation of others through uncivil protest represents a desire to be superior to others rather than to repudiate injustice.

At the more controversial end of mixed actions, resentment might be expressed through violent and destructive actions such as rioting, vandalism and the destruction of property. It is beyond the scope of this essay to demonstrate under what contexts these actions could possibly be legitimate or to consider whether political violence is ever justified at all. However, even if it were granted that political violence is always unjust, that does not mean that all resentments expressed violently should be deemed inapt. Insofar as the marginalized recognize that abiding by conventional moral norms will prevent them from effectively resisting injustice, there is the potential that certain people believe destructive actions like rioting are the only means available to enact political and social change. This is particularly relevant for people who lack social power and whose grievances are constantly dismissed given that the injustices they are resentful towards continue to reoccur. Under such contexts, it would still be inaccurate to deem their resentments as inapt, given that they are protesting a genuine moral violation; indeed, there is a

[85] The 2020 pipeline protests, in which railway blockades were held to protest the construction of a pipeline on Wet'suwet'en First Nation territory are an example of this. While the blockades may have been illegal, protesters resorted to civil disobedience to protest a recurring injustice that is constitutive of a settler colonial structure. When formal institutions and structures are embedded within settler colonialism, protesters resort to more disruptive means of challenging colonial practices.

good a moral reason for their resentment.[86] Therefore, their resentments should not be misconstrued as reflecting a desire to dominate others when their violent actions are often viewed as one the only resort available to resist the injustices they suffer from. In this sense, resentments expressed violently might very well coincide with protesting a genuine moral violation and a desire to build just relations and social conditions.[87] However, this is not to say that these resentments ought to be immune to moral criticism. As will be demonstrated at the end of this section, a person's resentments might be apt, but worthy of criticism for other reasons.

Nevertheless, the inability to recognize the constraints that the marginalized face will often prevent critics from realizing that instances above are apt resentments. In contrast, the resentments of members from privileged groups are more likely to be deemed apt, given that it is unlikely that they will need to resort to mixed acts to protest the injustices they have suffered. It would certainly be apt for a person from a privileged group to feel resentment upon suffering a moral injury, but due to their social status in society they are far more likely to be able to express their resentments in ways that are more civil and less morally ambiguous. Insofar as their moral worth is generally recognized by the law and civil society, the injustices they suffer are a deviation from the norm rather than a feature of the society they live in. As such, it is far less likely that their resentments will be expressed through disruptive large scale social protests that are vulnerable to becoming or being perceived as uncivil. In other cases, they might express resentments by holding the wrongdoer legally liable, a process they can be confident in if they do

[86] On the other hand, it could be suggested that destructive acts of rioting are an excessive expression of resentment. However, this is an example of the problems with evaluating the resentments of the marginalized on the basis of proportionality. Even if rioting is an intense and misdirected expression of resentment, it is not evident that it is not a proportional response to racist police murders and structural racism more broadly. Furthermore, under oppressive conditions, agents might have some good reason to believe they must resort to mixed actions that will, to some extent, impact bystanders who have not directly done anything wrong.

[87] Of course, plenty of inapt resentments will be expressed violently insofar as the resentful agent punitively punishes those who they believe are beneath them. However, not all violence inspired by resentment is equal, nor does it always represent the same desires.

not have a conflicted relationship with the legal system and law enforcement. In this sense, their resentments are more likely to be expressed in ways that are conventionally recognized as civil, legal and reasonable.

By contrast, the marginalized suffer disproportionately from injustice and oppressive social conditions, rendering it less likely that they can express their resentments in uncontentious ways. However, Amia Srinivassan rightly claims that one's anger can be apt and still be liable to moral criticism.[88] For instance, the rioter might be aptly resentful towards a given injustice, but in expressing their resentment, engage in actions that disproportionately target and harm the wrong persons. One's resentments might still motivate them to engage in morally objectionable actions for which they should be held accountable, but that does not mean that their resentment itself is inapt. While it is often important to criticize a person's resentments under such contexts, deeming their resentments as inapt risks obscuring the legitimacy of their claims to victimhood (since suffering a genuine moral violation is the primary feature of what renders a resentment apt). Despite the potential for apt resentments to motivate morally objectionable actions among the marginalized, it would be erroneous to conflate the resentment of the Black person rioting in response to racist police violence with the inapt resentments that a white supremacist might feel. Treating the resentments of the marginalized as inapt by appealing to their mixed actions risks not only dismissing their grievances but misconstruing their resentments as a desire to dominate others.

In a similar vein, it is also important not to conflate the notion that a person's resentment is inapt with their resentment being counterproductive. Indeed, plenty of apt resentments could be counterproductive, which is a problem that is (once again) especially relevant when a person

[88] Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 132.

is marginalized. For instance, critics of resentment who are sympathetic to the claims of victims might argue that resentment is counterproductive because it is likely to make others take their claims less seriously. As mentioned above, the potential for resentment to inspire morally objectionable actions is vulnerable to making others more dismissive of victims' grievances. However, one's resentment does not need to be expressed in morally objectionable ways for it to be counterproductive. Insofar as resentment is a confrontational expression of blame, it will often make the accused feel uncomfortable and defensive. Because of this, resentment could be counterproductive because people are likely to deflect from taking responsibility for their actions when they are being harshly accused of wrongdoing.[89] In other cases, resentment's (and, more broadly emotions) association with irrationality might result in others deeming the resentful agent pathological and thus incapable of making reasonable claims. Or perhaps when a person belongs to a group that is specifically stigmatized for expressing anger,[90] one might remark that their resentment is especially vulnerable to being dismissed in the public sphere.

These are all examples of resentment potentially becoming counterproductive even when they are apt. The extent to which resentment is truly counterproductive or whether it can be mobilized towards effective political action is matter of empirical investigation. Such an investigation is another phenomenon that is beyond the scope of this essay, but it should not be taken for granted that resentment is an inevitably counterproductive emotion that will not improve the well-being of victims. As mentioned by Lisa Tessman, the cultivation of moral anger was commonly practiced in feminist consciousness raising groups to motivate social activism in the 1960s-70s.[91] Indeed, others have remarked that the success American civil rights

[89] This is partially the basis for Iris Marion Young's rejection of resentments towards structural injustice.
[90] A common case of this is the stigmatization of the stereotypical angry Black person.
[91] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues,* 119.

movement was motivated by anger in response to injustice.[92] This is conventionally recognized as being true for figures like Malcom X,[93] but, even Martin Luther King viewed anger as having a role in motivating peaceful anti-racist protest.[94] Of course, these are merely anecdotes that challenge the counterproductivity criticism of resentment and by no means demonstrate that apt resentments are not usually counterproductive. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that apt resentments among the marginalized are counterproductive in plenty of situations. Regardless, this does render resentment any less of a morally legitimate response to injustice. Despite the practical concerns that one may have regarding resentment, criticisms centered on its counterproductivity should be separated from whether one's resentments are valid in the first place.

Finally, overemphasizing the counterproductivity of resentment can itself become a moral problem. Amia Srinivasan refers to this issue as *affective injustice*, which is "the injustice of having to negotiate between one's apt emotional response to the injustice of one's situation and one's desire to better one's situation."[95] Srinivasan argues it is a psychic tax, in which victims not only suffer from the original wrong, but are forced to engage in a normative conflict upon which they must decide "between improving one's lot and justified rage."[96] Considering that the marginalized encounter plenty of situations and circumstances that warrant resentment, and that their resentments are more likely to be socially stigmatized, Srinivasan argues that affective injustice disproportionately affects those who are already disproportionately affected by

[92] See: Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2021.
[93] Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 126.
[94] Martin Luther King, "Letters From a Birmingham Jail," in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1986), 297.
[95] Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 136.
[96] Srinivasan, 136.

other injustices.[97] Overemphasizing the counterproductivity of resentment can obscure the injustices suffered by the marginalized and place an unfair burden on them to forego their resentments to effectively improve their well-being. Advice centered on resentment's counterproductivity thus places the moral responsibility on victims to resolve these issues instead of demanding that perpetrators repudiate the actions that led to the victim's resentment in the first place. Additionally, Srinivasan argues that cautioning against resentment's counterproductivity is good advice only due to unjust social arrangements (i.e., certain groups of people being stigmatized for expressing anger and resentment). Thus, the sympathiser who constantly affirms resentment's counterproductivity to a certain extent becomes complicit in the injustices suffered by victims.[98] As such, it is worthwhile to not focus disproportionately on resentment's counterproductivity, but to also recognize and affirm the legitimacy of resentment to challenge its unwarranted stigmatization.

6 - A Case Against Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Stigmatizing resentment and focusing on its counterproductivity are often accompanied by the suggestion that victims ought to forgive rather than remain resentful. In this final section, I will criticize the tendency to pressure victims to forgive wrongdoers by foregoing their resentments and reconciling with their wrongdoers. While proponents of forgiveness and reconciliation often claim that they are concerned with the best interests of victims, these arguments are often misguided or potentially disingenuous. In particular, I will demonstrate the problems with centering reconciliation around the psychological healing of victims' psyches through the overcoming of resentment. This will be done by critically analyzing the style of reconciliation that the Canadian state has practiced with Indigenous peoples and demonstrating

[97] Srinivasan, 136.
[98] Srinivasan, 133.

that a more meaningful form of reconciliation ought to legitimize rather than pathologize the resentment of victims. When wrongdoers have not genuinely repudiated their actions, the expectation that victims ought to forego their resentments pressures them to affirm the injustice.

What is the relationship between forgiveness and resentment? In the literature on moral psychology and reactive attitudes, forgiveness has been described as the overcoming of resentment. For instance, Jeffrie Murphy claims forgiveness pertains to how a victim *feels* about their wrongdoer and "essentially involves an attempt to overcome resentment."[99] However, he argues that a person can be said to truly have forgiven their wrongdoer only if they forgo their resentments for moral reasons. In this sense, merely forgetting the memory of an old wrong or repressing one's anger to alleviate their mental pain of being resentful are not actually instances of forgiveness.[100] In contrast, a person could be said to forego their resentments for moral reasons (i.e. engage in forgiveness), because the wrongdoer has repented or perhaps because the victim believes that the wrongdoer has already suffered enough upon being punished or consumed with guilt.[101] Jean Hampton expands on this account of forgiveness by claiming that it is a process of rebuilding a relationship with one's wrongdoer by viewing them as a decent person despite their immoral action.[102] Similar to how a creditor might choose to no longer hold a debt against their debtor, Hampton claims that to forgive someone is to "no longer hold the immoral action against the wrongdoer."[103] Insofar as this is a relationship building process in which the victim chooses to view the wrongdoer as decent, she claims that genuine forgiveness is

[99] Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 20-21.
[100] Murphy, 23.
[101] Murphy, 24.
[102] Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy, 84*.
[103] Hampton, 38.

accompanied with an offer of reconciliation;[104] the restoration of "at the very least, the civil relationship that prevails between strangers in a human community."[105]

Despite his defense of resentment, Jeffrie Murphy still argues that forgiveness can be sign of virtue. For instance, he suggests it would be apt for person A to resent person B when person B's wrongdoing demonstrates they hold person A in contempt. But if person B repents their wrongdoing, they are indicating that they no longer hold person A in contempt, therefore the foregoing of one's resentments would be warranted. However, Murphy adds the caveat that the forgiveness is virtuous only if person B has repudiated their wrongdoing; otherwise, Person A's forgiveness indicates that they affirm person B's contemptuous wrongdoing, which indicates a lack of self-respect (which is incompatible with virtue).

On the other hand, Hampton argues that forgiveness does not entail the need for the wrongdoer to have repudiated their actions. Under such cases, Hampton claims that the victim is ultimately treating the wrongdoer "fair, justly, reasonably in view of his change of heart [i.e., the foregoing of his resentment],"[106] therefore requiring a wrongdoer to repudiate their wrong renders forgiveness redundant.[107] Nevertheless, Hampton argues that forgiveness does not condone the action of the wrongdoer, given that it presupposes that the action to be forgiven was wrong in the first place. To forgive someone is to express that they had previously done something morally objectionable.[108] Insofar as the forgiving victim does not condone the wrongdoer's actions, Hampton suggests the victim does not deny their self-respect since they acknowledge that they were treated in an illegitimate way. As such, she emphasizes the following benefits of forgiveness: (1) "the forgiver is no longer trapped in the position of the

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[104] Hampton, 42.
[105] Hampton, 37.
[106] Hampton, 41.
[107] Hampton, 41-42.
[108] Hampton, 40-41.

victim defending herself;" and (2) "the wrongdoer is no longer in the position of the sinner, stained by sin and indebted to the victim."[109] Insofar as forgiveness involves the foregoing of resentment, the first benefit resolves the negative consequences of resentment faced by the victim (i.e. the internal pain a victim feels and the negative actions it could motivate). However, she also notes that forgiveness can free perpetrators from their feelings of guilt and "save them from the hell of self loathing,"[110] which can result in self-destructive behaviour.[111] Indeed, Hampton's defense of forgiveness is largely predicated on it being a better alternative than resentment, because it improves the well-being of the victim and perpetrator.

As I have shown previously, Hampton exaggerates the problems of resentment, and as I will now demonstrate, she exaggerates the benefits of forgiveness. In fact, the notion that victims ought to forego their resentments by forgiving their wrongdoers can significantly enable the perpetuation of injustice and the continuation of their victimhood. In particular, foregoing resentments can leave victims vulnerable to further injustice when the forgiver does not require perpetrators to acknowledge and repudiate their wrongs. If the wrongdoer does not repudiate their own actions, the victim cannot be assured that the wrongdoer will not continue to engage in the same behaviour. Forgiving them under such contexts can communicate to wrongdoers a toleration of their wrongs by not demanding that they recognize the victims' worth as a person. Indeed, this is particularly true for the marginalized who are vulnerable to suffering from recurring injustices committed by wrongdoers who are less likely to be held accountable due to oppressive laws social structures. In fact, Darwall argues that "in a social situation in which the demands of personal dignity are sufficiently well established and generally reciprocally

[109] Hampton, 86.
[110] Hampton, 87.
[111] Hampton, 84.

recognized, explicit acknowledgement is less commonly called for."[112] However, Darwall's statement indicates that the opposite would apply for marginalized persons. Forgiving wrongdoers, as opposed to resentfully demanding them to repudiate their wrongs can enable the continuation of a social situation in which the victim's human dignity is not acknowledged, leaving them vulnerable to more injustice. In this sense, it is not resentment but forgiveness that can leave victims worse off.

Nevertheless, I do not disagree with Hampton that even if the wrongdoer has not repented, it is theoretically possible for a victim to forgive them without condoning their actions and undermining their own self-respect. However, when a victim repeatedly suffers moral injuries, but forgives wrongdoers without demanding their genuine repentance, there is good reason to be concerned that they are affirming, or at least tolerating, their own suffering. Indeed, in the wake of domination and oppression, it is not uncommon for oppressed peoples to deny their own self-worth. For instance, Frantz Fanon analyzes the phenomenology of colonized Black people internalizing "the complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment."[113] As such, Fanon remarks that there is a tendency for the colonized to affirm colonial narratives that portray European colonizers as superior. However, Celine Lebouef claims that for Fanon, moral anger serves a means to reflect on and repudiate the oppressive conditions that the colonized are subject to.[114] It is upon losing his temper that Fanon claims he starts to challenge the expectation to "stay in line and make myself scarce."[115] Indeed, this is consistent with the notion that resentment is a repudiation of wrongdoing and an affirmation of one's worth. In contrast, expectations for the marginalized to be forgiving rather than resentful

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[112] Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 143.
[113] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 30.
[114] Celine Leboeuf, "Anger as a Political Emotion: A Phenomenological Perspective," in T*he Moral Psychology of Anger*, ed. Myisha Cherry and Owen Flanagan (London: Rowman & Littlefield), 24.
[115] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 94.

when they face ongoing injustices, can be weaponized to pressure them to maintain and internally accept their subordination. It can discourage them from contemplating their oppression and demanding the recognition of their worth, and by implication pressure them to affirm the injustices they suffer. In this sense, a pattern of marginalized persons forgiving wrongdoers who have not repented is potentially indicative of social norms that reinforce their domination and oppression.

Indeed, in the same way that the marginalized are often stigmatized for feeling resentment in response to injustice, there are often social pressures for them to engage in forgiveness upon suffering wrongdoing. For instance, Myisha Cherry remarks that when Black people suffer from racist injustices, there is a tendency for forgiveness requests to almost instantly be directed towards victims.[116] She references numerous incidents of reporters asking the families of victims of racist police killings whether they forgive the officers almost immediately after the incidents occurred or after courts decided not to indict officers.[117] While the requests for forgiveness presuppose that these actions were wrong, Cherry scrutinizes this practice insofar as it aims to pacify victims who are rightfully angry in the wake on injustice. She refers to this as *hurry and burial trial*,[118] in which social expectations for forgiveness are used to maintain relations of domination and oppression by pressuring victims to move on instead of being angry and demanding social and political changes.

While it may be commendable for certain persons to forgive a wrongdoer even when that person has not repudiated their wrongs, this is not an expectation that should be placed on society's most vulnerable. To the extent that there should be a moral expectation for victims to

[116] Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 103.
[117] Cherry, 102.
[118] Cherry, 103.

forgive, it should only be after a victim can be ensured that their wrongdoers recognize and acknowledge the victim's moral worth.[119] However, when considering that many resentments felt by the marginalized are directed towards structural injustices, or perhaps interactional injustices enabled by oppressive structures, the potential forgiveness of specific wrongs does not entail the complete foregoing of their resentments. Under the right conditions, the racialized person might forgive the bigot who committed a hate crime but remain resentful towards the structural racism that enabled that wrong to occur in the first place. Indeed, as long as structural injustices continue to persist, it would be illegitimate to expect victims of structural racism to forgive the society that continues its perpetuation.

Finally, Hampton's claim that forgiveness should be encouraged because it improves the well-being of wrongdoers and establishes the foundations for reconciliation is misguided. It places the burden on victims to improve the well-being of those who harmed them, even though their forgiveness can potentially reinforce the victim's continued suffering. And despite Hampton's claim that foregoing one's resentments by way of forgiveness is an important step for victims and perpetrators to reconcile with each other, reconciliation is not possible unless the wrongdoer repudiates their own wrongs. It is unclear how moral and civil relations can be restored unless the wrongdoer commits to act properly. In this sense, the disproportionate preoccupation with getting victims to forego their resentments to achieve reconciliation risks absolving wrongdoers from their responsibilities to rebuild better relations. If anything, attempting to reconcile with those who have not repudiated their wrongs is vulnerable to maintaining unjust relations rather than restoring moral ones. As will be demonstrated in the

[119] Even if there is a moral basis for victims to forgive in such cases, it is important to appreciate that forgiveness can be practically difficult, particularly when an injustice was very severe/catastrophic. Under such contexts, it might not be reasonable to expect a victim to be completely forego their resentments even if it would be a praiseworthy thing to do.

remainder of this section, wrongdoers demonstrating a genuine repudiation of their wrongs is more conducive towards reconciliation than requiring victims to entirely forego their resentments.

Hampton's emphasis on encouraging victims to forego their resentments to reconcile with wrongdoers is made in reference to interactional wrongs, but this logic is common in the contexts of major historical and structural injustices. Under such cases, Catherine Lu considers this a superficial form of reconciliation that is more concerned with erasing the negative sentiments of victims than with engaging in a political project to create a mutually affirmable order with victims of historical and present injustices.[120] In focusing on the psychological healing of resentment, it depoliticizes reconciliation by moving discussions away from a larger political project that seeks to reform the conditions/structures that lead to one's anger. It pathologizes the resentment of victims and ultimately pressures them to become complacent in their own oppression and domination. Lu also argues that it aims for an unrealistic expectation of social unity that "serves to pressure the politically weak to accommodate evil and injustice."[121] However, in the aftermath of major human rights abuses and structural injustice, there is good reason to presume that complete social unity and harmony is a fantastical goal.[122] Nevertheless, if any meaningful semblance of social unity and restoration of moral relations are to be achieved, significant social and political changes are necessary. Otherwise, victims will continue to suffer the same injustices that cause them to be resentful. Therefore, to center reconciliation around the erasure of resentment rather than these social and political changes undermines the successful pursuit of reconciliation.

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[120] Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 183.
[121] Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics*, 183.
[122] Lu, 186.

This superficial style of reconciliation is particularly relevant in the context of Indigenous relations in Canada. Indeed, Glen Coulthard expresses significant skepticism towards the Canadian State's approach to reconciliation. He mentions that although the Federal Government appeals to goals of mutual respect and recognition with Indigenous peoples, its implementation of reconciliation ignores contemporary wrongs by portraying colonial injustice as a phenomenon of the past.[123] Coulthard therefore claims that instead of focusing on the state's wrongdoings, Canadian reconciliation has been more centered on healing the psyches of Indigenous Canadians who have been traumatized by historical events.[124] Under such a framework, current colonial injustices are ignored, while the resentments of Indigenous peoples are viewed as emotional baggage in response to a past that can ultimately not be changed. If the past cannot be changed and unjust practices have ended, resentment becomes perceived as an irrational emotion motivated by a tendency to dwell on one's victimhood. In this sense, Canadian discourses on reconciliation portrays the resentment of Indigenous peoples in a manner that resembles Nietzschean *ressentiment* where the moralized anger of agents reflects their inability to engage in life-affirming goals. This style of reconciliation pathologizes resentment because its backward-looking sensibilities are viewed as a self-tormenting barrier to creating a renewed relationship with the Canadian State and society.

Indeed, the Canadian State's pathologizing of resentment and temporalization of colonial injustices is an example of depoliticized reconciliation that pressures victims to affirm injustice. In particular, the ignorance of ongoing colonial injustices undermines reconciliation's role within a broader political project of implementing structural reforms that are necessary to ensure a

[123] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 121.
[124] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 121.

mutually affirmable political order. As such, Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism should not be understood as event but as a structure.[125] According to Wolfe, a structural understanding of colonialism views it as an "organizing principle of settler colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence."[126] This demonstrates that although circumstances and state practices have evolved over the centuries in Canada, colonialism is an ongoing phenomenon that cannot be relegated to a distance past. In this respect, resentment towards historical injustices is also attributed towards contemporary continuities of colonialism, albeit in different forms. On the other hand, temporalizing colonialism ignores contemporary instances of colonial injustices.[127] It enables the depoliticization of reconciliation by undermining the state and civil society's obligations to engage in structural reforms and instead focuses on the supposedly unhealthy resentful psyche of Indigenous peoples. Approaches to reconciliation that pathologize resentment pressure Indigenous peoples to move on while wrongdoing continues to persist.

However, despite my criticisms of reconciliation, I am not arguing against it altogether. When done properly, reconciliation is an important political project that can contribute towards the well-being of victims. For instance, Catherine Lu argues that reconciliation is an important process for ensuring the disaleniation of victims and establishing conditions for "agents' structural dignity and nonalienated agency, which enable human flourishing.[128] Reconciliation thus serves to ensure a mutually affirmable order in which historical victims are capable of acting as full moral agents in authoring their lives and the broader political societies they belong

[125] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.
[126] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.
[127] i.e., treaty violations, the exploitation of Indigenous lands for financial interests, the overincarceration of Indigenous peoples and the state's devaluation of the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women.
[128] Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics*, 214.

to. When understood in this way, reconciliation is incredibly important because it establishes the necessary conditions to build a more just society.

Although resentment alone cannot ensure political restoration or a mutually affirmable order, I argue that a more robust form of reconciliation must acknowledge the legitimacy of resentment. As argued by David Mclvor, "reconciliation does not herald a world free of conflict. Instead, it imagines a place where conflicts could become the basis for negotiation and mutual recognition rather than escalation."[129] When taking this into consideration, undermining the resentment of victims to achieve unrealistic goals of social harmony is likely to leave them unheard and thereby unwilling to negotiate the terms of reconciliation in the first place. It counterproductively contributes to the escalation of conflict because it suggests that one's emotional grievances are not worth listening to or taking seriously by political society. This only has the effect of increasing the alienation faced among victims while amplifying their resentment.

In contrast, for the politics of reconciliation to occur in a meaningful way, governments and civil society should resist the tendency to pathologize the resentment of victims. Respecting their resentments as legitimate in the wake of severe injustices is often an important component of reconciliation. Indeed, Thomas Brudhom argues that reconciliation ought to be premised on "everybody's coming to share the resentful victim's unreconcilable attitude to the inexplicable evils of the past."[130] A more robust form of reconciliation between victims and the broader political order would entail a common recognition that it is reasonable for victims to potentially never forego their resentments altogether given the magnitude of certain historical wrongs.

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[129] David W. McIvor, "The Mendacity of Reconciliation in an Age of Resentment," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 76, no. 5 (2017): 1145, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1111/ajes.12198.
[130] Thomas Brudholm, "Revisiting Resentments: Jean Améry and the Dark Side of Forgiveness and Reconciliation." *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 1 (2006): 21, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830500519714.

Reconciliation under such contexts does not seek complete social harmony and the complete removal of negative sentiments, but instead conveys to victims that the moral weight of their grievances is acknowledged. Legitimizing feelings of resentment thus demonstrates a willingness to take victims seriously thereby establishing stronger foundations to begin negotiations of how mutual recognition and affirmation of the political order can be achieved. It conveys a serious recognition that past and present injustices are wrong and indicates a willingness to repent and restructure a political order in which those wrongs do not persist. Although their resentments may never be totally erased, victims may become reconciled more broadly with a society that acknowledges their pain, anger, and critiques as valid. This is not to say that resentment will inevitably lead to justice or reconciliation, but that reconciliation is unlikely to succeed if the resentments of victims are simply dismissed as pathological.

Conclusion

The tendency to delegitimize the resentment of victims enables the perpetuation of injustice by silencing their repudiation of wrongdoing. Indeed, recognizing resentment's role as a reactive attitude demonstrates how it affirms one's sense of worth and conveys blame in response to injustice when wrongdoers fail to take their moral obligations seriously. Resentment is often expressed by society's most marginalized members in response to injustices that are of significant social and political concern. By the same token, their resentments are the most vulnerable to being dismissed and sanctioned, insofar their moral anger challenges relations of domination and oppression. However, when expressed by the marginalized, resentment expresses a demand to be recognized as an equal member of the moral community and to live under just background conditions.

Of course, resentment is not without its critics. The potential for resentment to motivate agents to vengefully dominate others has led it to be misconstrued as an emotion that expresses a hierarchical concern with being downranked rather than a repudiation of injustice. Indeed, this is sometimes the case, but it is fallacious to characterize all resentments in this way. As such, delineating the differences between apt and inapt resentments demonstrates how certain resentments protest genuine moral violations whereas others do not. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the resentments of the marginalized will often be expressed through morally ambiguous actions, but this does not render their resentments inapt. Even if a victim's resentment is expressed in morally objectionable or counterproductive ways, their resentments are legitimate insofar they are protesting injustice. Therefore, these resentments are fundamentally different from the resentments of those who desire to uphold relations of domination and oppression.

Despite my defense of resentment, I am not arguing that that is an end in of itself or that it will it inevitably lead to justice. However, it is important to take the resentment of victims seriously rather than to delegitimize and pathologize it, otherwise their protests of injustice risk being silenced. In particular, pressuring victims to forego their resentments for the supposedly noble goals of forgiveness and reconciliation can often harm the well-being of victims rather than restore it. Indeed, social expectations for victims to reconcile with wrongdoers when those wrongs continue to persist, is often weaponized to pressure them to affirm their oppression and suffering. Given these discrepancies, legitimizing resentment is essential to ensure that the moral weight of victims' grievances is acknowledged and taken seriously. Appealing to the pathology of resentment far too often has the consequence of silencing the resistance of injustice.

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