

Article

Looking at the Cracks and Fragments: *Ressentiment* in the Narrative of Resilience

Jasmin B. Advincula

Abstract: Resilience is a fundamental element in post-disaster recovery and development of states. However, beyond its prominence in state policies, resilience has increasingly been used as a part of a rhetorical ploy to conceal the lack or absence of political action. This narrative involving resilience has problematic implications on collective memory and recognition of the seriousness and extent of the tragic experience. To vividly illustrate true resilience and contrast it with its current depiction, this paper draws on the Japanese art of *Kintsukuroi*. In *Kintsukuroi*, the brokenness is not concealed but celebrated and garnished with gold. As embodied in this art, resilience is not the repression of a tragic memory or making light of the damage to move forward; rather it involves making the tragic experience meaningful by recognizing the extent of loss, embracing the truth, and remembering and integrating it into one's history and identity. This paper will discuss the Schelerian concept of *ressentiment* to explain the differences in the intentionality of resilience in the face of adversity, and it will contrast the 'narrative of resilience'—characterized by delusion and repression of memory—with the authentic process of overcoming that is present in true resilience.

Keywords: *Kintsukuroi*, *ressentiment*, resilience, trauma

In the wake of disasters, media coverage often recounts survivors' resilience alongside their usual reports on the affected areas and populations. While these stories celebrate human strength, they can sometimes oversimplify recovery, suggesting that cities devastated by calamities can rebound solely due to this trait. This perspective may inadvertently downplay the depth of suffering and the complex realities that follow such events. Some scholars argue that emphasizing resilience in this

way can become a rhetorical tool that normalizes political inaction or governmental neglect.¹

Resilience is often defined as the capacity to recover swiftly from adversity. However, this definition can overlook the profound losses preceding recovery. Consequently, resilience encompasses two distinct phases: the experience of loss and the subsequent journey toward recovery. By focusing solely on surface-level recovery and labeling it as resilience, we risk neglecting the depth of individual suffering. This oversight can lead to suppressed trauma, where merely enduring ongoing distress is mischaracterized as resilience. Such narratives may inadvertently normalize political inaction, as the emphasis on individual resilience can obscure the need for systemic support and intervention. In these cases, recovery seems to be illusory characterized by collective delusion and suppression of the truth, and if this is true, then resilience itself can also be deemed as illusory under the given definition.

To clearly contrast authentic resilience with the illusory form of resilience, this paper will use Max Scheler's discussion of *ressentiment* to show that the contemporary portrayal of resilience can be deemed as a form of *ressentiment*. Furthermore, to vividly illustrate how the narrative of resilience in today's society is a form of *ressentiment*, I will be using the Japanese art of *kintsugi* as a metaphor for authentic resilience and transformation. Finding beauty in impermanence, *kintsugi* involves acknowledging the brokenness and cracks of something precious that was destroyed, and it uses the most precious metal, gold, to embellish the cracks and make the beloved item stronger, more beautiful, and more meaningful.²

In contemporary discussions of resilience, two critical elements are often missing: the acknowledgment of loss, and the integration of traumatic experiences into one's personal narrative. Authentic resilience involves recognizing tragedy as an integral part of one's past and identity, rather than suppressing or forgetting it. This process allows individuals to confront their trauma, assimilate it into their life story, and ultimately foster genuine healing. Like *kintsugi*, it is not only a form of restoration that one can achieve by restoring the object to its old form, but it is also a transformative process that respects its past and recognizes its vulnerability and brokenness. For the

¹ Emily Joy Manalansan, "Resilience in the Face of Disasters: A Philippine Perspective," in *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint*, 57:2 (August 2016), 305–315, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12215>>; see also

Abu Al-Rasheed Tanggol, "Challenging the Narrative of Filipino Resiliency," in *Rappler* (18 November 2020), <<https://www.rappler.com/voices/imho/opinion-challenging-narrative-filipino-resiliency/>>.

² See Andrew Juniper, *Wabi-Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2003).

same reason, the craftsman using *kintsugi* intentionally makes the precious item stronger and more enduring, and like this Japanese art, I argue that embracing and recognizing the suffering and vulnerability are vital for achieving a more profound and authentic form of resilience.

***Ressentiment* in the Narrative of Resilience**

In contemporary portrayals of resilience, particularly when individuals are lauded amidst devastating events, one can discern the presence of *ressentiment*—a concept introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.³ Nietzsche described *ressentiment* as a form of self-deception arising from feelings of powerlessness and incompetence, leading to an outward projection of blame and the creation of a “slave morality.” This morality inverts traditional values, elevating traits like humility and submissiveness while denigrating strength and assertiveness. In the context of resilience narratives, this dynamic can manifest as a collective delusion, where the true extent of suffering is suppressed and mere endurance is glorified, potentially hindering genuine recovery and personal growth.⁴ A man of *ressentiment* is coming from a position of powerlessness and weakness, and to overcome his current condition, he engages in delusion or self-deception by ascribing values and distorting the image of the good such as those in the case of impotent hatred and revenge. Nietzsche mainly used this concept to denounce Christian morality as celebrating weakness and impotence as virtues. The kingdom of God and the idea of salvation, for instance, are seen as a disguise to rationalize the fear and hatred of weak Christian men.

Ironically, by drawing on Nietzsche’s same ideas on *ressentiment*, Max Scheler turns his diatribe against Christianity on its head. A “Catholic Nietzsche,” Scheler elaborated on the former’s ideas about *ressentiment*, defining it as:

a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature.⁵

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by and Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22–25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, ed. and trans. by Lewis B. Coser and William Wolfgang Holdheim (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 45.

From this definition, the act involves a form of self-imposed delusion that is intentionally done by the subject, and it involves one's judgment, desires, and emotions. Due to incapacity, weakness, or incompetence, there is a revaluation or devaluation of the object to fit one's condition. An example of this would be the act of *sourgraping*. This act, which is a coping mechanism, is done by making oneself believe that his object of desire is not good and desirable when he is incapable of having the object. Using grapes as an example, when he becomes aware that he cannot have sweet grapes, he convinces himself instead that the grapes are not really sweet but sour.⁶ The person may also focus on some negative aspects of his desired object to change how he values the object. In *ressentiment*, one has an awareness of the lie but tries to poison the mind by forcing themselves to believe that it is devoid of value. Since the judgment on the value of the object changes, the emotions and desire for it also follows—if the thing is devoid of value, then desire for it also ceases.

In Scheler's *Formalism and Non-formalism in Values*, he presents a hierarchical structure of values, where spiritual and holy values are higher than vital and material values. However, this hierarchy may be disrupted when *ressentiment* is present. One may convince themselves that values of utility are more important than other higher values due to weakness and incapacity. This phenomenon is visible in the practice of asceticism. In its true state, the one practicing asceticism recognizes the value of both the thing sacrificed, and the thing to which the sacrifice is being made for, as well as the difference of the two things in terms of hierarchy. However, when *ressentiment* enters the picture, the intentionality of the practice of asceticism is fundamentally changed because it is not only deliberately abstaining from things of lower value, but the thing being sacrificed is now being denied of value.⁷ One is changing their original valuation of the object not only as something lower to spiritual values, but devoid of any value and significance. This failure to recognize its value renders the whole act as pointless, and the act may not be even deemed as a sacrifice, if the essential element of 'giving-up' something of value is removed from the equation.

This also applies to the concept of resilience. The phenomenon involving *ressentiment* is present in an illusory form of resilience. Etymologically, resilience is defined as the ability to return or jump back or recoil. It comes from the Latin word, *resilire*, wherein the root word 'salire' which means 'to leap' or 'to jump', and adding the prefix 're', the term means

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷ Max Scheler and Manfred S. Frings, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). See also Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 154.

‘to jump again’ or ‘to leap forward again’. This conveys the idea of springing back to the original shape after being bent or stressed, or returning to the original position. Looking closer at the meaning of the term, a vital aspect that could be inferred from it would be that before recovery there is a state of brokenness and imperfection that is often neglected. One is already deemed resilient once they appear to function ‘normally’, or once they appear to be able to bear it and live with their daily lives. However, if the state of loss and brokenness would be devalued and undermined. Similar to the case of false asceticism, resilience would lose its essence. For how could there be true recovery, if the thing or state to recover from is denied of value and recognition?

This etymological definition is aligned with the definition used by United Nations and other state agencies, which view resilience as the ability of the community or society to absorb, resist, accommodate, and adapt to a certain hazard in an efficient manner.⁸ To measure this ability, there are criteria and resiliency points to take into consideration which is then used to create framework and strategic planning. However, these plans focus mainly on the economic implications of a catastrophe that it has even become an economic metric for some institutions.⁹ This overemphasis on the economic aspect has the effect of underestimating the extent of the problem and suffering of the victims. This is why many scholars criticize the use of resilience as rhetoric intended to justify and excuse the lack of political action by the government to reach out and address the real conditions of the people. The rhetoric of resilience, especially when its focus is on individual adaptability, fits well with neoliberal forms of governance. In such cases, governmental neglect is concealed and communities are trapped in the same vulnerable condition where they have to be resilient in order to survive. This happens in two ways: firstly, by looking at recovery simply as getting back to the old state where the community is functioning again, and where houses and buildings are rebuilt. Here, the psychological and emotional well-being of the individuals displaced and traumatized are neglected. Secondly, while the attention of the state is directed at physical and infrastructure recovery, the individuals neglected in the same process are at the same time burdened with the image of resilience imposed on them—the image, unfortunately, allows them to be further exploited and commodified. Looking at resilience as a mere glorified virtue of enduring suffering, the traumatized condition

⁸ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), “Resilience,” <<https://www.undrr.org/terminology/resilience>> (accessed 13 January 2025).

⁹ Cf. Lauren E. B. Eastwood, “Challenging Resilience: The American Red Cross and Disaster-Related Commodification,” in *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 9:3 (September 2019), 306–315, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2019.1613738>>.

and vulnerability of the victims are neglected, and the institutions and real causes allowing and aggravating the tragedy are left not accountable.¹⁰

A vital aspect of being resilient as an individual, or even as a community, is the recognition of what was lost and the extent of the suffering endured. In fact, inherent in the act of acknowledging the damage and loss is the affirmation of the value and honor of those that were lost and destroyed. Aside from implicitly devaluing those things when the suffering and the damages are neglected, failure to recognize these also prevents true reconciliation, mourning, and repentance, which serve as pivotal catalysts of structural and institutional changes for the city or the state. Without recognition, *ressentiment* enters the picture as one indulges in a delusion of reality and misplaced pride in the suffering itself rather than genuine recovery and healing.

The Art of Kintsugi as a Metaphor for Resilience

To further illustrate the nature of authentic resilience and contrast it with *ressentiment*, the art of *Kintsugi* will be used as a vivid metaphor to illustrate the nature of resilience. Looking closer at the philosophy and the principles behind this art, one can better understand when resilience is authentic and when it is *ressentiment*.

Kintsugi is a famous Japanese art form, and its origin can be traced back from *Xiushi* art of China used in making lacquerwares.¹¹ According to Tsai Wen-Ting, the Japanese even sailed to China to study this technique in making lacquerwares, bringing into Japan the Ming Dynasty classic on lacquer ware *Xiushi Lu* (*A Treatise on Lacquer Art*).¹² The technique in repairing porcelain wares uses lacquer and gold foil to decorate the pieces. Moreover, in China, the craftsmen used curium nails to repair broken vases and teacups. The art began to reach and develop in Japan when a teacup was given as a gift to General Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa. He deeply cherished the cup,

¹⁰ Clemence Humbert and Jonathan Joseph, "Introduction: The Politics of Resilience: Problematising Current Approaches," in *Resilience*, 7:3 (2019), 215–223, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2019.1613738>>.

¹¹ Wubin Xu, Yue Ma, and Chenxi Xiao, "Study on the Restoration Aesthetic and Cultural Connotation of 'Kintsukuroi' in Contemporary Lacquer Art," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society (ICCESE 2018)*, <<https://doi.org/10.2991/iccese-18.2018.159>>.

¹² Tsai Wen-ting, "In Search of Lacquer's Lustrous Past," trans. by Jonathan Barnard, in *Taiwan Panorama Magazine: An International, Bilingual Magazine for Chinese People around the World* (1 June 1998), <https://www.taiwan-panorama.com/en/Articles/Details?Guid=c2662bd9-b7a0-4452-995c-b3afd3a66482&CatId=8&postname=In+Search+of+Lacquer%27s+Lustrous+Past&srsId=AfmBOokRY0E_1FAVclTzmyVLTeeCTiD4Fv1x4MBJ9jpEINSTjiRTR_2>.

but it accidentally fell and it was shattered. The general heard through his messenger the restoration process of the Chinese, but the idea was found to be repulsive since there will be damage in piercing the curium nails in the porcelain. So, the Japanese developed their own art of restoration using Chinese lacquer and golden foil. They call this unique aesthetic process *kintsugi* or *kintsukuroi*.¹³ The process in *kintsugi* is almost similar to the art of restoration in China for lacquerwares except for the part that, instead of curium nails, it uses an *urishi* sap as adhesive, which hardens and breathes into it as it ages. It also uses red wet lacquer, and 24 karat golden dust as embellishment and support for the cracks of the porcelain.

Aside from the difference in technique, the art of *kintsugi* is also imbued with philosophy, and it stems from the *Wabi-sabi* philosophy of Japan deeply rooted in traditional Buddhist culture. *Kintsugi* reflects the core of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings found in the *Tevijja Sutta*, and this includes the four sublime attitudes or the four *Brahma-viharas*: *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā*, *uppekhā*.¹⁴ The *mettā* can be understood as a loving mind, a form of love that is unselfish, universal, and all-embracing. It is also often depicted as the love of a nourishing mother towards her newborn. Meanwhile, *karunā* is a form of compassion. It is not a mere feeling but an act in itself, characterized by the desire to alleviate the desire of another. Somehow similar to *karunā*, *muditā* also involves overcoming barriers and seeing oneself in another. The third sublime attitude can be understood as empathized joy and involves caring for the well-being of others as his own well-being. Lastly, *uppekhā* is a form of wisdom characterized by having pure love and compassion for others.¹⁵ The sublime attitudes or *brahma-viharas* emphasize the acceptance of flaws, impermanence, and imperfections which are incorporated in the *Wabi-sabi* philosophy behind *kintsugi*. The thing is perfect in its imperfection, and there is beauty in this state of imperfection and transience—one of the most salient Japanese aesthetic ideals. In this art, the broken lines are not concealed but rather highlighted with gold—recognized and celebrated. Its imperfection, fragility, and brokenness are embraced, marked, and assimilated into its new form, and has become a part of its story.¹⁶ It is not only a form of restoration, but a transformative process as the precious object is not only repaired but

¹³ Xu, Ma, and Xiao, "Study on the Restoration Aesthetic and Cultural Connotation of 'Kintsukuroi' in Contemporary Lacquer Art,"

¹⁴ Alyx Becerra, "The Japanese Art of Kintsugi," *The Ethnic Home*, <<https://www.theethnichome.com/the-japanese-art-of-kintsugi/>> (accessed January 2025).

¹⁵ Bijay Kumar Sarkar, "Buddhists Concept of Brahma-Vihar: An Analysis of Morals," in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 4:1 (2019), 185–188, <https://old.rrjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/185-188_RRIJM190401037.pdf>.

¹⁶ Juniper, *Wabi-Sabi*, 105–109.

also enhanced.¹⁷ The analogy is also applicable to the process of recovery of communities and individuals after a tragedy. For there to be true reconciliation, repentance, and true recovery, one must be able to embrace and confront the truth since the healing journey only begins when there is recognition of the true condition of the community or individual.

Recognition of Loss and Suffering

Recognition and acknowledging the true state of affairs is vital to be able to truly recover. However, in the case of the victims, the desire to suppress and forget the horrors and memory of the tragedy is natural, as recalling makes the victim suffer twice. In the case of a city struck with war or calamity, it is essential to assess the extent of loss, identify the individuals or institutions accountable, and understand the causes that led to destruction to have a holistic view of the tragedy. This would enable the city and its inhabitants who are victims to have a stronger sense of identity, as it also paves way to genuine desire for change.

The opportunity for the victims to let out their narratives is essential to their recovery, for one to see himself as a survivor, one should be able to look face to face at his horrifying past; otherwise, one would not be able to assimilate this occurrence in his memory. In fact, this very act of bearing witness can be likened to the metaphor of *kintsugi*—akin to filling the cracks of a vase with gold.¹⁸ In line with the philosophy behind *kintsugi*, this could resonate with the four sublime attitudes where embracing one's true state is essential, as well as having compassion and empathy for others. Furthermore, according to Buddhist teachings, having these sublime attitudes prevents one from experiencing tension and resentment.¹⁹ Since in this act of witnessing, the fragility and the suffering of the victim is being extracted, recognized, and considered vital to himself and to others. Overcoming *ressentiment* requires one to speak up and be true to himself. As Nietzsche observed:

While the noble man lives for himself with trust and candour (*gennaios*, meaning “of noble birth” stresses the nuance “upright” and also probably “naïve”), the man of resentment is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and direct with himself. His soul squints. His spirit loves hiding places, secret paths, and back doors. Everything furtive attracts him as his world, his security,

¹⁷ Becerra, “The Japanese Art of Kintsugi,”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

his refreshment. He understands remaining silent, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily diminishing himself, humiliating himself. A race of such men will necessarily end up cleverer than any noble race.²⁰

To be able to truly recover, an essential step is breaking the silence and being true to one's self. Furthermore, on a community level, absence of witnesses and testimonies to a certain catastrophic or traumatic event would suppress the truth of that event, although even if the truth is repressed and buried to oblivion, it somehow plays a formative role in how their life will continue. Cathy Caruth, a scholar of trauma and memory studies, noted that:

The survivors did not only need to survive so they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.²¹

In an event where many lives are lost, most especially if they are taken brutally, and if the horrors of the event are beyond ordinary and traumatic, the victims may be rendered incapable of being a witness. Caruth calls this phenomenon 'collapse of witnessing', a condition where the tragic event left no witnesses, as the experience made the victims unable to articulate their experience, and unable to be a witness to their own selves and to others. The Holocaust is her primary example of this phenomenon, as the event is unfathomable, which according to Caruth, is almost cognitively impossible for it to have a witness, as it, at the same time, made the victims believe their deserved subhumanity. It has eradicated the imagination of an 'Other' in their mind—which is vital since this other is, at the same time, a listener, a bearer to the testimony of their own experiences.²²

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 38.

²¹ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 63.

²² Caruth made reference to Buber's I-thou relationship. In Buber's discussion, when another person is referred to as 'thou' in this sense, it means that the person is not held purely as an object of experience only, a bundle content grasped by the 'I' but as another subject'. Here, Caruth is discussing that this possibility of regarding another person as 'thou' was impossible during the holocaust. The victim cannot even turn to anyone, and be regarded as a subject, they could not even turn to themselves and see themselves as subjects to bear witness to their own experience.

Caruth argued that it is helpful for the victims to have an outsider to the event who will serve as a listener to their tragic experiences. The outsider-listener serves as a witness to the survivors, and it gives the survivors an opportunity to relive their experience of the event.²³ Through this mechanism, the outsider-listener becomes the witness to the event before the witness becomes a witness to himself and the event. The outsider-listener becomes a bearer of a narrative that was difficult to face for the victim, while at the same time able to sympathize authentically with the victim while maintaining one's separateness from the witness and the event.²⁴ Thus, the listener is able to objectively perceive the lived experience of the survivor. Through this process, the survivor is able to reclaim his position as a witness, and at the same time, he would no longer feel that he bore the experience alone, as the event would already have two witnesses (the listener and his own self). Also, through this process of extracting testimony, a victim is able to truly recover and survive the event. As Caruth eloquently puts it:

It is the realization that the lost ones are not coming back; the realization that what life is about is precisely living with an unfulfilled hope; only this time with the sense that you are not alone any longer—that someone can be there as your companion—knowing you, living with you through the unfulfilled hope, someone saying: 'I'll be with you in the process of your losing me. I am your witness'.²⁵

Thus, it is important for the state to provide an avenue for these kinds of narrative exchanges to help the victims reclaim their identities, so that they could really continue with their lives.

Moreover, aside from recognizing the extent of loss and suffering of the victims, another essential dimension to recognize is the fault or the shortcomings of the state and institutions that are expected to protect these individuals from catastrophic events. The victims may feel betrayed as they had entrusted themselves to these institutions which have failed to protect them, and ultimately this subsequently led them to lose their sense of trust and safety to the city or the state.²⁶ Hence, another vital factor in achieving holistic recovery is the presence of sincere reconciliation, consisting of true

²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁴ Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. by Peter Heath (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

²⁵ Caruth, *Trauma*, 71.

²⁶ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

repentance from those accountable, and forgiveness from those affected and victimized. However, this is only possible when there is recognition of the damage and their accountability to it.

According to Scheler, forgiveness eradicates revenge and other forms of *ressentiment*, as it has the effect of lifting a debt—releasing what is suppressed.²⁷ Deconstructing the act, one can see that the act of forgiving would be indicative that one recognizes that there is something done and a resulting damage that has to be forgiven. Without these two elements, the act would lose its object. Forgiving is an act of the will, and inherent in the act is the recognition that he remembers the suffering endured, and that he is able to overlook the fault due to mercy and compassion. As Paul Ricoeur wrote elsewhere, forgiveness indicates that something is not forgotten.²⁸ Moreover, in this process when the damages and loss are truly seen for what they are, the values and the integrity of those things lost or damaged are affirmed. Hence, one can say that in this act, a huge partaking in the act is the confrontation with the truth.

On the other hand, in asking for forgiveness one should be truly repentant, and for this to happen, there are two elements that must also be present: there should be recognition of the damage done, and one's awareness that one is accountable for it. As Scheler noted in his work, *On the Eternal in Man*, "repenting is equivalent to re-appraising part of one's past life and shaping for it a mint-new worth and significance."²⁹

If one truly has remorse for what has been done, then one would necessarily feel the desire to undo something that is already unalterable, and this is only possible when one was able to recognize the extent and the seriousness of the damage, loss, and suffering caused by his actions. Moreover, upon confronting this reality, a truly repentant person wishes therefore that it had not happened; but since this is not possible, as the past cannot be undone, this usually leads one to make good resolutions and promises not to commit the same mistakes again. As Scheler puts it, "the more you close your eyes to what should be the subject of repentance, the more tightly you bind on your feet the chains that encumber your progress."³⁰

To make lasting, institutional, and systemic changes, this kind of remorse is necessary. According to Scheler, someone who is truly repentant is driven by an inner recognition of their own fault, and a willingness to admit

²⁷ Scheler, *Ressentiment*. See also Max Scheler, *Person and Self-Value: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. by Manfred S. Frings (Dordrecht, Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1987).

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 486–493.

²⁹ Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man* trans. by Bernard Noble (London: SCM Press, 1960).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

and be accountable for their mistakes.³¹ This kind of conversion in a person is crucial, as this breeds genuine desire for change that makes the city or the state stronger and more resistant to adversities.

Furthermore, this kind of repentance is necessary if we want to make our cities truly resilient. There has to be an avowal of fault, desire to ask for forgiveness, and a genuine act of forgiveness after reflecting on the depth of the fault. As Ricoeur discussed, in the exchange of forgiveness, the act of forgiveness is an extraordinary act that reaches far beyond the altitude of the fault.³² Similar to the art of kintsugi, the defects and cracks from the fall are not only confronted and mended, but the finest materials and the most precious metal—urushi sap, red lacquer, and 24 karat golden dust are used to cure the object. In true reconciliation, similar to restoring porcelain vases, the act of forgiveness goes with a recognition of fault and a promise. This is why authentic resilience that possesses these traits is not only able to bring back the object to its old form, but also address its vulnerability and fragility, which makes it stronger and more resilient.

Building from the Ruins

When a porcelain vase falls, it breaks and loses its function and beauty, and the first step to begin its journey to recovery is to acknowledge its current state, and pick up the fragments. This also applies to human beings and communities. After the tragedy, a person is left with remnants of the destruction, and fragments of blurred and tragic memories of their last days with their loved ones. While the reality may be difficult to face, recognizing what is lost and the real state of affairs is vital for true healing and the initiation of the recovery process—one has to know and to build from what is left.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of any disaster or tragedy, the city is not only destroyed physically, but it also loses its identity—its being a place of solace, childhood, and livelihood for its people. Given this, a certain way of life cannot be restored anymore. However, the situation becomes worse when instead of recognizing their suffering and loneliness, the responsibility of being ‘resilient’ and adapting to the current situation is imposed on them for the sake of the recovery of the whole community.³³ Looking closer, one can see that even the rebuilding process can be imbued with *ressentiment*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49–61.

³² Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 486–493.

³³ Lovely Mae Laborte, “How ‘Filipino Resiliency’ Is Being Used as a Means to Elude Climate Justice and Government Accountability in the Philippines,” in *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 11:3 (2022), <<https://doi.org/10.24940/ijird/2022/v11/i3/mar22025>>.

The glorification of resilience shows the state's denial and neglect of the real condition of the community. In aiming to be resilient, communities often emphasized collective endurance at the expense of recognizing the individual suffering of a person. This phenomenon can be analyzed using Scheler's criticism of humanitarianism. In *Ressentiment*, one of the defenses posed by Scheler against the attack of Nietzsche on Christian love and morality, was that Christian love was erroneously equated to the universal love of mankind, 'humanitarianism', or 'love towards every member of the human race'.³⁴ The two kinds of love are different, and in the latter kind of love, Scheler assented to Nietzsche that *ressentiment* can indeed be found at the roots of it. This universal love of mankind is built from *ressentiment*, and it is worth noting that this kind of love views community similar to how society in the present times views 'resilient' communities.

In humanitarianism, the object of love is an abstract collective entity. The 'neighbor' or the 'individual' present in real love is replaced by 'mankind'. The 'neighbor' degenerates into being a mere member of an abstract totality—or a representation of humanity. This shift is significant since in the love for 'neighbor', the object which is the neighbor is deemed as the closest person who can help us to deep and spiritual connection outside ourselves.³⁵ Comparing the two, in love for neighbor, love is a movement, and a spiritual action. It is not only a mere feeling, or a passive act. On the other hand, love of mankind is more impersonal and springing from a delusion.³⁶

This love for 'mankind' is imbued with *ressentiment* according to Scheler, as it is originally coming from a desire to escape, or a hatred towards the self or a smaller unit of people in the community. It affirms the importance of the whole to deny the value of the members. This is akin to how modern society treats 'resilient' communities, as they are seen as a sum-total of individuals, where an individual life barely matters and is reduced to a number comprising the whole. As Scheler claims, the fundamental forms of communal life are valued far above all individual interests, opinions and intentions.³⁷ After a city is afflicted with a catastrophe, the recovery of the sum-total of the inhabitants is taken as the recovery of the whole city, and individual sufferings are left not accounted for.

According to Laborte, in the hopes of having a resilient community, it is usually the oppressed, the indigenous, or the poor people who bear the responsibility of being resilient. They are vulnerable, and their appearance as

³⁴ Cf. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 114 and Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

³⁵ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 116.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

able to function is being glorified, leading the city to hastily consider this as recovery of the whole, without regard to their personal stories and trauma.³⁸ It is worth noting to ask, if resilient individuals are deemed resilient because they can endure and survive from a tragedy or disaster that happens regularly, is the community truly resilient?³⁹ Indeed there is a problem with affirming this view. Since if there has been true recovery, then one should not find himself as a regular victim of the same cause. In cases like this, the vulnerability of individuals and real problems are not really recognized and addressed.⁴⁰ Resilience, in this phenomenon, is seen more as a virtue of being able to endure and live with the suffering. Their true state is concealed, and their bare survival is affirmed. This condition in itself is given a positive value to downplay and overshadow the value of what is lost in the tragedy, and to deny accountability for what was lost—which is a mark of *ressentiment*.

Furthermore, aside from recognizing the vulnerability of individuals, the vulnerability of structures must also be recognized. In the aspect of reconstruction, houses and establishments should not only be rebuilt in the same manner as they were originally created but instead built with foresight. The vulnerability and faulty foundations of the old structures must be addressed, and the structures must be rebuilt with a view of making them stronger. Moreover, in the process of recovery, not everything is restored and rebuilt. People determine which is significant and valuable: what is to be restored, and how it should be restored. However, as described by Scheler, modern society has also become utility-focused, and some things of higher value are often neglected. To achieve a holistic recovery, there should also be attempts and efforts to recover things of higher value, such as the identity and historical heritage of the city.

Historical churches and heritage sites, for instance, should not simply be rebuilt and repaired for them to merely function, but rather they must be craftily restored with the hope to get its original appearance and form to maintain its old identity.⁴¹ Hence, usually the same materials are used, and often the rubbles from the old form of the building would be the same materials to be used to rebuild the historical site. In this process, it is not only the structure that is aimed at being restored, as they are built for the people who value them. Their way of life, sense of community, and identity are also in the hope of being returned to normal. In trying to preserve the history and

³⁸ Humbert and Joseph, "Introduction: The Politics of Resilience."

³⁹ Laborte, "How 'Filipino Resiliency' Is Being Used as a Means to Elude Climate Justice and Government Accountability in the Philippines."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Paolo Belardi and Giovanna Ramaccini, "From Suffering to Hope. The Survey of Rubble as a Measure of Resilience," *Disegno*, 7 (December 2020), 129–140, <<https://doi.org/10.26375/diseigno.7.2020.14>>.

identity of the city, the people who advocate for it show their affirmation of the value and historical relevance of the destroyed site.

Furthermore, as Belardi and Ramaccini remind us: the rubbles or the remnants of the ruins that are used to rebuild architectures such as historical churches would be the *conscience of history*, as they stand as a witness and as a reminder of what was lost and has been overcome.⁴² In this sense, ruins may not only symbolize physical destruction but also its resilience—whether in individuals or cities. Moreover, the manner of rebuilding reflects the technique of *kintsugi*, where the fragments and pieces of the broken vase are the ones used to rebuild itself, but the goal is not only to put it together but make it more enduring and stronger. The old form is respected as there is no alteration made, but its vulnerability is recognized.

Conclusion

Ultimately, where there is authentic recognition of those things, reality is confronted, and true healing happens. Through this manner of holistic recovery, resilience is not reduced to a mere illusory product of *ressentiment*, since the suffering is not downplayed and things lost are not devalued, as Scheler notes the usual structure of *ressentiment*: “the formal structure of resilience is always the same: A is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the un verbalized intention of denying, devaluating, and denigrating B. A is ‘played off’ against B.”⁴³

Given this structure, *ressentiment* is indeed present and embedded in the very idea and modern conception of resilience, evident in the suppression of truth, delusions of recovery, and failure to recognize the true condition and reality of the society. Instead, what is being recognized and attributed with a positive value is the suffering, as the city takes pride in the bare survival of the tragedy. How individuals live and survive after the event is not given significance. Furthermore, in the devaluation and downplaying of the damages, one closes his eyes to reality, but at the same time, there is an awareness of the need to close his eyes and avoid confronting the truth. According to Scheler, these are some of the common features of *ressentiment*, and clearly in this process, the community engages itself in a self-imposed delusion.

This paper explored the nature and effects of *ressentiment*, and illustrated how it is present and partaking in how resilience is conceived and used in the policy literature of the last few decades. The discussion also emphasized the importance of acknowledgment in affirming the value of

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 68.

what was lost, and the value of the experiences marked by trauma and suffering. Furthermore, the mainstream idea of resilience is shown to be misleading, and following Scheler, the structure of modern conception of resilience would contain the usual pattern of resilience, as it downplays the reality and extent of tragedy, and overemphasizes superficial recovery.

To further illustrate the nature of true resilience in contrast to the illusion of resilience, the art of *kintsugi* was used as a vivid visual representation of genuine resilience. The Japanese art is coming from the *Wabi-sabi* tradition rooted in Buddhist religious philosophy, and the four sublime attitudes under it further illustrate how the art shows the importance of embracing the truth—the reality of imperfection and impermanence of things.

Moreover, in illustrating how vital the act of recognition is, this essay examined the significance of witnessing both for the healing process of the victim and to the society at large. The act of recognition also plays a crucial role in such cases when victims feel betrayed and marginalized by the state that was expected to protect them. To have an exchange of forgiveness and systemic changes, the one asking for forgiveness must acknowledge his fault and accountability, and the one forgiving must recognize the fault to be pardoned. These two elements are essential in the act, as this exchange is an extraordinary act of the will. Genuine repentance goes with the desire to change oneself, and forgiveness relieves one from harboring a vengeful form of *ressentiment*.

Furthermore, the process of recovery—whether individual or communal—must consider the presence and effects of *ressentiment*. When the sufferings of individuals are neglected, recovery efforts become surface-level, as shown in Scheler's critique of the depersonalized and detached approach of humanitarianism where the Other becomes a mere member of an abstract collective entity. Ultimately, part of authentic resilience is true reconciliation and healing which is more than just rebuilding and restoring what was lost, and this requires empathy and shared acknowledgement. These principles underlie the art of *kintsugi*, which makes witnessing, acceptance, and true healing and forgiving possible.

*Department of Philosophy
Ateneo de Manila University, The Philippines*

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