

## **The Experience of Ressentiment and revenge: The case of Iran since 1979**

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### **Abstract**

In this book, I aim to develop the concept of Ressentiment as it pertains to the study of international politics. To achieve this, I draw upon two key sources: recognition theory, Hegel, and ressentiment by Max Scheler. I argue that, although the foundations for an exploration of Ressentiment are present within the interdisciplinary Hegelian scholarship associated with recognition theory, this concept remains insufficiently explored. To advance it into a more robust theoretical framework, I trace a path through recognition theory back to Hegel's original dialectic of master and slave as articulated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I contend that this dialectic reveals the genuine dynamics of recognition and misrecognition in social existence, rather than merely depicting a state of nonrecognition. This foundational nonrecognition is similarly conceptualized by social theorists in terms of conflict and aggression in international relations. Both Hegel and Scheler emphasize a misrecognized, desiring subject that challenges conventional understandings of agency within international politics. Finally, I illustrate the relevance of a Hegelian analysis for international relations by examining the interplay between nonrecognition and states' conflict-seeking behaviors, specifically to explain conflicts between Iran and Israel through the lens of Ressentiment since 1979.

This book focuses on highlighting the role of social factors in influencing Iran's behaviour in the Middle East. To achieve this, it primarily analyses private statements, interviews, speeches, and research papers sourced from archival documents, aiming to uncover how social factors shaped the behaviour of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward other actors in the International society.

**Key words:** Iran, Islamic revolution, Ressentiment, Revenge, (mis)recognition, ontological (in)security, conflict, self and other

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **I. Ressentiment: A Self-poisoning of the Mind**

In making the case for integrating the concept of resentment into IR theory, I now turn to Max Scheler. Scheler (1994) can occupy a central place in IR social theories although he wrote almost nothing to integrate the notion of resentment to explain states' behaviors. As a phenomenologist Scheler criticizes Nietzsche's first three treatises 'On the Genealogy of Morality' about the origin of the moral judgments or more specifically the concept of Christian love as the most delicate "flower of resentment". While exploring the concept of Resentment, Scheler believes that "Resentment is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences". With definite causes, one can clearly trace the origin of the pain and react to it due to resentment. For Scheler, resentment occupies a large amount of human experiences leading to various acts. Resentment as a self-poisoning experience, can gradually shape individual's feelings of love and aversion and more dramatically, the way in which individuals shape their value judgments in the society. Scheler (1994) posits that the main cause of resentment resides in "a lasting mental attitude" which is "caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects" (e.g. attributing passive form of love via prudery to females). Resentment as a lasting experience pervades over time and he takes it as a normal component of human nature.

### **Resentment and repressive forces**

There is a violent tension when revenge, hatred, envy and their effects are coupled with impotence. Impotence is an awareness of incapability followed by intense depression, fear, anxiety, and intimidation (p. 20-21). In this condition, if subjects become able to discharge the repressive forces, they will be able to prevent it from turning into that psychological dynamite which is called resentment. However, once the discharge is blocked (as you feel fear or anxiety or anguish), this process can lead to repression. Here, the repression intensifies when the steady and constant pressure of authority deprives individuals, of an object "of what" he is afraid or incapable. Now, although fear has a specific object, becomes objectless and a deep blockage gives rise to a form of anxiety. By removing them from the sphere of consciousness, the individual or group ceases to be clearly aware of their existence and becomes even unconscious of the nascent impulse of hatred, envy, or revenge because he is scared to act on it. Here, the mass of previously repressed emotions attracts and assimilates the new affect (21).

The new effect or behaviors have different aspects. Although the negative feelings or impulse "radiates" in all directions, he may detach itself even from the man who has injured or oppressed him. In this condition, the repressed emotions turn into negative attitude toward certain apparent traits and qualities, no matter where or in whom they are found. Although the object of fear is not clear, the repressive feelings turn into visible hatred toward a group of people who represent those qualities and leads to class hatred. In this condition, as Scheler notes, appearance, gesture, style of dress, or manner of speaking that signifies a specific "class" can evoke feelings of revenge and hatred or, alternatively, fear, anxiety, and respect (21).

Interestingly, often resentment presents with a smile, a meaningless gesture, or a passing remark, in the midst of expressions of friendship and sympathy. Scheler believes,

*“When a malicious act or remark, apparently unfounded, is suddenly inserted into amicable or even loving behavior which can have lasted for months, we distinctly feel that a deeper layer of life breaks through the friendly surface” (p.22).*

Repression turns against the person himself and negative affects we've driven them within can affect our mind and body. These affects make up a substantial component of hatred wrath and revenge.

*“But repression does not only stretch, change, and shift the original object, it also affects the emotion itself. Since the affect cannot outwardly express itself, it becomes active within. Detached from their original objects, the affects melt together into a venomous mass which begins to flow whenever consciousness becomes momentarily relaxed. Since all outward expression is blocked, the inner visceral sensations which accompany every affect come to prevail. All these sensations are unpleasant or even painful, so that the result is a decrease in physical well-being” (p.22).*

this is another important effect of repression. they turn against the person themselves. The result being “self-hatred,” “self-torment,” and “revenge against oneself” (23).

### **Ressentiment: Devaluation of Values**

As a natural emotion, individuals can easily find themselves drawn into the experience of resentment. Consequently, repression of these natural feeling, as the primary cause, leads to constant willingness to indulge in certain “value delusions and values judgment”. Often unconsciously, individuals lose their capacity to project fair judgments towards others and sharply ignore the hierarchy of values among subjects. This process represents itself by systematically refusing to accept other individuals’ certain values by lowering their vital values. Ressentiment distorts the reality and in return inserts mixed up emotions about what actually matters in the realm of human true values. Making factitious value judgments.