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The Globalisation of Resentment: Failure, Denial, and Violence in World Politics

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Abstract

Through the lenses of contemporary terrorism, this article charts the rise of global resentment against the background of the multiplication and denial of failure. The article examines resentment and *ressentiment* as emotional responses to different kinds of failure: failure of justice and failure of recognition, respectively. It then investigates their place in the affective and moral economy of the global age, teasing out the key distinctions between the two emotions and assessing the strengths of the claim concerning an ever expanding diffusion of *ressentiment* in late modern times. Through inroads into classical and contemporary political theory, the article seeks to rescue resentment from the relative hegemony of *ressentiment*. The article closes with a reading of the Paris terror attacks of 7 January 2015 and 13 November 2015, that seeks to disentangle the different forms of resentment mobilised in these acts. By raising the issue of the moral value of resentment, the article ultimately seeks to address the question of how to cope with failure while holding on to emancipatory, counter-hegemonic, and self-affirming political practices.

Keywords

terrorism, resentment, emotions

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> Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;
> Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
> Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds:
> And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,
> Stir up their servants to an act of rage,
> And after seem to chide 'em. This shall make
> Our purpose necessary and not envious:
> Which so appearing to the common eyes,
> We shall be call'd purgers, not murderers.
>
> – William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act II, Scene I

It is commonplace for pop psychology today to invite their readers to embrace, rather than resist, failure. Invoking a supposedly timeless wisdom that stretches from Confucius to Sylvester Stallone, self-help magazines such as *Psychology Today* urge readers to cease looking at failure as one looks at an unappealing birthday present, and to start welcoming failure as a gift, disappointment as a growth opportunity, and defeat as a path leading to complete mastery of the resilient self.[1] A good dose of denial, disavowal, and effacement is normally involved in a process often presented as a therapeutic 'quick fix'. While the unresolved feelings or incongruent actions that may have precipitated failure are mostly left unscrutinised, the concrete relationships in which such outcomes have emerged are glossed over, just as the wider social, cultural and political context becomes conveniently elided. In a therapeutic fantasy turned nightmare, the focus turns obsessively to the self and its expected ability to adapt and reconfigure towards personal success, achievement, and happiness.[2] Rather than a moment of appearance and truth, generative of new possibilities and configurations, failure is sidestepped, managed, and superseded. Its denial renders it barren.

Contemporary global politics is awash with failure. The failure of a liberal post-Cold War 'New World Order', the failure of financial and monetary systems, the failure of climate change governance, the failure of the Global War on Terror, the failure of the Arab Spring, the failure of democratisation processes, the failure of EU migration policies – the list goes on. On the one hand, political processes have been rendered more complex, disaggregated, unpredictable, prone to accidents, and to the multiplication of risk – including the risk of failure – by globalisation.[3] On the other hand, the

1. See *Psychology Today*, 'The Gift of Failure'. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/collections/201408/the-gift-failure. Last accessed 20 December 2015.
2. For critical commentaries on positive psychology, see Tim Dartington, 'The Therapeutic Fantasy: Self-love and Quick Wins', in *Politics and the Emotions*, eds. Paul Hoggett and Sam Thompson (London: Continuum, 2012); Sam Binkley, 'Happiness, Positive Psychology and the Program of Neoliberal Governmentality', *Subjectivity* 4, no. 4 (2011): 371–94; Paul Verhaeghe, *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-based Society* (London: Scribe, 2014); and Nicole Aschoff, *The New Prophets of Capital* (London: Verso, 2014).
3. James Der Derian, 'Global Events, National Security, and Virtual Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 669–90; Patricia Owens, 'Accidents Don't Just Happen: The Liberal Politics of High-Technology 'Humanitarian' War, *Millennium:*

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inherent vulnerability of ever more complex political processes is often amplified tactically and capitalised upon by entrepreneurs of populism and managers of unease, eager to exploit failure by leveraging a politics of fear.[4]

Failure, after all, can trigger toxic emotions. Its occurrence breeds a host of reactive 'red' emotions such as shame, humiliation, anger, and resentment, that are ordinarily considered not only corrosive of human relationships, but detrimental, on a collective and political scale, to civic compassion and social order.[5] A tradition in modern Western political thought – from Grotius to Nortbert Elias – has long attached a stigma to such emotions, considering them primarily as destructive forces to be contained by reason or transcended through charity.[6] But in praising compassion over anger and tolerance over rage, the same 'civilising' tradition has also inadvertently rendered the recognition of failure more difficult, not least because of the emotions that come attached to it – disavowing failure when possible, denying it when it happens.

Failures, particularly of justice, recognition, and status, however, engender emotions that are at the heart of important political dynamics – from protests to social movements, from political violence to revolutions. In the context of the recent 'affective turn' in social and political theory, and of rising popular discontent and protests across much of the globe, an acknowledgement has gradually formed according to which, rather than being enemies of political causes, negative emotions play a fundamental role in politics.[7] Thus, for instance, anger has been recently rediscovered as 'the essential political emotion'.[8] Drawing on the classical Aristotelian view of anger as useful and morally

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Journal of International Studies 32, no. 2 (2003): 595; Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). See also fn 21 of this article.

4. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); Chantal Mouffe, 'The "End of Politics" and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005) and Didier Bigo, 'Globalized (In)Security: The Field and the Ban-Opticon', in *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty. Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11*, eds. Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 10–48.
5. See for instance, Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 315.
6. See Andrew Linklater, 'Anger and World Politics: How Collective Emotions Shift over Time', *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (2014): 574–78 and Andrew Linklater, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 154–231.
7. In distinguishing emotions, which entail awareness and 'an element of information processing', both from mere feelings, which are more automatic and physiological, and from affect, which is beyond representation, I follow the argument developed in Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, 'Theorizing Emotions in World Politics', *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (2014): 500–3. On the affective turn, see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); William Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). For a critique, see Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 434–72.
8. Peter Layman, 'The Politics of Anger', *Socialist Review* 11 (1981): 55–74.

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justifiable affect, a number of scholars have thus urged to reinstate its moral and political value.[9]

Closely related to anger, akin to indignation and yet also never far from rage, resentment has also been defined as 'a moral feeling' that derives from the 'sense of being unfairly treated'.[10] In fact, in *A Theory of Justice* John Rawls considers resentment as both different from and more important than anger, as a political and moral emotion. While anger can arise independently of situations of injustice, resentment always invokes a concept of right and the existence of a moral grievance. While we may feel indignation towards the wrongs we perceive to have been done to others, resentment concerns wrongs that we perceive as our own because they are directed at us.[11] However, although recognising the value of resentment, Rawls is also quick to point out that this emotion can acquire 'perverse and destructive forms'; envy can easily masquerade as resentment just as resentment can easily slip into rancour and bitterness[12] – and turn into *ressentiment*.

Resentment has long been interpreted as central to a particular mode of political action, namely, terrorism. Annette Baier once noted that terrorism has the 'power to make resentment felt'.[13] Similarly, Jon Elster more recently claimed that permanent feelings of resentment are 'the most relevant feature of populations' from which terrorists, in particular suicide bombers, are drawn.[14] Finally, Slavoj Žižek has repeatedly

9. See for instance, Mary Holmes, The Importance of Being Angry: Anger in Political Life', *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 2 (2004): 123–32; Paul Muldoon, 'The Moral Legitimacy of Anger', *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (2008): 299–314; and Mary Whitebrook, 'Love and Anger as Political Emotions', in *The Politics of Compassion*, eds. Michael Ure and Mervyn Frost (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).
10. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 540.
11. Ibid., 488 and 484, respectively. Hannah Arendt's concept of 'moral outrage' as developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951) comes close to this idea of resentment. A detailed comparison, however, is beyond the scope of this article.
12. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 489 and 540.
13. Annette Baier, 'Violent Demonstrations', in *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, eds. Raymond Gillespie Frey and Christopher W. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.
14. Jon Elster, 'Motivations and Beliefs in Suicide Missions', in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, ed. Diego Gambetta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 245. This naturally raises the larger epistemological question of whether one can explain action out of emotion. For a strong defence of this possibility that invokes a narrative approach against the rationalist tradition of either negating emotions or adding them on as ad-hoc 'variables', see Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. 37–49. The question of how to link emotions to terrorism is further complicated by the fact that primary data about the emotional states of clandestine actors is obviously hard to trace, or, sometimes, it is entirely unavailable due to the attacker's own death. Interestingly, however, the internet and social media have potentially made this issue less crippling, by making a 'digital ethnography' of terrorism and its emotions possible. See Thomas Hegghammer, 'Why Terrorists Weep: The Socio-Cultural Practices of Jihadi Militants', *The Paul Wilkinson Memorial Lecture*, University of St. Andrews, 16 April 2015 and Ursula Lindsey, 'The Ties That Bind', *The Chronicle Review*, 30 November 2015. Available at: http://chronicle.com/article/The-Ties-That-Bind-Jihadists/234161. Last accessed 3 April 2016.

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linked the violence of terrorism post-9/11 to the subjective and collective experience of resentment.[15] Understood as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through the threat or use of violence in the pursuit of political change, terrorism appears as a quintessentially affective political phenomenon, trading in emotions at both ends – in its motivations (resentment) and its effects (fear).[16]

The political and moral value of resentment is yet to be established uncontroversially, partly due to the political practices it inspires, partly due to the Janus-faced nature of this emotion. Its ambiguity is well encapsulated in the slight literal variation which separates the two terms commonly used to refer to it – resentment and *ressentiment*. Resentment has thus been given both a virtuous face, when it indicates a legitimate response to a perceived injustice; and vicious features, when it is engorged with metaphysical envy and narcissistic rage. Interestingly, recent political and International Relations (IR) theory has tended to subsume or fold the former into the latter, discussing resentment predominantly, if not uniquely, as *ressentiment*.[17]

In this article I argue that there is value in redeeming the distinction between resentment and *ressentiment*, and in rescuing, as much as possible, the former from the relative hegemony of the latter. To do so, I investigate the way in which failures – specifically, failures of justice, recognition, and status, and the denial of such failures – provide the conditions of possibility for a globalisation of resentment and for the contemporary wave of terrorist violence. The first part of the article reflects in general terms on failure in IR. In particular, it investigates the claim made by a number of scholars, from Ulrich Beck to Wendy Brown, according to which failure today is increasingly experienced at the level of the individual. In considering how individuals cope with failure, the article then turns its attention to individual emotions as being microfoundations of politics, and specifically, contemporary terrorism. By drawing on classical and contemporary political theory, the second part of the article examines the place of resentment in the affective and moral economy of the global age. The article here teases out some of the key distinctions between resentment and *ressentiment* as emotions that respond to two different kinds of failures: failures of justice, on the one hand, and failures of recognition or status, on the other. The third part of the article gestures at their contemporary configurations.

To illustrate the epistemic, normative, and political relevance of my argument, the fourth part of the article examines the case of the Paris terror attacks of 7 January 2015

15. Slavoj Žižek, *On Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 85–104.
16. The definition is from Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 40. Although terrorism studies have long emphasised the importance of psychological factors, research on emotions is still surprisingly scant. For a similar acknowledgement and an attempt to move things forward, see David Wright-Neville and Debra Smith, 'Political Rage: Terrorism and the Politics of Emotion', *Global Change, Peace & Security* 21, no. 1 (2009): 85–98; and Priya Dixit and Jacob L. Stump, *Critical Methods in Terrorism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2016), 196.
17. As illustrated in political theory, for instance, by the work of William Connolly and Wendy Brown (discussed below) and, in IR, by Mustapha Kemal Pasha, 'Western Nihilism and Dialogue: Prelude to an Uncanny Encounter in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 683–99.

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and 13 November 2015. Discerning whether resentment or *ressentiment* was at the heart of the attacks – among the worst in recent European history – is crucial for a number of reasons. Attributing the attacks to resentment or *ressentiment* yields different 'intelligence' about the situation in which they occurred, enabling different epistemic insights.[18] This also has important implications for our moral evaluations of the events. Finally, depending on whether we recognise the attacks as resentment or *ressentiment*, different responses will be required, appropriate, and justified. Ultimately, by raising the issue of the moral value of resentment and *ressentiment*, the article seeks to address the question of how to cope with failure in global politics: whether through emancipatory or non-emancipatory projects, whether through self-affirming or self-sabotaging political practices.

Coping with Failure: Globalisation, Immanence and Violent Individuation

If progress and emancipation arguably formed the double totem of Western modernity, failure constituted the 'limit-situation' which, to paraphrase Karl Jaspers, set modernity 'whirling' and announced the coming of its crisis.[19] Thinkers of late modernity such as Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, and Bruno Latour, have recently concerned themselves with theorising politics and society as increasingly complex systems that can – and often do – fail.[20] The progressive inclusion, immanentisation, and ontologisation of failure has thus drawn particular attention to the role of accidents, risks, contingencies, and complexity in governing global societies – a trend which IR has quickly latched on to and which sits at the heart of its speculative, precautionary, and new materialist turn.[21] More recently, resilience has emerged as the paradigm most closely invested in considering failure as a 'fact of life' which must be welcomed, managed, and successfully overcome.

As critical IR scholarship has amply demonstrated, however, risk and resilience seem to function today as the preeminent rationalities of neo-liberal governance. 'Neoliberal citizenship', Mark Neocleus claims, 'is nothing if not a training in resilience'.[22] The rationality of resilience and the move towards an ontologisation of risk, thus descends from the injunction to cope with 'what is' and its failures – whatever these may be – without asking necessarily

18. Here I apply Martha Nussbaum's insights about the 'intelligence of emotions' as developed in her *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
19. Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 2014 [1933]).
20. See Zygmut Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); and Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993).
21. For good examples, see Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility*; Luis Lobo-Guerrero, *Insuring Security: Biopolitics, Security and Risk* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); and Claudia Aradau, 'Security That Matters: Critical Infrastructure and Objects of Protection', *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 5 (2010): 491–514.
22. Mark Neocleus, '"Don't Be Scared, Be Prepared": Trauma-Anxiety-Resilience', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 37, no. 3: 192.

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why these may be so. Questions concerning causes, consequences, and responsibility are cast away as modernist and dualist relics, swallowed up by an ever-encompassing flat and monist ontology that demands 'its due'.[23] Failures are less and less subjected to causal and moral analysis, while they are more and more considered as horizontal 'entanglements' to be sidestepped and managed, rather than solved in any meaningful way.[24]

The injunction to incessantly cope with and adapt to failure crucially applies not only to systems, societies, and polities. As Michel Foucault presciently argued, this injunction trickles all the way down, and ends up applying first and foremost to individuals.[25] Beck claimed specifically that the *tragic* individualisation of late modernity flows directly from failure: 'the individual must cope with the uncertainty of the global world by him- or herself. Here individualization is a default outcome of a *failure* of expert systems to manage risks. […] Sustaining an individual self of integrity in world risk society is indeed a tragic affair'.[26] Similarly, Bauman vividly portrayed the individual condition as one of extreme vulnerability to systemic failures, and yet bearing full responsibility for their costs. 'The responsibility for resolving the quandaries generated by vexingly volatile and constantly changing circumstances is shifted onto the shoulders of individuals'. And again, 'it is the individual's lot and duty to pay [the] price, because […] no authoritatively endorsed recipes […] could be blamed in the case of failure'.[27] This, however, creates the conditions for progressively alienated, frustrated, and especially resentful, individuals. As Wendy Brown has argued, individuals are at once saturated with human power and yet are increasingly alienated from their capacity to truly act politically. 'Starkly accountable, yet dramatically impotent', the individual 'quite literally seethes with *ressentiment*'.[28] Thus, the way in which failures are rendered immanent, ontological, and a matter of individual responsibility – rather than of political and normative concern – seems to generate particular emotional results, notably the rise of resentment and/as *ressentiment*.

23. Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature* (unpublished draft, 2013), 126 and Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?', *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004), 225–48.
24. This critique takes inspiration from Kate Soper, 'Realism, Humanism, and the Politics of Nature', *Theoria* 48, no. 98 (2001), 55–71.
25. See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978–79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Nicholas Kiersey, 'Everyday Neoliberalism and the Subjectivity of Crisis: Post-Political Control in an Era of Financial Turmoil', *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies* 1, no. 4 (2011): 23–44.
26. See Ulrich Beck, 'Living in the World Risk Society', *Economy and Society* 35, no. 3 (2006): 336. See also, Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).
27. Zygmut Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 3–4.
28. Wendy Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993): 402. See further on for a fuller investigation of Brown's arguments on individualisation and *ressentiment*. For an insightful analysis of Brown's theses, see Simon Glezos, 'Brown's Paradox: Speed, *Ressentiment* and Global Politics', *Journal of International Political Theory* 10, no. 2 (2014): 148–68.

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The 'affective turn' in social and political theory has picked up on this need to investigate the affective sensibilities of our age, drawing due attention to the role of individual and collective emotions as microfoundations of politics.[29] However, the IR literature has especially exhibited a residual preference for emphasising the collective, or 'macro' level, over the individual 'micro' level. The rationale is clearly offered by the editors of a recent *Forum on Emotions and World Politics*: 'unless one shows that emotions matter beyond a purely individual and private level, there is no ground to examine their relevance for global politics'.[30] This, however, can be challenged on two accounts. To start with, taking Bauman and Beck's arguments seriously means thinking about the level of the individual as increasingly central to the global politics of late modern times. It is at this level that risks, contingencies, and failures are experienced and processed.[31]

Second, however, there is another sense in which individual emotions, especially varieties of resentment, matter; a further sense in which the individualisation of global politics may be defined as truly tragic. The failure, or loss, of states' monopoly on legitimate violence is cascading into forms of contemporary violence that organise and reflect the individualised nature of global politics. As the recent wave of terrorist attacks testifies – from Anders Brevik's 2011 attacks in Norway, to more controversially, the recent San Bernardino's shootings – self-radicalisation is no longer exceptional, but is increasingly frequent and possible.[32] The terrorist movements of today, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, rely on a diasporic and horizontal pool of volunteers who are often encouraged to act independently, sometimes under only the most tenuous direction.[33] As noted by a number of scholars, if there is a thread common to the latest wave of terrorist attacks, it is arguably the way in which personal resentments resonate with,

29. See fn 7 above and also James Jasper, 'Emotions and the Microfoundations of Politics: Rethinking Ends and Means', in *Emotion, Politics and Society*, eds. Simon Clarke, Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson (New York: Palgrave, 2006).
30. Bleiker and Hutchinson, 'Theorizing Emotions in World Politics', 499.
31. The revival of this perspective in IR is illustrated by Daniel Jacobi and Annette Freyberg-Inan, *Human Beings in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
32. The role of social media in this process can hardly be overestimated. See Cristina Archetti, *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach* (New York: Palgrave, 2012). On San Bernardino, see the recent reportage by William Finnegan, 'Last Days', *The New Yorker*, 22 February 2016.
33. 'Research suggests [that] pressure from security services forces a tactical adaptation and groups – including Daesh […] – call on those who share their ideology to act alone without direction or support'; in 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Literature Review', Raffaello Pantucci, Clare Ellis and Lorien Chaplais (London: Rusi Publications, 2015), 1. For the larger debate, see Barak Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of al-Qaeda and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Karin Knorr Cetina, 'Complex Global Microstructures: The New Terrorist Societies' in *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2005): 213–34.

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and are embedded in, larger political narratives and grievances which are today global in scope.[34]

Personal resentments can actualise, resonate, and reverberate with collective ones. Thus, resentment towards the failure of multiculturalism, integration, and assimilation has regularly been combined with personal resentments in the justification of the terror of recent attacks.[35] Resentment linked to the perceived humiliation of Arabs and Muslims at the hands of Westerners, especially the US, since 9/11, provides another important dimension.[36] As Jessica Stern has recently noted concerning ISIS, the 'narrative of victory most appeals to those who feel they have lost something'.[37] In identifying themselves as 'the brothers who have refused to live a life of humiliation',[38] ISIS frames the movement's grievances in terms of an aspirational parable that turns failure into success; loss into the recovery of dignity. Finally, the contemporary wave of terrorist attacks mobilises the much deeper and trans-historical reservoir of resentment felt towards colonialisation and imperial histories. This becomes clear if one considers that ISIS presented the breaking of the borders created by the 1916 Sykes-Picot treaty between Syria and Iraq as one of their greatest victories, and indeed as the symbolic moment of establishment of the caliphate.[39] Additionally, the fact that at least three of the Paris attackers were of Algerian descent has been noted as being arguably significant.[40]

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34. Despite noticeable strategic, operational, and generational differences, al-Qaeda and ISIS are similar in the way their narratives weave the personal and social plane together. See Ramon Spaaij, *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention* (New York: Springer, 2012) and Raffaello Pantucci, 'A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists' (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2011).
35. For instance, in the case of Mohammed Merah, the so-called 'Toulouse bomber', who spoke to *France 24* about his resentment towards the agents of the French army that had rejected his application a few months before the attack, and against the new French legislation banning women from wearing the full Islamic veil. See *France 24*, '"Gunman" calls *France 24* hours before pre-dawn siege', 22 March 2012 and *The Guardian*, 'Mohamed Merah: Polite Neighbour Who Was Turned Down by French Army', 21 March 2012.
36. Khaled Fattah and K.M. Fierke, 'A Clash of Emotions: The Politics of Humiliation and Political Violence in the Middle East', *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 1 (2009): 67–93; Paul Saurette, 'You Dissin Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics', *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006): 495–522; and E.G. Lindner, 'Humiliation as the Source of Terrorism: A New Paradigm', *Peace Research* 33, no. 2 (2001): 59–68.
37. Jessica Stern, 'What Does ISIS Really Want Now?', *Lawfare*, 28 November 2015. Available at: https://www.lawfareblog.com/what-does-isis-really-want-now. Last accessed 20 December 2015.
38. A.M. Al-'Adnani, 'This is the Promise of Allah', 29 June 2014. Available at: https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2014/06/. Last accessed 3 April 2016.
39. Pieter Van Ostaeyen, 'The Islamic State Restores the Caliphate', 29 June 2014. Available at: https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2014/06/. Last accessed 3 April 2016.
40. See for instance, Robert Fisk, 'France's Unresolved Algerian War Sheds Light on the Paris Attack', *Independent*, 16 November 2015. Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/france-s-unresolved-algerian-war-sheds-light-on-the-paris-attack-a6736901.html.

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While the main theoretical preoccupation of today seems to be how to sidestep, handle, and overcome the effects of failure through resilience and risk management, the move to make failure immanent and ontological only succeeds in pushing failure (and its real effects) down to the level of the individual. The micropolitics of affect that presides over the ways in which failure is processed, blame and responsibility are attributed, shame and humiliations are handled, and resentments are articulated, thus becomes crucial. This is especially important at a time of increasing and violent individuation. Resentment is the emotional plane around which failures experienced at the individual and global level convergence. A journey into its nature and place in the contemporary condition is thus required.[41]

Resentment or *Ressentiment*? On the Moral and Political Status of a Global Emotion

Resentment has a long history and a bad name. It is one of those negative emotions which, according to historians and philologists, have driven the movement of human development. The history of resentment can be considered as parallel to that of progress, if not a counter-melody born from its very failures.[42] In this history, resentment has an

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Last accessed 3 April 2016. Also see Alec G. Hargreaves, 'French Muslims and the Middle East', *Contemporary French Civilization* 40, no. 2 (2015): 235–54.

41. Two important caveats are in order before proceeding further. A study into the origins and dimensions of resentment should be confused neither with a deterministic account of terrorism, nor with a justification of actions inspired by it. In terms of the former, scholarship has long accepted that terrorism is best understood in processual terms and as a contingency-ridden multi-causal phenomenon. See respectively, John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2005); Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Alex Schmid, 'Root Causes of Terrorism: Some Conceptual Notes, a Set of Indicators, and a Model', *Democracy and Security* 1 (2005): 127–36. Not all resentful individuals become terrorists, after all. However, while this means that terrorism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single cause or set of causes, this does not mean that resentment is causally unimportant. In terms of the latter, as a particularly heinous form of political violence, terrorism generates deep moral dilemmas – its legitimacy has been almost invariably denied, at least until recently (see further along, fn. 88). In so far as it violently calls into question pre-given political orders and reveals 'the presence of two worlds in one' (Jacque Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', *Theory and Event* 5, no. 3 (2009): 21), terrorism is often met with inevitable ambivalence.

42. Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) and Bernardino Fantini, Dolores Martín Moruno, and Javier Moscoso (eds). *On Resentment: Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013). On casually discovering the literary work that arguably first described *ressentiment*, namely Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, in February 1887, Friedrich Nietzsche compared the book to a melody: 'ein Stück Musik, sehr fremder, sehr undeutscher Musik; […] ein Geniestreich der Psychologie, eine Art Selbstverhöhnung des γνῶθι σαυτόν' ('a piece of music, very strange music, very un-German; a psychological stroke of genius, a cruel jibe of "know thyself"'). See C.A. Miller, 'Nietzsche's 'Discovery' of Dostoevsky', *Nietzsche Studien* 2, no. 1 (1973): 202–57 and Walter Kaufmann, 'Introduction', in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (London: Penguin, 1975).

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ambiguous place – similarly to violence, it is deemed to be both a creative and a destructive force, a functional or dysfunctional attitude.[43]

In its positive incarnation, resentment is the guardian of justice.[44] As a moral emotion, resentment is not only an appropriate individual response to failures of justice, but it is also an indispensable attitude to cultivate if an overall degree of fairness is to be maintained in society. The 18th century Presbyterian theologian, Joseph Butler, considered resentment as an indispensable social bond holding society together, a 'weapon' whose function is to 'to prevent and remedy […] injury, and the miseries arising from it'.[45] Considering this sentiment in the context of other moral virtues, such as charity and compassion, Butler concluded that resentment is needed precisely to allow injustices to be acknowledged and injuries to be punished, rather than merely forgiven or forgotten. In some circumstances, therefore, resentment is morally superior to charity. Although acknowledging its potentially beastly character, unsocial nature, and violent potential, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith painted a similarly positive picture of resentment. According to Smith, resentment functions as a necessary corrective to imbalances in justice, and as the reparative mechanism which restores society to a state of harmony and fairness.[46] Once restrained and tempered of any of its excesses, resentment becomes that 'noble and generous' feeling of indignation that inspires the sympathetic recognition of others, and transforms a community of strangers into a community of moral agents bound by the same *nomos*.[47]

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43. A growing body of literature across moral philosophy, anthropology, and political theory has reflected on terminological difference between resentment and *ressentiment*. See, most recently, Michael Ure, 'Resentment/Ressentiment', *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 599–613; Didier Fassin, 'On Resentment and *Ressentiment*: The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions', *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 3 (2013): 249–67; Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Amery and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, 'The Dramas of Resentment', *The Yale Review* 88, no. 3 (2000): 89–100. The terminological distinction between resentment and *ressentiment* is not always used unambiguously, partly due to the difficulties of translating *ressentiment* in English without collapsing this into 'straight' resentment. For a puzzling example of such confusion, see Fassin, 'On Resentment and *Ressentiment*', 260. For an example of a carefully considered choice and an argument for a 'third way', see Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, esp. 12–13, 101–3.
44. The positive role of negative emotions (such as resentment, anger, and rage) in justice is explored in Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 'Are Envy, Anger, and Resentment Moral Emotions?', *Philosophical Explorations* 5, no. 2 (2002): 148–54 and in two brilliant and so far unpublished works: respectively, Grace Hunt, 'Affirmative Reactions: In Defense of Resentment' (PhD diss., The New School, 2012); Rupert Brodersen, 'Rage, Rancour and Revenge: Existentialist Motives in International Relations' (PhD diss., The London School of Economics, 2014).
45. Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (Cambridge: Hilliard & Brown, 1827 [1726]), viii, quoted in Fassin, 'On Resentment and *Ressentiment*', 251–2.
46. Strikingly, it is in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that Smith uses for the first time the now well-known metaphor of the 'invisible hand', namely, the self-regulating mechanism responsible for restoring harmony in markets, or, as it happens, moral orders. In Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 215.
47. 'We admire that noble and generous resentment which governs its pursuit of the greatest injuries, not by the rage which they are apt to excite in the breast of the sufferer, but by the

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The contemporary political philosophy of scholars such as Jeffrie Murphy, Margaret Walker, and Robert Solomon follows on from these arguments, combining the insights from Adam Smith with a revived Aristotelian view of resentment and anger as morally justifiable and useful affects.[48] Robert Solomon goes as far as to assert that, as 'a passion of justice denied […], resentment lies at the heart of democracy'.[49] It is the emotional state which, more than any other sentiment, proves that we care about and are 'committed to certain moral standards, as regulative of social life'.[50] What is judged to be detrimental if not wholly questionable, in the view of these authors, is thus not the place of resentment within the moral order. Rather, it is the contemporary prejudice *against* negative emotions, and the overriding fixation for 'closure' that places societies at fault when it prevents them from acknowledging and remedying injustices. Therefore, it is the *absence* of resentment in the face of injustice that should be denounced as immoral. There is virtue in resentment, in other words. As Jean Améry stated, there is virtue in the moral 'vertigo' of resentment that disrupts the moral order and prevents hasty attempts at reconciliation.[51] It is only because of resentment that injustices become 'a moral reality' and it is only through resentment that an entire community, including perpetrators of injustice, are 'swept into the truth'.[52]

Amongst contemporary political philosophers, however, a much less positive understanding of resentment ordinarily circulates. This is due to the hegemony exercised by the Nietzschean reading of a quintessentially existentialist notion, that of *ressentiment*.[53] While resentment is understood to denote a legitimate sense of anger, and a desire for justice in the face of an injury, *ressentiment* indicates the pernicious and self-defeating folding-in of this emotion onto itself. *Ressentiment* is suspended, delayed, or botched revenge. As a frustrated, ossified, and ultimately generalised form of resentment, *ressentiment* plants itself in the psychic underground of the sufferer as a blunt arrow, kept in permanent tension by the pain or memory of humiliation, yet never released from the bow of desire.[54] From there, according to Friedrich Nietszche and Max Scheler, *ressentiment* poisons the mind of those who suffer from it – like a wave on a rock, in a restless

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indignation which they naturally call forth in that of the impartial spectator', in Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 30.

48. For a brief overview, see Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 10–11.
49. Robert C.A. Solomon, *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 270.
50. Richard Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 69.
51. Rorty, 'The Dramas of Resentment', 89–100.
52. Jean Améry, *At The Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (New York: Schocken, 1980), 70.
53. Hunt, 'Affirmative Reactions', 71–109.
54. For a phenomenology of *ressentiment*, see Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. Natasha Randall (London: Canongate, 2012 [1864]), esp. 22. For a commentary on Dostoevsky's novel as a portrait of a contemporary lone-wolf terrorist, see Elisabetta Brighi, 'The Mimetic Politics of Lone-Wolf Terrorism', *Journal of International Political Theory* 11, no. 1 (2015): 145–64.

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movement that blurs past and present, *ressentiment* recalls the injuries suffered; resentment, unconsummated and thus intensified, bounces back as *re*-sentment.[55] What makes this emotion particularly corrosive, aside from its generic, permanent, and ontological character, is a form of denial. Instead of recognising the value of what is desired, *ressentiment* involves on the one hand, the careful cultivation of a type of false consciousness predicated on the inversion of the value of what was originally desired, and on the other, the delusion of an idealised alternative world where the victim becomes the ruler, and suffering can finally cease.[56]

According to Max Scheler's reading of Nietzsche's *ressentiment*, the origin of this emotion lies not in a failure of justice but in a failure of recognition or status, in particular the envy that derives from comparing oneself to others and resenting one's inferiority. 'Envy […] is the strongest source of *ressentiment*. It is as if it whispers continually: "I can forgive everything, but not that you are – that you are what you are – that I am not what you are – indeed that I am not you"'.[57] *Ressentiment* is the affect that underpins the construction of scapegoats, the exercise of revenge, and the affirmation of a negative or inverted form of enjoyment. For the subject experiencing *ressentiment*, enjoyment comes more from the misfortunes of others than an increase in one's well-being. Imposing one's suffering on others through revenge therefore becomes a way of actualising one's negative enjoyment.[58]

In classical and modern political theory, resentment and *ressentiment* thus occupy very different places on the emotional spectrum. At an analytical level, the two emotions differ along a series of important dimensions – including the level of motives, diagnosis, attribution of blame, temporal frame, recommendations, and consequences. Thus, while

55. 'The existence of *ressentiment* thus demonstrates the artificial nature of the separation between past and present, which exist one inside the other; the past becomes a present that is more present than the present'; in Ferro, *Resentment in History*, 128.
56. Victimary narratives are therefore central to *ressentiment*. For a comprehensive treatment of the mechanisms behind the construction of victimhood and its proliferation in global politics today, see Harald Wydra, *Politics and the Sacred* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), 178–224.
57. Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (New York: Shocken, 1972 [1912]), 52. For a comparison of Nietzsche's and Scheler's rendering of *ressentiment*, see Nicholas Birns, '*Ressentiment* and Counter-*Ressentiment*: Nietzsche, Scheler, and the Reaction Against Equality' in *Nietzsche Circle*, September 2005. Available at: http://www.nietzschecircle.com/RessentimentMaster.pdf. Last accessed 3 April 2016.
58. The readings of *ressentiment* given by Nietzsche and Scheler overlap, yet also differ considerably – *inter alia*, in terms of the degree of emphasis laid on envy as the underlying motive of *ressentiment*, and in terms of the possibility of channeling and venting *ressentiment* into revenge. As brilliantly argued in Brodersen, 'Rage, Rancour and Revenge',156–8, Nietzsche understands revenge to be exclusively in spiritual rather than actual terms, while in Scheler the possibility of actual revenge stems directly from the misplaced aggression of *ressentiment*. Contra Brodersen, however, I argue that one should not infer from this that Schelerian *ressentiment* equates to 'simple' resentment incorrectly named, and as such, is not real *ressentiment*. The tension of *ressentiment* is precisely the one that survives after its necessarily partial revenge is consummated.

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resentment is preoccupied with injustice and is moved by moral grievances deriving from perceived failures of justice, *ressentiment* is concerned with inequality and is fuelled by the envy deriving from perceived failures of recognition or status. To adopt Jon Elster's terminology, while resentment is an emotion of interaction, *ressentiment* (like envy) is an emotion of comparison.[59] Resentment starts from an affirmation of rights. It demands the reparation of wrongs in a commensurate and prompt way, and is satisfied by the increase in one's own well-being that follows that reparation. *Ressentiment*, on the other hand, starts from the perception of one's impotence or lack of rights. It expresses itself as a generalised and non-specific desire for revenge, made more intense by the construction of scapegoats and the cultivation of fantasies of vendetta. Its satisfaction ultimately comes more from the misfortunes of others than from an increase in one's well-being. Thus, resentment and *ressentiment* point to two different kinds of failure (of justice; of recognition or status) and to two different ways of coping with failure.

If resentment can be deemed a political and moral emotion, the moral bases and political implications of *ressentiment* seem more problematic. However, how tenable are these stark distinctions in empirical reality? Are these truly incommensurable emotions, driven by different passions and seeking satisfaction in different ways, or are they overlapping, especially in the prevailing conditions of global politics today? Is the relation between resentment and *ressentiment* one of mutual exclusion or contamination? Lastly, if we are witnessing an epidemic of *ressentiment*, as some contemporary scholars argue, what does that say about the kinds of failure we are confronted with today?

Resentment and *Ressentiment* in Late Modernity

Rather than being exclusively private or merely physiological, emotions are social and cultural too – the psychic and affective landscape changing with the changing social and political condition.[60] A number of theorists have reflected on the issue of whether the political and social conditions of late modernity, at a time of rampant neoliberalism and incessant securitisation, promote emotions of resentment or *ressentiment*.

William Connolly's writings on the politics of resentment are a particularly interesting case in point. Connolly's concern with resentment stems from a long-standing interest in how to ground democratic societies – in the 'globalisation of contingency' of late modernity – on an egalitarian and pluralist ethos.[61] While Connolly acknowledges that

59. Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 141.
60. Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 388; Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and, for a contemporary evaluation, see Iain Wilkinson, *Anxiety in a 'Risk' Society* (London: Routledge, 2001).
61. William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) and William E. Connolly, Pluralism (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

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resentment and moral indignation are arguably 'indispensable sources of energy and inspiration' for the formation of new political subjects and social movements,[62] he warns about the exclusions and excesses spawned in the process. Identity politics, in particular, is also always potentially a politics of resentment, that deprecates, rages against, and ultimately punishes, difference.[63]

If the origins of resentment lie in the entanglements and paradoxes of identity and difference, for Connolly *ressentiment* is altogether 'another matter'.[64] Connolly, in particular, recognises two routes into *ressentiment*. The first relies on a Nietzschean reading of *ressentiment* and places the origins of this emotion outside of the immediate political fray, within a second-order, metaphysical plane. *Ressentiment* is a form of existential resentment against 'mortality, time, and the world' – against our finitude.[65] The second route into *ressentiment*, however, is moral and political – and highlights the transition, rather than the opposition, between resentment and *ressentiment*. '*Ressentiment* is stored resentment that has poisoned the soul and migrated to places where it is hidden and denied',[66] 'it can grow out of an accumulation of justified resentments' and can get dangerously congealed and 'encoded into the spirit of institutional life', endangering pluralism.[67] Thus, not all forms of *ressentiment* are without political or moral bases. The failure to acknowledge and respond to protracted grievances causes resentment to fester and escalate into *ressentiment*. The denial of failure, in other words, leaves the subject worse off than the experience of failure itself. This is not least true, as Gilles Deleuze has argued, because it consigns the subject to an emotion that is alienating and non-emancipatory. Far from being an active and positive mode of political action, *ressentiment* decomposes resistance and incapacitates contestation.[68] Crucially, for Connolly the contemporary condition is one around which these two routes into *ressentiment* converge and 'whirl together'.[69]

In her writings, Wendy Brown has similarly mobilised the concept of *ressentiment* to account for the particular character and formation of identities in late modernity.[70] According to Brown, the contemporary subject is characterised by a condition of radical

62. William Connolly, 'A World of Becoming' in *Democracy and Pluralism: the Political Thought of William Connolly*, ed. Alan Finlayson (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010), 228.
63. These may be inevitable in so far as identity and difference are mutually constituted, and in so far as security is, at least to some degree, pursued in identity. 'The multiple drives to stamp truth upon […] identities function to convert differences into otherness and otherness into scapegoats', Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 67.
64. Connolly, 'A World of Becoming', 228. Compare also Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 213, n.17.
65. William E. Connolly, 'The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine', *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 877.
66. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 213, emphasis added.
67. Connolly, 'A World of Becoming', 228, 230.
68. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 57.
69. Connolly, 'The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine', 879.
70. Wendy Brown, 'Wounded Attachments'; *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); and Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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failure and diffuse envy. On the one hand, the failure to measure up to the idealised standard of the 'middle class'. On the other, the envy experienced towards the model of the sovereign, liberal individual. The consequence is that the subject 'seethes with *ressentiment*',[71] an emotion which appears to be a general and fundamental existential condition in the 'plastic cage' of late modern societies.[72]

Contemporary *ressentiment*, according to Brown, exhibits three main characteristics. First, the externalisation and displacement of suffering, which involves the production of scapegoats: 'a culprit responsible for the hurt, and […] a site of revenge to displace the hurt' and the re-enactment, rather than the resolution, of injuries as they are distributed and externalised to others.[73] Second, a failure of the will: 'identity structured by this ethos becomes deeply invested in its own impotence', generating only a blunted critique of power and returning incessantly to its own narcissistic wounds, rather than finding ground for genuine self-affirmation.[74] Third, the proliferation and sacralisation of the condition of victim. In noting the rise of victimary narratives and of a moralising politics of recognition, Brown anticipates the coming of that 'empire of trauma' which anthropologists Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman identify as being a constitutive cipher of the contemporary moral economy.[75]

This is a perspective also shared by the French-American theorist Réne Girard.[76] Rivalry and envy, already normally present in human relations given their inevitably mimetic nature, seem to have escalated out of proportion in late modernity.[77] The triumph of the very operating principles of liberal and capitalist societies – namely, equality and the market, and their competitive effects – are now amplified on a global scale.[78] Furthermore,

71. Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', 402.
72. Brown, *States of Injury*, 28.
73. Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', 401. A revenge, however, that often does not extinguish *ressentiment*. See fn 58 above.
74. Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', 403. On the link between narcissism and violence, and on Heinz Kohut's pioneering work in the area, see Felicity de Zulueta, *From Pain to Violence: The Traumatic Roots of Destructiveness* (London: Whurr Publishers, 1993).
75. Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
76. See Réne Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); Réne Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and Réne Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010). For introductions to Girard's mimetic theory, see John Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003); Elisabetta Brighi and Antonio Cerella, 'An Alternative Vision of Politics and Violence: Introducing Mimetic Theory in International Studies', *Journal of International Political Theory* 11, no. 1: 3–25; Antonio Cerella and Elisabetta Brighi, eds., *The Sacred and the Political* (London: Bloomsbury-Continuum, 2016).
77. Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: MSU Press, 2013).
78. See especially Stefano Tomelleri, *Ressentiment: Reflections on Mimetic Desire and Society* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015) and Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and Secular Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

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immanence and the loss of any transcendental points of reference consign humanity to give up its normative horizons, and to live and fight its battles mimetically, which means violently. Both principles operate on, and multiply, the occasions for comparisons and envy. This is further escalated by the fact that the promise of equality and wealth is frustrated by the reality of inequality and the structural imbalances that are often simply denied by society. All resentments, therefore, are turned into *ressentiment*: questions of justice are ontologised, rendered horizontal, and turned into mere questions of comparison, recognition, and status. In resonance with Connolly and Brown, Girard states that,

> we live in a world where many people, rightly or wrongly, feel blocked, or paralyzed, in all aspirations, obstructed from achieving their most legitimate goals. Individual psychology inevitably ends up resenting this permanent frustration, and the need arises for a term that expresses this state of affair. […] The word *ressentiment* seems designed to play this role.[79]

As seen from this brief survey, in contemporary political theory the difference between resentment and *ressentiment* remains crucial in terms of its moral and political implications. And yet, the political conditions of late modernity seem to suggest a less stark juxtaposition of the two emotions, if not the blurring or superseding of one to the other. First, the conditions of late modernity are such that both routes into *ressentiment* (metaphysical and political) burst wide open: the exposure to the contingency, the immanentisation of politics, and the contradictions of neoliberalism all invite *ressentiment* while they increasingly preclude the articulation of resentment. Second, the proliferation (in numbers) and intensification (in tone) of interpretative frames that encourage self-perceptions of victimhood and impotence all contribute to make *ressentiment* more acute. Third, and finally, the persistence of moral grievances stemming from failures of justice over time can transform these emotions alchemically into deeply rivalrous forms of *ressentiment*. The protracted denial of failures of justice, in other words, leaves the subject reeling and prone to revenge, rather than the pursuit of reparation. Thus, the denial of failure is more dangerous than failure itself, not least because it abandons the subject to the alienating, non-emancipatory, and self-sabotaging emotion of *ressentiment*. However, if this is true, what are the consequences of this state of affairs when the possibility of violence is multiplied and the means of revenge become not just imaginary, but actual? Is the current wave of global terrorism fuelled by resentment or *ressentiment*?

Resentment, *Ressentiment* and Terror: Paris and the World

On 7 January, and again on 13 November, 2015, Paris was struck by the worst terror attacks in its peacetime history. If one combines the fatalities from the attack at the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters and Kosher supermarket carried out in January, with the mass shootings at the *Bataclan* theatre, suicide bombings at the *Stade de France*, and the shootings at the restaurants of the 10th and 11th *arrondissment* carried out in a coordinated fashion on 13 November, it is clear that these attacks represent the worst wave of

79. Réne Girard, 'Preface', in Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, ix–x.

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terrorist violence on French soil since the anarchist wave of terror in the 1890s and the series of Algeria-related attacks of the 1960s and 1990s.[80] On both occasions in 2015, the attacks were perpetrated by European citizens – mostly French nationals of non-European descent, including Algerian and Moroccan – and claimed by ISIS, with the exception of the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters killings, which were claimed by al-Qaeda in Yemen. All attackers were later revealed as having links, although loose and unstructured in some cases, to local jihadi groups in France and Belgium. A number of them are currently believed to have fought with ISIS in Syria and Iraq.[81] The motivations voiced by the attackers linked their protest against the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons to the treatment of Muslims in France, especially concerning the veil ban and discrimination by the police, to French and US involvement in Iraq, Syria and Mali.[82]

Immediately after the attacks, quite aside from the outpouring of public mourning, an uncomfortable debate started to emerge within public opinion, state authorities, and intellectuals concerning three main questions: first, the possible motives of the attacks; second, what the attacks revealed about the state of French and global society; third, how best to respond to them. My argument is that in navigating these questions, we are faced with the task of discerning whether resentment or *ressentiment* fuelled them. Further, this choice will have important consequences for how we can epistemically know, morally judge, and politically respond to the attacks. To flesh out what is at stake, and on the

80. For a historical perspective, see Walter Laqueur, *A History of Terrorism* (New York: Transactions, 2001), and for a history of Paris and terrorism, see Julian Bourg, 'Paris in Terror: France's Long History of Political Violence', *The Boston Review*, 3 December 2015 Available at: https://bostonreview.net/world/julian-bourg-paris-terror. Last accessed 3 April 2016.

81. For recent developments on the ongoing inquiry, see Rukmini Callimachijan, 'ISIS Video Appears to Show Paris Assailants Earlier in Syria and Iraq, *The New York Times*, 24 January 2016 and *The Telegraph*, 'Who Were the terrorists? Everything We Know about the Isil Attackers so Far', 20 November 2015.

82. On the November 2015 attacks, see especially Scott Atran, 'Mindless Terrorists? The Truth about Isis is Much Worse', *The Guardian*, 15 November 2015. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/15/terrorists-isis. Last accessed 3 April 2016; Jürgen Habermas, 'Le djihadisme, une forme moderne de réaction au déracinement', *Le Monde*, 21 November 2015. Available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/21/jurgen-habermas-le-djihadisme-une-forme-moderne-de-reaction-au-deracinement_4814921_3232.html. Last accessed 3 April 2016; Adam Shatz, 'Magical Thinking about Isis', *The London Review of Books* 37, no. 23 (2015): 11–14. On the Charlie Hebdo attacks, see Zygmunt Bauman, 'The Charlie Hebdo Attack And What It Reveals About Society', *Social Europe*, 13 January 2015. Available at: https://www.socialeurope.eu/2015/01/charlie-hebdo. Last accessed 3 April 2016; Olivier Roy, France's Oedipal Islamist Complex', *Foreign Policy*, 7 January 2015. Available at: http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/07/frances-oedipal-islamist-complex-charlie-hebdo-islamic-state-isis. Last accessed 3 April 2016; Etienne Balibar, 'Trois mots pour les morts et pour les vivants', *Liberation*, 9 January 2015. Available at: http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2015/01/09/trois-mots-pour-les-morts-et-pour-les-vivants_1177315. Last accessed 3 April 2016. A vast bibliography on the Paris attacks has been compiled by the French Colonial Historical Society and is available as '#Parissyllabus'. Available at: http://frenchcolonial.org/index.php/pedagogy-resources. Last accessed 3 April 2016.

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strength of the distinctions teased out in section two and three of the article, a number of first cut, discriminating questions can therefore be posed: Can the Paris attacks be read as an expression of legitimate resentment, motivated by a desire to rectify failures of justice, and even 'necessary' to reinstate fairness in society? Far from proving the attackers' lack of commitment to certain moral standards, did the attacks provide a moral vertigo necessary to 'sweep us into the truth' of otherwise invisible crimes and injustice, to paraphrase Jean Améry? Alternatively, were the attacks a form of revenge produced by a frustrated, misdirected, and generalised resentment better understood as *ressentiment*? Was radical envy as a result of perceived inferiority, rather than a sense of justice, at the heart of these attacks – an envy only magnified by exclusionary victimary narratives? Were the attacks a reflection of perceived impotence, rather than power, and the expression of a narcissistic fantasy aimed at violently inverting a negative power differential, rather than rectifying specific wrongs? Finally, did the attacks manifest a mixture of the qualities above and how, if at all, can we make sense of any overlaps?

Although left implicit, the conceptual pair of resentment and *ressentiment*, with their related questions, were arguably key in driving the debate that followed the attacks. Thus, while they didn't justify the attacks, a number of intellectuals attributed moral and political significance to them. For instance, the French sociologist Emanuel Todd read the events in two ways: first, as proof of resentment deriving from a reality of deep injustice and discrimination; second, as providing important insights about the French social and political situation, dominated by an Islamophobic middle-class and a myopic defence of the principle of the freedom of speech. The recognition, rather than the denial of grievances, formed part of the only possible political solution.[83] On the other hand, the position which prevailed in both French and British governments attributed no political or moral significance to the attacks. Attempts to understand the causes of the attacks amounted to mere 'sociological excuses' and were thus a worthless endeavour.[84] Instead, the attacks were interpreted as a mindless vendetta, with no relation to issues of justice, but were part of a delusional plan fuelled by rancour and envy – bearing the hallmark, in other words, of *ressentiment*. No insights were to be gained from the attacks, if not the increased need for robust counter-terrorist policies against 'enemies' – a 'fascist' 'death cult'[85] – rather than political actors.

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83. See Emmanuel Todd, *Who is Charlie?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015) and *The Guardian*, 'Emmanuel Todd: the French Thinker Who Won't Toe the Charlie Hebdo Line', 28 August 2015. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/aug/28/emmanuel-todd-the-french-thinker-who-wont-toe-the-charlie-hebdo-line. Last accessed 3 April 2016.
84. See *Le Monde*, 'Manuel Valls: "Non, la France du 11 janvier n'est pas une imposture"', 7 May 2015. Available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/05/07/manuel-valls-nous-devons-resister-au-pessimisme-ambiant_4629245_3224.html. Last accessed 3 April 2016. Also see, Xavier Molénat, 'La sociologie excuse-t-elle les terroristes?', *AlterEcoPlus*, 1 December 2015. Available at: http://www.alterecoplus.fr/en-direct-de-la-recherche/la-sociologie-excuse-t-elle-les-terroristes-201512011020-00002614.html. Last accessed 3 April 2016.
85. *The Guardian*, 'Hilary Benn Makes Emotional Plea for Britain to Bomb Isis "fascists" in Syria', 3 December 2015. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/02/william-hague-breaks-with-cameron-over-use-of-ground-forces-in-syria. Last accessed 3 April 2016.

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The use of political violence by non-state actors has always, historically, generated great moral ambivalence and political polarisation. Of all types of political violence, terrorism was until recently the one traditionally considered not only as the most contentious, but invariably the most illegitimate.[86] It is unsurprising, therefore, that the double attacks in Paris generated such stark responses. However, if we now return to the questions raised above, to what extent can we see traces of resentment or *ressentiment* in the attacks?

It would be hard not to recognise that the violence seen in Paris demonstrated once again the power of resentment, and that terrorism should be understood as a particularly dramatic 'power to make resentment felt'.[87] Genuine resentment towards a specific set of issues was, after all, expressed in the statements and testimonials left by the attackers, all too often casually dismissed in the media as 'bizarre rants'.[88] These manifested the degree of anger and extreme unease towards three specific sets of issues: the limits of multicultural integration and the conditions of Muslims in France; the failures, excesses, and crimes of post-9/11 Western interventions in the Middle East; and the uncomfortable legacy of colonial history. As a painful reminder of how these issues remain unresolved, resentment and the violence that it generates can hold up a mirror to societies often too tempted to achieve 'closure' prematurely and unfairly, if not to deny failure altogether. As recognised by Adam Smith and Joseph Butler, more than reconciliation or forgiveness, it is the expression, rather than the denial of this resentment and its sympathetic recognition by others, that potentially turns a community of strangers into a community of moral agents bound by the same *nomos*.

As Connolly warns, however, the more this process of recognition is delayed or stalled, the higher the likelihood that such resentment may fold in onto itself, ossify and re-present itself as *ressentiment*. When *ressentiment* takes over, justice leaves the scene and revenge takes over – the aim of depriving and making others suffer becomes more important than affirming one's worth. Depriving innocent civilians of life and the enjoyment theoreof, as

86. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), C.A.J. Coady, 'The Morality of Terrorism', *Philosophy* 60, no. 231 (1985): 47–69 and Robert E. Goodin, *What's Wrong With Terrorism?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006). This has recently started to change. See, Uwe Steinhoff, 'How Can Terrorism Be Justified?', in *Terrorism: The Philosophical Issues*, ed. Igor Primoratz, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 139–56 and Christopher Finlay, *Terrorism and the Right to Resist: A Theory of Just Revolutionary War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

87. Baier, 'Violent Demonstrations', 54.

88. One of the January attackers, Amedy Coulibaly, was recorded speaking on his mobile phone during the siege at the Kosher supermarket. He voiced his resentment as such: 'Stop attacking the Islamic State, stop unveiling our women, stop putting our brothers in prison for everything and anything. […] You're the ones who elected your governments. Firstly, the governments never hid their intentions to be at war in Mali or elsewhere. […] Secondly, it is you who is financing [the government]. You pay taxes'. When one of the hostages replied that paying taxes is an obligation, Coulibaly replied: 'You do not have to. I do not pay taxes'. See, 'Paris Shootings: Listen to Terrorist Amedy Coulibaly's Bizarre Conversation with Hostage during Supermarket Siege', *Daily Mirror*, 10 January, 2015. Available at: http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/paris-shootings-listen-terrorist-amedy-4953451. Last accessed 3 April 2016. Also see, 'Radio Station Releases Extracts of Terror Suspect's Rant', *ITV News*, 10 January 2015.

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happened in Paris, constitutes a powerful clue of a resentment turned *ressentiment*. And yet, a few questions should make us hesitate before reaching any definitive conclusions. After all, the persistence of grievances can hardly make the same grievances illegitimate. Further, it is sufficient to look at the history of terrorism to know that the killing of innocent lives has been, at times, the only way to have grievances finally addressed.[89] At the very least then, Connolly's two routes into *ressentiment* conflate situations that have rather distinct moral characteristics. More generally, the stark analytic distinction between resentment and *ressentiment* erodes the more a case mixes elements of the two.

And yet, there is an additional way in which the face of *ressentiment* may be recognisable in the attacks. Slavoj Žižek advanced a reading of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks that provides an interesting account of the role of envy in the confrontation between Islamic terrorists and the West.

> Do the [*Charlie Hebdo* terrorists] really fit this description [of fundamentalists]? What they obviously lack is a feature that is easy to discern in all authentic fundamentalists, from Tibetan Buddhists to the Amish in the US: *the absence of resentment and envy*. […] The problem is not cultural difference (their effort to preserve their identity), but the opposite fact that the fundamentalists are already like us, that, secretly, they have already internalized our standards and measure themselves by them. Paradoxically, what the fundamentalists really lack is precisely a dose of that true 'racist' conviction of their own superiority.[90]

Rather than demonstrating a 'clash of civilisations' and a desire to assert irreconcilable differences, in Žižek's account the encounter between Islamic terrorists and the West seems to function according to a hyper-mimetic and imitative logic, which is the logic of envy and *ressentiment*. Envy is to be understood less in patronising terms, and more as the inevitable loss of self-dignity which Frantz Fanon vividly described in the colonised – who lived across from the spectacle of colonial modernity, 'felt robbed of all of these things', and yet could only measure themselves by the master's own standards.[91] It is the relentless comparison and frustrated desire of identity, rather than difference – including religious difference – that fuels *ressentiment* and its violent expressions.

This, however, can hardly be understood as a condition exclusive to terrorists. The flattening of relations and the refusal of any verticality makes failure immanent and ontological; this risks turning issues of justice into a mere envy-generating competition over status. As this article has illustrated, a number of scholars converge in identifying this as the increasingly global condition under the spell of a failed or 'fake egalitarianism', and a condition on the verge of an 'uncontrollable explosion of *ressentiment*'.[92]

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89. As Frantz Fanon put it in reference to Algeria's *Front de Libération Nationale*, France only listened when 'the knife was at its throat […] when confronted with greater violence'. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2001 [1961]), 48.
90. Slavoj Žižek, 'Are the Worst Really Full of Passionate Intensity?', *The New Statesman*, 10 January 2015, emphasis added. Available at: http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-i-ek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity. Last accessed 3 April 2016.
91. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 58.
92. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, eds., *The Truth of Žižek* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 228, 231.

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If the Paris double attacks of 2015 teach us anything, therefore, it is that today it is imperative to resist conflating resentment and *ressentiment*, and instead, to rescue, as much as possible, the former from the latter. Just as we need to avoid narrowing failure down conceptually to the mere management of its effects, we must resist any excessive infatuations with immanence that precludes the possibility of normative standards. By the very same token, it is imperative to reclaim those moral and political emotions that are able to render failure once again political, rather than just contingent, steering us away from the moral and political morass of late modernity.[93]

Privileging resentment over *ressentiment*, however, makes demands on ourselves. First, it asks us to go against powerful environmental stimuli that are currently converging to create *ressentiment* as our sovereign mode of being. Second, it expects us to be incessantly aware of our own nature and limitations as deeply imitative subjects, prone to envy and narcissism. Third, it demands that we build societies able to cultivate resentment, rather than *ressentiment*, and that are able to denounce failure rather than to embrace resilience, so that we can feel – and feel more deeply – a sense of moral outrage on behalf of others and their grievances.

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93. On what moral philosophy and political theory should this more positive notion of resentment be founded on and channelled into, is an important question that unfortunately exceeds the scope of this article. Contrary to the opinion of Hunt, 'Affirmative Responses', whether Nietzsche's philosophy of *ressentiment* can *still* provide such a frame of reference seems, however, debatable.

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