On Resentment and *Ressentiment*

The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions

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To speak of "resentment" in English
is sometimes to speak of "*ressentiment*".
Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*

In the introduction of his remarkable edited volume on *Ordinary Ethics*, Michael Lambek (2010) writes: "Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good. Yet anthropological theory tends to overlook all this in favor of analyses that emphasize structure, power, and interest". The recent development of a rich field of anthropological research on morality (Zigon 2008) and ethics (Faubion 2011) can be viewed as an endeavor to seriously address, from various theoretical perspectives, this challenge of studying the way people try to act morally and be ethical subjects rather than approaching them primarily as rational or strategic agents driven by power and interest. This field has been structured along two main theoretical lines, one following the classical Durkheimian-Kantian (Durkheim 1974/1906) definition of moral codes and duties (Read 1955, Ladd 1957), the other adopting the recent Foucauldian-Aristotelian (Foucault 1990/1984) turn on ethical subjectivities and virtues (Widlok 2004, Mahmood 2005) – what James Laidlaw (2002) describes as the theoretical opposition between an anthropology of obligation and an anthropology of freedom.

Although it would certainly be reductive to limit the scope of this body of work to the sole consideration of the good or to a bipolarity merely contrasting good and evil, and although one should not consider the delimitation of moralities and ethics in various culture as a priori excluding politics, I would like to suggest that, on the one hand, not enough attention has been provided to ambiguous moral forms and ethical positions, and that, on the other hand, the boundaries between the moral or the ethical and the political are empirically more confused than what one usually believes. In the following pages, I will therefore strive to explore moral sentiments that escape the alternative between good and evil and make sense in relation to political issues. They belong to a sort of grey territory that obliges us to rethink what we take for granted about the distinction between the bright side and the dark side of our moral world, and about the separation of the ethical from the political. The affects I am interested in are rancor, bitterness, acrimony, anger, ire, and indignation, which have in common to be a response to what is experienced or imagined as an injury or an injustice. More precisely, I will concentrate my reflection on what Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (2000) calls the "dramas of resentment", or rather on what I propose to analytically distinguish as resentment, to use the English word, and *ressentiment*, which corresponds to the French term.

The reason I am interested in resentment and *ressentiment* is primarily empirical. During the past ten years, in two very different contexts, I have been confronted with situations in which these deeply entrenched "reactive attitudes and feelings", as Peter Strawson (1974: 6) calls them, were shared by certain groups, publicly expressed by some of their members, and often served to justify discourses and conducts which were difficult to comprehend. The first one concerns post-apartheid South Africa, the impressive work undertaken by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and yet the nagging persistence of tensions and divisions exemplified by the AIDS controversies. The second one involves policing in France, the politics of security developed by the state in the past two decades, and the contested activity of anticrime squads in the housing projects where poor and immigrant populations are concentrated. Despite the obvious differences between the two contexts, I contend that to understand the violence of the polemics in South

Africa and of the police in France one has to consider the moral justifications of the agents, which in both cases are grounded in a profound rancor. However this affect does not have the same factual premises among South African blacks and French law enforcement. Their distinct historical and sociological backgrounds imply a divergent political signification. This is why, in interpreting the two scenes, I will differentiate *ressentiment,* in the first case, and, in the second one, resentment.

Two precisions should be provided here to avoid misunderstandings. First, my endeavor to construct this departure between the two terms and the realities they represent should be taken as a theoretical argument to identify moral ideal-types accounting for empirical situations. I am conscious of the possible blurring of lines and overlap of meanings in certain concrete situations. Second, the sort of subjectivity I try to analyze is not so much psychological as political. I am interested in the formation of subjects engaged in actions they justify on moral grounds rather than in the depths of their unconscious to which the ethnographer has little access. These limits being acknowledged, I am nevertheless convinced of the importance for social scientists and of the significance for social agents to recognize this linguistic and conceptual distinction much more clearly than translators usually do.

To carry out this intellectual project, I will start with a brief philosophical evocation of Jean Améry's reflection, which I consider seminal for my argument, in the light of Adam Smith, for resentment, and of Nietzsche, for *ressentiment*. I will then present and discuss the two case studies, that is, the *ressentiment* of blacks in South Africa linked to their experience of apartheid and the resentment of the police in France in relation to the function assigned to them. I will conclude by discussing the relevance of the two categories for the program of a political anthropology of morality and the comprehension of contemporary societies.

The Life of Concepts

In 1966, the Belgian philosopher Jean Améry published *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* ("Beyond Guilt and Atonement"). Born Hans Mayer in Austria, he changed his identity after the Second World War, merely translating his first name but

ironically using the anagram of his last name, as a way of distancing himself from the people and places that brought to his mind the Nazi regime, which had tortured and later deported him to the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, where he miraculously survived. Composed in German, the volume is a series of essays written two decades after the fact and proposing a phenomenological analysis of the experience, during and after the war, of the victims of the persecutions by the Third Reich: "To the extent that the reader would venture to join me at all he will have no choice but to accompany me in the same tempo, through the darkness that I illuminated step by step", Améry (1980/1966: xiv) writes in the preface to the 1966 edition. The first text provides the title of the American translation of the whole book: *At the Mind's Limits*, but the most troubling chapter is simply entitled: "*Ressentiments*", which regrettably becomes "Resentments" in the English version, as if the use of the French word in an essay in German was not significant and as if the explicit reference to the Nietzschean theory of *ressentiment* by Améry could be ignored (in the quotations, I will replace the English word with the French original, faithfully to the author's intention). Addressed to the German people, the text was read on a German radio.

Instead of discussing, as have other philosophers including Hannah Arendt, the political and judicial aspects of the postwar developments, Améry (1980/1966: 64) provides a sort of confession, which he thinks of some value to comprehend, beyond his own case, the feelings of many survivors of the camps: "What matters to me is the description of the subjective state of the victim. What I can contribute is the analysis of the resentments, gained from introspection". This is not an easy undertaking, though, since it exposes the author to misunderstandings and criticisms on moral as well as psychological grounds: "My personal task is to justify a psychic condition that has been condemned by moralists and psychologists alike. The former regard it as a taint, the latter as a kind of sickness." Investigating the depths of his rancor, Améry (1980: 72) attempts to exhibit and legitimize his reluctance toward all forms of obliteration of the past: "In two decades of contemplating what happened to me, I believe to have recognized that a forgiving and forgetting induced by social pressure is immoral". To those who claim that one

should not turn to the past but look toward the future, invoking the supposedly natural work of time, he opposes that "man has the right and privilege to declare himself to be in disagreement with every natural occurrence, including the biological healing that time brings about". Time can never be a sufficient argument in favor of the obligation to forget and forgive.

Yet this refusal of oblivion and this attitude of defiance have nothing to do with a desire for vengeance or the pleasure of punishing, as some would assume: not to forget and not to forgive does not imply that one is nourishing the base urge to inflict suffering on those from whom one has suffered. For Améry (1980/1966: 77), the response to what happened "can be a matter neither of revenge on the one side nor of a problematic atonement on the other"; it is rather a question of "permitting *ressentiment* to remain alive in the one camp and, aroused by it, self-mistrust in the other". Society always tends to protect itself or, at best, prevent similar acts from happening again. But the victims should be the only ones who can decide what to do about the deeds of the criminals. Remembrance and rancor have, in Améry's view (1980/1966: 70), the moral function of keeping alive for the perpetrators the meaning of what they have done: "My *ressentiment* is there in order that the crime become a moral reality for the criminal, in order that he be swept into the truth of his atrocity". The philosopher is conscious, however, of his belonging to a moral community doomed to shortly disappear and concludes by asking for patience with regards to those like himself whose rest is still disturbed by rancor. Twelve years after writing these essays and a few months after their republication in German with a new preface, he committed suicide.

Although Améry strictly limits his reflection to the survivors of the Nazi regimes, I believe his defense and personal illustration of *ressentiment* have a broader meaning, which will survive their death – in the sense of *überleben* highlighted by Walter Benjamin (1968/1923) – since it concerns issues at the heart of current situations in which countries have to deal with the aftermath of mass atrocities or extreme oppression. As Thomas Brudholm (2008: 160) writes in his penetrating discussion of the text: "Seen as a rejoinder to common understandings of what is appropriate, laudable, and healthy with regard to victims' responses to

past violations, the essay is as timely and stimulating today as it was fifty years ago. In relation to the emergence of the rhetoric of healing and closure and the new prominence accorded to forgiveness in psychological counseling, as well as contemporary thinking about reconciliation after mass atrocity, Améry proposes a valuable cautionary view to be taken into consideration". Actually, not only does he offer a counterpoint to the consensual valuation of empathy and pardon as personal virtues, but he also defends an antithesis to the contemporary politics of amnesty and atonement as universal paradigms. To the almost unanimous celebration of Christian moral sentiments over the past two centuries and its recent revival through humanitarianism and reconciliation in international relations, he offers a solitary resistance by introducing this linguistic and ethical differentiation between resentment and *ressentiment*. The genealogy of this distinction can be traced through the history of moral philosophy.

For the eighteenth century Scottish Enlightenment movement, resentment is generally viewed as a noxious emotion. Most notably, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith (1976/1759: 34-40) describes it as an "unsocial passion" which he opposes to sympathy as a "social passion", a contrast he illustrates through a literary reference: "We detest Iago as much as we esteem Othello". The former is a resentful man, the latter a noble heart. Certainly, Smith concedes that resentment is a "necessary part of human nature" and admits that "a person becomes contemptible who tamely sits still, and submits to insults, without attempting either to repel or to revenge them". But he adds: "Though the utility of those passions to the individual, by rendering it dangerous to insult or injure him, be acknowledged; and though their utility to the public, as guardians of justice, and of the equality of its administration, be no less considerable; yet there is something disagreeable in the passions themselves, which makes the appearance of them in other men the natural object of our aversion". Thus resentment, "the greatest poison to the happiness of a good mind", is a negative and undesirable emotion, even when it has the justified grounds of a response to an unjust wrong.

According to Smith (1976/1759: 94-97), resentment is indeed a reaction to the pain inflicted by another agent. But "the object, which resentment is chiefly

intent upon, is not so much to make our enemy feel pain in turn, as to make him conscious that he feels it upon his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner". Vengeance should have no place here and resentment can never justify any form of brutality. Rather Smith (1976/1759: 172) considers that "we ought always to punish with reluctance, and more from a sense of the propriety of punishing, than from any savage disposition to revenge". If resentment is a normal – although "disagreeable" – passion, its consequences must be moderated by a sense of mercy and controlled by an imperative of duty. Actually, for him, the measure of the righteousness of the punishment is determined by what any "impartial person" would consider to be fair. Resentment is therefore an unsocial but legitimate passion, which must be tamed by the moral principles that regulate retribution. It puts human beings at risk of resembling animals when it leads to mere retaliation, but it can be disciplined as long as a sense of justice prevails and therefore be viewed as an indispensable component of self-defense in social life.

This dual dimension of resentment had been even more emphasized three decades earlier by Joseph Butler (1827/1726: 687-70), who entitled one of his fifteen sermons "Upon Resentment", attempting to answer the question: "Since general benevolence is the great law of the whole moral creation, why had man implanted in him a principle, which appears the direct contrary to benevolence?" Distinguishing "hasty and sudden" anger, "frequently raised without apparent reason", from "settled and deliberate" resentment, due to our "representing to our mind injustice or injury", he considers the former as "natural" and the latter as "moral". For the Presbyterian theologian, resentment is the indignation one feels when confronted to injustice inflicted on others or to oneself and the "desire having it punished". Using a finalist argument that was customary in his time, he asserts that "to prevent and remedy such injury, and the miseries arising from it, is the end for which this passion was implanted in man". Resentment is consequently "one of the common bonds, by which society holds itself". It must be viewed as a weapon against "vice and wickedness", permitting the punishment of the guilty, whereas compassion or pity would make retribution impossible. Henceforth the "moral

consideration" one should have for resentment is due to the "good influence" it exerts "upon the affairs of the world", since it serves to prevents or correct the humans' tendency to do wrong.

With the concept of *ressentiment* introduced in the *Genealogy of Morals*, a completely different perspective is adopted. According to Nietzsche (1989/1887: Preface, 3), not only is it the historical origin of morality; it is also its psychological foundation. It provides the answer to the question: "Under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess?" Contrasting the "slave morality" with the "noble morality", Nietzsche (1989/1887: I, 10) argues that, whereas the latter "develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself", the former "directs one's view outward instead of back to oneself" and "needs a hostile external world". On one side, "the man of *ressentiment",* focused on his personal world and problems, "understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble". On the other, "the noble man", impervious to *ressentiment* and apt to forgetting, is "incapable of taking his enemies, his accidents, even his misdeeds seriously for very long". The construction of a moral adversary is crucial here, since the man of *ressentiment* "has conceived 'the evil enemy', 'the Evil One', and this is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a 'good one' – himself!" This is exactly the contrary of what characterizes the noble man who, according to Nietzsche (1989/1887: 11), "conceives the basic concept 'good' in advance and spontaneously out of himself and only then creates for himself an idea of 'bad'!" Values thus proceed from diametrically opposite logics: the "bad of noble origin" and the "evil out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred" have nothing in common, except the fact that their antonym, the "good", is deceivingly the same. This is why one can affirm that *ressentiment* transforms the couple "good" and "bad" into the couple "good" and "evil", a new duality in which "good" has changed its signification, becoming properly moral, rather than practical or aesthetic.

In fact, although he opposes slaves and nobles in his analysis of morality, Nietzsche (1989/1887: I, 7) makes another distinction, which seems even more

crucial to his argument, between the "priests" and the "knights", who both belong to the superior class, but do not share the power, which is monopolized by the latter therefore causing the frustration of the former. Unable to rule and conscious of their weakness, but aching for power, the priests elicit a "radical revaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say, an act of the most spiritual revenge", by which they systematically reverse the knights' values based on the equation: "good = noble = beautiful = happy = beloved of God". Guided by the "hatred of impotence", these "most ingenious haters" declare that "the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone – and you the powerful and noble are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless of all eternity". And this is how "begins the slave revolt in morality, that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind it and which we no longer see because it has been victorious". One recognizes in this inversion of values, through which the weakness of the oppressed becomes a virtue, a fundamental feature of the Christian doctrine: the devaluation of the values of the dominant and the revaluation of the values of the dominated, as formulated in the Beatitudes pronounced in the Sermon on the Mount, by "this Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this 'Redeemer' who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, the sick and the sinners", in Nietzsche's words (1989/1887: I,8). For him, the genealogy of morals is inseparable from its sociology and theology.

This approach of *ressentiment* was further developed in an eponym book by one of his most prominent followers, Max Scheler (2003/1913: 25-27), who characterizes it as the "self-poisoning of the mind caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects" leading to "a tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments". The source of *ressentiment* is the "thirst for revenge" that erupts as the result of a reaction of frustration provoked by a combination of envy for what one does not have and of impotence to obtain it, but it is neither mere anger nor pure emotion: it supposes the work of time and of consciousness. The realization of vengeance would annihilate *ressentiment*, which "can only arise if these emotions are particularly

powerful and yet must be suppressed because they are coupled with the feeling that one is unable to act them out – either because of weakness or because of fear". Hence the fact that *ressentiment* is a feature characterizing the experience of "those who serve and are dominated, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority". At least at a sociological level, since for Scheler (2003/1913: 59-68), there is also a theological dimension. A converted Catholic himself, he differentiates two opposite attitudes in the "way of stooping to the small, the lowly, and the common": "love entirely free from *ressentiment*", which is not moved by the desire of these "negative values, but despite them"; and "the 'altruistic' urge, which is a form of hatred, of self-hatred", since its "interest in 'others' and their lives" is only motivated by a form of "*ressentiment* morality". In the first case, one does not cherish misery or sickness, but the person behind them, whereas in the second case, one recognizes the dominated and the suffering ones only through their weakness. This idealized distinction between love and *ressentiment* is further developed by Scheler (2003/1913: 79-83) via a reflection on what he calls "modern humanitarianism", that is, the universal love of mankind, which he distinguishes from Christian love.

From this brief outlook through almost three centuries of moral philosophy, it is clear that, in the views of Smith and most of the Scottish Enlightenment and even more of Nietzsche and his follower Scheler, resentment and *ressentiment,* respectively, are negative moral emotions. But they are so in a very different sense and with a different intensity. For Smith, resentment represents a passion, which can be a legitimate response to a wrong committed against the person and lead to a fair punishment of the perpetrator. There is a moderate tone in his criticism of resentment, which he assimilates to a form of indignation related to an injury. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* defines a condition, which characterizes the repressed feelings of the dominated and legitimizes their reaction against the dominant. There is a radical stance in his critique of *ressentiment*, which he views as a vengefulness based on envy and impotence. The difference between the two theories and the two words is even more profound, though. With Smith, we are in the realm of the psychological and within the limits of morality: the objective is to explain and justify social interactions involving injuries. With Nietzsche, we are in the domain of the

genealogical and at the foundations of morality: the goal is to interpret and shake the obviousness of our moral certainties.

To return to Améry, it is remarkable that he explicitly – and reluctantly – inscribed his path in that of Nietzsche, when one considers his gruesome posterity. "The man who dreamed of the synthesis of the brute with the superman must be answered by those who witnessed the union of the brute and the superman", writes Améry (1980/1966: 68). "They were present as victims when a certain humankind joyously celebrated a festival of cruelty". The project here is to revert the perspective on *ressentiment* – from the strong to the weak, from the dominant to the dominated. This inversion is, however, a complex phenomenon. On the affective side, it retains its negative dimension of hostile sentiment, at the risk of creating misunderstanding in a time when forgiveness and reconciliation seem consensual. On the political side, it rehabilitates the will not to forget and not to pardon, simply because one cannot erase the wrong that was done, especially when the perpetrators and those who let their crimes happen are still alive, sometimes occupying official functions in the new political regime. The choice of the word *ressentiment*, rather than resentment, thus indicates affirming an anthropological, rather than psychological, signification to his position, but legitimizing it from a moral, instead of emotional, perspective. The man who invokes *ressentiment* as a personal stance towards his former torturers is neither the man of *ressentiment*, whom Nietzsche associates with revenge, nor merely a resentful man, whom Smith would be willing to absolve: he is a man defending a form of dignity that is increasingly censored and has become unintelligible.

It is these conceptual as well as ethical distinctions that I want to apply to the analysis of two quite different situations, which may have only in common the moral incomprehension they have both raised. But unlike the philosophers I have discussed, my stance is not normative: it is not to judge whether it is right or good to feel and express resentment or *ressentiment;* nor is it to decide whether social agents should rather be forgiving than rancorous. I simply try to account for these reactive attitudes which are so common and yet so little analyzed.

Ressentiment and the South African Experience

"As if nothing ever happened". This inscription tagged on a wall in Johannesburg long intrigued me. Although I had no way to ascertain what the author of this graffiti really meant by this enigmatic sentence, I soon came to consider it as a sort of magic sign that had been put in my way to help me understand the South African scene after 1994. I interpreted it as the obliteration of the past and the contestation of this erasure, as I could perceive them during my fieldwork in Soweto and Alexandra, the two main townships of Johannesburg, and in the former homelands of Lebowa and Gazankulu, in the Northern Province recently renamed Limpopo, as well as in the medical worlds, scientific arenas and public sphere, which were also parts of my ethnography between 2000 and 2005 (Fassin 2007). One of my friends, a renowned Professor of Public Health, once confided to me how much his childhood had been painfully complicated, because he was torn between the two parts of his father's family, respectively classified as "Coloured" and "African" and therefore spatially separated, and how, doing his internship in a rural area, he was denied the entry to a hotel where he was supposed to stay overnight while his white colleagues were welcomed by the owner, a situation which he reminded him of his years at the university where, not having access to the medical residence, he had to spend three hours daily commuting to attend his courses. Even in the Soweto hospital where he later worked as a resident, he confided that the white doctors would ignore or despise him and his friends of color. Then came the first democratic elections, which sounded the death knell for the apartheid regime and the beginning of the politics of reconciliation. The attitudes of his colleagues towards him changed from one day to the next. They would now greet me and shake hands, he commented; they would talk to me and laugh with me. As if nothing ever happened.

A common narrative to account for that period of dramatic transformations goes as follows. For almost five decades the apartheid regime imposed a racist and inhuman treatment of the non-white population, especially the most numerous so-called "racial group", the Africans, who were discriminated against, frequently

abused, harshly exploited, dispossessed of their lands, expulsed from their neighborhoods, and segregated in urban townships and rural homelands, all in the name of white supremacy. At some point, the conjunction of the struggles led in the country by the Mass Democratic Movement and abroad by the African National Congress, of the revolts of the youth in the townships and the international boycott of the economy, precipitated the collapse of this oppressive system. Soon after the liberation of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of political organizations and the negotiations for the transition towards democracy, despite a context of violence and plots against African leaders, and under the threat of a civil war between ethnic groups fueled by the white power, the 1994 elections took place peacefully and gave birth to a government of national unity. As the dismantling of the apartheid regime occurred at an accelerated pace in most domains of public life, the project of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission took shape and the audiences started under the authority of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Seven thousand individuals applied for amnesty for gross violations of human rights committed in the previous decades, the most horrendous crimes being left to the work of regular tribunals. When the Commission officially ended its activities in 1998, one could consider that in only four years the new government had managed to replace the white supremacist regime by the "rainbow nation" promoted by Desmond Tutu. It dealt with its past in an apparently consensual manner while intensely working on the remaking of a multicultural world under the banner of the "moral regeneration" movement initiated by Nelson Mandela. So went the story usually told or simply imagined, acknowledging the truly remarkable achievement of the South African people and their leaders. However, the collective desire – both internationally and locally – to see this uniquely harmonious political transition succeed obscured the profound tensions that continued to divide the South African society.

These tensions were dramatically revealed by the controversies about the HIV epidemic, most spectacularly at the time of the 13th International AIDS Conference, in July 2000, when the South African President, Thabo Mbeki, publicly unveiled his doubts about the cause of the disease and the efficacy of its treatment (Schneider 2002). While much has been written on what was designated as

denialism on the part of the government, and more specifically on the consequences of this position in terms of public health, little attention has been given to the discourse of the chief of state and his supporters as well as to the larger context of the polemics. Firstly, interpreting the disease as a result of poverty rather than the action of a virus explicitly raised the question of the negation of socioeconomic factors by most specialists of the infection who insisted not only on its biological origins but also its supposed behavioral and cultural components: speaking of sexual promiscuity or of traditional practices, not to mention the virgin-cleansing myth supposed to account for the frequency of sexual abuse via a belief in the purifying power of raping young women, was a way of negating the role of inequalities and violence inherited from the past in the expansion of the infection, and more generally of not recognizing the political economy of the disease as a legacy of apartheid. Secondly, declaring antiviral drugs as ineffective at best, toxic at worst, openly manifested a suspicion regarding not only the pharmaceutical industry but also medicine, public health and more broadly whatever could be viewed as emanating from the white world: for more than a century, indeed, epidemics of plague, flu, tuberculosis and syphilis, successively, had served to justify the exclusion and segregation of the Africans, from the construction of the first so-called native locations to the generalization of townships and homelands; more recently, the discovery of a program of Chemical and Biological Warfare developed in the last years of the apartheid as a deadly weapon to be used against African leaders and population, including the dissemination of lethal microbes, finally cast doubts on the assumed benevolence of scientists and physicians. In sum, the heterodoxy of the President and his followers was nourished by a profound mistrust resulting from past experiences, which were largely denied by orthodox scientists as having anything to do with the present situation.

This mistrust found its most expressive form in the speech Thabo Mbeki delivered on October 12, 2001, for the Centenary of the birth of Z.K. Matthews, who had been the first African to obtain a B.A. from a South African University and later became a prominent figure of the African National Congress in the struggle against apartheid (http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=2727). Evoking the

stigmatizing representations of Africans transmitted by the educational system during the past century and referring to their recent echoes in the comments publicly made about AIDS, the President denounced those who affirm that Africans are "natural-born, promiscuous carriers of germs" and "human beings that cannot subject their passions to reason", predicting that "our continent is doomed to an inevitable mortal end because of our unconquerable devotion to the sin of lust". The tirade targeted the trivialization of a racist discourse on African AIDS, both in international spheres (Bibeau 1991) and on the national scene (Van der Vliet 2001), which had a longer history on the continent (Packard and Epstein 1991). Unsurprisingly, this unusual language for a chief of state, full of acrimony, elicited virulent reactions from his political opponents as well as from liberal intellectuals, who saw new evidence of what they viewed as a cynical instrumentalization of history. Let us turn our back to the past and direct our attention towards the future, they would say. These criticisms prompted Thabo Mbeki to reply on August 9, 2002, in his speech at the funeral of Saartje Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman who had been exhibited as a freak show attraction in nineteenth century Europe and whose long claimed remains had finally been repatriated from France to be buried in her home country (http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=2948). Calling for the courage to confront her tragic story, which had become emblematic of the South African history, the President added: "I speak of courage because they are many in our country who urge constantly that we should not speak of the past. And they are so bold as to say that the past is no longer, and all that remains is a future that will be". This comment is echoed by the great South African novelist, Zakes Mda, in his preface to the play *Nothing but the Truth* (2002: viii): "There is a demand from some of my compatriots that, since we have now attained democracy, we should have collective amnesia, because memory does not contribute to reconciliation. We should therefore, not only forgive the past, but also forget it. However, it is impossible to meet this demand, for we are products of our past. We have been shaped by our history". For Mbeki or Mda, lucid memory is a condition for the remaking of the nation, whether it is called reconciliation or merely coexistence.

Indeed, during all his years of political leadership, the most notable element of Thabo Mbeki's remarkably crafted speeches was his recurrent reference to history – a particular history, in light of the suffering endured by the African people. The contrast with his predecessor was certainly striking. Whereas Nelson Mandela is a man of reconciliation, Thabo Mbeki appears to be a man of *ressentiment*. The past is mobilized by the former to unite the nation under a timeless philosophical bantu notion of *ubuntu*, meaning the necessary connection with and generous relation to others, while it is resurrected by the latter to emphasize divisions, as in the famous 1998 "Two nations" speech in which he opposes one nation "white, relatively prosperous", and the other "black and poor", a reality he describes as "underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white domination". The fact that Nelson Mandela served twenty-seven years in prison in South Africa while Thabo Mbeki lived twenty-eight years in exile, mostly in Britain, has been used as an argument to discredit the latter who obviously suffered less directly from the apartheid regime than the former. A sociological interpretation seems, however, more relevant to account for this paradox, since it can be argued that, for political leaders, exile, because of the absolute distance it builds with the enemy, is more propitious to the development of rancor than is presence, which allows, even under harsh conditions, more complex social interactions with foemen, especially when one has to negotiate with them. But this relativization of the situation and its consequences in terms of reconciliatory dispositions were definitely not accessible to the majority of Africans living in townships and homelands, who essentially had contacts with whites through the uncontrolled brutality of the security forces or the distant contempt of their employer. Hence the banality of bitterness and animosity toward the former oppressor I encountered among those who had this experience of segregation, humiliation, violence and fear.

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Amnesty Committee crystallized the tensions between the official politics of national absolution and the victims' reluctance to pardon. Desmond Tutu himself tried to convince those who presented their harrowing cases in the hearings to forgive their perpetrators. For

him, the act of pardon is a spiritual sublimation that permits the construction of the individual and collective future. As Thomas Brudholm (2008: 52-53) argues, though, this politics of reconciliation promoted by the archbishop "was both blurred and maximalist". It was blurred, because forgiveness did not only imply renouncing revenge, but also, as a result of the acceptation of the principle of amnesty, abandoning potential legal procedures. It was maximalist, because it supposed the possibility of unilateral forgiveness, when criminals would not exhibit signs of repentance. It thus exerted an almost untenable pressure on the victims, especially when, during the hearings, they were physically and emotionally confronted with the chasm existing between their experience and that of the perpetrators – not only in the past, but also in the present.

Sylvia Dlomo, an old African woman who thought her son Sicelo had been killed by the security forces decided to testify before the Commission although she would have preferred a prosecution and punishment in a regular tribunal (Pigou 2002: 106). At the hearing, she realized to her despair that the alleged criminals expressed no genuine contrition: "These people are coming forward to ask for forgiveness, just because they want to get away with it and not to say they are really sorry for what they did. You can see them smiling all over the place. You can see others chewing gum right inside the court. What does that mean? You are crying, mourning for your loved one who died in a gruesome way, but they are laughing?" Antje Krog (2002:90), an Afrikaner poet who wrote a literary report on her two years of observing the work of the Commission, also manifested an emotional reaction of incredulity regarding the men applying for amnesty: "It's them! It's truly them… I go cold with recognition. That specific salacious laughter, that brotherly slap on the hairy shoulder, that guffawing circle using a crude yet idiomatic Afrikaans. The *manne*… We all know: they were the doers. Their task was not to make speeches or shuffle papers. Their task was to murder. I find myself overcome with anger". Between the two women, though – one who has lived through not only the killing of her son but the decades of oppression, the other who has been a lucid critic of the racist social group to which she belonged – the affects aroused by the casual and provocative attitudes of the alleged criminals are different.

On the one hand, Sylvia Dlomo experiences *ressentiment,* in the sense that she does not want to forgive, but does not seek revenge either: she is in search of the truth about the circumstances and reasons for the death of her son and aspires to a just retribution of the criminals, while the Commission is trying to provide a reasonable agreement between the parties in the perspective of an amnesty which would settle the case. Eventually, when she is informed that the murderers of Sicelo are not the white men who have appeared before her, but friends of his and members like him of the armed resistance against the regime who killed him because they suspected him of being a spy, she feels not only disgraced by this supposed revelation which taints the memory of her son, but betrayed by the commissioners who seem unwilling to investigate further this astoundingly improbable turnaround. On the other hand, Antje Krog feels indignation against those men whose vulgarity and ruthlessness she recognizes too well and profoundly rejects: they may belong to the same ethnic group, yet they do not share the same moral world. Thus, *ressentiment* is on the side of the victims, indignation on the side of their advocates. One has to have personally experienced the violence and humiliation of domination, including the shame of one's submission and impotence to respond, to feel the aches of *ressentiment*, which is the reaction to injustice and injury as well as to the sense of indignity resulting from one's involvement in one's condition – an experience those who are objectively on the side of the dominant have not been exposed to, whatever sympathy they may harbor for the victims and hatred they may feel towards the perpetrators.

One can therefore understand the practical and theoretical complications posed by the "moral equalizing of suffering", which Richard Wilson (2000: 80) views as a crucial feature of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "In the hearings, commissioners repeatedly asserted that all pain was equal, regardless of class or racial categorization or religious or political affiliation. Whites, blacks, ANC comrades, IFP members, and others all felt the same pain. No moral distinction was drawn on the basis of what actions a person was engaged in at the time". Actually, the difference that people felt and acknowledged did not only have to do with the actions that were presented in the hearings: it was also, and probably even more

decisively, related to the sort of everyday experience of apartheid in which they were embedded. The experience of the whites was definitely not that of the blacks, and equalization of their suffering barely made sense.

A story to which Desmond Tutu particularly liked to refer concerns a white woman who was severely injured and whose friends were killed as the result of a hand grenade attack by the member of a liberation movement (Brudholm 2008: 55). When she was released from the hospital, she stated that she would like to meet the perpetrator "in a spirit of forgiveness", adding remarkably: "I hope he forgives me". For the archbishop, her magnanimity illustrated the power of human goodness and her suffering showed that everyone endured the regime and its consequences. However, he overlooked how different these ordeals might have been, depending on whether they were inscribed in the "history (*Geschichte*) of the victor" or the "history (*Historie*) of the vanquished", in Reinhart Koselleck's words (2002). This white woman could legitimately have felt anger or even resentment toward the criminal – which in fact she did not. But she could not have experienced the *ressentiment* felt by many black people, since she had not been exposed all her life to the violence of inferiorization and stigmatization from those who had injured her. The attack caused her a terrible physical and psychological injury, yet it had little in common with the moral injury of being abused without any possibility to respond and even under the obligation to submit to it.

In parallel to this story, one could evoke that of a young African woman who was brutalized and gang raped by the security forces, who were searching her house for an anti-apartheid activist (Dube 2002). She testified before the Commission but had no intention to have her attackers granted amnesty, if they were to be found: "One of my rapists had said they were going to humiliate me until I hated myself. 'You won't even look into a white man's face again'. I realized how true he was". This experience of degradation and culpability was meaningful to her in the larger context of her life in the township under the oppressive regime and its continuation in the present through the impunity of the perpetrators and the lack of significant reparation. It is certainly what Antje Krog (2002: iv) had in mind when she dedicated her book to "every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips".

Ressentiment is more than an affect: it is an anthropological condition related to a historical situation of victim – a description that does not suit the ordinary experience of resentment as it is encountered among the police.

Resentment in French Policing

"It's always the fault of the police". During my fieldwork conducted between 2005 and 2007 in an urban area near Paris (Fassin 2011), I would frequently hear that expression of discontent as a comment on news items or local events involving deviant acts, generally violence, committed by their colleagues. This grievance towards the public had two implications: first, that the police were constantly suspected; second, that they were never guilty. Factually, these assertions could be seen as correct. In effect, although the excessive use of force was ordinary, particularly in the poor neighborhoods and housing projects, these acts had very little consequence. Only a small proportion of the deviant acts of the police led to complaints from citizens, since those most frequently abused knew that their word would carry little weight against that of the officers in a tribunal, and furthermore, barely one out of ten charges that were lodged gave rise to an administrative or judicial sanction, which consequently remained exceptional and, moreover, appeared to be seldom enforced (Jobard 2002). Thus, viewed from the perspective of the institutions in charge of assessing and possibly punishing abuses, the police were almost never guilty, whereas, regarded from the side of the inhabitants, this impunity prompted a confused sentiment of suspicion. The only conflicting voice to disturb this lenient consensus was that of the National Commission for the Deontology of Security, an independent authority that reviewed cases submitted by citizens via their representatives and expressed public advices to the Ministry of the Interior: its assessments were generally less indulgent than those of the disciplinary committees and the court system, but this rigor eventually caused its suppression by the government. The protection of police deviance by official institutions was therefore ensured, even in apparently obvious cases. In November 2005, two adolescents died in an electric transformer where they had hidden to escape the

anti-crime squad that was chasing them. The immediate response of the Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, was to accuse the youth of having committed a robbery and to exonerate the police from any responsibility. The prosecution did not open an inquiry. However, it was later substantiate that the two boys were not deserving of any blame and that the officers were conscious of the deadly risk but did not try to intervene. Still the judge dismissed the case. A young police officer I was accompanying in his night patrols a few weeks after this tragedy, which provoked the most spectacular riots of the past twenty years, told me his impression: "I don't think the police were even chasing them. Actually, these kids might have simply been playing hide and seek among themselves. But once more everybody attacked our colleagues". It is always the fault of the police.

This vision of the public as hostile, which fuels a profound resentment among law enforcement, is certainly not new. In his pioneering study of the police of a midwestern city, presented as his dissertation in 1950, the sociologist William Westley (1970: 108-110) highlights the performative function of this imaginary. In effect, it is characterized by "first, an adverse definition of the police on the part of the public and a consequent hostility toward the police and, second, the fact that the policeman's occupation selects interactional situations in which this hostility is intensified". The construction of this image thus contributes to the production of reality: the police are all the more aggressive since they view their public as hostile and through their aggressiveness render the public hostile. But this representation has also a social function. According to the author of *Violence and the Police*, "since they see the public as hostile to the police and feel that their work tends to aggravate this hostility, they separate themselves from the public, develop strong in-group attitudes, and control one another's conduct, making it conform to the interests of the group". Indeed, this cohesion does not only rely on positive images, such as their maintaining security and promoting peace in society, but also on negative ones, such as the hostility of the public, which allows them to build a world apart, immunized of attacks coming from the outside and preserved from insiders' possible betrayals. As the psychologist Penny Dick (2005: 1372) observes: "To protect and defend the ideological boundaries of the profession requires in-group

affirmation and both spatial and moral distanciation from out-groups, who pose a potential threat to their identity". This representation of the public as hostile has therefore a long history in the forging of the professional culture of the police.

Yet four elements singularize contemporary France in this regard. Firstly, contrary to what is generally believed, polls invariably indicate the popularity of the police, which is one of the most respected public institutions, far more so than education, justice and employment agencies: even recent affairs of corruption have not substantially altered this relation of trust. Secondly, the social construction of the public as enemy has been part of a strategy by the government during the past decade to regain the favor of the far right constituency: more specifically, the population of the housing projects, mostly comprised of working-class immigrants and minorities, has been targeted as well as undocumented aliens and Roma people, with a bellicose language being used against them by the President and his successive Ministers of the Interior, allegedly in the name of the war on crime. Thirdly, the judicial system has been increasingly under pressure and even under attack from the executive authority: legislation has been passed producing more and more severe sanctions against petty crime, constraining the judges' decisions, at the same time as the magistrates were also publicly accused of leniency, despite the empirical evidence to the contrary; justice has therefore been considerably weakened in a period when its resources were diminished, contributing to its discredit. Fourthly, the victimization of the police appears to be an even more recent invention orchestrated as a state policy to transform their image: significantly, during the 2005 national riots, regardless of the fact that several hundred policemen were injured, no violence was publicly reported, as the vulnerability of the security forces was not supposed to be displayed; by contrast, since the 2007 local riots of Villiers-le-Bel, prompted by the death of two young men who were knocked down by a patrol car, the publication and prosecution of even minor wounds suffered by the police have become systematic, for they are now considered to facilitate the subsequent work of repression; rather than the youth killed by the police being the victims, it is henceforth the police injured by the youth who are victimized; paradoxically, this evolution occurred during a time when casualties among law

enforcement reached a historic low, with a national average of two deaths per homicide each year, four times less than four decades ago.

These various ingredients constitute a politics of resentment, eliciting animosity against certain segments of the population and rancor regarding the magistrates, while transforming the police into victims, entirely at odds with objective facts, including polls concerning the trust they benefit from the public. This production of resentment via political discourses and public policies is deliberate. It makes possible and acceptable what Everett Hughes (1958) describes as the "dirty work" characteristic of certain professions, taking various forms: "It may be simply physically disgusting. It may be a symbol of degradation, something that wounds one's dignity. Finally, it may be dirty work in that it in some way goes counter to the more heroic of our moral conceptions". In the case of the police, the dirty work includes something of these three components, but the last one is certainly the most common. The officers with whom I spoke had entered the profession, they said, to "arrest thieves and thugs" – probably not acknowledging they had also chosen it for the security of employment. However, confronted with a relative scarcity of accessible crime and the pressure of a government anxious to demonstrate its efficacy, they found themselves reduced to the unsatisfactory task of apprehending undocumented immigrants, whom they had to separate from their family, and marijuana smokers, while ignoring the dealers who were under special investigation by the narcotics squad. These two categories of offenders presented the dual advantage of being easy prey, increasing their statistics of arrests, and of being easy cases, augmenting their proportion of elucidation – which are the two main criteria to assess their activity. But many among the police were unhappy with their designated role. "I refuse to get into that, it's just too simple: you go to a migrants' hostel, and you're sure to find illegals", one officer told me. "If it's to pick up stoners, that's not what I did this job for", another complained. Many admitted that had they known what their activity would be like they would not have chosen this profession – if, in fact, they would have really had the choice. The work they considered dirty resulted from this discrepancy between expectations and reality,

not only in terms of heroic representation of their role, but also, and perhaps even more, from the perspective of the moral rationalization of their action.

In reference to the famous detective film, the criminologist Carl Klockars (1980) has conceptualized the "Dirty Harry problem", which he depicts as a "moral dilemma" of having to use or not "dirty means" for "good ends". In my fieldwork experience, this alternative seemed a romanticized version of the work of the police: most of the time the recourse to dirty means did not have the excuse of good ends. In the case of discrimination, which was as systematically denied as it was commonly practiced, racial profiling was in part the logical consequence of the so-called "politics of the figure", meaning quantified objectives of arrests to be reached by each squad. The stop and frisk had a greater likelihood of being successful when checking non-whites, especially in terms of finding undocumented immigrants, who were easy targets to attain the fixed goals. Most law enforcement officials did not view this statistical discrimination as dirty means: it was mere pragmatism, they argued. In the case of violence, it was also encouraged by the government, which had given instructions to use with much more liberality the judicial procedure named "outrage and rebellion", signifying the possibility of prosecuting individuals for any behavior that could be construed as talking back to or physically resisting the police. This possibility considerably reinforced the officers' power and legitimized brutal interventions either as provocations or as reactions, markedly in the poor neighborhoods and the housing projects where it was most often utilized to exert a social control over the population, particularly the youth. But again the police did not consider these abuses as dirty means: it was simply the use of coercive force to accomplish their professional duty. Yet, to account for the deviant practices, one cannot limit the analysis to this rhetoric of denial. Patrol officers are not only submitted to the injunctions of national policies, they demonstrate their agency. They are not only subjected to government manipulation, they are engaged in subjectivation processes. To understand their capacity or even propensity to develop ordinary practices of discrimination and violence, one has to apprehend more profound reasons. Resentment is crucial to this interpretation.

Not being able to make reality correspond to their expectations, they are facing the frustration of inaction and the ambiguity of their role. The squad I was working with had decorated their office with several posters of the hero of *The Shield*, the fictional television series that narrates the story of the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department, whose brutality and corruption caused a major scandal in the late 1990s. In fact, their everyday life resembled much more a softer version of *The Wire*, which Anmol Chaddha and William Julius Wilson (2011: 164) rightly praise as a pedagogic introduction to "systemic urban inequality" but insufficiently recognize as a didactic instrument to approach the "crisis in blue" as the author of the fiction program, David Simon, entitled a series of articles in the *Baltimore Sun* (cited in Williams 2011: 211). To comprehend the sociological grounds of the moral experience of patrol officers I am analyzing, one has to consider the fact that the French police is a state institution, which implies a national recruitment 80% composed of young men and rarely women from rural areas and small towns, mostly from the de-industrialized North of France heavily hit by the decline of coal mining. These recruits, who have no experience of the urban environment, receive training that often deepens the cultural gap between them and the inhabitants of the areas where they will have to work: neighborhoods are depicted as a "jungle" and their residents as "savages", facilitating the development of racial prejudices. "These bastards – they don't like us! But I don't like them either", commented the head of the anti-crime squad as we drove near young African and Arab men. When confronted with the hardships of the housing projects and their populations, massively composed of immigrants and minorities, who actually belong like them to the working class, they tended to distance themselves by accentuating differences. Their resentment can thus be regarded as related to what Pierre Bourdieu (1999/1993: 4) designates as a "positional suffering", that is, the misery emanating from the social location occupied and the frustrations it elicits. It is displaced from the state, which subjects the police to the degrading situation of having to deal with a stigmatized population, to this public and those who are viewed as being on its side. A shift all the easier to make as the representation of the public as hostile is part of their identity building.

But the resentment felt by the police is exacerbated by the depressing sentiment they usually have that, as I heard them comment during our patrols night after night, they "work for nothing", since the judges often release the suspects they arrest. Actually, the most lucid among them recognize that frequently the cases they present for arraignments are not convincing for lack of proof, but the majority fails to accept this self-criticism and holds the magistrates responsible for their supposed leniency, a perception not corroborated by empirical data, as we have seen. But acrimony against the judicial system, which is a federating affect among officers, serves to justify what one can call, paraphrasing Michael Lipsky (1980), street-level justice. Since the judges don't do their job, let's do it in their stead, implicitly argue the police. This informal substitution takes three forms: immediate punishment, delegated retribution and punitive expedition.

Immediate punishment corresponds to the brutality and humiliation exerted on a suspect either in his neighborhood, in front of friends, neighbors and relatives, or back at the police station, where he is the most vulnerable. It can be inflicted as a supplement to what he will later get in the court. But it can be carried out when the police know they will not be able to proffer sufficient evidence of culpability and are nevertheless persuaded that the individual is guilty or, even if he is not, has been in the past and did not receive adequate sanction. Delegated retribution consists in randomly sanctioning the member of a group, knowing that he may have no personal implication in the act committed but considering him a suspect by proxy. This happens in particular when youth throw stones from a distance, often in the dark and sometimes hidden, and the police accuse the one they have been able to stop, who is simply the less fast or the less lucky. In one such case, the officers I was accompanying ran after a group who quickly disappeared in the housing project; when a few minutes later, they discovered a young African man in one of the stairwells, and arrested him; he was presented to the judge the next day, under the accusation of being the stone-thrower; but during the confrontation between the suspect and the officers, the description they provided of his clothing did not correspond to what he was wearing when he was caught. Punitive expeditions are conducted when the police are chasing someone whom they think is a culprit and

who has escaped them, generally in a context of verbal provocations or violent interactions. Several patrol cars, sirens wailing, hurry to the site of the altercation and the intervention turns into a collective retaliation, with neighbors shoved, doors broken, insults proffered, witnesses sometimes injured, and in the end, unlucky people present on the scene arrested, although they did not necessarily have any connection with the initial search. A commissioner explained to me how difficult it was for her to restrain her "men" from blindly avenging themselves on the spot, as opposed to undertaking an inquiry which could lead to a much more judicially effective procedure the following day. These behaviors, which correspond to what Jerome Skolnick (1966) phrases as "justice without trial", and the tolerance they benefit from their hierarchy cannot be understood if one simply considers them as deviance. One has to take into account the self-justification in terms of fair sanction by substitution, which allows them not to be condemned as pure vengeance, but rather to be legitimized as justice.

Resentment, which underlies these practices, does not correspond to any form of oppression or stigmatization suffered by the police. Indeed, with very few exceptions, they have not personally been the victims, either directly or indirectly, of the population on which they exert their force and sometimes their reprisals. They professionally and institutionally nourish their rancor towards the public in general, through the representation of its hostility, and towards the underprivileged in particular, via common prejudices fuelled by government discourses: the first dimension has been described as characteristic of their professional culture (Crank 2004: 61) and the second defines what is often called institutionalized discrimination (Kamali 2009: 42). Considered from the perspective of power relations, one can say that the police are not dominated or dominant. On the one hand, they are subjected to the authority of the state, which delegates to them its monopoly of legitimate violence. On the other hand, they are subjectivized through their interactions with their public, upon which they exert their coercive force. Although the spectrum is wide from hardened rancor to softer disillusionment, their resentment is diffused, neither related to a specific experience, since they seldom have been exposed to a particular ordeal, nor focused on a special group, as it

includes the poor, immigrants, minorities, magistrates, superiors, and society at large. It corresponds to a sociological position causing them frustration and discontent, which they displace from the system that gives them an ambivalent mission towards certain populations and individuals whom they have been socialized to consider as their enemies.

Conclusion

In his essay dedicated to patriotism from the collection entitled *The Persistence of the Color Line*, Harvard Professor of Law Randall Kennedy (2011: 182-183) evokes his father's relationship with his country. Having grown up in Louisiana, he "attended segregated schools, came to learn painfully that because of his race certain options were foreclosed to him despite his intelligence, industry and ambition, and witnessed countless incidents in which blacks were terrorized and humiliated by whites without any hint of disapproval from public authorities". This experience concerned more specifically one institution: "He bore a special grudge against the police – municipal police, military police, all police, because in his experience, a central function of police was to keep blacks in their 'place'. I saw with my own eyes why he developed such a loathing". Indeed, when traveling with his family through the country, and especially the South, he would frequently been stopped, "not because he had committed any legal infraction but simply because he was a black man driving a nice car", as the police officers would openly tell him, adding that he "should take care to behave himself" since things there were not like in the North: " 'Okay, boy?' Then there would be a pause. It seemed as though the policeman was waiting how my father would respond. My dad reacted in a way calculated to provide the maximum safety to himself and his family: 'Yassuh,' he would say with an extra dollop of deference". Referring to these recurrent interactions with white people, Kennedy analyzes them as the reason why his father could never "view the United States as 'his country' ". Whereas he was apparently "a vivid embodiment of the American dream", having become a respected man who owned a home and sent his sons to a prestigious university (where they significantly

all became lawyers), he had a different perspective: "Like Malcolm X, he believed himself to be the victim of a terrible and ongoing injustice that white America refused to acknowledge satisfactorily". For Kennedy, his father's reaction is representative of a common attitude among black people who have endured the experience of racial segregation and consider that little recognition is granted not only to the realities of the past but also to their continuation in the present. This is how, according to him, one must understand the "God damn America!" pronounced by Reverend Wright, Barack Obama's former pastor, which infuriated the white constituency and threatened the election prospects of the Senator from Illinois. It was not mere remembrance of things past, but reference to the present of continuous discrimination, increasing impoverishment and massive incarceration that affects African Americans. While disapproving of the pastor's hyperbolic stance, Kennedy insistently strives to make sense of his position.

This is also what I have attempted to do here: make sense of resentment and *ressentiment* – but in addition establish a difference between them. Certainly, one could say, following the classical line of moral philosophy and even much of its contemporary extensions, that Kennedy's father and the Southern policeman both manifest the reactive attitude composed of animosity and rancor that is usually designated as resentment. Perhaps it is true for the psychologist who considers that the psychic effects of an injury are indifferent to the fact that it is real (the racial discrimination regarding the father) or imagined (the affront caused by black presence for the policeman). I contend that it is not, though, if one displaces the analysis from psychological subjectivity to moral and political subjectivation. Discussing my own ethnographic studies, I have therefore proposed to analyze the process of moral and political subjectivation of the black man in South Africa and the police officer in France – or their counterparts in the United States, in Kennedy's account – as respectively *ressentiment* and resentment. Drawing a parallel with earlier research I conducted, I would like to suggest that to introduce this linguistic and moral difference is as critical for resentment as it is for trauma. On the basis of the identity of symptoms, it has indeed been established that not only the consequences of surviving a sexual abuse or a genocide could be classified under the

same clinical category of posttraumatic stress disorder, but also that this suffering could affect in a similar way the victim and the perpetrator of violence (Young 1995). This reduction of experiences to either symptoms or suffering obliterates, however, the moral experience of the subjects and the political signification of their subjectivation, as I have shown in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Fassin 2008). In an analogous way, I predicate that the social sciences must account for the difference between the reactive attitudes of the black man harassed by law enforcement and of the police officer who harasses him, even though they are both felt as responses to an injury, whether real or imagined.

The establishment of this difference is not the result of an a priori theoretical construction. It is an a posteriori conceptual elaboration based on an empirical observation: my approach has been resolutely inductive. Inspired by Améry's affirmation (1980/1966: 81) that he believed in the "moral value" and "historical validity" of his *ressentiment*, I have attempted to distinguish the experience of the blacks in post-apartheid South Africa and the police in poor urban French neighborhoods – not all the blacks and not all the police, of course, but in both cases a quite common experience that was indifferently referred to as resentment. I therefore propose two ideal-types of moral and political subjectivation. *Ressentiment* is a reaction to historical facts, which generate an anthropological condition: victims of genocide, apartheid or persecutions experience this condition. It implies not primarily revenge but recognition. It signifies the impossibility to forget and the senselessness to forgive. The man of *ressentiment* may have been directly exposed to oppression and domination, or indirectly, through the narratives of his parents or grandparents, for instance. By contrast, resentment is a reaction to a relational situation, which results from a sociological position: police officers, far right constituents, long-term unemployed workers may find themselves in such a position. It involves diffuse animosity and tends towards vindictiveness. It shifts its object of discontent from specific actors towards society at large and vulnerable groups in particular, via imaginary projections. The resentful man is not directly or indirectly exposed to oppression and domination, but he expresses discontent about a state of affairs that does not satisfy him. *Ressentiment* results from a historical

alienation: something did happen, which had tragic consequences in the past and often causes continuing hardship in the present. Resentment amount to an ideological alienation: the reality is blurred, leading to frequently misdirected rancor. Circumstances often bring together the man of *ressentiment* and the resentful man, the South African blacks socialized in the apartheid and the South African whites frustrated by the new rules of the post-apartheid, the French youth belonging to Arab and Subsaharan minorities and the French police sent to poor neighborhoods with their inhabitants of African origins. These asymmetrical confrontations are moments of truth for society, as have been the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the first case, the 2005 urban riots in the second one: they unveil the difference between the two experiences.

To try to comprehend these attitudes is not to justify them, though. Accounting for the *ressentiment* of the South African blacks – or of many of them – is not to contest the importance of the reconciliation process and the significance of the politics of forgiveness: it is interpreting a form of resistance to the current dominance of amnesty and oblivion, which has generally been dismissed. Analyzing the resentment of the French police officers – or again of many among them – is not to exonerate them from their responsibility in the unfair treatment of their public: it is explicating what they do and how they act from their perspective, rather than merely condemning or conversely obliterating their deviance. If it is true that both emotions should be taken seriously as a political and moral "address", that is, a "communicative display that sends a message and invites a kind of response", as Margaret Walker (2006: 134) cogently puts it, differentiating the two has substantial implications for the understanding of this address. It is precisely because these sentiments are often not seen as moral and because their political meaning is frequently ignored that one should give them one's attention. *Ressentiment* and resentment are part of contemporary moral economies (Fassin 2009): they represent what Primo Levi (1988/1986) analyzes as "grey zones" which require a rejection of our Manichean propensity and ethical comfort.

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Abstract:

Whereas the anthropology of morality and ethics has been mostly focused on values and actions oriented toward the good and the right, and has generally assumed that its object could be separated from the political, the purpose of this article is to apprehend reactive attitudes in response to an injury or an injustice, therefore displacing these common presumptions. A distinction based on ethnographical findings is proposed between two such attitudes. On the one hand, *ressentiment*, in the Nietzschean lineage, corresponds to a condition related to a past of oppression and domination: it is exemplified through the South African blacks in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the AIDS controversies. On the other hand, resentment, in the Smithian tradition, amounts to a situation in which a social position generates frustration and acrimony: it is illustrated via the French policing of poor neighborhoods and immigrant populations in the context of the 2005 riots. *Ressentiment* as historical alienation and resentment as ideological alienation characterize two forms of moral sentiments and modes of political subjectivation. Their study, in reference to Jean Améry's work on survivors of the Nazi regime, contributes to an anthropology of what Primo Levi called "grey zones".

Keywords:
Resentment. Ressentiment. Alienation. Moral sentiments. Political subjects. AIDS. Police. South Africa. France.