Fung Global Fellows Program
The Culture and Politics of Resentment
October 18 - 19, 2019

Organized by the Fung Global Fellows Cohort of 2017-18:
Daniel Karell, Miranda Jakiša, Olga Panteleeva,
Jürgen Schaflechner, Yunus Sözen, Sjoerd van Tuinen
Faculty Sponsor: Prof. Gyan Prakash, Dayton-Stockton Professor of History

Workshop Agenda

Friday, Oct 18
Resentment Workshop
Room 271, Louis A. Simpson International Building (LAS)

9:30 am - 10:00 am  Continental Breakfast
10:00 am  Opening Remarks and Introductions
10:10 am - 12:30 pm  Panel 1 - The Sociology of Resentment
  Discussants:
  Ruth Braunstein (University of Connecticut) - ’There goes the shirt right off my back’: Taxes and the meaning of resentment
  Daniel Karell (NYU Abu Dhabi) - Against People Like You: Power, Victimhood, and the Crafting of Resentment
  Rory McVeigh (University of Notre Dame) - The Politics of Losing: Trump, the Klan, and the Mainstreaming of Resentment

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm  Lunch (in-room catering)
1:30 pm - 4:00 pm  Panel 2 - Official and Grassroots Discourses of Collective Trauma in Putin’s Russia
  Discussants:
  Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (Kings College London) - Putinism and Collective Trauma Construction in Russia
  Olga Panteleeva (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) - Channeling Disillusionment: Esotericism under Putin
4:00 pm - 4:30 pm Coffee + Refreshment Break

4:30 pm - 6:30 pm (LAS, Room A71) Movie Screening + Discussion
The Toxic Reigns of Resentment
Jürgen Schaflechner, Sjoerd van Tuinen

7:00 pm Dinner (upon invitation)
Palmer House - 1 Bayard Ln, Princeton, NJ 08542 [map], (609) 258-3715

Saturday, October 18
Resentment Workshop
Room 271, Louis A. Simpson International Building (LAS)

9:30 am - 10:00 am Continental Breakfast

10:00 am - 12:30 pm Panel 3 - Identity Politics and Resentment

Discussants:
Asaid Haider (Penn State) - Identity: Words and Sequences

Robert Pfaller (Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung) - How to Come Home from Our Ressentimental Journey? From the Enjoyment of Victimhood to an Ethics of Elegant Behavior

Jürgen Schaflechner (University of Heidelberg) - Resenting Resentment. Problems and Potentials of a Concept

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm Lunch (in-room catering)

1:30 pm - 4:00 pm Panel 4: The History and Theory of Resentment

Discussants:
Stefan Dolgert (Brock University) - Resentful Institutions: The Political Science of the Iliad

Robert Schneider (Indiana University Bloomington) - The Rise and Fall of the ‘Resentment Paradigm’—ca. 1935-1975

Sjoerd van Tuinen (Erasmus University) - The Resentment-Ressentiment Complex: A Critique
4:00 pm - 4:30 pm  Coffee + Refreshment Break

4:30pm - 6:30 pm  Panel 6: Democracy, Resentment & Populism

**Discussants:**

Jeremy Engels (Penn State) - *Sitting With Resentment: Rethinking the Rhetorical Ethics of a Democratic Emotion*

Yunus Sözen (LeMoyne College) - *Populism and Resentment*

7:00 pm  Dinner ([Despáña Restaurant](https://example.com), 235 Nassau St, Princeton; 609-921-2992; [map](https://example.com)).
ABSTRACTS (in order of presentation)

Ruth Braunstein (University of Connecticut) - 'There goes the shirt right off my back': Taxes and the meaning of resentment

Much has been written in recent years about how American politics - and especially the conservative populist sentiment that fueled the Tea Party movement and the rise of Donald Trump - has been shaped by the “politics of resentment” (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016; McVeigh and Estep 2019). This insight has helped observers to better understand the inextricable links between economic and cultural grievances, and between structure and feeling. Yet resentment is a relatively commonplace emotion, experienced to varying degrees by nearly everyone at some point. How and under what conditions is resentment transformed into an actionable, politically salient feeling for some individuals? This paper begins to answer this question by drawing on recent insights into the role of emotion in social movements, as well as research-in-progress on Americans’ moral views toward taxes.

Daniel Karell (NYU Abu Dhabi) - Against People Like You: Power, Victimhood, and the Crafting of Resentment

How can social and political activists induce resentment in their audience? To do so, activists need to resolve a paradox: activists must convince listeners that they are victimized to the point that they support the activists’ agenda, yet also powerful enough to carry out this agenda. Drawing on two original corpora -- 23,000 pages from publications produced by Afghan jihadists and 37,000 transcripts of YouTube videos created by American right-wing “influencers” -- I identify discursive patterns evoking kinds of power and victimhood. Namely, notions of power are rooted in claims of either moral righteousness or supremacy bestowed by tradition. Victimhood, in turn, relies on assertions of oppression or constraint. Combinations of these expressions of power and victimhood form rhetorical styles of resentment that, I argue, help activists rhetorically resolve the “resentment paradox”.

In 2016 Donald Trump shocked many observers when he rose to the presidency after many Americans had failed to take his campaign seriously. Despite his obvious shortcomings and lack of qualifications for the job, he was able to capitalize on resentments held by many Americans who felt that they were losing power in society while mainstream politicians were ignoring their plight. Trump sensed that the time was right to capitalize on this resentment, openly linking voter grievances to a white nationalist agenda that also featured blatant sexism,
homophobia, and xenophobia. Trump’s electoral success is strikingly similar to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920s. The two cases, viewed through the lens of power devaluation theory, reveal both the effectiveness and the limitations that come with engaging in “the politics of losing.”

**Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (Kings College London) - Putinism and Collective Trauma Construction in Russia**

This paper explores the high point of Putinism relying on the constructivist interpretation of collective trauma. The paper argues that the Kremlin’s politics of legitimation gradually coalesced around a specific frame of the 1990s (i.e. likhie devyanostye) as a distinctly negative, violent, and a dark period in the country’s history. The central media mechanisms used for propagating this frame are discussed and the Kremlin’s success in this process is explained in the paper using the concepts of discursive fit and common sense knowledge. The concept of discursive fit highlights the cultural resonance of the Kremlin-propagated frame of the 1990s. The paper illustrates this resonance by references to the most popular representations of the 1990s in Russian films and literature.

**Olga Panteleeva (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) - Channeling Disillusionment: Esotericism under Putin**

Esoteric movements flourish in times of trouble. Scholars of Russian esotericism have tended to explain the sharp rise of occult sensibilities after the Soviet collapse through the same historical framework that political scientists use to explain the success of the Kremlin’s current rhetoric about rebuilding the strong state - the traumatic memory of the financial and institutional crises of the 1990s. This talk analyses one of the many post-Soviet sectarian movements that combine alternative healing practices with the idea of the spiritual revival of Russia. A mixture of New Age spirituality, Christianity, and neo-Nazism, the nation-wide sect The Movement of the Creator proclaims that the Slavic people are Aryans, “the chosen people.” While the sect appeals to those disillusioned by bad healthcare institutions, it also promotes pro-Putin attitudes. Adopting a flag that spells “USSR,” the sect’s aesthetics and rhetoric parallel the Kremlin’s “great power statism” and imperial ambitions. At the same time, it channels grassroots dissatisfaction with dysfunctional state institutions away from the government by placing the blame for the health problems that plague the population on a lack of faith, and promising miraculous healing through prayer and listening to classical music. In this talk I argue that this sect’s ideology provides a way for making sense of the discrepancy between bad governance in contemporary Russia and the image of a strong nation that the Kremlin projects.

**Asaid Haider (Penn State) - Identity: Words and Sequences**

This paper explores the history and meaning of the term “identity politics,” along with the term “identity” itself. It focuses on the history of the deployment of this language within social movements and academic political debates, attempting to trace its relation to the prospects for emancipatory politics.
Robert Pfaller (Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung) - How to Come Home from Our Ressentimental Journey? From the Enjoyment of Victimhood to an Ethics of Elegant Behavior

The sociological distinction between aristocratic (as well as suburban) cultures of "honor" and bourgeois cultures of "dignity" (Berger, 1970) appears to correspond largely to Nietzsches distinction between "masters'" and "slaves' morals". Yet in recent years the passion of complaining and blaming others has achieved a new standard. Sociologists have therefore suggested a third category: "victimhood". This means that Nietzsche's accounts on ressentiment may be even more true to social reality today than they were at Nietzsche's own time. In order to account for these developments, one has to examine both the social institutions as well as the corresponding types of subject-formation. Understanding the move from "outer-directed" to "inner-directed" cultures (Sennett, 1977) may allow us to describe ways out of a current misery that spoils people's most elementary solidarity as well as their joy in life, and that also re-distributes the recognition of one's suffering from the impoverished masses to the most privileged elites.

Jürgen Schaflechner (University of Heidelberg) - Resenting Resentment. Problems and Potentials of a Concept

The concept of “resentment” has seen a recent revival in journalistic and academic circles. Especially events such as the Brexit, or the Trump election have stirred up discussion about resentment as a way to explain reactive political behavior. But how useful is resentment as an analytical concept to describe certain forms of political engagement? Which political practices are we able to explain when we call individuals—or even whole groups—resentful? Using a case-study of severe structural power imbalance, namely the situation of religious minorities in Pakistan, this paper shows some of the fallacies that arise when resentment—as well as its French kin ressentiment—is used as an analytical category. Notwithstanding such problems, I will argue that resentment can look at unique forms of reactive political practices when it is re-conceptualized as a form of practice.

Stefan Dolgert (Brock University) - Resentful Institutions: The Political Science of the Iliad

A number of prominent theorists on the Left (Wendy Brown, William Connolly) see the rise of Trump (and Right-wing populism more generally) as an offshoot of the politics of resentment, and argue that resentment “as such” is a fundamental danger to civilization. In their view resentment is such a toxic force that it must be eradicated if there is to be any real future for democratic politics, and thus they attempt to craft a political version of Reinhold Niebuhr’s “spiritual discipline against resentment” as an antidote. While their concerns are certainly warranted, in this essay I follow thinkers (James Madison, Chantal Mouffe) who urge instead that resentment be managed or cultivated rather than eliminated, and I make this case by returning to one of the foundational texts of “Western Civ,” Homer’s Iliad. In Homer’s text we see resentment presented as the challenge to political order, and (in Achilles’ leadership over the funeral games of Patroclus) we see an outline of how to harness and channel anger in order to ameliorate the effects of resentment (rather than extinguish its causes). I see this return to Homer as complementary to recent
revisions to rational choice institutionalism, like Akerlof and Kranton’s Identity Economics (2010), thus bringing together two strands of thinking (normative political theory, and institutional economics) to offer a more sanguine (if less utopian) vision of democracy’s future via a more textured depiction of its past.

Robert Schneider (Indiana University Bloomington) - The Rise and Fall of the ‘Resentment Paradigm’—ca. 1935-1975

In 1962 there appeared a volume of essays, The Radical Right, edited by Daniel Bell, with contributions by such scholars as Richard Hofstadter, Talcott Parsons, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, David Riesman, and others. The authors shared a common concern: to explain the emergence of the “New Right” in post-WWII America, embodied at the time primarily by McCarthyism and the John Birch Society. Drawing upon previous work of the 1930s analyzing the rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism by Parsons, Harold Laswell, Erich Fromm, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (The Authoritarian Personality), and others, The Radical Right, I argue, not only offered an empirical and analytical view of right-wing sentiments in the US but crystallized a full-scale paradigmatic treatment of these ideological tendencies, with “resentment” as a key feature.

What I am calling the “Resentment Paradigm” relied on several intellectual props, among them modernization theory, a commitment to psychoanalytical concepts, the concept of status (as opposed to class), and an embrace of Cold War liberalism. Indeed, these props endowed this paradigm with a persuasiveness and power such that it prevailed virtually hegemonically over intellectuals and other observers well until the 1970s when, I argue further, a sustained critique of modernization theory and Freudianism, along with a disillusionment with traditional liberalism, led to its decline. What was left, to be sure, is the still-useful concept of “resentment”—deployed these days more than ever; but without a paradigmatic packaging that, with all its flaws, endowed it with analytical heft.

Sjoerd van Tuinen (Erasmus University) - The Resentment-Ressentiment Complex: A Critique

There exists a widespread contemporary discourse in social and political theory that aims to salvage ‘resentment’ from ‘ressentiment’. Liberal and conservatives agree: while resentment is essential for democratic practices, there is always the risk of its ‘sliding’ into ressentiment. This paper investigates the ideological function of this differentiating exercise. Why is it necessary to constantly protect the socio-political order from the risk of moral corruption in these terms, and for whom?

Without exception, one of the main authorities invoked in identifying this risk is still Nietzsche. This is all the more surprising, as Nietzsche never actually made any distinction between resentment and ressentiment, and certainly would have rejected its relevance to his own understanding of politics. It is therefore by way of a historical reconstruction of Nietzsche’s
concept of ressentiment in its cultural and socio-political context that a critique of the mainstream discourse on the reactive attitudes becomes possible. At stake are the principle and possibility of politics in the age of the ‘domestication’ or governmentalization of moral sensibilities. Do the many attempts at distinguishing resentment from ressentiment not ultimately frame these attitudes in the form of a false problem that not only incorporates some reactive sentiments at the cost of a depoliticization of others, but also obscures the conditions of political action as such?

The argument will proceed in two steps. First, a distinction is made between three problems that play a key role in the evaluation of the reactive attitudes, those of their rationality, their authenticity, and their justness. It is then argued, by way of a critique of the distinction between moderate from excessive resentment and by way of a deconstruction of the distinction between unreflected and self-conscious ressentiment respectively, that the first two problems are ill-posed. While these problems concern differences in degree, and are therefore always prone to the relativism of what is here called ‘the ressentiment-ressentiment complex’, the true problem with the retributive passions concerns a difference in kind, not between resentment and ressentiment, but between active affects and passive or reactive affects. This leads to the concluding claim that while moral sentiments and political actions are always entangled, only the latter can constitute the ground of social justice.

Jeremy Engels (Penn State) - Sitting With Resentment: Rethinking the Rhetorical Ethics of a Democratic Emotion

In Ancient Greece, rhetoric, the first of the liberal arts, emerged at the same moment as democracy, for democracy demands that citizens be skilled in the production and critique of rhetoric. Rhetoric is a basic art of civic self-defense; it is how citizens make the power (kratia) of the people (demos) real. Moreover, rhetoric is one way that citizens relate to and manage the emotions of democratic life, including resentment, a natural production of any populist politics organized as a clash between the elite and the masses, the rich and the poor, the few and the many. Resentment has long been feared as the most democratic, most volatile, and potentially most violent of all the emotions, though it has come, today, to reside at the heart of American politics. This presentation asks two questions: what is the relationship between resentment and democratic politics? And are there better, or worse, rhetorics of resentment? By engaging these two questions, and taking a moment to sit with resentment, I hope in this presentation to rethink the rhetorical ethics of a most democratic emotion.
In this talk, I focus on the relationship of two polemical concepts, resentment and populism, as well their relationship with democracy and authoritarianism. I first overview the populism literature and discuss the location of the concept of resentment within this literature. Afterward, utilizing the Turkish and Argentinean cases as illustrations of populism-in-power, I offer an alternative location for the relationship of resentment and populism. Utilizing Ure’s conceptual framework that distinguishes different forms of resentment, I argue that populism-in-power (especially its right-wing forms) is the vehicle that transforms (or degenerates) ‘socio-political resentment’ to ‘ontological ressentiment’.