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## On Resentment: Past and Present

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Fantini, Bernardino (ed.); Martin Moruno, Dolorès (ed.); Moscoso, Javier (ed.)

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# On Resentment



On Resentment:  
Past and Present

Edited by

Bernardino Fantini, Dolores Martín Moruno  
and Javier Moscoso

**CAMBRIDGE  
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P U B L I S H I N G

On Resentment: Past and Present,  
Edited by Bernardino Fantini, Dolores Martín Moruno and Javier Moscoso

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# INTRODUCTION

## ON RESENTMENT: PAST AND PRESENT

In *A Room of One's own*, an essay published in 1929, Virginia Woolf explores the connections between women and literary creation, describing a type of sublimated anger mixed with indignation to portray the emotional universe surrounding the seventeenth-century female poet Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchilsea. In the eyes of Woolf, resentment appeared as a necessary step in women writers' emancipation, as personalities like Finch could only realise their oppressed identity by means of the recognition of their negative feelings against Patriarchal Civilisation:

Yet it is clear that could she have freed her mind from hate and fear and not heaped it with bitterness and resentment, the fire was hot within her ... It was a thousand pities that the woman who could write like that, whose mind was turned to nature and reflection should have been forced to anger and bitterness. But how could she have helped herself? I asked, imagining the sneers and the laughter, the adulation of the toadies, the scepticism of the professional poet. She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write, and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps, though her husband was of the kindest, and their married life perfection.<sup>1</sup>

For Woolf, the poetry of Anne Finch, "the melancholy lady," embodied female resentment against men, a combination of hate and fear that emerged primarily in women because they were trapped in a way of life that was imposed on them by their husbands, a life devoid of freedom in the public and in the private sphere.<sup>2</sup> Men were superior, argued Woolf while she dissected the interior life of Finch, because they had the power

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, repr. Oxford University Press, 1998), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Woolf, 79.

to forbid what women wanted really to do, making them perfect wives and mothers but never writers. What Woolf was pointing out about resentment was that it was not only a poisonous mindset that led Finch to acute depression at the end of her life, but furthermore, and most importantly, the fact that it acted as a way of denouncing social injustices, which required a spectator to be able to feel sympathy towards the victim that had suffered violence.

This public dimension of resentment, which had already been pointed out by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), related this emotional experience to our capacity to feel indignation, “which boils up in the breast of the spectator, whenever he thoroughly brings home to himself the case of the sufferer.”<sup>3</sup> By contrast to further nineteenth-century interpretations, such as those of Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Scheler, who would stress the pathological proportions of resentment or more exactly of what they called *ressentiment*, Adam Smith focused on the importance of this social passion as a mechanism of retributive justice when an innocent victim was wrongly injured.

Some questions immediately arise from these two different perceptions of resentment: were Adam Smith and Friedrich Nietzsche referring to the same emotion or were they speaking about fundamentally different experiences? Even though contemporary historians such as Marc Ferro have identified the presence of resentment from Greek Antiquity up to the twenty-first-century terrorist attacks of radical Islam, can we argue that this experience has remained unchanged throughout history?<sup>4</sup> In other words, can we take the meaning of resentment for granted as it has always been understood under the same linguistic definition and had the same social appreciation in the past?

These were some of the concerns which originally inspired our project “On Resentment,” launched in September, 2010 as an initiative put forward by the HIST-EX “Emotional Studies” research group (Centre for Human and Social Sciences, Madrid) in collaboration with the Institute for the History of Medicine and Health at the University of Geneva. The choice of this topic of research responds, on the one hand, to the multifaceted nature of our working group, which brings together more than eighteen researchers from the fields of cultural history, anthropology, history of science, philosophy, literature and sociology, as well as artists

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Edinburgh: A. Millar, A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1767), 127. It is also interesting to consult John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 533, to see how resentment has been reintroduced in the modern theory of justice.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

from photography and cinema. In this respect, the project “On Resentment” provided us with a common field in which it was possible to encourage a dialogue expressing ideas from very different perspectives to explore the diverse representations through which this affective experience has been crystalized throughout history.

On the other hand, our interest in studying an emotion such as resentment comes from the fact that our individual research projects are mainly focused on the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century emotional communities and, therefore, we were looking for an emotion which could help us to trace discontinuities between codes, norms and institutions that ruled ancient and modern societies. In our view, resentment was a good example of how affective experiences are not irremediably psychological, but rather how they have been shaped in particular cultural and social contexts such as the French Revolution, the Romantic Era, the Latin American independence movement or the World Wars.

Our starting point was, contrary to that supported by Ferro, to consider that resentment has a history which could be reconstructed by paying attention to the evolution of common patterns of feeling in a wide range of modern social currents, such as the nineteenth-century working class and women’s liberation movements. In this way, our project “On Resentment” follows the main lines of the multidisciplinary programme of research, which has been called by some scholars “the History of Emotions.”<sup>5</sup> This new way of understanding the emotional life of the past has gained increasing interest during the last three decades thanks to the publication of books exploring the history of particular emotions such as Peter N. Stearns’ *Jealousy: the Evolution of an Emotion in American History* (1989), Patricia M. Spacks’ *Boredom: the Literary History of a State of Mind* (1995), Barbara Rosenwein’s *Anger Past* (1998), Joanna Bourke’s *Fear: A Cultural History* (2005), Elena Pulcini’s *Invidia: La passione triste* (2011) and Javier Moscoso’s *Pain: A Cultural history* (2012).

The historical evolution of resentment can be perceived through a careful analysis of the changing meaning of the term used to describe this affective experience, which did not acquire a moral connotation until the second half of the eighteenth century, when it began to be understood as a sentiment rooted in a deep sense of injury that arises against the author of an injustice.<sup>6</sup> To write the history of resentment, however, also necessitates

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Pampler, “The History of Emotions: An interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein and Peter Stearns,” *History and Theory* 49 (2010): 237–265.

<sup>6</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals* (London: A. Millar, 1751).

an examination of the rise of a plethora of cultural expressions, revolutions and counter revolutions, which vindicated their preaching of equality as a form of hatred mixed with fear and indignation directed against an oppressor.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we cannot understand the history of resentment as a mere invention of certain philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche or Max Scheler. If resentment became a major topic of cultural discussion in the nineteenth century, this was not because intellectuals cultivated its philosophical expression, but rather because certain cultural conditions promoted its emergence as a defining emotional feature of modern society. According to this, our initial hypothesis was to understand the history of resentment as being intimately linked to the transformations that occurred in late eighteenth-century societies following the impact of the French Revolution on world politics, a period that was marked by the promise of a merit-based society in which, for the first time, individuals were conceived as having the opportunity to fulfil their expectations under the same social conditions.

From this point of view, resentment appears not only as the exclusive property of women but of all individuals, groups and national communities that have defined their identity through the denunciation of their suffering and misery, and by the accusation of the aggressor that had transformed them into victims. Seen in this light, resentment flourishes among those “who are reduced to total powerlessness” in the context of what Hannah Arendt called a politics of pity assuming “different forms depending on the position within the structure of domination occupied by the groups which embody it.”<sup>8</sup> However, this emotion may not only be considered as an attribute of the “unfortunate victims,” as its influence has also been frequently exhibited by powerful figures in the history of politics. As the Spanish physician Gregorio Marañón suggested in his study of the life of Tiberius, resentment was a passion of the mind associated to those people who, despite attainment of considerable power, suffered from an inferiority complex. Thus, resentful people who became important political leaders such as Caesar Tiberius, used their power to unleash resentful elements of their cruel and violent personalities in conducting a type of personal revenge motivated by the humiliations that they had endured in their past. In these terms, resentment—observed Marañón—was produced by an

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<sup>7</sup> For a recent history of indignation, see Anne Claude, Ambroise Rendu & Christian Delporte, *L'Indignation: histoire d'une émotion, XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 133; See also Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965).

accumulation of suffering that led to a “fermentation of feeling that breaks out, when it is least expected, in some arbitrary form of conduct.”<sup>9</sup>

Here lies the intricate nature of this emotion—it acts in silence, as its expression is blocked by forces such as fear, anxiety and intimidation and, therefore, it should be depicted as a repressed reaction, which attempts to avoid direct confrontation with superiors, authority figures, as well as with sexual partners.<sup>10</sup> This aspect is exactly what distinguishes resentment from hate or effective anger—that frustration lies at the heart of the first, giving rise to strong feelings of bitterness. This characterisation of resentment as a repressed reaction explains why resentful people can neither act, nor forget, as the effects of this emotion become more virulent as time goes by.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to other emotional experiences that have very often been described as synonymous with resentment, such as rancour, the former establishes an intimate relationship with temporality, as it needs to be constantly cultivated by memory. Unlike rancour, resentment implies the renewal of the original suffering which is caused by the traumatic event. It even modifies our perception of time as it chains us to a permanent past; a past full of dark memories that prevent us from living in the present and looking with hope towards the future. The only future that can be imagined in the context of resentment is one that is brought into being by the obsessive desire of revenge oriented towards the destruction of all persons, communities and systems that are considered potential enemies. Furthermore, the persistent sense of hostility involved in resentment seems to respond to a cyclical pattern, which defines this emotion in clinical terms together with other pathological symptoms such as anxiety, depression and, notably, embitterment.<sup>12</sup> This aspect of resentment, which emphasises the obsessive repetition of past memories, was reinforced by

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<sup>9</sup> Gregorio Marañón, *Tiberius: A Study in Resentment* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1956), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976), 291.

<sup>11</sup> Michael André Bernstein, *Bitter Carnival and the Abject Hero* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 108.

<sup>12</sup> Among the notable studies conducted in contemporary psychiatry and psychology, which reveal the presence of negative emotions such as resentment in personality disorders, is Michael Linden, *Embitterment: Societal, Psychological and, Clinical Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2011) and A. Fossati, E. S. Barrat, I. Carreta, B. Leonardi, F. Graziolli & C. Maffei, “Predicting Borderline and Antisocial Personality Disorder features in Non-Clinical Subjects using Measures of Impulsivity and Aggressiveness,” *Psychiatry Research* 125 (2) (2004): 161–170.

means of the popularisation of the French term *ressentiment* in nineteenth-century European literature and, notably, in the German language, which introduced a stronger connotation with memory and a peculiar nuance of lingering hate in comparison with its English counterpart, along with other German words such as *Groll*, meaning grudge, or *Schadenfreude* that means joy at the suffering of others.

As various studies have shown, this French word was widely used by the German élite at least from the eighteenth century, probably as a result of the impact of the French Enlightenment movement on the intellectual Prussian milieu.<sup>13</sup> However, it is not until the early nineteenth century that we can start to perceive how resentment became a central concern in science as well as in aesthetics. On the one hand, the medical expression of resentment was extensively studied by anatomical and psychological models such as Franz Joseph Gall's phrenology, a scientific movement that explained human behaviour according to the different forms of the skull, as well as by means of an identification of each part of the brain with a moral disposition. Some supporters of Gall's theory such as the Scottish George Combe interpreted resentment as a basic reaction to violence, which was present not only in the human but also in the whole of the animal realm. From this perspective, this passion was understood as a type of self-defence, "the result of wounded Self-esteem, aided by destructiveness."<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, resentment would become a central topic in early nineteenth-century Romantic aesthetics as is shown by the work of poets such as John Keats (1795–1821) and Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) or writers such as René François de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), who appealed to this expression to describe their inner experiences, which were profoundly embedded with envy, pride and malignity against the political model of civilisation that had been introduced during the French Revolution, and that was later imposed all over Europe with the rise of the

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<sup>13</sup> See Kurt Kepler, "Problems of German-English Dictionary Making," *The Modern Language Journal* 41 (1) (1957): 26–29; Rüdiger Bittner, "Ressentiment," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, edited by Richard Sacht (Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994). According to *Littre's* dictionary the prefix "re" included in *ressentiment* originally functioned only as an intensifier rather than a word, which attempted to depict repetition. Before the eighteenth century in, for example, François de la Rochefoucauld, "Lettre à Mme. Sablé," in *Maximes, suivies des Réflexions diverses, du Portrait de La Rochefoucauld par lui-même, et des Remarques de Christine de Suède sur les Maximes* (Paris: Garnier, 1967) 558; the term *ressentiment* appears as a synonym of "a sentiment de reconnaissance."

<sup>14</sup> Georges Combe, *Essays on Phrenology* (Edinburgh: John Anderson, 1830), 170.

Napoleonic Wars.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Thomas Pfau has recently observed that *ressentiment* always appeared to be related to melancholy in the context of European Romantic culture, as both emotions:

arise from a deeply felt alienation and aversion to the emergent hegemony of the nation—an imagined community of middle class, professionally trained, gentile subjects—justifying and reinforcing its specious coherence by worshipping the image of a national literature.

Melancholy cannot be imagined without a careful cultivation of painful *ressentiment*, which was not only the mirror through which the romantic projected their aversion against the contemporary world—as past times were always better—but also “the veritable affective signature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German culture after Waterloo.”<sup>16</sup>

Even before Nietzsche spread the French word *ressentiment* as a *terminus technicus* in his philosophy, Søren Kierkegaard had pointed out this emotion as a key concept for explaining the dynamics of culture. As he explained in *The Present Age* (1846), his own time was marked by the rise of a particular envy, which he termed *ressentiment*, a social phenomenon that generally happens when people consider themselves as equals and thereby mediocrity becomes the criteria for measuring individuals’ achievements. For Kierkegaard, the best cultural expression of *ressentiment* was a “passionless, sedentary, reflective age” dominated by “envy and abstract thought” in which all creativity was stifled.<sup>17</sup> In Kierkegaard’s work, as would also be the case in Nietzsche and Scheler’s further philosophy, the notion of *ressentiment* seems not only to have introduced a peculiar connotation of malice in its meaning, but also a fundamentally different conception to the eighteenth-century Scottish definition of this social passion in politics. From the nineteenth-century perspective, resentment lost its significance as a central social passion linked with justice, which is implanted in human nature for “salutary purposes” to evolve into an expression of the bad conscience of certain individuals and groups who turned their inner suffering into a strategy of revenge.<sup>18</sup> What differs between these two representations is the development of a suspicion about the morality of pity which began to be understood as a

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Roe, *Keats and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 26.

<sup>17</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 23–4.

<sup>18</sup> Hume, *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals*, 264.



mere expression of resentment. Thus, the transformation of resentment into *ressentiment* showed not only that this emotion should be understood in connection to the rise of the egalitarian ideology but also as a symptom of abnormal behaviour closely linked with psychological and psychiatric troubles of the modern self.

As Nietzsche explained in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), *ressentiment* was a dark passion caused by affects such as “anger, pathological vulnerability and impotent lust for revenge,” which revealed not only a sign of weakness in certain individuals, but moreover the moral disease of Western culture—Nihilism. Like a kind of physician, he provides in his biographical essay *Ecce Homo* (1908) a detailed description about how the physiological mechanism of this emotion worked. It was equally traditionally associated with stomach problems as resentment was, according to Ancient Greek medicine, included in the group of choleric emotions such as anger, frustration and envy, controlled by the gall bladder.

Nothing burns one up faster than the affects of *ressentiment* ... no reaction could be more disadvantageous for the exhausted; such affects involve a rapid consumption of nervous energy, a pathological increase of harmful excretions—for example the gall bladder into the stomach.<sup>19</sup>

Following the genealogical method, Nietzsche portrayed the psychological type of the man who harbours *ressentiment* as embodying the mental attitude of the weak and powerless—the *schelechtwegekomene*—against their more fortunate fellow men, their aristocratic masters.<sup>20</sup> As slaves cannot revolt against noble men openly, they try to discredit them and their achievements, leading to a falsification of all genuine sensations and compensating “themselves with an imaginary revenge,” which gave birth to values such as God and the Devil.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the slave revolt began when *ressentiment* became creative and established its own code of morality, which is particularly represented in Christian morality, as a vengeance upon aristocratic masters. However, not only are Christians

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<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, edited by Peter Gay & Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 686.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche described the man of *ressentiment* in *The Genealogy of Morals* as follows: “While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself, the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright, nor naïve, nor honest with himself ... His spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors; everything covert entices him as his world, his security, his refreshment, he understands how to keep silent, how to not forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble.”

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 472.

included in Nietzsche's list of resentful people, but also all personalities "watching for danger and advantage everywhere" such as Anarchists, Anti-Semites and intellectuals, who are the most brilliant practitioners of literary and philosophical *ressentiment* as the conceptual systems that they have elevated only reveal their evil motivation and revenge against the instinct of preserving life.<sup>22</sup>

While for Nietzsche *ressentiment* was definitively a pathological disposition, associated with a particular psychological type, Max Scheler would understand its emergence as a typical modern phenomenon "accumulated by the very structure of society," which is largely independent of the individual temperament. For Scheler, this kind of existential envy particularly appeared in modern democratic societies "where equal rights or former social equality go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, property and education."<sup>23</sup> Although Scheler was not directly focused on the historical genealogy of this emotion in his 1915 investigation *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* with the historical, he pointed out how the core of Christian ethics has not grown on resentment, but rather that of "bourgeois morality, which gradually replaced Christian morality" from the thirteenth century onwards, and "culminated in the French Revolution" demanding supreme rights of the majority of civil society.<sup>24</sup>

The sociological groups subject to resentful feelings included women, the industrial proletariat, but also the disappearing class of artisans belonging to the petty bourgeoisie. All these groups cultivated a kind of romantic nostalgia towards the past. Scheler concluded by explaining *ressentiment* as a particular emotional attitude that describes the sociological type of "the common man," who felt a profound insecurity and weakness as a permanent condition of their existence, being constantly divided between their object of desire and themselves.<sup>25</sup> As the sociologist René Girard would observe in his mimetic theory, resentment is anthropologically inscribed in our subjective identity as a result of the dynamics of desire that rule our modern societies. Thus, from a Girardian point of view, our desire to be other than we are is always at the heart of this particular suffering.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions*, 291.

<sup>23</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 28. See also Jack M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure: A Macrosociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Scheler, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Scheler, 23.

<sup>26</sup> René Girard, *Il risentimento* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 1999).

This preliminary overview does not expect to be an exhaustive account of what has been written about resentment, but rather to shed light on its most important transformations since the second half of the eighteenth century up to contemporary society. In a broader sense, these changes in the representation of resentment, that should be considered fundamental moments in order in writing its history, also reveal the main cultural changes which have shaped our modern society, such as the belief that all individuals are equal and, therefore, they have the same right to education and job opportunities. Drawing on these considerations, the following contributions attempt to explore discontinuities and continuities in the history of resentment, providing new perspectives to Emotion Studies coming from the history of art, photography, war and culture studies and, even, the history of science. As will be shown throughout this collection of essays, resentment has not only inspired philosophical treatises, but also paintings, photographs depicting the brutalisation of the enemy during the Great War, the modernisation of chemical industry during World War I, novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, and nineteenth-century women's manifestos that claimed resentment as way of emancipation. Resentment is not only introduced as a polyhedric experience, but it will also be elucidated throughout this volume with the help of recent analytical tools provided by historians of emotions such as "emotional communities" or "emotional styles" to make the particular cultural and social conditions which prompted its emergence visible.

The first section of the present volume, which we have entitled "How to Write the History of Resentment," brings together various contributions aimed at examining the changing representation of resentment and its French relative *ressentiment* in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western societies. In the first chapter, Javier Moscoso addresses the question of the material expression of resentment, according to the "social passion" definition proposed by Adam Smith, which was communicated to our fellow man by our natural sympathy. Following the eighteenth-century Scottish moral tradition, Moscoso interprets the famous painting of Théodore Géricault, *Le radeau de la Méduse* (1818), as embodying the subjective experience of political and moral resentment. As he argues, Géricault's work does not attempt to enhance the viewer's approval towards the figure of the "benefactor," but rather to suggest sympathy with the hatred of the victims towards the perpetrators of their misfortune, and thereby aims at showing resentment rather than compassion, as it involves an implicit accusation and a craving for justice.

In chapter two, Yamina Oudai Celso proposes a reflection about Friedrich Nietzsche's *ressentiment* in order to explore the nineteenth-

century cultural forces that nourished his moral interpretation. However, Celso interprets Nietzsche's *ressentiment* not as a mere philosophical concept that can help us to understand the origins of Western morality, but rather as a "symbolic language of emotions" that requires philosophical, psychological and even medical knowledge in order to be explained. In turn, the third chapter, written by Patrick Lang, sheds light on the role of *ressentiment* within the entire work of the phenomenologist Max Scheler. A comparative analysis between *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* (1912) and *Der Geist und die ideellen Grundlagen der Demokratien der großen Nationen* (1916), led to him to conclude that this emotion was not only understood as a consequence of social inequalities, but equally as a specific combination of inequality and equality, linked to the unawareness of the hierarchy of values.

As the title of the second section suggests, "Gendered Resentment" deals with the representation of this emotion both as a way of expressing female opposition to male authority, as well as the male response when the patriarchal model encountered historical contestation. On the one hand, Lina Minou's contribution seeks to demonstrate how resentment underwent a change within an eighteenth-century British context by means of conducting an investigation into its embodiment within the female protagonists of the sentimental literary tradition. Whilst in seventeenth-century English literature, resentment appears to be associated with the experience of having a true feeling, in eighteenth-century literature it can be associated to a more empathic view, tied to injury. Drawing on the ethical discourse on anger of that time, Minou deduced that current expressions associated with resentment such as "to take ill" or "stifling one's resentment" involved intricate considerations about women's topics such as decorum, virtue, honour or social status.

On the other hand, Susanna Ferlito proposes the examination of the question of gendered resentment in "Responding to Injury—on the Shadow Economy of Female Resentment" as expressed in the writings of one of Italy's most devoted Risorgimento patriots: Cristina di Belgiojoso (1807–1871). This case of female theorising and aesthetic channelling of resentment addresses the question of how nineteenth-century women strove to be heard in their expression of strong feelings of social and sexual injustice without being dismissed as overly emotional. Finally, Elise Dermineur's contribution deals with the understanding of what she calls "gender resentment," a social mechanism, which she identifies in eighteenth-century rural France, which was a result of men's feeling of inferiority towards women. In this case, resentment mirrored the increasing economic power of women in rural areas, such as those located

in the South of Alsace. As these women became gradually more involved in economic activities, a reaction toward this breach in the patriarchal system followed, which is reconstructed by means of a detailed analysis of local judicial records that inform the reader about the prevailing emotions ruling in these rural communities from 1680 to 1789.

The third section of the book, which we have entitled “Look Back in Anger,” inspired by John Osborne’s play, addresses the issue of resentment as a particular form of hostility directed at the person identified as the cause of one’s frustration in the context of interpersonal relationships, which includes those created in a medical as much as in a political context. Pilar León Sanz’s essay explores the pathological dimension of resentment in the so-called school of psychosomatic medicine, as it was developed in the United States between 1930 and 1960. From this clinical perspective, resentment appeared as a central emotional aspect together with deception and seduction in the therapeutic relation established between physician and patient. It was also seen as one of the features defining psychosomatic diseases.

As Juan Manuel Zaragoza-Bernal argues in the following chapter, resentment frequently arose in intimate relationships and, particularly, when one of the members of a couple suffers from a chronic disease and the other becomes a caregiver. Drawing on the case of Arthur Conan Doyle’s biography, Zaragoza-Bernal demonstrates to what extent resentment shapes not only the experience of disease, but furthermore the creation of the social identity of both the caregiver and the sick. This section, based around stories of resentment, is completed with Joseph Maslen’s contribution in which he proposes parallels between the history of emotions and the political biography of Margaret Thatcher, Conservative Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990. Thus, he approaches Thatcher’s biography considering that she was a victim of shaming practices earlier in her career, and how those experiences were related to resentment between social classes. Maslen concludes by pointing out how the dynamics of resentment describe perfectly not only Thatcher’s life and her relationship with British political culture, but moreover the emotional politics of class in contemporary British history.

The fourth section “Coming into Conflict: Resentment, Wars and Revolutions” brings together a series of exciting contributions focused on analysing how this affective experience has worked as a cohesive element unifying the masses against a common enemy in the history of modern warfare. Following this approach, Manuel Lucena’s essay explores some of the ways in which this emotion was a slogan that was vindicated in the

age of Atlantic revolutions, from the independence of the United States in 1776 to the French Revolution in 1789, the Haitian Revolution and the foundation of the first black republic of the world in 1804, and the independence of Portuguese and Spanish America in 1824. Lucena explains that resentment was used by the Creole elites to justify their rebellion against the kings and the monarchies and, furthermore, how it also served mixed races, free blacks, slaves and poor whites to convey their political aspirations for social changes.

Taking the relationship between war and emotions as starting point, Javier Ordóñez attempts to analyse the role played by resentment in modern warfare in his study. With this aim in mind, he suggests interpreting the emotional background of WWI through analogy to the production of synthetic components by the modern chemical industry, an hypothesis that led him to understanding the creation of a modern type of hatred in relation to the scientific concept of *Ersatz*. Ordóñez views the emotional chemistry produced during World War I as being intended as a way of unifying the different societies in conflict. By replacing natural emotions for “synthetic” ones, the continuity of the conflict could be ensured. Finally, in her essay, Beatriz Pichel examines other aspects of the Great War from the point of view of visual culture studies—how resentment became a powerful tool for constructing national propaganda in France. As Pichel explains, resentment was portrayed in the French press as the feeling that justified the fight against the German population, achieved through the production of a particular type of photograph that portrayed German prisoners, as well as crimes such as the destruction of churches.

The last section, “Resentment and Collective Identities,” stresses how resentment has been a powerful force in the creation of social and national identities, as in the case of the twentieth-century working class, or in the definition of international political relationships such as those maintained between Lebanon and Syria. Firstly, Stefano Tomelleri proposes approaching the question of resentment by discussing classical and contemporary views in sociological theory to set out his own interpretation of this emotion according to the main cultural transformations of modernity. For Tomelleri, resentment should be conceived as a relational form, crystallised in concrete historical processes such as the crisis of the hierarchy, the individualization of social manoeuvring and the liberalisation of desire.

In the following chapter, María Garrido emphasises the relevance of emotions such as resentment, shame and indignation in contemporary sociological and political research, stressing that they are not solely processes controlled by rational decisions. From the point of view of the theories of recognition, Garrido seeks to comprehend the emotional

experience of the twentieth-century working class as a way of restoring the dignity of those who suffer by means of transforming their individual experiences into a collective reality. In the final essay of this volume, Elisabeth Meur looks at emotions as being at the heart of world politics. The imbalanced structure of the international system can generate anger, feelings of unfairness, frustration, envy and also resentment. By relying on emotion regulation theory and the concept of coping, Meur examines the Lebanese-Syrian relationship as a case study, which reveals how resentment can be understood as a mechanism that prevents violent conflicts in the context of international politics.

The majority of the contributions included in this volume were originally presented at the International Workshop “On Resentment,” which took place at the *Louis Jeantet Auditorium* (Geneva), October 26–28, 2011 thanks to the financial support of the Swiss National Foundation. The celebration of this workshop organised by the Institute of Philosophy of The Spanish Scientific Council (Madrid) in partnership with the Institute for the History of Medicine and Health based at the University of Geneva, provided us the opportunity of discussing our initial hypothesis on the history of resentment, as well as our ideas about the future of the history of emotions with other scholars from around the world. Since the celebration of this workshop, we are delighted to see a growing fascination towards the elucidation of this complex emotional experience and its multiple psychological, cultural and social expressions as shown by the celebration of the Symposium “Resentment’s Conflicts,” organised by the Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the recent publication coordinated by Antoine Grandjean and Florent Guénard at the University of Nantes.<sup>27</sup>

The present book is the fruit of our particular way of understanding the History of Emotions not only as an intellectual but also a moral and political exercise, which is moved by the firm belief that to elucidate the changes perceived in the representation of resentment means to also shed light on embodied cultural transformations, which are crucial to understanding our contemporary world. Even though the present book attempts to write the history of resentment as a modern phenomenon, further work is needed to carry out a comparative study between this emotion and other affective experiences, such as Aristotelian anger or the concept of *nemesis*.<sup>28</sup> We hope that this book can contribute to what

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<sup>27</sup> Antoine Grandjean, Florent Guénard, *Le ressentiment, passion sociale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Susanna Braund, Glenn W. Most, *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Nietzsche conceived as a history of the human passions, oriented towards showing how our past philosophical treatises, judicial records, artistic creations and moral systems are only cultural expressions of our most intimate affects.

Dolores Martín Moruno  
Geneva, December 17, 2012.

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**PART I:**

**HOW TO WRITE THE HISTORY  
OF RESENTMENT**



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE SHADOWS OF OURSELVES: RESENTMENT, MONOMANIA AND MODERNITY

JAVIER MOSCOSO

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Resentment is not an easy word. Neither is it an easy reality. On the contrary, its meaning is fuzzy and its referent unclear. In the most important repository of the emotions of antiquity, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, there is no mention of any feeling or affection that, one way or another, would resemble what we mean by this term today.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, our contemporary understanding of the word very often refers to nothing more than residual and lasting hatred. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as "a sense of grievance; an indignant sense of injury or insult received or perceived, a feeling of ill will, bitterness or anger against a person or a thing." The *Dictionary of the Spanish Academy* (DRAE) does not even consider within its semantic field any moral or affective sense.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been undertaken under the research project "Historical Epistemology: History of Emotions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," funded by the Spanish MICINN FFI2010-20876.

<sup>2</sup> David Konstan, "Ressentiment ancien et ressentiment moderne," in *Le ressentiment*, ed. Pierre Ansart (Brussels: Bruylant, 2002) 259–76. On the historicity of emotions, see also David J. Konstan: "Y-a-t'il une histoire des émotions?" *ASDIWAL: Revue Genevois d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire des Religions* 1 (2006): 23–35; revised and expanded version under the title "Haben Gefühle eine Geschichte?" (trans. Regina Hörschele), in *Pathos Affekt Emotion. Transformationen der Antike*, eds. Martin Harbsmeier, Naomi Kubota & Sebastian Möckel (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2009), 27–46; revised French version in *Mythes, rites et émotions*, ed. Philippe Borgeaud (Geneva: Librairie Droz 2009), 15–28.

On the contrary, it equates its signification with a pain or ailment that does not simply go away.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I do not mean to enquire into the semantic variations of this word, but to face and comment on the changing reality of this moral and political passion. In the next few pages, I will attempt to draw some connections between the cultural history of emotions and the political history of psychiatry. Resentment, on the one hand, and monomania, on the other, will serve to explore the cultural forms of modern subjectivity, the conditions that make both the salience of a particular mental disorder and the intellectual reflection on a highly sophisticated social passion possible. I will argue that resentment and monomania came about in the same cultural and political space and that, in a sense that should become clear later, neither could have developed without the presence of the other. I will focus on a famous artist and an even more famous painting to illustrate this. However, before I get into the details, a few methodological clarifications are in order. In the first place, it might be wise to mention that my approach does not share the tenants and assumptions of the seminal work of Marc Ferro.<sup>4</sup> Unlike this French historian, who defended resentment as a key and constant element in the revolutionary processes of any type and any period, from Antiquity to contemporary societies, I consider resentment as a passion of modernity, whose first systematic treatment was provided by Adam Smith in the mid-eighteenth century, and whose birth depended on highly embedded social roots. Of course, we may find here and there emotional reactions that, one way or another, resemble the basic features of modern resentment. Historians are fully aware of these of continuities or discontinuities within the cultural history of emotions.<sup>5</sup> Resentment, however, is not a universal emotion, but a highly intellectual passion linked to the denial of fortune as a form of retribution, to the promise of an equalitarian and meritocratic society and to the democratization of mental illnesses.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the history of monomania, I do share some assumptions with the recent and not so recent readings in the social and cultural history of mental disorders. The works of Jean Goldstein, Marcel Gauchet and

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<sup>3</sup> The Spanish *Diccionario de Autoridades*, in volumen III, published in 1737, defines “Resentimiento” as “la muestra o seña de sentirse o quebrantarse alguna cosa.”

<sup>4</sup> Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Malden: Polity Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History. Lost and Found* (Central European University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> On this last point, see Lennard J. Davis, *Obsession* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Gladys Swain have confronted some of the connections between mental illness, subjectivity and modernity.<sup>7</sup> More recently, Laure Murat, in the *L'homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon*, has also drawn interesting suggestions regarding the political history of monomania before and after the events of the French Revolution.<sup>8</sup> My approach, however, also differs from theirs in that my reading is primarily concerned with the relation between distorted experiences and inflated passions. I am not so much interested here in the layers of the modern identity, as Goldstein was, or in the romantic bio-politics of the self, as Gauchet and Swain proposed, following Foucault. I intend to shed some light on the historicity of human experiences and, in particular, on the salience of moral and political resentment. This “historical epistemology of experience,” as I would like to call it, following the work of Lorraine Daston, Ian Hacking or Arnold Davidson, will lead me to suggest, in the case of resentment, a few cognitive and cultural conditions that made its formulation and inclusion within a theoretical framework possible.<sup>9</sup>

I would argue that the formation of the resentful consciousness rested on two different social and epistemic virtues. First of all, resentment took place within the dramatic setting of modern theatricality. It demanded not just the presence of victims and offenders, but also the attentive eye of an “emancipated spectator,” a figuration very similar to what the philosopher Adam Smith referred to as simply “the spectator,” the “bystander” or the “witness.”<sup>10</sup> These witnesses shared with the victims their thirst for vengeance and their desire for justice. Without being the most affected persons, they

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<sup>7</sup> Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. Goldstein, *The Post-revolutionary Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Marcel Gauchet & Gladys Swain, *Madness and Democracy. The Modern Psychiatric Universe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Laure Murat, *L'Homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon. Pour une histoire politique de la folie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Lorraine Daston, *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, Chicago y Londres (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality. Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). For a more recent approach, see Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> All references to Adam Smith are taken from his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. Raphael y A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982). On Smith, see Fonna Forman-Barzilai: “Sympathy in Space(s). Adam Smith on Proximity,” *Political Theory* 33 (2005): 189–217, 192. For a more contemporary account, see Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011).

assumed as their own the circumstances and disgrace of others; they sympathized with the bitterness of others. This is the reason why resentment was not truly a sentiment, but a re-sentiment, made from the remains, emotions, shadows or shades of others.

In the second place, resentment came about as a consequence of the new correlation in the distribution of merit; a quality fully shared with the outburst of monomania, and in particular with the monomania of ambition. Far from being a low passion of the heart it was regarded as a high perception of the mind and, in particular, of the imagination. Its emotional qualities came about as the cultural expression of social inequality and implied the political denial of fortune to explain and justify social differences. The presence of this passion called into question the merits of those who enjoyed a privileged situation. Their position was very often regarded as a consequence of usurpation or corruption. To resentful eyes, the status and the honours of many others were not the result of their own deeds, but the corollary of a succession of social manoeuvres that turned them into vulgar usurpers.

The economy of modern resentment is built on a *tableau vivant* which, denying the upheavals of the medieval and early modern fortune, takes the stand to show neither compassion nor hatred but a third inter-subjective value: denunciation. This is one of the meanings that, in fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* confers to the word: “an act of feeling or perceiving something,” very close to the similar word “discernment,” in the sense of appreciation or understanding of something. Adam Smith called this kind of discernment “imaginary resentment.” For the Scottish philosopher, as for many other defenders of empathetic agreements, our feelings of compassion, impotence, indignation, shame or lewdness always were, first of all, generated from vicarious emotions. When seeing the criminal in the dock, he argued, we “place ourselves in his situation, conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter, as it were, into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him.”<sup>11</sup> This quality of the imagination was in use, of course, during the punitive procedures of the Ancien Régime, and therefore during its rituals of retribution, but it equally applied to the contemplation of the misfortunes and tragedies of other victims, not necessarily guilty; victims whose lives had been lost, for example, as a consequence of an event that, like a shipwreck, could no longer be regarded as a natural disaster, but as the result of mischievous and malignant actions.

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<sup>11</sup> Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 9. See also Norman S. Fiering: “Irresistible compassion: An aspect of eighteenth century sympathy and humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 200–202.