

DEALING WITH FEELINGS OF UNCERTAINTY AMID EXPECTATIONS OF ENTITLEMENT

from: **“Uncertainty, Anger, and Settler States of Feeling**

The people I interviewed who opposed land claims were angry and resentful that they were forced to feel such uncertainty; they saw it as unexpected and unfair. Many made arguments that the economic uncertainty brought on by Indigenous land rights meant they could not carry out business and farming properly; they could not plan or develop their businesses and their communities. They organized protests, arguing that their cultures and communities were “at risk” (Mackey 2005). Many also spoke longingly of “before,” when they had been certain and secure in their lives, land, and futures. The way they argued against land rights suggested a feeling that never before had their faith in their secure ownership of property, and their trust in the territorial integrity of nation, been betrayed in this way. Uncertainty as a result of Indigenous land rights, I suggest, understandably disrupts longstanding “settled expectations” of entitlement. States of anger about uncertainty implicitly construct an opposite normative state of affairs in which settlers and the settler nation-state did, or believed it did, have certain and settled entitlement to the land taken from Indigenous peoples.

The passionate anger about uncertainty expressed by the non-Native people I interviewed should not be surprising. It makes sense that if people feel their property and their expectations of a particular life and future might be suddenly and unexpectedly destroyed, they will feel endangered, uncertain, and angry. We can imagine that generations of settlers have grown up with ubiquitous narratives about how their families (and other families like theirs) have worked hard on the land to build the nation. Such narratives have never before seemed to be at odds with the national narrative or with the settled laws of the land. The people I spoke to seemed to have been thrown into a state of vertigo. Their settled worlds seemed upside down.”¹

Decolonization requires de-centering ideas that white people problems are the most important problems. They are not. While politicians in 2020 argue about the future of their delusions, the repatriation of indigenous lands to indigenous peoples can be done and should be done.

1 “Unsettling Expectations : (Un)certainly, Settler States of Feeling, Law, and Decolonization”. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society / Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* , 2014, Volume 29, no. 2, pp. 235 – 252 . doi:10.1017/cls.2014.10