

Ana Blazheva, MA

Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje
ana.blazheva@isshs.edu.mk

MELANCHOLY AS A POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL IMAGINATION

Abstract

The text will investigate the melancholia starting from the psychoanalytical discourses and their fundamental texts: Freud's *Melancholia and Mourning*, Melanie Klein's reconsideration of the psychogenesis of manic-depressive positions and Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun*, to its potentials for political imagination and transformation. For the basis of rethinking melancholia into the political context I use the critical writings by Sara Ahmed on the cultural politics of emotions and the manner in which they reflect the power relations and the potentials for political transformation. Furthermore, the book *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief (Race and American Culture)* by Anne Cheng starts from the Freudian analysis of mourning and traces the dynamics of rejection and internalization which can help in explaining the American racist culture. The idea is to investigate if the model of melancholia can help understand the mourning and loss not as symptoms but as dynamic processes with forceful, but also with transformative potentials for political imagination. By investigating the melancholia of the marginalized the idea is to explore the possibility to transform the mourning into a stance against the wound. The text will look into the dynamics of the student movement in Macedonia from 2014/15 as an example of creative transformation of the marginalized position into the new political discourse that initiates the democratic processes in the society.

Key words: melancholy, politics, transformation, student movement

INTRODUCTION

The concept of melancholia will be investigated with focus on two aspects. One line of analysis is the psychoanalytic discourse on melancholia in the works of Freud, Klein and Kristeva. The other line is the analysis of the transformation of melancholic dynamics behind the marginalized position of the students in contemporary Macedonian society into political action. The aim is to follow the psychodynamic process of melancholia within the societal processes and to see if there is possibility for creative transformation of this dynamics into the political imagination and into political action. The leading question in this paper is how the melancholic process and marginalized position can be transformed into political action? I take the student movement “Student plenum” and its emergence as phenomenon that I analyze to understand the basic processes and conditions which enabled this movement to transform the political discourse and therefore make significant change into the social realm of the Macedonian society.

PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCOURSE OF MELANCHOLIA

In his essay “Mourning and melancholia” Freud discusses the differences of the process of mourning the loss of loved subject and melancholy. Mourning, he argues is the usual reaction after the loss of the loved person or loss of some abstraction taking place of subject, like freedom for example. During the process of mourning the self is not brought into question. Melancholia on the other side, as Freud explained is pathological process of mourning. Freud describes several mental features that characterize both processes. The mourning as well as melancholia have - profoundly painful dejection, lost of interest in the outside world, lost of the capacity to love, inhibition to all activity. The distinctive feature he points out is the lowering of the self regarding feeling that occurs in melancholia. He says “In the mourning it is the world that has become poor and empty in melancholia it is the ego” (Freud, 1917: 246).

What happens with the ego? Why the loss of something loved ends with the wounded ego? Freud explains it with the shift of the reproaches for the loved object to hers/his own ego. The conflict of love Freud says is going on with all the pros and cons that ultimately lead to the loss of love. How does this happen? He explains it with the object relationship – something happens (it could be a disappointment) that shatters the object-relationship. The result is not the usual withdrawal of the libido from the object and displacement to the new one, but the free libido which was withdrawn, goes/attaches to the ego. It makes identification of the ego with

the abandoned object. The identification is therefore the process that transforms the loss of the object to become ego-loss. Freud suggests that the loss of the object can be followed by the regress to narcissistic wound, closed in the internal world of the ego. The notion of primary narcissism, for Freud as the initial investment of the libido in the ego, was used to explain as “the instinct of self-preservation” (Freud, 1914: 74).

Another important insight of Freud’s analysis of the underlying process of melancholia is about the transformation of what he calls the conflict of love into the “crushed state of melancholia”. The closed, uninterested, self-lowered position was at first revolt, he suggests (Freud, 1917: 248).

While loss is the essential for mourning, in melancholia it is not just loss but also, being slighted, neglected or disappointed can import opposed feeling of love and hate into and reinforce the ambivalence that characterizes the conflict of love, argues Freud (251).

Melanie Klein made significant insight into the depressive position, as she calls them, in children. She deepens the analysis of melancholy by locating its basis in early development by description and analysis of the first loss of the loved object. In the “Addition to psychogenesis of the manic-depressive position” she analyzes the early development of children and how they pass through the depressive states along with what enables the child to overcome those states. One of her conclusions was that there is a close link between the infantile depressive position and the phenomena of mourning and melancholia in adulthood (Klein, 2008: 76-77).

She argues that experiences of “depressive position” in the early childhood are basis for melancholia in the adulthood. She also explains that one of the important processes that take place is the introjection of the loved object into the Self. If the introjection is not successful it will lead to forming the pattern of “losing the loved object” in the adult person. According to Klein, first loss of the loved object is occurring while ending of the breastfeeding. (Klein 2008) Klein describes the inner world in terms of internal relations and happenings, as product of the infant’s own impulses, emotions and fantasy. It is profoundly influenced by his good and bad experiences from external sources and formation of “good” and “bad” object respectively (Klein,2008: 141).

Another significant analysis of melancholia in the psychoanalytic discourse that takes Freud’s, Klein’s and Lacan’s interpretations further is psychoanalyst and literary critic Julia Kristeva. Pointing toward melancholia’s processes as essentially driven from the relation with the other she names the primitive loss as the “loss of the necessary other”. This as Freud pointed out is regress to narcissistic wound as the last sanctuary for survival that Kristeva explains as specific narcissistic melancholic for which the sadness becomes replacement for the lost object. That is

how for the melancholic the sadness becomes replacement for the other. She also reviews Freud's notion of ambivalence and the hidden aggression towards the lost object and therefore towards self that appears together with the sadness. Love and hate establish complex dialectics of idealizations and devaluations of self and other that are result of the process of identification (Kristeva, 1992).

Psychoanalytical discourse is focused on the internal processes which are occurring as result of the continuous dynamic between the subject and its environment. Moreover the ego can be viewed as a function through which the processes of exchange of the subject with the environment are processed through identification and/or introjection. This interrelatedness is important aspect for the further analysis of the melancholia in terms of marginalization of groups and subjectivities in societal context and political dynamic.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES OF MELANCHOLIA

How the melancholy dynamics is relevant in the social domain? Is it possible for psychological dynamic to be translated into political transformation or action?

Answers to these questions are no easy task. However, several theorists already investigated these possibilities and used psychoanalytic language and discourse to analyze and explain social contexts and use it as language for political transformation. Sara Ahmed critically approached the emotions and explored their relation with the relations of power as well as the potentials for political transformation. She argued how emotions are not only internal processes in the realm of subjectivity but circulate between us. When expressed they become "ours," they initiate response. She also explained how emotions are constructed by social and cultural practices. Emotions also modulate our approach and relation towards things and therefore they participate in the construction of "I" and "Us," as Ahmed says "emotions produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated" (Ahmed, 2004: 10). Therefore I am encouraged to use emotional experiences and describe and analyze them in social and political realm. Ahmed also explores why social transformation is so difficult? Why relations of power are so tough, inextricable and persistent when they face collective resistance? She also reminds us that feminists introduced emotions as political issue and showed us how power shapes the surface of bodies and worlds (Ahmed, 2004).

The concept of racial melancholy is one of the examples how the melancholy dynamics is used to explain the position of communities/groups in certain social relations and context and the dynamics of the processes of exclusion and identification of the dominant group and marginalized. Cheng in her book "The Melancholy of

the race” uses the model of melancholia to understand how the mourning and the loss of the one that was hurt are not only symptom but also dynamic process of coercion and its transformative potentials for political imagination. She analyzes if transformation of the mourning into stepping forward against the wound is possible (Cheng, 2000).

This transformation and change in the social and political domain is only possible through relation. I argue this by grounding it in the Badiou’s concept of change. Badiou proposes that the change is relational. It is not property of the being as such but of being localized in a world. He says “The change is not the destiny of being but possibility when being is localized in the world submitted to certain relation with other multiplicities. The field of relations is the field of change. The change is possible because of experience, which is pure relationship with our world” (Badiou, 2012).

STUDENT MOVEMENT “STUDENT PLENUM” AS MODEL OF TRANSFORMATION OF MELANCHOLY INTO POLITICAL IMAGINATION AND ACTION

In this part of the paper I will concentrate on description and analysis of the emergence of the student movement “Student plenum” searching for the elements and aspects that enabled the movement to grow and to transform student position from marginalized into empowered to initiate change in the overall political discourse.

I’m using data from the research for my doctoral thesis that is focusing on the student movement that rose in 2014. The research was conducted during the period of January – July 2015. The overall methodology is grounded in critical ethnology and phenomenological methodological paradigm. The methods used in the research are field observations during the period of the occupation of the University also known as “Autonomous zone” and two series of interviews with ten students from the Student plenum – 20 interviews in total. Using the research and data presented in this paper I focus on the experiences of the students before the movement and during the intensive period of forming and functioning of “Student plenum” and during the occupation of the University St. Cyril and Methodius named “Autonomous zone.

At first I will present findings from the research that can illustrate the marginalization and melancholic position students were experiencing before their engagement into the student movement. Their experiences speak about the disappointed expectations from the higher education – where their individual

potentials, interests and needs weren't considered as important and relevant. This made them feel unimportant and neglected.

The Faculty disappointed me a lot...not only the faculty, I believe that you can get as much as you invest from anywhere but I had different expectations out of the academic life, being a student... More fairy tale and glorifying image and vision....I expected that there will be people that think, are creative, that I can learn from, that it will be wow!...and when I got there...I was disappointed, I saw that all they expect from me is just little bit, and no one is interested in the rest...at first I was questioning what should I do, but later I got used to it and gave little of me, just as much as it was expected...and I felt even worse about myself for giving so little and knowing that I have so much more to give! I entered the matrix and kind of shadow followed me that it is not as it should be... (Int 2_VR)

But the attitude of the professors towards the students, it means, the professor has no respect for you as his/hers colleague or future collaborator, but as subjugated, you are there just to pass the exam and get the grade, he/she is there just to give you some information and that's it. (Int 2_MN)

Students' personal experience of not being able to find job and become financially independent from their parents also made them disappointed and depressed. They felt that being student was undervalued and lead to their subjugated position. The effects from all these experiences in the long run makes them depressed, apathetic or they dream or try to go somewhere else where they consider will have better opportunities to find work and live better life.

We don't have security over the future, a young man that lives without this security could lose himself, or go and search it somewhere else....I planned to find job and to write my thesis, but it didn't happen...over more than a year I felt depressed, I didn't want to see people....the whole situation is pushing you towards depression and I fell under it, I fell...it is so easy to be in apathy, too easy, melancholy is the most common thing here in our country (pause) I know countless people, smart people, that stare at the stars, that take drugs, fall into excesses. Cause it is all that is asked of you, since there are walls all around that you hit million obstacles. Every day you see how powerless you are and slowly you start to accept that. (Int 1_KM)

Translated into psychoanalytic discourse – marginalized position of the students is the result of disregard of their position in the society, neglect of their potential,

lack of acknowledgement and respect. They have lost their place, and they lose their hope. It is not melancholy over the loss of the subject but the grievance over the loss of their position in the community and their sense of worth. Internalization through introjection creates situation for the students to feel personally lost, inadequate, insufficient, frustrated and looking “envious” towards others that are situated, successful and belong to the newly formed elite that enjoy all the privileges.

I could say that the last fifteen years, twenty years there is constant devaluation of the status of the students in the society. And especially since this government is in power has huge impact in the degradation of the students.... The students were apathetic, totally apathetic, not interested for their own future, or interested for their future somewhere else, not in this country. This government made students to believe that there is no prosperity here and underestimated them so much that it pushed this new law, the external testing... Students are such a marginalized group that is facing terrible social obscurity and huge problems, and what students get at the end of the week is one free beer in the student parties wrapped in kitsch and cheap entertainment, and all of that in radical apathy.... The only chance for success is by getting political partisan membership in order to get employment enabled by the ruling political party. (Int 1_BR)

What is the point of transformation? How does individual subject transform its marginalized position into empowered political action and therefore participate in the social transformation? I looked for answers to this question in the stories of the beginning of the Student movement. What happened? How was it experienced and what was meaningful for the students?

In short summary, the movement occurred as derivative of other student initiative called “Open Suitcase”. The later was initiative of group of students from the Faculty of Philosophy that wanted to offer a place where students from different faculties and backgrounds could meet and discuss socially and student relevant issues. Their program consisted of screening socially engaged movies or videos and facilitation of discussion on the issues raised by the presentation. The next quote is narrating exactly the emergence of the idea of Student plenum:

We wanted, aware of the problems, not to just throw the critique directly, but to offer new values and help the students to unite. We were aware that we can't do anything if people don't know each other. That's how we started with the cultural initiative that aimed at bringing students into doing something together, we wanted this idea to grow into something more than just screenings but this was the main activity....It didn't matter how many

people were there, 2 or 50, we played the movie, facilitated the discussion and back then it didn't feel that it has any social influence, but we were convinced that it is important! For us it was really important!....And in one discussion in October, I don't remember which movie was screened, the discussion started - Let's do something together! And in that moment the people met, connected and decided to make the plenum. (Int 1_VR)

What I point out as spark for the emergence of the movement is the point of recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of each other as together in their joint revolt and hope "Let's do something together!." Here again I refer to the Badiou's concepts of change and politics and argue that the critical point for transformation of the melancholy into political action is in the process of relating with the others that share and or empathize with the same position in certain context, in a shared venture of creating different practice and experience vis-a-vis the one that brought them into the marginalized position. This itself is a political transformation towards radical change. For Badiou politics can be understood as "collective action, organized by certain principles, that aims to unfold the consequences of a new possibility which is currently repressed by the dominant order" (Huddleston, 2009). Moreover the instance of the political subject is one of a collective, as opposed to an individual subject.

But what are the main conditions that enabled this idea to become so fertile and grow further? I would propose that several crucial elements deriving from the way this movement was born made the fertile ground. Other factors related to the local social and political context would not be elaborated in this paper because of the space limitations but also given that it would mean broadening the focus of the analysis which is not coherent with the concept of this paper.

Two organizational elements that I find essentially related to the growth and the power the movement gained that transformed the marginalized student position are horizontal organization and inclusiveness.

Horizontal organization is relatively new way of organizing social movements that occurred in response to the growing crisis and lack of democracy such as Occupy movement (Sitrin, 2012). Michael Kazin says that these movements are not based on creating either a program or a political party that will put forward a plan for others to follow. At the same time, these movements are attempting to prefigure future society through present social relationships (Kazin, 2015).

On organizational level horizontality refers to the active creation of nonhierarchical relations through decision-making processes. One of the main values built in the horizontality is equality. However, it does not guarantee equality given to the assumption that inequality will always permeate every social interaction and that

each person is responsible for continuously challenging these inequalities at every step of a decision-making process (Maeckelbergh, 2012). Students confirm that their experiences of plenum discussions were rather frustrating but also enriching.

Honestly the horizontal organization can sometimes be, and I don't agree when they say –ineffective, it can be slow!...And anyone can say their opinion even if someone else already said the same, but it has its beauty, everyone to feel included, to be able to make statement, to be heard.... Yes, yes, yes, to think over “aha my colleague was speaking about this, maybe he is right, although there were moments when we couldn't hear each other... (Int 1_TF)

Different concepts, projects and practices of participatory, horizontal, deliberative, discursive democracy belong to the contemporary political theory and practice that develops transformative democratic strategies for improving democratic values such as egalitarian social justice, individual liberty combined with popular control over collective decisions, community and solidarity, and the flourishing of individuals in ways which enable them to realize their potentials (Fung and Wright, 2003). Students were very conscious of the democratic aspect of the movement. They value the democratic experience they had as truly genuine and dialectic.

With the plenum meetings we really trained democracy, we comprehend it, and we experienced it! And now we know what democracy is. I had opinions that I thought were flawless, but those are dictators opinions, autocratic opinions...Here we succeeded in a magical symbiotic way to entangle so many contexts and so many opinions and it gets dimension of not just some simple eclectics, or syncretism that connects differences, but it makes a whole, one synthesis! One synthesis out of the best qualities... (Int 1_BR)

Dialogue in all forms - with tension between the different ideas, debates for conflict resolution or Socratic dialogue for revealing truth were all embedded part of the plenum discussions that enriched the experiences but also the articulations and strategies of the movement and ensured their intelligence and creativity to make breakthrough in the political arena.

Inclusion is also essential element that ingrains the equality as crucial value shaping the group dynamics. What was important in the local context for this movement was the demonstration that students have no fear of being labeled with political party activism which was also creatively articulated in number of student's actions and strategies. Furthermore, inclusiveness was important for

the demonstration that there is not necessarily need for ideological homogeneity as well relatively new phenomenon in local social movements. Along with the inclusiveness of ethnic and other minorities and marginalized identities which opened new era of social movement and political discourse in the Macedonian society.

And here all together and it was the most interesting thing of all that there were no prejudice among people, we slept together, ate together from different ethnic background, religious, sexual and all, and we were all together because I was not used to that outside the occupation to see it in Macedonia. (Int 1_VL)

I think that the horizontal organization is what enables everyone to say whatever he/she wants...I think that...It was the only place in the state that you can be free, think freely, talk freely! Aside that there is always saying that we have rights to free speech...You really don't!... Here, you could just shout out loud! If you feel like it...You can! And people will understand you! (Int 1_KM)

Two additional elements come from the subjective experiences of the students - sense of freedom and belonging as crucial elements that derive from the group organization and dynamic essential for the transformational power of the “Student plenum” movement. Political theoretician Murray Bookchin elaborates that the roots of the word freedom came from the German Freiheit, which takes its point of departure not from the individual but from the community or, more broadly, from society(Bookchin, 1994). In this paper freedom is seen as relational phenomenon experienced during the lived experience in the shared community. Aside of being one of the exploited abstract or subjective concepts and ideas, freedom as experienced by students especially in the local social and political context is one of the crucial elements for the political imagination and personal as well as collective transformation of student position. Sense of freedom for the students inside the movement and during occupation made significant changes in their everyday life practices. Next quote will illustrate how sense of freedom experienced during “Autonomous zone” is reflecting everyday life.

And you know, we take that with us in our neighborhoods and not just that, lot's of habits! You don't know how many times when I walk by local shop I stop myself not to take an apple (laughs)... There (in Autonomous zone) it was normal that you take apple from the food corner for free, we shared food. It was kind of going back to normal! We live in abnormal conditions

and in completely normal for two weeks! Completely normal! Where you can say whatever you like, think freely and do whatever you like without hurting or imposing to the other. (Int 1_KM)

Sociology and social psychology usually deal with belonging as part of social identity. In this paper I regard sense of belonging not in terms of creation of new social identity but moreover as relational phenomenon confirmed in the personal experiences. I think that belonging also was important element in the transformation of the melancholic and marginalized position. Psychologically it is related with the sense of acceptance and acknowledgment by other/s and opens possibilities for changes in the identity position or in psychoanalytic terms ego position. Politically it can also initiate and shape kind of political identity which is not fixed. I find Mouffe's notions of political identity to be suitable in describing it as alignment through joint articulation of each other's needs that in articulatory practices bring together different subject positions refiguring them in the process of negotiations (Mouffe, 1992a: 379).

The feeling "this is ours and we build it together" which we wouldn't have if three people made it, however..."this is ours and we take care of it", we should find our place there and we should contribute...this care and the responsibility that I noticed in so many people, maybe not all but many, it is the thread that make us one community and all those feelings...mutual care, sharing, giving, solidarity were flourishing, flourishing as in no other community or environment I ever saw before. I don't know what was that inspired people to be so open towards others, to share so much and to connect, is it the space itself that was our or the plenum as our guideway... some combination made it possible and simply it existed and it was ours and it was shared/communal... (Int 2_VR)

The sense of freedom and belonging facilitated the empowerment of the students and creation of their own community built in revolt against values and principles predominating today's politics and society but in solidarity and dialogue among themselves and with others. Therefore students find their experience from the "Autonomous zone" as victorious experience of true democracy in opposition to the experiences of antipode of democracy in everyday politics.

The Autonomous zone itself was a victory. Every day, every moment, every donation was a victory. This instant change in the way we grasp the notion of how it should be and the presentation of the true models of democracy, against what is the antipode of democracy, it can not be other than victory. Professors of humanistic science to speak about energy? Probably not

because they are part of some kind of New Age movements. All of us were talking about energy that really was what we felt there. And when you feel like that, when it pushes your body towards something, it is victory. The victory is to be with these people. (Int 1_LL)

This and the quote that follows illustrate how emotions are shaping bodies and spaces, as feminists also pointed out. These experiences describe how emotions as part of community based on genuine democratic principles and values are source for shaping the political imagination and transformation.

It is the most beautiful thing that happened in that space, from its existence. It was surreal for me, the whole, throughout the duration it was surreal...It was very special experience, it was our space full of our energy. Everyone was there, we were united. Everyone was happy there. We had so much support, people were coming, they donated, talked to us, it was very, very beautiful experience... It was magical. I met so many people! So many people met each other!... (Int 1_VR)

The occupation itself can be viewed as Event in Badiou's terms. The occupation allows something completely new to come into existence. It was truthful experience and students came out more empowered and alive.

We had an experience together. Now we know each other. Now, whoever has any problem, any hardship, he can say "Please come" and I will go, no matter what. And I will listen and if he is right I will be on his side. And new spirit was born! Spirit that – We are not powerless! I think this is most important, and now we know that and we know each other. (Int1_KM)

At the end I would conclude that it is possible to transform melancholic experience and position into political imagination and it is possible in collective and genuine venture in which subjects can relate, feel free and accepted. Political transformation is possible within community where there is chance to experience again what was once lost and longed for. Organization of community on democratic values such as horizontality and inclusion enable these experiences which come not as given but as negotiated and shared. Not to end this paper in naive or overenthusiastic tone I would like to point out that political imagination with the creative potential for transformation of the melancholic position into empowered one is an Eventual experience that is not stable or final. It is experience I see as important for survival of subjective and collective efforts for better life and shared future, for other challenges for the subjects and communities for new political imagination and transformation.

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