Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society

Mourning, Melancholy, and the Politics of Class Transformation

Ceren Özselçuk

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://
www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

Mourning, Melancholy, and the Politics of Class Transformation

Ceren Özselçuk

In recent attempts to problematize the relation between radical social change and identity politics, social theorists have drawn attention to affective attachments to an injured identity that are said to foreclose political transformation. This essay, while taking these critiques of identity politics seriously, questions the political demand for a "death of identity" that is often implied by such critiques. Specifically, it raises the following issues for class-transformative politics as they apply to the contexts of economic dislocation and loss: given that there is no easy or ready-made way to move beyond an identity politics riveted to loss and injury, how can we rethink the relationship between identity politics and class transformation? What politically empowering modalities are capable of addressing loss, such that they assist rather than stunt classed resubjectivation? This essay mobilizes the concepts of melancholy and mourning from Freudian psychoanalysis in order to formulate a response to these questions. The objective is to expand upon current political strategies of transformation in order to move from capitalist exploitation toward communism while at the same time placing the issue of resubjectivation and the register of affects at the forefront of revolutionary politics.

Key Words: Mourning, Melancholy, Politics of Class Transformation, Resubjectivation

In her pointed analyses of contemporary politics, Wendy Brown (1995, 2002) draws attention to a number of paradoxes that she finds to be endemic to the "late modern capitalist, liberal and bureaucratic disciplinary social order" and to the mode of identity politics that it conditions. It is to these paradoxes that Brown refers when she elaborates the contradictory operations through which identity-based claims foreclose, delimit or subvert their transformative potential. One such paradox stems from forming "wounded attachments" toward a threatened and excluded identity.

> In its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity ... becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion, augments or "alters the direction of the suffering" entailed in subordination or marginalization by finding a site of blame for it. But in so doing, it installs its pain over its unredeemed history in the very foundation of its political claim, in its demand for recognition as identity. In locating a site of blame for its powerlessness over its past—a past of injury, a past as a hurt will—and

> locating a "reason" for the "unendurable pain" of social powerlessness in the present, it converts this reasoning into an ethnicizing politics, a politics of recrimination that seeks to avenge the hurt even while it reaffirms it, discursively codifies it ... The loss of historical direction, and with it the loss of futurity characteristic of the late modern age, is thus homologically refigured in the structure of desire of the dominant political expression of the age: identity politics. (Brown 1995, 73–4)

In this intricate depiction of the inner workings of identity politics, Brown alerts us to the formation of a particular economy of desire that is at fault for producing a specific deadlock for contemporary politicized identity. In invoking past and present injury as the only viable political ground on which to speak against its exclusion, identity politics simultaneously reinscribes the conditions of its injury as the essential constituent of its identity and, in so doing, forfeits the possibility of transforming such conditions. Underlying the stultifying and "wounded attachments" to such a form of political conduct are affective dynamics that propel the marginalized identity to invest actively in its own suffering.

In order to formalize these psychic mechanisms, Brown draws from Nietzsche's account of the logic of *ressentiment*. In the type of politics that dwell in *ressentiment*, injured identity, by means of installing a righteous pride in its powerlessness, becomes complicit in the reproduction of the conditions of its exclusion, thereby rendering itself impotent. All the while it channels its *ressentiment* around its impotence into a rage toward the enemy (or the enemies), which it continuously erects in order to avenge its hurtful marginalization.[1] The short-circuit of desire fixed in this way substitutes "recrimination" and "revenge" for "the capacity to act," in the process forestalling the possibility of resubjectivation.

The Politics of Working-Class *Ressentiment*

A somewhat similar critique of identity politics is present within the poststructuralist Marxian approach to working-class politics. In separate articles, J.K. Gibson-Graham (1999, 2001) and Eric Schocket (2000) bring attention to the deep-seated culture of workerism: the embrace of an identitarian attitude that not only animates the conventional forms of working-class struggles but also prevails over leftist academic approaches to the study of working-class identity. For instance, Gibson-Graham underlines the foreclosure of class transformation when, faced with the processes of economic restructuring, class struggle retreats to a nostalgic defense of a threatened worker identity and confines the scope of resistance to preserving the old ways of being, hence deflects any real change from taking place. On the other hand, leftist

---

1. That the excluded remains in a "secret dependency" on the *other* (i.e., on the opposed symbolic system) in order to articulate its own identity is a problem also taken up by other critical theorists, such as Ernesto Laclau (1996, 29–30). Nevertheless, Brown seems to shift the focus of the discussion to a contradiction that is not only historically specific, but also formatted in the register of desire and affects, and, therefore, that is of a different kind from an ontological paradox, which, according to Laclau, unavoidably conditions all politicized identity.

analyses often stave off the present possibilities for imagining a postcapitalist agenda by deeming them ''unrealistic.'' Class politics, as prevalently envisioned by both the working class and more broadly by the Left thus leads to the conservative outcome of maintaining existing class relations with ''no present project of becoming'' (Gibson-Graham 2001, 4). In this ''modernist'' form of working-class struggle—which Gibson-Graham convincingly ties to the gendered performance of a certain culture of masculinity—we once again witness a politics of *ressentiment*, with the reproduction of workers' (and also the Left's) attachment to occupying the powerless, yet morally superior, position of subordination. This attachment breeds a perverse desire for the continuation of capitalism, even though capitalist exploitation is that which excludes the workers from the appropriation and distribution of surplus value.

With capitalist wage-labor thus reified almost as an ''ethnicized'' identity, its impending loss is generally met with the affective companions of pain, self-pity, and a failed anger that come to be addressed to the ''insurmountable ubiquity'' of capitalism. In cases where resistance actually ends with the loss of employment, *ressentiment* gives way to a *melancholic* state in which self-absorption in injured identity produces a backward-looking politics, a resistance toward relinquishing the loss (of capitalist wage-labor) and a withdrawal from the search for new possibilities (such as seeking to establish noncapitalist and nonexploitative class relations).

At this point, a brief digression is necessary to clarify the relation between *ressentiment* and *melancholy*. Although I present the argument as if the affective state of *ressentiment* were conducive to *melancholy*, *ressentiment* and *melancholy* refer to two separate mechanisms in the formation of identity. While the state of moralizing powerlessness distinguishes *ressentiment*, a fetishistic attachment to a long held but lost object characterizes the state of *melancholy*, in which one integrates her trauma around loss into feelings of hatred toward the self, the object of loss as well as the external obstacles held responsible for the loss (Freud 1957). Even at the level of this rudimentary distinction, we can discern a relation of contiguity between these two affective states: insofar as the resentful subject identifies with a state of powerlessness, she is unable to act upon and reconfigure her injury, preparing the ground for *melancholy* to set in. That is, one can surmise that the resentful subject, by casting herself as powerless, has *always already lost* the capacity to work through and transform her conditions of existence. In a sense, she is always already a *melancholic* subject. What the affective states of *ressentiment* and *melancholy* appear to share, then, is an *immobilizing attachment* to injury.

As the relation between the laboring subject and wage-labor gets sedimented in the exclusive and invariable terms of belonging to, defending, and finally lamenting a victimized position, class ceases to be conceived as an economic *process* that is changing and changeable. Instead, class takes the form of a *noun*: the name of an essentialized identity (Resnick and Wolff 1989). Seen from the perspective of Marxian class politics, the problematic nature of identity politics that Brown eloquently describes becomes even more palpable, as Schocket aptly summarizes.

> [T]he identitarian position cannot embrace class in its Marxian sense as dynamic and ultimately self-negating, as a set of operations we struggle to overturn rather than as a set of voices or, indeed, a ''culture'' that we

rediscover and honor. Put as simply as possible, since class can only name a relational inequity that is intolerable, it cannot comfortably fit into a system that is formulated with the opposite agenda: the positive valuation of difference. (Schocket 2000, 4)

Identity politics, then, not only causes harm for working-class politics by producing a resentful and melancholic political identity but, more to the point, identity politics appears to be logically incompatible with the very raison d'être of class politics.

Class Transformation As the "Letting Go of Identity"?

In his brief and illuminating critique of the current identitarian trend within U.S. academia's approach to working-class studies, Bill Mullen provides yet another exposure of how identity politics occludes the possibility for class transformation. Mullen stipulates that from a Marxist perspective "the first step toward working-class emancipation is the recognition by workers that *they must lose, not gain their 'identity'* and identification with capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, and other capitalist processes" (2002, 38; emphasis added). After emphasizing the political urgency for workers to admit that working-class identity is nothing but a chain to be thrown off in order to move beyond capitalism, he ends his manifesto with a new and powerful internationalist slogan: "Workers and working-class studies scholars of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your identities!" (41).

Mullen's provocative remarks, certainly refreshing in their shifting of perspective within working-class politics and studies, nonetheless remain too abstract. How exactly does the recommendation that one let go of one's identity translate into concrete practices of class-transformative politics? This question is especially pressing for activists and academics who are trying to discern, within the disruption of previously held economic identifications (or in the aftermath of such a destabilization), ways to embark on the kinds of class transformation and alliance building to which Mullen aspires. In some current research projects focused on class transformation, what is initially encountered is nothing less than a strong resistance by the disenfranchised working classes to the letting go of injured identities or the relinquishing of their loss. In fact, the insights arising from collaborative and participatory research with marginalized communities suggest that it is practically impossible, if not outright arrogant, to ignore the persistent narratives of injury that follow from sudden and pervasive economic dislocation. That is why, the researchers argue, acknowledgment of pain and the feelings of nostalgia and abandonment associated with the loss of economy is a necessary step in connecting empathetically with injured communities, and, at the same time, enabling them to recount and exhaust the "negative" affects of loss before both the researchers and the dislocated communities move on to the next stage of generating new economic (noncapitalist) identifications in and through research practice (Cameron 2003, 1–4).

At this point, I want to avert a number of possible misunderstandings. First, the need to display sensitivity to the loss of economic identity is not due to a pragmatic political concern. Working through the loss is not to be perceived solely in terms of an unproductive, albeit inescapable, process—a period of empty time sacrificed to

grieving—only to be promptly consummated and superseded before the arrival of new identifications. In fact, I argue that the temporal boundary that separates the bereavement of the "old" identity from the subsequent process of resubjectivation may not be clear cut. That is, unlike the position that class-transformative research and theory at times seems to assume a priori, I do not wish to impose a stagist consequentiality between the processes of resubjectivation and working through the loss, such that the former is reserved to commence only after the "old" working-class identity is successfully and thoroughly left behind. Rather, I want to posit the possibility of a spontaneous interdependency between resubjectivation and working through the loss. This is a thesis that necessarily complicates the supposed self-evidence of the demand for the "death of identity." That is because insofar as the "new" identity is not completely sealed off from the constitutive effects of the "old" identity, and to the extent that the significance of the "old" identity is open to (re)symbolization through the process of grieving, neither the simple formula of "giving up" nor the content of the identity to be given up has a clear and preconstituted meaning.

That said, the argument is not that the project of class transformation *always* and *necessarily* requires the acknowledgment and incorporation of the threatened or lost identity. There might very well be occasions when those touched by loss do not want to commemorate or continue to enliven their past identities. In fact, irrespective of whether or not they are capable, such subjects might invite a certain symbolic death and actively voice their desire to break with their prior social existence and injuries. In such cases, class transformation might be one of the many ways to experience this break. This essay inquires into the dynamics and language of class-transformative research in situations in which neither the overcoming of loss nor the direction for change is explicitly demanded by the injured subjects. It is at this point that political strategies for social change can facilitate an empowering reclaiming of a past, which undeniably bears upon the present.

Given that under certain conditions there exists no easy and ready-made way to move beyond an identity politics riveted to loss and injury, how can we begin to rethink the relationship between identity politics and class transformation? Admitting that the affects of loss might be not only unavoidable but potentially productive, what are some of the politically empowering modalities for "incorporating" them such that they assist rather than stunt (classed) resubjectivation? Even further, what might "incorporating" mean in such a context, given that we want to differentiate it from a simple rehashing of the old ways of being?

"Mourning and Melancholia"

In order to make sense of these questions, I would like to turn to Freud's (1957) distinction between *melancholy* and *mourning* as a way of classifying different forms of circling around injury, as a conceptual apparatus to theorize two distinct modes of relating to loss. In the essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud characterizes mourning as a process in which one gradually "works past" and through the disabling affects of loss (of a loved person, an ideal, and so forth) in order to arrive at the

possibility of forming new relations and attachments. In contrast, he associates melancholia with a paralyzing attachment to loss. One can certainly read Freud's essay to be saying that loss is associated only with crippling affects, while mourning is conceived as the terminable process of grieving that concludes when the pain of loss is fully overcome and the object of loss is entirely left behind. However, reading "Mourning and Melancholia" alongside Freud's other works, some recent interpreters offer a slightly different representation of mourning (Forter 2003; Santner 1996; Woodward 1993). They distance its meaning from a complete *forgetting* of the loss. Eric Santner, for instance, speaks of mourning as a form of productive articulation that "integrates," rather than abandons, the loss into a "transformed structure of identity" (1996, xiii). In a similar vein, Slavoj Žižek likens the structure of mourning to "sublation (*Aufhebung*) through which we *retain the notional essence of an object* by losing it in its immediate reality" (2000, 659; emphasis mine).

Here, "integration" and "retention" should not be seen as operations that restore to consciousness an always already fully signified but repressed loss. Rather, they are to be perceived in the figure of a reconstruction, imparting to the labor of mourning a creative dimension. In this sense, we can understand mourning as an inaugural setting for the symbolic articulation of "that" which we have lost, a practice for mastering the affects of loss in the very process of making sense of them. Potential in this creative process is a unique temporal effect: successful mourning constructs the past as a "viable" and "empowering legacy" such that imagining a different future becomes a distinct possibility (Santner 1996, 30). In the "timeless" temporality of *mourning*, there is an "encounter of the future and the past" that opens up to resubjectivation.[2]

In a related matter, the "notional essence" of the object and the history that is produced anew in mourning is not reducible to any positive and unchanging notion, or immutable essence, that would reestablish our damaged being as whole. Quite the opposite: experienced alongside the production of a new notion of loss, there needs to be a realization that there is in fact nothing to the objects and histories of attachment that secure the lost unity of our subjectivity. In this sense, *mourning* includes in its very definition an acceptance of its own practice, the practice of *mourning*, as the interminable dimension of human lives and the concomitant affirmation that the subject is ultimately a subject of loss. Thus, if there is any

---

2. It is "timeless" because, in its simultaneous and overdetermined recasting of the past, present, and future, "successful" mourning collapses the conventional notion of "linear time." This traditional notion sees time as the progressive unfolding of discrete moments in which the past, conceived to be lived and fixed in its meaning for once and all, unidimensionally constrains the present and future. In contrast, the temporality of mourning explodes linear causality: mourning destructures historicized narratives into elements, which are then made available for a resignification in the "present." Such a process has a reverberating effect on the new constructions of the past, present, and future. For two insightful interpretations of Freud's concept of "timelessness," and the ternary structure of time implied in it, see Benjamin (1992) and Laplanche (1992). For a recent psychoanalytical treatment of the concepts of "timelessness" and the "infinite," explored in the context of Nietzsche's notion of the event and eternity, see Zupančič (2003, especially 21–2).

radical gesture of "giving up" within the labors of mourning, we might claim that it pertains to the fantasy of a centered and unified subject.

Against this depiction of mourning, melancholy is characterized as a state in which there is an inability to mourn, an incapacity to articulate and symbolize loss as well as to experience certain affects—especially the affect of anxiety that is said to belong to separation, the event through which one becomes a viable subject that is distinct from an object.[3] Put differently, in melancholy there is a conflation of the subject and the object such that the subject remains entrapped within the fantasy of the "One": the fiction of a unified and centered subject. In a similar vein, Santner describes melancholy as the inability to work through the loss of the "fantasy of omnipotence." That is why one "grieves not so much for the loss of the other as for the fact of otherness and all that that entails. Melancholy, one might say, is the rehearsal of the shattering or fragmentation of one's primitive narcissism, an event that predates the capacity to feel any real mourning for a lost object, since for the narcissist other objects do not yet really exist" (1996, 3).[4]

The distinction between mourning and melancholy attests to the fact that there can be two different modes through which the memory of an injured past may be configured and pain of loss signified. From this new lens, the politics of *ressentiment* can be seen as referring to a particular moment in identity politics that is characterized by an inability to mourn and by the foreclosure of transformation. Diversifying the politics of loss by reference to a difference between melancholy and mourning gives us the space necessary to imagine a different kind of identity politics. The discussion of mourning also suggests that the double processes of disinvestment and resubjectivation are inextricably and complexly linked. Mourning retains a trace of the lost past; it reinterprets the past such that, in the very act of reinterpreting, it makes possible the ability to construct compensatory investments that diminish and redefine the disabling experience of loss. Once more, it is important to note that this ability has implications beyond the making of concrete investments: it involves the flexibility and the desire to make such concrete investments and the acceptance of the fact that any identification would never be complete. And in this sense, mourning is truly a process of resubjectivation, if, by becoming a subject, we refer here to nothing but the necessity of a movement and desire (or rather the drive) for change without guarantees or predetermined ideals.[5]

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, mourning is not a solitary, self-indulgent act, but is a social relation in which pain is externalized and addressed to an other

3. Given the constraints of space, it is impossible to do justice here to the complexities and variegated interpretations of the theory of the subject assumed by the psychoanalytically informed theories of mourning. Similarly, it is impossible to discuss satisfactorily the ways in which such a theory differs both from theories premised on the unified and centered subject of the conscious as well as from those of the decentered subject. For a beautiful exposition written from within Marxism that introduces the salient elements and theoretical significance of Freud's subject of the unconscious as well as of Lacan's reappraisal of it, see Althusser (1996).

4. For two other illuminating explorations of the functioning of melancholia within leftist and gender politics, see Brown (1999) and Butler (1997), respectively.

5. For a nuanced and lucid article from a Lacanian perspective, on the theory of the subject that distinguishes the subject of desire from the subject of drive, see Dolar (2001).

who bears witness. In other words, since reconstitution of the injured self in mourning involves nothing less than a reconfiguration of the position of the subject in reference to the social, such a reconstitution cannot be accomplished in isolation (Santner 1996, 24). It requires the presence of a social setting that empowers and facilitates the process of becoming a viable subject who desires to reattach to the world—rather than to failure and injury as in *ressentiment* or to a damaged and drained ego as in melancholy. In fact, one might surmise that melancholy sets in when the social conditions of mourning are absent. It is this last point that leads me to pose the question: can we conceive of class-transformative research as a means of providing such a social environment? In other words, can we regard research practice as the political corollary of the work of mourning?

Class-Transformative Research As a Site for Mourning?

I want to pursue this analogy in the context of a set of conversations and interviews that I, together with a group of journalist-activists, carried out with workers from state-owned paper enterprises (SEKA) in Turkey, which, at the time of our research, were undergoing privatization. The motivation of the research project was to equip the antiprivatization movement with a discourse of collective economic governance that could serve as an alternative to what seemed to be the only available option under the circumstances: the preservation of state capitalism. In the politically disarming atmosphere of privatizations, we wanted to seize the opportunity to think about the reorganization of privatized enterprises along the lines of communist enterprises.

Our project is inspired by the approach of the poststructuralist action research of Jenny Cameron (2003), J. K. Gibson-Graham (2002), and the Community Economies Project (2001). Poststructuralist action research perceives the economy and the subjects of economy as decentered formations that are shaped and reshaped by the constitutive effects of diverse discourses, including the discourse of research practice. It is involved with communities that are impacted by the different mechanisms of economic restructuring—deindustrialization, disinvestment, privatization, and rapid capitalist development—and, as a result, have gone through or are currently going through the process of marginalization, with some of these communities still experiencing the effects of a significant economic loss of capitalist employment. First, this line of research critically interrogates the performative effects of the dominant discourses of economic development. These discourses, in representing disadvantaged communities as completely bereft of local resources and capacities, essentially assimilate and reduce economic recovery to the ability to reestablish access to capitalist development. Second, collaborative research with communities is prioritized as a political practice (political in the sense of having the potential to enact social transformation) with a view toward destabilizing the dominant economic representations that procure and sediment investments that are capitalocentric. The aim of this work is to simultaneously open up a space for forming identifications with an alternative community economy populated by nonexploitative class processes. To this end, research is deployed to unearth and incite overlooked

and undervalued collective and local economic identities in order to move them toward what action researchers call a "communist becoming."

In the particular research in which I participated, we similarly tried to destabilize the identification of workers with state capitalism in Turkey. As an initial strategy, we forged the argument that we would not have faced the current economic predicament if we had not invested in state capitalism for years—that is, if the workers, rather than the state, had been the active agents all along in the appropriation and distribution of surplus value. In positing a *sameness* between state and private capitalism in terms of breeding exploitation, economic insecurity, and inequality, we were trying to distance workers (and ourselves) from the historically rooted attachment to state economy. In a sense, we were pushing for a "death of identity," at least the identity that made workers (and ourselves) imagine state capitalism as the only possible option.

Somewhat different from the strategies deployed by poststructuralist action researchers, this particular strategy may resemble another type of political intervention promoted by poststructuralist Marxism: to present and expose the reasons for the crises and contradictions experienced at various social sites as the effects of capitalism. Such a strategy (of disidentification) deploys the trope of crises not as a foretelling of the immanent end of capitalism, but as a rhetorical tool for connecting concrete social problems—cultural, political, economic, and/or psychic—to the existence of capitalist class relations. The implicit expectation in this approach is that the narratives consequently produced will distance workers from capitalist exploitation and make them understand and support nonexploitative class relations.[6] As I will try to argue, however, at least in the ways and the setting in which we deployed it, our research practice pointed to the limits of this political strategy.

Another strategy we employed was the citation of examples of successful and feasible collective enterprises that have emerged as a response to economic crises. The goal was not to discuss these examples in order to replicate them in a new setting, nor was it merely to compare and contrast the conditions surrounding those cases with the present conditions of the workers in order to draw lessons and recipes for action. These examples were mostly there to provide *just examples*—stories to tell that incite surprise and give support to the contingency of things. An example close to home was a group of former workers from Kardemir Steel factory who got together and set up their own businesses after threats to privatize the factory in the mid-1990s (Yıldırım 1999). When we asked the workers what they thought about envisioning new economic alternatives such as coops and business partnerships along the lines formed by the former Kardemir workers, their response was that those workers "wouldn't have been successful in their new businesses and would have left the city by now, if Kardemir had actually been privatized and closed down at the time." While this answer may be seen as a defense mechanism against imagining alternative economic identities, it nonetheless carries a truth: the response captures the possibility of a contradictory economic interdependency in which those who clung

6. For a recent article that proposes this strategy to the Left as a potent and radical Marxian political practice to unsettle the entrenched ideology of consumerism within the United States and, from there, to foment class transformation to communism, see Wolff (2005, 233–4).

to their "old" identities provide conditions of existence for others who give up their identities to establish new economic positions.

In both the strategies we deployed, we encountered staunch resistance to the idea of workers' governance (and to the related notions of communism, worker cooperatives, and democratic governance that occasionally surfaced in conversations in connection with the idea of workers' governance). Many of the union leaders argued, on the one hand, that "running a firm was neither unions' nor workers' job," and that the idea of worker governance was "incompatible with "being a worker" or with "serving the interests of workers." Taking power as new owners and managers evoked moral reprehension from some of the union leaders and workers, and such a move, in turn, was portrayed as essentially corruptive. On the other hand, the workers also mentioned the impossibility of running a firm on their own since "even the most powerful institution such as the state could not manage to do it." Occupying this powerless position seemed to be an inescapable, if not a desirable, quality of being a worker.[7]

The disinclination of workers to adopt the idea of self-governance can be read as emblematic of a politics of *ressentiment*. An alternative explanation to entertain would be to regard this resistance simply as manifesting the workers' wish to "remain workers" or as demonstration of their subjective choice to be "unwilling to take on other kinds of responsibilities." In this likely scenario, the apparent resistance becomes at least partially unrelated to whether workers denigrate or balk at power, or whether they perceive themselves as ill-equipped and insufficient subjects with respect to conveying power. Under this premise, summoning *ressentiment* as the *only* cause in order to make sense of the resistance to class transformation runs the danger of becoming a reductive way to diagnose such reluctance.[8]

This is a valid thesis. In our particular case, however, the avowed dislike of workers toward self-governance coexisted with their demand for "autonomy" and the reform of state enterprises. Hence workers, rather than wanting to "remain as they are," opted for some sort of change and mentioned on multiple occasions the need to reorganize the state enterprises, which entailed to some degree the reconfiguration of class positions held with respect to the enterprise. In fact, the *ambivalence* of workers—they demand "autonomy" from the state while they are hostile to self-governance—suggested that they themselves were vague and uncertain with respect to the limits of "responsibility" and "authority" that would be appropriate for them in order to "remain state employees." It was in this context that we found it puzzling—and not simply reducible to a conscious choice—that the ambivalence in workers' demands quickly ceded to a determined opposition once the idea of workers' governance was raised for discussion as one possible way to realize the change that workers demanded.

It is of significance to further explore the complex reasons—besides a possible rootedness in a politics of *ressentiment*—behind workers' aversion to self-

---

7. For a more detailed discussion of how the concept of power was differentially and contradictorily deployed by the workers in ways that rendered them reluctant for self-governance, see Özselçuk (2005).
8. As part of his comments on this article, Jack Amariglio raised this possibility.

governance. It is also important, however, first, to distinguish aversion to self-governance from resistance toward giving up the "state employee identity," and, second, not to quickly reduce the latter—workers' insistence on demanding and getting back their jobs—to the paralysis attributed to *ressentiment* or melancholy. In fact, as the interviews unfolded, an expansive redefinition of loss was produced by our interviewees that disrupted the reduction of their resistance to the mere presence of a fixation on vindicating the state or a confining and nostalgic gesture toward the past. Lost subjectivity was persistently reclaimed, not just as a sectarian injured identity or indication of melancholic resignation, but as the "nodal point" at which a multiplicity of economic relations were condensed. In workers' narratives, what was objectified as being under attack by privatization was in effect the public economy. *Public economy* was conceived by the workers as a type of relationality embedded in a "destructured economy," with its articulated moments of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange, along with interdependent economic sites that include the household, the factory, the forest commons, the city community, the broad community of the Turkish public, and so on.[9] With the public economy defined as the lived and historically rooted experience of economic interdependency and solidarity, the violence of privatization, in turn, assumed the meaning of an individuating and dehistoricizing logic and culture.

While the signifier of public economy was already mobilized by the antiprivatization movement, my argument is that it was through our research practice that the content of the loss of the public economy was partially concretized and, at the same time, detached from an injury that was narrowly focused on the immediate object of loss (in this case, state employment). By the same discursive move, the injury caused by the loss of state employment was also expanded, finding some release in the process of being articulated as the collective loss of a historical project: the Republican project of creating a public economy. The transposition of a particular injury into a universal form (in both the spatial and temporal senses of the term) broadened the scope of the dislocated economic space and opened a discursive realm within loss for possible identifications *with* and *of* the "public."[10] Hence, an effect of symbolizing the loss in this particular form was the widening of the sphere of collective action and intervention. Could we perhaps read in this effect the seeds of the work of mourning, whereby "the notional essence" of a lost object is "retained,"

---

9. For a Marxian conceptualization of a "destructured economy," see Callari (1988). For a more detailed discussion of the interdependent components of the public economy as acknowledged by the workers, see Özselçuk (2005).

10. The same process could also be perceived as the broadening and universalizing of "worker identity." In fact, insofar as we agree on the poststructuralist premise that "all political identity is internally split, because no particularity could be constituted except by maintaining an internal reference to universality as that which is missing" (Laclau 1996, 31), can we ever speak of a strict notion of particularism and, for that matter, a pure notion of identity politics that is devoid of all universalizing aspirations? In this sense, a more appropriate way to approach the different forms of identity struggles could be in terms of understanding them as "competing universalities" (Butler 2000), each with different degrees and tendencies of *particularization,* rather than in terms of struggles among discrete and atomic particulars.

or rather, produced for future and collective reconstructions of the economy? Before I respond to this question, once more I turn to Wendy Brown.

"Being" versus "Wanting"

In an interesting twist of argument at the end of her critique of identity politics, Brown, rather than calling for a total dispensing with "identity investments," instead recommends a shift in the language of identity from that of "to be" to that of "to want." According to Brown, such a shift could "exploit politically a recovery of the more expansive moments in the genealogy of identity formation, a recovery of the moment *prior to its own foreclosure against its want, prior to the point at which its sovereign subjectivity is established through such foreclosure and through eternal repetition of its pain*" (1995, 76; emphasis added). The "expansive moments" in Brown's account seem to refer to those states in identity formation when the injury has not yet been reclaimed as the sole property and defining attribute of an individualized identity—that is, before the identity establishes its right "to be" on a sedimented and privatized history of its injury. Instead, the "expansive moments" appear to describe a fluid and indeterminate state, a situation in which the identity still "wants."

Brown leaves unsubstantiated the nature and the object of this "want" that the injured identity is prone to "foreclose." However, using her previous arguments as a guide, we can infer that this "want" refers to a certain *desire* of the identity to transform its existence. Perhaps it is for good reason that Brown leaves "want" without any attachment to a positive predicate or direction: the "want" is "expansive" precisely because it refers to nothing—that is, not to any predetermined course of action, but to the pure desire of wanting to change.[11] In fact, Brown's "wanting" subject sounds quite familiar to the mourning subject who, in mourning, not only reconfigures a past, present, and future, and reestablishes an attachment to the world, but also embodies the very desire to reattach and thus to transform its conditions.

Now, if we return to our original question and repose it: could Marxian research practice resuscitate the "expansive moments" of "wanting" in identity politics before the latter flattens into a state of *ressentiment* or melancholy? Could it interrupt and produce an internal shift in the historically memorized and repeated narratives of working-class pain, thus construct a site for reciting new meanings for loss that might in turn "expand" into the "want" of resubjectivation?

11. I shall also add that the "expansive" effect of "wanting" that Brown talks about alludes not only to the transformation of a singular and particularized body. In deploying the language of "wanting" something—as opposed to "being" something—the identity literally extends to an object, proposes a project or an action to which other identities can also relate and attach or participate in. In other words, while "want" is without an object (in the sense of actually possessing it), it nonetheless always aims toward an object; in fact, "want" is this very aim. In contrast, does the language of "being" not conjure up an image of a static and self-contained body that claims objects as its own in order to set up its boundaries, to differentiate and close in on itself?

From the Politics of Mourning to Communist Praxis

In the brief discussion of our research project, I hinted at a positive answer to this question. In particular, by highlighting the discursive process in which the singularity of workers' injury was translated into the bereavement of a public economy, I emphasized the productive articulation of pain insofar as it multiplies the range of collective identification and action. Meanwhile, I pointed to the emergence of another public space—the engaged space of research practice—as a possible social environment for mourning class transformation. In presenting research practice as a setting for mourning, my objective was to complicate the arguments that connect class transformation to the necessity of the "death of working-class identity."

When refracted through the prism of overdetermination, strategies aiming to end capitalist wage-labor are no longer a simple matter for poststructuralist Marxian politics. In highlighting the contradictory relations among different class processes as well as among class and nonclass processes, overdetermined class analysis allows us to theorize capitalism as providing necessary conditions of existence for communist or other nonexploitative class processes that we might choose to identify with, or still for other subjectivities that we might not disregard offhand. Reading the implications of overdetermination for the formation of class subjectivities to its letter, Julie Graham (1996) directly engages with the ethical ambivalence that marks the class politics of nonexploitation when she raises the possibility of multiple subjectivities and affects to be condensed within exploitative class structures, some of which we might positively value. It follows from the premise of overdetermination that the break with capitalism could no longer be reduced to a unified and total rupture.

Althusser raised a similar question for Marxist political practice with his invocation of *survivals:* elements of economic, political, and ideological structures, customs, habits, and even traditions from older modes of production that persist in the present (1977, 114). He argued that Marx's conception of overdetermination ruled out thinking about survivals in terms of Hegelian supersession: "the maintenance of what-has-been negated-in-its-very-negation" (115). Instead, Althusser insisted that that these elements from the past need to be thought in terms of "a terribly positive and active structured reality," an "objectivity" that Marxian political practice constantly runs up against but has so far failed to provide with a rigorous and proper conceptualization (114–5). He also suggested that revolutionary practice could "reactivate" these survivals, but did not explicate further the workings of this "reactivation" (116). One might argue that the psychoanalytical concept of *mourning* responds to the problem of how to think about survivals within Marxian political practice: mourning carves out a theoretical space so that we can conceive of class transformation without reducing the political strategies imaginable within poststructuralist Marxism to those seeking to effect a complete rupture from past identity.

The affirmative reading of our research practice has rested on the assumption that the unpacking of state economy—into the respective elements of a corrupt and resented state that abandoned the region and the nation to privatization, and the public economy which workers affirmed and reclaimed—displaced state capitalism, if only slightly, and expressed the incipient vision for a new form of collective economy.

However, as the discussion of mourning has suggested, the articulation of an expansive meaning of loss, in itself, is not a guarantee for *desiring* or *acting upon* the discursively produced possibility of reclaiming the public economy. Resubjectivation entails the experience of a certain desire for change, the "wanting" of change *in conjunction with* the narration of alternative identifications.

In his critique of the trade union movement within the United States, George DeMartino points to the creative and militant ways of mobilizing that unions adopt in moments of crisis (attacks against unionization, plant closures, rolling back of wages, and so forth), which supposedly go beyond safeguarding the narrow interests of workers. Unions accomplish this, DeMartino argues, "by presenting the limited goal of securing a collective bargaining agreement as a broad campaign for social justice" (1991, 35). However, such maneuvers for universalizing injury remain "instrumentalist" since "[u]nions enter into coalitions with rigid identities … and fully preformed agendas" (35), limited by the horizon of reinstating the normalized class relations. Thus, they fall short of becoming a true "basis for a thoroughgoing integration for movements" (36) that would bring about a radical change in the existing forms of industrial and firm governance.

Lacking resubjectivation, and thus lacking "the want" to radically rethink and reconstruct the public economy, mobilization of a collective identity in the antiprivatization movement in Turkey could similarly dissolve into an "instrumentalist" politics of maintaining the status quo (i.e., the realignment of the public economy with state capitalism in the form that it previously existed) or a narrowly defined interest. In order to differentiate a "revolutionary" form of politics from an "instrumentalist" one, communist praxis that insists upon a break with capitalist exploitation needs to take the question and dynamics of resubjectivation as central. Perhaps a class language is necessary to simultaneously think of the economic definition of communism (i.e., the collective production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus value) together with a political definition of communism as a revolutionary activity, as an activity of resubjectivation that desires to reconfigure the past, present, and future. One might suggest that in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels gesture toward such a political definition of communism while embedding revolutionary activity within the transformation of economic (class) relations: "Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence" (1986, 56–7).[12]

12. I see the articles in this symposium by Yahya M. Madra (2006) and Ken Byrne and Stephen Healy (2006) as further attempts to connect the economic conception of communism with the political process of resubjectivation and to establish a new ethics of communism. Madra mobilizes the "axiom of communism," or "the refusal of the exception," to the appropriation of surplus as the "universal" moment of resubjectivation in each and every concrete situation. In his exposition, the question of ethics is integral to the very definition of communism. Byrne and Healy similarly raise the question of the enjoying subject of negativity and antagonism as a necessary precondition and entailment of communism. My discussion of mourning should be read alongside these articles, which try to open to debate the relationships between the subject, ethics, and communism.

References

Althusser, L. 1979. Contradiction and overdetermination. In *For Marx*, trans. B. Brewster, 87–128. London: Verso/NLB.

——. 1996. *Writings on psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*. Trans. J. Mehlman, ed. O. Corpet and F. Matheron. New York: Columbia University Press.

Benjamin, A. 1992. The unconscious: Structuring as a translation. In *Jean Laplanche, seduction, translation, drives: A dossier*, trans. M. Stanton, ed. J. Fletcher and M. Stanton, 137–57. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Brown, W. 1995. Wounded attachments. In *States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*, 52–76. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

——. 1999. Resisting left melancholy. *boundary 2* 26 (3): 19–27.

——. 2002. Suffering the paradoxes of rights. In *Left legalism/Left critique*, ed. W. Brown and J. Halley, 420–34. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Butler, J. 1997. *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

——. 2000. Competing universalities. In *Contingency, hegemony, universality: Contemporary dialogues on the Left*, ed. J. Butler, E. Laclau and S. Žižek, 136–81. New York: Verso.

Byrne, K., and S. Healy. 2006. Cooperative subjects: Toward a post-fantasmatic enjoyment of the economy. *Rethinking Marxism* 18 (2): 241–58.

Callari, A. 1988. Some developments in Marxian theory since Schumpeter. In *Classical political economy: A survey of recent literature*, ed. W. O. Thwett, 227–58. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Cameron, J. 2003. Collaborating with communities: An asset-based approach to community and economic development. Paper presented to the Planning Institute of Australia, National Planning Congress, Adelaide.

Community Economies Collective. 2001. Imagining and enacting noncapitalist futures. *Socialist Review* 28 (3/4): 93–135.

DeMartino, G. 1991. Trade-union isolation and the catechism of the Left. *Rethinking Marxism* 4 (3): 27–51.

Dolar, M. 2001. The enjoying machine. *UMBR(A)*, no. 1 (Polemos).

Forter, G. 2003. Against melancholy: Contemporary mourning theory, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and the politics of unfinished grief. *Differences* 14 (2): 134–70.

Freud, S. 1957. Mourning and melancholia. In *The complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, 237–60. London: The Hogart Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1999. Capitalism goes the "Full Monty.". *Rethinking Marxism* 11 (2): 62–6.

——. 2001. Class enchantment. *Theory and Event* 5 (3).

——. 2002. Beyond global vs. local: Economic politics outside the binary frame. In *Geographies of power: Placing scale*, ed. A. Herod and M. Wrights, 25–60. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Graham, J. 1996. Paper presented at conference, Politics and Languages of Contemporary Marxism, 5–8 December, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Laclau, E. 1996. Universalism, particularism and the question of identity. In *Emancipation(s)*, 20–35. London: Verso.

Laplanche, J. 1992. Psychoanalysis, time, and translation: A lecture at the University of Kent, 30 April 1990. In *Jean Laplanche, seduction, translation, drives: A dossier*, trans. M. Stanton, ed. J. Fletcher and M. Stanton, 161–77. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Madra, Y. 2006. Questions of communism: Ethics, ontology, subjectivity. *Rethinking Marxism* 18 (2): 205–24.

Marx, K., and F. Engels. 1986. *The German ideology*. Pt. 1 with selections from pts. 2 and 3. Ed. C. J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers.

Mullen, B. 2001. Working-class studies without borders. *Rethinking Marxism* 14 (3): 38–40.

Özselçuk, C. 2005. Realizing a "public economy"? Anti-privatization movement in Turkey and its democratic potential. Seminar given to the social sciences and humanities faculty at Bennington College, 7 April, Bennington, Vermont.

Resnick, S. A., and R. D. Wolff. 1989. *Knowledge and class: A Marxian critique of political economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Santner, L. E. 1990. *Stranded objects: Mourning, memory and film in postwar Germany*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Schocket, E. 2000. The veil and the vision: Seeing class in American literature. Paper presented at Marxism 2000 conference, 21–4 September, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Yıldırım, E. 1999. Employee buyouts and industrial relations under employee ownership: A case study of Karabük steel mill. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 20 (4): 561–82.

Wolff, R. D. 2005. Ideological state apparatuses, consumerism and U.S. capitalism: Lessons for the Left. *Rethinking Marxism* 17 (2): 223–35.

Woodward, K. 1993. Late theory, late style: Loss and renewal in Freud and Barthes. In *Aging and gender in literature: Studies of creativity*, ed. A. M. Wyatt-Brown and J. Rossen, 82–101. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Žižek, S. 2000. Melancholy and the act. *Critical Inquiry*, no. 26 (summer): 657–81.

Zupančič, A. 2003. *The shortest shadow: Nietzsche's philosophy of the two*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.