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**Working Paper**

## Humanities in transition: Liberation of knowledge in Central Asia and the potential role of the European Union

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**Zentrum für internationale Entwicklungs- und Umweltforschung der  
Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen**

**Humanities in Transition:  
Liberation of Knowledge in Central Asia and the  
Potential Role of the European Union**

by

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No. 50

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# Humanities in Transition: Liberation of Knowledge in Central Asia and potential role of the European Union

## INTRODUCTION

Central Asian societies, like some other states in the developing world, are in the process of transformation from one party and ideology dominated system to the wider understanding of the political, social and cultural orders. For successful transition education and the knowledge transfer systems are very important. Despite of their relevance for the transformation processes, humanities, i.e. literature, philosophy, art history, music, religion, language, history and social sciences, i.e. anthropology, sociology, political sciences etc. are often facing considerable difficulties in Central Asia, like in some other societies. The recent information on the media about the accusations on the part of the Iranian spiritual leader against humanities and social sciences<sup>1</sup>, as well as the severe critics of President of Kazakhstan concerning their role<sup>2</sup>, demonstrate the importance of these disciplines for contemporary discourses. In both cases the leaders' attempt to define the role of these sciences just as an effective instrument of their ideology: one for religious purposes, the second for the secular "national" interests. It's interesting to note, that, in spite of the widespread university system in contemporary Middle and Central Asia with well-equipped laboratories for "exact" sciences, showing the "openness to technology and industrial production", there is a strong "mistrust of the human and social sciences" (Arkun, 1994).

The proposed paper discusses the role of humanities in organising and developing of thinking culture in post soviet Central Asia. The following questions will be addressed: To what extend can these disciplines help the students to train the independent thinking capacity? It seems to be extremely important for the people in societies, going through a far-reaching socio-economical and political transformation. What are the reasons of fragmentation of thinking culture into memorization and analysing? What is the way to move from the traditional memorizing and imitation to the deeper understanding and implementation of ideas? What

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<sup>1</sup> Ayatulloh Khamenai put on humanities and social disciplines the responsibility for the last political turbulence during the elections in Iran in summer 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Nursultan Nazarbaev threatened to close the research centers and institutions for humanities and social sciences, if they do not serve directly the national interests.

has already been done in this respect in Central Asian humanities? How is it possible to balance between different concepts of education, competing currently in Central Asia, including the secular educational system, existing traditional Muslim social capital and liberal education potential "invading" this region? What is the emancipation function of knowledge for the contemporary world? And, finally, what is the role of humanities in the process of emancipation?

There is a very controversial debate on the role of humanities among different social groups in Central Asia: students, professors, politicians, religious people, technocrats and peasants. The implementation of the innovative methods within the humanities is often criticised by some educators. They are considered to be distortive for morality, as the free communication between students and lecturers, questioning and challenging the ways of teaching, could undermine lecturer's reputation and thus, entail additional problems. These apprehensions can be explained by the fact, that the education is closely related with the interest (Habermas, 1973). How can the old generation give up their traditional position of managing the social sphere? The intention is that the knowledge has to be passed to the students only through the mediation of teacher's, but not directly. The part of concern refers to the transmission of values or moral issue, with which usually the traditionalists justify their conservative position. It's very important to analyse the role of the reasoning, independent thinking, correlation between memorization and understanding in humanities at Central Asian universities, which are developing new concepts of humanities in transition period with regards to moral issues.

The situation of developing humanities and reforming education in Central Asia nowadays has some similarities with the time of Jadids (reformists) at the beginning of the 20th century. The challenges of Socrates and his school, in figurative sense, a young man, who was eager for the new learning modes from Aristophanes' comedy "The Clouds" (the debate between the old soldier "teaching" Socrates how to teach young students: "...discipline, discipline and only just discipline!") is continuing his journey and is the bone of contention between "Old Education" and modern liberal "Think Academy" in contemporary Central Asia. The memorization still goes hand in hand with controlling of the knowledge and implies the domination of one particular view in higher education.

There are two main assumptions or hypothesis concerning the reasons of current conceptual crisis in development of humanitarian knowledge in Central Asia. The first one refers to the epistemological problem and means the lack of rational discourse in societies, arisen from the introduction of the authoritarian power and the distortion of emancipator potential of rational reasoning in education (Giri, 2004). It is important for Central Asia to establish new schools of educational philosophy, new epistemology, based on "the emancipatory interest in knowledge and destruction of false a priori assumptions" (Habermas, 1973). The second hypothesis considers the socio-political problem, as the prevailing dichotomised thinking

between matter and form, East and West, tradition and modernity, man and women, religion and state, material and ideal etc., belongs to the socio-political heritage and was even strengthened by the Cold War ideology. While the post-colonial conditions and Manichaeian Trap induced people to think in the dichotomised categories, in globalised world the peace and prosperity are impossible to be reached without the general liberation of knowledge.

The contemporary higher education in the region is moving to and fro between different ways of thinking. One of them refers to understanding through traditional memorization of facts and evidences. The other one underlines the understanding through various forms of mind training like reviewing of facts, analysing, discussing and debating. In order to understand the modern conditions of teaching humanities at Central Asian universities, to show the importance of educational reforms in developing of such necessary skills like independent and creative thinking, it is necessary to analyse two stages of Central Asian past: pre-soviet and soviet. In the pre-soviet era the discussion will be devoted to the well-known Jadid's project. Afterwards, the soviet and post soviet educational systems, as well as the Aga Khan Humanities Project for Central Asia will be highlighted

## **1. PRE-SOVIET HUMANITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA**

Despite different religions and faiths existing in the pre-soviet Central Asia including Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Buddhism etc., the education in the region was predominantly Islamic. It brought to Central Asia diverse sources of knowledge and thereby did not exclude the local, traditional beliefs and practices. Generally, the Muslim tradition identifies two types of knowledge: First of them, called the "ulum-ul-aqli" - "rational sciences", contains all branches of sciences studying nature, universe, human environment, philosophy and most other humanities. Within the second type, so called "ilm un-naqli", the knowledge comes in a narrative way and implies the received religious information. The source of the first type of knowledge is the nature, society and human beings. In the second type however, the knowledge comes from the life of Prophet Muhammad and his revelations, as reported in Holy Quran and Sunna, (the narrative stories about the Prophet as a source of learning and juridical decisions). In the tradition of Islamic culture the knowledge exists from the beginning. Some scientists insist, that even the notion of "Quran" is to be understood as an invitation to "read" or "recite". The notions of "aql" – intellect and "arafa" – cognition, are frequently used in Quran. As Arkoun argues, "The Quran persistently invites the faithful to "look at" the created world in order to appreciate the greatness and the power of God"(1994). There are also many "hadises" stories from the Prophet of Muhammad, which tell, that for the sake of knowledge one should pass all borders, even if they are in China. A number of the Muslim scholars refer to certain parts of Quran as a source to confirm the analogy between the created world and religion. According to them, religion is reflection and justification of physical world and, if



anyone wants to cognise God, he should go through the understanding of the nature, of the world, as a creation of God (Khusrawi, 2002).

In contemporary world it might be difficult to understand, that classical Muslim education was very rich, diverse and not limited to religious education in its literally meaning. Besides the widespread system of madrasas (traditional religious seminaries), there were many other learning and research centres, academies ("Dar-ul-ilm", "Khizanul-hikma" -the houses of wisdom) and nets of exoteric learning ("Khanaqa", "Zawiya" - the places of learning specific to mystic teaching of Sufism). The education system furthermore included the practice of private home learning<sup>3</sup>.

In the later centuries the Islamic education changed due to several factors. The defensive aspect of religion became common. Through the invasion of Mongols, a number of the formal learning centres have been destroyed. The influence of the Islamic Jurists ("Faqihs"), who managed to monopolize the social sphere, caused the stronger protection of the rules for the religious orthodoxy and dominance of only dogmatic interpretations of the religion. The mystical esoteric teaching, well known as the school of "Asawwuf" contributed to the marginalisation or even exclusion of rationalistic traditions from the public spheres and brought dramatic changes into the learning process. The range of knowledge in many Muslim countries gradually became narrow, especially in Central Asia, where the negative influence was strengthened by the colonial ruling system before Russian invasion in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The schools became the domiciles for the people teaching specific religious knowledge like reading, reciting of the sacred book, teaching of Arabic language, making comment on old comments, in sum, serving only to the formal and ritual religious needs of communities. Later, the Russian colonial system was interested to keep the traditional learning centres in conservation in order to show their weakness and helplessness to cope with modern challenges.

The knowledge could be controlled not only by political elites in the battle for social sphere and influences, but also by religious leaders and scholars. The control through memorization is not only the heritage of the education policy, but could also be regarded as a product of the traditional culture. Nowadays, in Islamic educational institutes, madrasas, the old teaching methods like memorization, making comments of religious texts and even doing comment on comments are very popular. It is understandable, partly because of the particularity of religious education and its unchangeable objects of learning. According to Sadriddini Ayni, the main corpus of curriculum in the 20<sup>th</sup> century didn't change since the time of Tamerlan, the tyrannical ruler of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. As already mentioned above, the state policy of the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the very famous scholar Abu Ali Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna, has never attended any school or Madrasas. He received the education from the teachers invited by his father and improved his knowledge and skills by personal endeavouring.

Russian Tsar and the Soviets aimed to keep these institutions in isolation, without any dynamics and interfering into its contents. As a result, the religious curricula in official madrasas remained the same as at time of traditional rulers: Emirats (Bukhara) and Khaqanats (Khiva, Khuqand). Depending on the individual endeavour of the teachers and religious scholars, as well as teaching places, there were only some few differences.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were some attempts to modernise the Muslim education initiated by Jadids (Islamic modernists) in Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent and other cities. Those attempts failed after several years. The reason was the strong resistance on the part of Ulama, who claimed, that their traditions were ignored or disregarded by Jadids. Ulama, as religious and intellectual elite, did their best, to avoid any innovation and managed to maintain the controlling role in order to save the existing stereotypes of religious traditions. In the next part the Jadidism will be closely analysed in order to identify the knowledge and teaching methods, which they suggested.

### 1.1 Jadid's endeavour on education reforms

The discussion about the role of humanities in pre-soviet emirate of Bukhara<sup>4</sup> can begin with a story from Jadid's literature (1886-1938), "Debate between a Teacher from Bukhara and a European", composed by one of the most prominent Bukharian Jadid, Abdurauf Fitrat. The story was written in form of political-philosophical treatise, Socratic dialog. It depicts the Bukharian society at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, in period of Manghit dynasty. Furthermore, the text is a good example for understanding and self-reflection of social and cultural contexts. In order to have more impression on the readers, the writer uses an exaggerated style of writing:

*... in country [Bukhara] where the leaders drink the blood of the people and commit adultery, where the 'ulama' make a usurious profit, betray the right of the pupils and create discord among the Muslims, where the students drink alcohol, and where the rich have ceased paying alms and commit a great many sins and nobody has prevented them from doing this, nor will they, why do you forbid a useful school just because of chair sitting? If your 'ulama' are really 'ulama', they should be "the heirs of the prophets" and "like the prophets of Israel". In spite of the fact that God had prohibited oppression in the verses "God does not wish injustice to the creatures of the world" [Sura 3, Verse 86] and "God does not show the unrighteous the way," [Sura 3, Verses 86] why don't they strive to root out of the basis of oppression, which is so widespread in Bukhara? ...*

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<sup>4</sup> Bukhara was the most prosper center of Central Asian Muslim civilization after the Samanid's dynasty (9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> centuries).

*Praise God, I still remember that in Marv<sup>5</sup> I met one of those fleeing from the despotism of - . I asked the reason for his flight, and he said, "I had a beautiful wife. Apparently the eldest son of our governor had heard of her. To satisfy his lust and desire, he sent for me and asked me to send her to him. Four days later the sergeant-at-arms of the governor came to see me looking like one of the chief guardians of Hell and, accusing me away. ...without any investigation he put me in jail. ... As soon as I reached my house, alas, I saw that the door was open, and there was no sign of my wife and property (Fitrat, 2002).*

For Abdurauf Fitrat, as a representative of Jadids, the knowledge is the most important medium to solve all socio-economical and cultural problems (oppression, corruption of the system, illiteracy etc.). He is thereby blaming Ulama in loosing social responsibility. Although this story is constructed, a product of author's imagination, (as M. Weber's "ideal type"), it is based on some real examples and facts. The story illustrates a society inclined to corruption and suffering from the despotism of local rulers. It shows Jadid's understanding of the social role of knowledge, which is in opposition to the corrupted education, presented by Ulama.

Jadidism was the cultural reform or modernist movement of Muslims in Central Asia. The Arabic term 'jadid' means new or modern. Their contributions to the reform of education in the region were essential. Jadid's struggle for modernization of education, language and culture, known as 'Jadid movement', was in opposition to Qadimists – traditional Ulama. The movement aimed to make Islam 'pure' (i.e. free from superstition and prejudice) and to reconstruct it according to the main religious sources, Quran and the Sunna. The 'Jadid movement' was related to the Pan-Turk and Pan-Islamic ideas propagating at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These movements entered Muslim regions of Russia mainly from Turkey through returning students, who were educated or got job positions in this country. The theoretical fundamentals for this movement were the ideas of early modernists, like Allama Jama-luddin Afghani<sup>6</sup> in Egypt. His disciples were preaching the Pan-Islamic ideas in other parts of the world. Among the Muslim leaders and theologians, who induced the Muslim revival and disseminated the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turk ideas in Russian empire, were Yusuf Akchura Oglu, Shihabuddin Marjani, Abdul Qayum Nasiri, Ismail Bogamprinski, Abdur Rashid Ibrahim, Muhammad Amin Rasuljada and others. Ismail Bey (1851-1914) played an important role in the propagation of Pan-Turk ideas by his well-known journal 'Tarjuman'. He is the author of a number of books and plays. Born in Crimea, Ismail Bey returned to Russia after completion of his higher education in France and Turkey, where he was inspired by the republican Romantics (Hannan, 2002). Two fundamental cornerstones of these reform initiati-

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<sup>5</sup> Marv is the ancient name of the city Mari, located now in Turkmenistan.

<sup>6</sup> This was a first attempt to use religion as an instrument against colonialism.

ves were Islamic idealism and Turkish nationalism<sup>7</sup>. Soon, the movement started to have a strong influence not only on Central Asian Turkish speaking nations, but due to the Islamic idealism, also on Farsi speaking ethnic groups like Tajiks, Afghani and Iranians, living in Bukhara, Samarkand, Fergana and other parts of Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Leading Jadidist theoreticians in Central Asia were Behbudi, Hamza Hakimsoda, Abdurauf Fitrat, Abdulhamid Cholpon, Sadriddin Ayni and others, who were trying to interpret the religious heritage of the Islam by rationalist methods. As noted by Adeeb Khalid, for them "...Knowledge, indeed, became the panacea for all ills of society and faith. It was knowledge that made nations strong and wealthy, and allowed them to embark on the path of progress. "Pure" Islam thus became for the Jadids synonymous with progress and civilization" (Khalid, 2000).

## 1.2 Jadid's concept of knowledge

The Jadids opened the new method schools as the opposite to traditional old religious maktabas and madrasas. These new schools were oriented to the new European (Russian) approaches of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They appreciated the role of sciences and new technologies (unlike of modern Islamic fundamentalists). The most important point of Jadid's activities was the application of interactive elements of liberal education through curriculum, theatre, literature, music, moral teaching, print and public media. The clearest example for using drama as a part of the education is "Padarkush", written by Mahmud Khoja Behbudiy (Samarqand, 1874-1919), for literature the already mentioned work of Abdurauf Fitrat. The central idea of both is the demonstration of advantages of new teaching methods in comparison to the old traditional system, presented in madrasas.

The traditionalists accused new method schools in corrupting young generations and undermining religious traditions. As Fitrat wrote, some traditionalists perceived the new system as invented by the unbelievers and "...if children sit on chairs, through this imitation of the Russians they will become Russians themselves" (2002). The innovators on the other hand, charged the old methods of education for being non-systematic: "student enters upon ten years in a miserable, wretched, dark, stuffy room, strongly resembling a corner of a prison or a stable.... And the lesson goes like this: "read and pass on!" Nobody cares whether yesterday's lesson is well learned or today's understood", with "teacher of the character of the Angel of Death", who humiliates students and corrupts of 'pure' Islam (ibid).

To one of the main principles of Jadid's education system belonged the concept of understanding instead of simple memorization. The old maktabas and madrasas system contained difficult dogmatic texts, topics, problems, vocabularies and even poetry (Sufi texts of Hafiz

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<sup>7</sup> Within the framework of Jadid's project their reformist initiatives were limited to this paradigm.

Shirazi, Alisher Navoiy and etc.). The students were expected to memorize them<sup>8</sup>. Jadid's criticized the old system, in which:

*the children at the age seven go to school and study for ten years and learn to read and write Persian. After this they toil in the seminary, pay all that they own to the schoolmaster, study for twenty years, and finish not knowing any more than the nature of the lam of hamd and the augmentation of the third radical. Even after studying Arabic for twenty years they are unable to speak it. After they finish, instead of going out to serve Islam and guide the people to the right path, they trample their human dignity underfoot before their fellow men for a meager livelihood. For a minor teaching job they make an illiterate judge's house into the exalted Ka'ba [the sacred site in Mecca] and his doormen into angels of mercy (Fitrat, 2002).*

The same description of the old system of education reported also Sadridin Ayni, who couldn't read other than accustomed texts after completion of maktab in his village Gijduvan. Furthermore, Jadids demanded the desacralization, universalization of knowledge and individual inquiry.

They favoured the universal type of knowledge, accessible to the wider audience, contrary to the sacralized knowledge of traditional Ulama and sanctioned knowledge of the Russian empire. They found the way of independent learning in newly invented printing technology, which made learning less dependent on master's authority. It was not any more simple "...insertion in a chain of authoritative masters, but mastery of the textual sources of Islam in the original, now available print" (Khalid, 1999). Sacred texts now were not in the domain of elite, but accessible to lots of people, though not to all. If "for the maktab all knowledge was sacral and tenet of Islam pervaded everything taught, in new method schools Islam become object of study, knowledge of which could be acquired in the same way as all other knowledge" (ibid). This conception emphasised the importance of the individual inquiry of knowledge.

The Jadids demanded the rationality as opposition to the imitation. 'True' knowledge had to be acquired individually through the primary textual sources of Islam (Quran and Hadis), but not only by making commentaries to them (Fitrat, 2002). This method promoted individual efforts and exertions. Nobody can judge whether his opinion is true. Everything should be varified by personal search of primary texts. It was a direct appeal to the human reason, ijti-had (rational religious interpretation), which, according to Jadids "did not end in the early Islamic era, and that Muslims are not bound by the positions of the great scholars of the distant past" (Khalid, 2002) and, that "time for ijti-had must never have become extinct" (ibid). Ijtihad was founded by the Russian Tatar Jadidist and famous theologian Abdullah Bubi (Ta-

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<sup>8</sup> In reality nothing was wrong with memorizing poetry. Traditionally it was the way of mastering in writing of poems.

tarstan, 1871-1922), who opposed the czarist regime. Bubi studied in Arabia, Cairo, and Beirut. He established a reform-style school in his village. Bubi wrote: "Who would have imagined that Islam – which based itself on reason and thinking, and in every sentence addresses reason and thinking- would be deprived of the freedom of ijihad and would be left under the yoke of taqlid [imitation of great scholars]? I wish this were just imagination" (Bubi, 2002).

Unfortunately, many ideas of Jadids remained a simple declaration without practical application. Modern educational program and Jadids' understanding on humanities were limited because of the restricted economical and political opportunities in Central Asia and its dependence on Russian empire. Beside many positive attempts of educational reforms, inspired by ideas of French Revolution, Jadids mostly generalized the educational conditions in Central Asia and couldn't see positive sides of Ulama's and madrasas traditions. The cultural backwardness of the region, Jadids Pan-Turkist political agenda and pan-Islamic approaches had also negative influence. In addition, Jadids project was in common elitist, new method schools were mostly sponsored by funds of merchants and growing bourgeoisies. They were not accessible for the majority of citizens in Bukhara, Samarqand, Khuqand and etc. The suspect of Bukharian Ulama, Emir, as well as the Russian Tsar against Jadids resulted in their persecutions and arrests. Jadids had some hopes concerning the Russian revolutions at beginning of the 20th century. They welcomed the October Revolution in 1917 in Petrograd (Saint-Petersburg). However, after October Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Jadids were gradually removed from the political and cultural sphere and were exiled during the 1936-37 repressions. They were partly sent to Siberia, where they died<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, the main element of Jadids' heritage like suggestions on individual reasoning (Ijtihad) instead of memorization and imitation (Taqlid) remain important intellectual capital for present Central Asian Humanities teaching.

## 2. POST SOVIET EXPERIENCES IN HUMANITIES

*"The world's biggest problem is how to keep the peace.  
The world's second largest problem is how to achieve prosperity"  
(David McClelland)*

Soviet education rejected Jadids' approaches on reforms, especially with regards to using religion as a tool of inspiration for modernization of societies. Instead of this, ideology based rationalistic education (particularly in humanities) has been introduced. There was no place for religious teaching except atheism. The soviet public education system had educated a number of highly qualified specialists in different branches including many scientists (physics,

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<sup>9</sup> Only one prominent representative of Jadids remained alive and later become founder of Tajik Soviet literature. His name was Sadridin Ayni, who died by natural death in 1953.

mathematics, cosmic biology and genetics, cosmos and technical engineers). There were several well-known specialists in social sciences and humanities as well (like Vygotsky, L., Bakhtin, M., Losev, and etc.), but many of the scholars could not avoid the ideological pressure. After the launching of the first Soviet sputnik (1956), scholars in the West started to investigate the reasons of such a remarkable technical progress. They assumed that the achievements in science were not due to a more or less mechanical reproduction of technologies, but to the thoroughness of the whole educational system, which was devoted to the preparation of highly trained minds in all the true disciplines (Grant, 1960). The humanities were also far from being neglected, as disciplines like teaching languages and literatures (Russian, foreign, and local languages), history (Russian, local and the world's), archaeology, philosophy (History, Marxist, "Bourgeois" –Western), political economy, music, arts, theatrical arts were well represented in Soviet Higher Education. However, the teaching in humanities was accompanied by the Marxist Theory. For example, the authors S. Kalkhchyan and Y. Petrov have clearly shown in their article "The teaching of the philosophical sciences", how much time was spent by teachers and students at the universities on Marxist-Leninist philosophy (ibid). However, contrary to the assertion of the editor in the foreword, there was no sign of "mind training", but rather of the ideological brainwashing.

## **2.1 Differences between humanities and technical education during Soviet times**

Some scholars have attempted to identify the reasons of different approaches of the political system toward the technical and humanitarian (and social) disciplines. According to Stephen P., Heyneman (2000):" Science, technology, theoretical mathematics, solid state physics, and nuclear engineering, for instance, were better protected from political interference and less subject to ideological distortion in the criteria for academic excellence. Hence, these areas were considered more prestigious." Since humanities and socio-political sciences can influence the formation of the youth and its future behaviour, these sciences have always been the matter of concern for political establishment. In soviet social sciences, teaching profession and humanities were under massive pressure and were politicised. Therefore, they faced big sense of disdain.

The social sciences were considered risky by political authorities because they included inquiry about what motivates human nature and what people truly believe. Posing these as empirical questions to be investigated was profoundly threatening to party authorities, for it could imply that those authorities did not in fact already have the answers. Social sciences and humanities were therefore subject to significantly more political control.

*Similar control and differences in prestige were associated with different types of educational institutions. Because they had often been established prior to the party/state and held to universal traditions of academic freedom and the "pursuit of truth",*

*universities raised concerns among political authorities. There were worries that university faculty might question official interpretations of history, the effectiveness of public policies, or the certainty of what was held to be popular opinion. For this reason, universities were often unflavoured by comparison to technical and engineering institutions. Fields of engineering and polytechnics expanded rapidly and were offered prime choices of property, laboratory equipment, and faulty salaries (Heyneman, 2000).*

The reasons of the technical progress need special research. As Andersen (1959) observes with regards to the education system of the United State, the connection between technical achievements and the quality of education is not that obvious. The Atomic bomb and Sputnik only are not the signs of success is education or of the indicators of high quality of school system: "We produced the atomic bomb at a time when critics were lamenting the supposed deterioration of our school. The bomb was created by a few scientists with unlimited resources, though the craftsmen who produced the delicate instruments were no less essential. The quality of our schools may have been irrelevant to this feat. Similarly, Sputnik proves little about the general quality of Soviet schools".

Taking in to account this concern about the general quality of schools, the curriculum contents of social sciences and humanities were weak, whereas the engineering disciplines were technically well equipped and generally successful "...because of technology considered politically 'safe' and useful for the state" (Heyneman, 2000). Although humanities used to be the essential part of Soviet curriculum, they could not play the appropriated role because of their ideological load. Perhaps the crisis of Soviet humanities has to some extent prepared the future collapse of the entire political system.

## **2.2 Challenges of transition for the education system**

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries started to move away from a single party political system towards the officially declared democratic organisation, guaranteeing individual freedoms and market economy. However, transition to new social and political system is not an easy task. Inequality in economic power and income, collapse of existing state economy with guaranteed social services, weakness of the legal systems and institutions reinforced the social tensions. Some countries (Tajikistan) went trough civil war, others faced so called "colour" uprisings (Kyrgyzstan) and raids of religious militant groups (Uzbekistan). Nowadays Central Asian countries are slowly moving towards peace building processes and are putting first steps for the development of open societies. Many of these states have become aware of the key role of education in transition to multiparty democracy.

Central Asian education, as a part of the social system, is undergoing the process of transition, albeit with certain difficulties. Generally, the system of education is facing challenges regarding structure, financing, social cohesion and so on. The education system was constructed to serve a centrally administered economy and is therefore "vertical" in its na-



ture. Given the shortage of educational resources and reduced teacher salaries it is difficult to maintain equal educational opportunities for different social groups (Heyneman, 2004). These challenges impede the understanding of education as a tool to achieve prosperity, provide social cohesion and bring forward the behaviour, which is expected under the social contracts. According to the research results in education, the understanding of the role of social contract is a necessary civil society mechanism for peace building, avoiding tyranny and constructing new social institutions.

Like religious ethics in the past (for example in Protestantism), in modern times the education plays great role in formation of social capital (Coleman, 1988). The concept of social capital implies the accepted norms of behaviour, which went through the social consensus. The existence of social capital is expected to improve governance, develop economy and make the life of community better as the social capital is supposed to "...increase the level of trust and willingness to act in ways that will benefit a community even when the benefit to the individual self is not immediately obvious" (Neyneman, 2000).

Certainly, the transition process towards a more active role of social capital is a very complicated procedure. The declared liberal values can't be quickly integrated into the real life, which was for a long time constructed by the state. The public education, which used to be dominated by the ideology of a relatively strong-organised Soviet one party state, is now under deep crisis, suffering from the lack of the material and intellectual support. Nevertheless, there is the strong understanding of education as a social capital under Central Asian societies.

As a relict of the Soviet times the educational systems in Central Asia are still centrally organised. For instance, with a population of about six-seven million and more than 25 universities, Tajikistan has similar problems of higher education as other post soviet republics. The collapse of the communist ideology automatically removed the exceptional superiority of Marxist humanity disciplines. The emergence of some new subjects like cultural studies, history of religions, sociology, anthropology, as well as Islamic and Quran studies since the period of 'Perestroika' significantly changed the educational environment. The main problem for Tajikistan as for other post soviet countries is a still centrally planned higher education and the resulting lack of choice for students. As Rafique Keshavjee (2004), the founder and Director of Aga Khan Humanities Project for Central Asia, describes

*Almost all state institutions following narrow Soviet strictures. What were some of these limits? Firstly, all courses, including their hours and class sizes, were determined centrally. All degree programs had set programs of study, and while students in their later years had some choice within their disciplines, these choices were set centrally. There was limited autonomy in that each university had a faculty senate that approved new courses, but the courses have to be approved in the Ministry of Education. The rectors reported directly to the Presidential Apparatus, and, as such, had a powerful*

*voice as a council within the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education set budgets of all but one of the universities.*

The process of transition from autocratically constructed social order to democracy, including the democratisation of the educational system is being impeded by different factors. The most challenging one is the identification of new priorities for the higher education. The existing activities in this way are chaotic. Professional training of teachers and the development of a new curriculum is not satisfactory (this kind of activity used to be a prerogative of the Centre (Moscow). Although the teaching staffs are rather big, the way of their working is not effective and innovative enough. The existing teaching contents are often either imitation of the Russian curriculum, or local product, filling the old wine into new nationalistic bottles. There are only few facilities conducting real research in humanities and social studies. Some of them are supported by international NGOs and communities. Furthermore, there is a weak desire to integrate new knowledge into the existing curriculum. A part of contents in humanity courses are neutral and abstract with very limited connections to the real context of social or individual life.

The mission of a teacher was in common understood as a moderator, transmitter of 'sacred' (political approved) slices of knowledge. The Soviet pedagogy was teacher-centred. Especially teachers of humanities were the very experts of 'true' knowledge. The post soviet Central Asia has big intention and claim to change and develop the education system, but actually the situation has not yet cardinally changed. Although there are no authoritative ideological sources any more, the humanities teachers claim the same extra-role and position in the society, as before in soviet times. During learning processes the teachers are holding all initiative in their hands, with the same self-centred approaches and stultifying didactic style, as before. How is it possible to assess student's development in such a case? As usual, at the end of the courses teachers demand from students to repeat orally the already given knowledge or to write a term paper (essay). If students demonstrate some level of knowledge or awareness of the passed topics, it counts to be a good sign for their achievements. As described by Chad Thompson (2003): "Much assessment still is based upon oral examinations, wherein a student may be expected to be able to recite a variety of facts, detached from any context, or where a students might be required to spin forth hazy generalisations related to the course content. In either case, the expectation is to display a discrete mastery of the course content, apart from any analysis of this material" Thus, the assessment process is lacking modern requirements concerning students independent thinking.

### **3. DISSEMINATION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THROUGH TEACHING HUMANITIES WITHIN AGA KHAN HUMANITIES PROJECT (AKHP)**

Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) was created as a response to the needs of Central Asian societies in order to integrate the rich past of these nations with the promising future. AKHP, as an educational agency has developed multicultural and interdisciplinary courses and trains teachers of universities and schools in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Since 1998 the project helps teachers to develop the interactive pedagogy and new concepts of humanities. It encourages Central Asian scholars and teachers to promote their innovative thematic curriculum materials in humanities and to test them. The work of the project started in a very difficult situation. The collapse of the Soviet Union and civil war in some areas were followed by many economical and cultural problems. After long work and discussion with different individuals and representatives of educational and scientific institutions in Central Asia, the Anthropologist Dr. Rafeeqe Keshavjee from Harvard University, brought together a team consisting of several local intellectuals. They focused their attention on the skills and values, which were likely to be important to Central Asia: the ability to transfer, to interpret and to increase knowledge, to take risks, to develop strategic thinking and to build social capital.

During 10 years of activities AKHP created 9 humanities centres across the region. The project developed eight semester courses and prepared lots of teaching materials, which were printed and disseminated annually among the universities as additional reading. The project provided intensive professional training to more than 500 university teachers/faculties and reached several thousands of students as participants and beneficiaries of these courses. AKHP experience revealed, that there are several factors, which are impeding sustainable reform in education. Dr. Rafeeqe Keshawjee identified the following ones:

- **Authoritative Expertise**

In the post soviet Central Asian universities teachers and texts are presented as “experts”, telling the only truth. This status is absolute, while the role of students is passive and is limited to memorisation and repetition.

- **Critical Thinking as Entertainment and Opinion**

Over the past ten years great efforts have been made to break this paradigm of authoritative expertise through the promotion of “critical thinking”. Traditionally, such skills are detached from course contents and are seen as a means of classroom entertainment with no contribution to the learning process itself.

- **Pedagogy as ideology**

Soviet educational practices had a clear ideological bias. At post soviet Central Asian universities the same is the case in the guise of a “national ideology”. The students and

teachers often regard the pedagogical reforms, such as the promotion of pluralistic tolerance and critical thinking, as another ideology.

Aga Khan Humanities project is international non-governmental organization (NGO). It is not pursuing any political ideology, religious purposes or propaganda. It is assisting the government and the higher education institutions in curriculum development and teacher's professional training, combining the equity and excellence. It is not only a simple innovative project, but attempts to create a bridge between tradition and innovation. According to its principles, the following issues of modern humanities are central for students in Central Asia: "1.Ability to link the past and the future creatively. 2. Ability to fulfil aspirations for national identity pluralistically. 3. The desire to re-establish Central Asia's role in linking and mediating various traditions. 4.The need to bridge secular and religious perspectives on ethics and knowledge" (Keshavjee, 2004).

The identified thematic approach and the most important themes are:

- The responsibility of the individual to community, society and the environment
- Tradition, innovation and change
- Formal and informal traditions
- Art and the Human Condition
- The Rise and Decline of Civilizations
- The Human as the Object of Cognition

As a result of long-term international teamwork in reviewing and revising of the curriculum, the following multicultural and interdisciplinary standards courses in humanities have been developed:

- Introduction to Humanities, which provides basic skills of learning
- Individual and Society. The topic is addressing the needs of searching for new forms of national, cultural and regional identities
- Tradition and Change. The connection of traditions and modernity is a very complicated problem. This course deals with the problems of the interpretation of the past in order to face future
- Negotiating Human Nature, the philosophical debates on origin and human being
- Seeking Social Justice
- Identifying Civil Society
- Art and Appreciation. Through these course students start to think and to be involved in processes of creation of artistic work and to examine the world of imagination

- Rhythm and Movement, which teaches the role of music in human life

The objective of AKHP is not only production and dissemination of knowledge, but also the concerns about the ethical issue, individual choice, sense of responsibility, independent thinking and balance between reason and ethics. As declared in preliminary strategy, the courses are accompanied by artistic dimension in order to establish a stable connection between reason (science) and responsibility (moral).

AKHP is based on the local Central Asian cultures and values. The development of curriculum and teaching is based on indigenous traditions of Central Asia (for example, pre-Islamic, Islamic, Soviet heritages, cultivate multicultural approaches, diversity), with some modern innovations. AKHP is involving local teachers and intellectuals and is providing them with native texts, materials and is enabling them to participate in curriculum design as the authors. Furthermore, it motivates the teachers to change their approaches, develop new skills and gain cross-cultural competences. AKHP plays the role of a catalyst of innovation in Central Asian humanities. The teachers and writers participating in this project went through a very difficult process of transition from teacher centred learning and theoretical curriculum to the student centred and practice-oriented teaching contents. They started to learn by doing, to take risks, to identify and discuss real social and cultural problems with students. They used to avoid these things before, frightened of doing errors.

AKHP students became more inquiring and voluble. This issue was the object of conflict between teachers, as the right of the students to participate in the learning situation is even until now the bone of contention between "Old Education" and modern liberal "Think Academy". The students became masters of questioning. Here is the first impression and typical voice of student, entering these classes: "For the first time in my life, I have ideas of my own. For the first time in my life, I am no afraid to speak my mind. For the first time in my life, I feel like a human being" (Keshavjee, 2004). It is interesting, that later on, when the new generations attended the courses, they started to question this opinion. They found it not to be correct to say, that one felt like human being for the first time. The time lag between these two generations is about 7-8 years. First students were the young post onflict generation of Tajikistan, who went through severe civil war. Obviously the change took place through the time, generations and approaches. It can be interpreted as a sign that the critical and analytical thinking in the region is blossoming. The students are learning not only through the texts, but also from each other during discussions and debates. The Cross-cultural curriculum and inter-active teaching allow them to develop the skills, to listen and to be listened, as well as to participate in different creative students projects like "Oral tradition" or "Cinema Groups".

Despite the success stories, AKHP is still facing difficulties to implement its concept of humanities in Central Asian classrooms. One of the reasons is the continuation of mentioned understanding of the "pedagogy as ideology", the dominated approach in Central Asian humanities. Similar to the soviet times, some students start to understand new values like, for

example, tolerance and diversity as dogmatic norms. As pointed by Chad Thompson, one of AKHP teachers and then Regional Coordinator: "Students begin with the conviction that responsibility, pluralism, diversity, are "good", and offer conclusions that simply reiterate this starting point. ...They believe in pluralism, but they do not understand it" (Thompson, 2003).

The aim of the project is to enable the students to cope with different levels of understanding. According to John Biggs, (who presented the SOLO taxonomy), the understanding consists of the essential elements between "Low-level engagement" and "High-level engagement", covering memorizing, not-taking, recognizing, relating, applying, generating, reflecting, theorizing procedures (Biggs, 1999). One could observe the character of the levels of understanding, when students 'jump' through the levels and try to come to the conclusion directly. In fact, it is not a productive way of learning, as it can transform the inquiring of the truth just to the demonstration of opinions. Everyone can have the opinion. There is no any objective knowledge, which is the epistemological result.

*"Our students are attempting to dispense with "structural" levels of understanding and move directly to 'extended abstract' levels. Without the foundational understanding of the material at hand, our students are doing no more than offering opinions. Such a process does not provide our students with the academic skills necessary for further university studies, nor does it provide the deeper appreciation of tolerance which is required for insightful , thoughtful participants to build their civil societies" (Thompson, 2003)*

The mentioned shortcomings have been identified by the AKHP headquarter and some efforts have started to overcome it. A newly designed program of Teachers Professional Development (2004) intends to find the approaches to solve these problems during two years. Of course, these kinds of shortcoming are not only characteristic for Central Asian students and universities, but are widespread in modern world. The same narrowness of approaches was also noted by researches concerning the US humanities, particularly in teaching of American history. African American, European and Asian immigrant groups faced many difficulties with regards to the canonists at the US universities (Stearns, 1993), including the debates on Vietnam War (Bromwich, 1997) and on the importance of great books. (why we call as a "Great Books" just the Greece-Roman heritages? What about books of other civilizations?)

## **4. MODERN DEBATES ON KNOWLEDGE AND ITS LIBERATIONS**

### **4.1 Epistemological discourse**

One of the difficulties, the development of humanities in Central Asia is struggling with, is the lack of rationalistic discourses and debates on the subjects of humanities. The majority of research is still being conducted by application of the Marxist - Leninist methods, which are mostly dominated by positivist and dogmatic (right and wrong) approaches or are moving

towards descriptive nationalistic ones. For example, during one of the AKHP workshops the university instructors were requested to read and analyse the famous work of V.I. Lenin "What to do?" Some of the participants were reluctant to discuss this text critically, because in their opinion, Lenin and the similar authors were already the part of their local identity. According to them, the history should be treated with respect, without challenging some of its aspects. Thus, Lenin's writing became a part of "sacred tradition" without any need to "think" about it.

In opposite to it, some other countries in Central Asia ordered to remove all books and writings related to the soviet (all Marxist-Leninist literature) past from the libraries in order to make way for the brainwashing based on national ideology (the case of Uzbekistan). To cut the links with the soviet past was one of the reasons, why some Central Asian states changed their alphabets from Cyrillic into Latin. There is a need to replace the old ideology with new research methods. The patriotic feelings and personal experiences are important, but they are not enough for solid scientific work.

Many scholars in Central Asia are still reluctant to accept new concepts of modern humanities like human diversity and gender issues or the problems of ethnical, cultural and sexual minorities. These topics are considered as Western agenda, imposed from outside, but not reflecting the local needs. The new political elites in region seem to have delineated the frame for permissible research in the fields of humanities. Only few researchers in political sciences, history, philosophy, anthropology and so on could evade the soviet and local ideological humanities. Most of them got grants and scholarships from abroad and have good command of foreign languages. The majority of faculties, teachers and researchers in the region have only limited access to the new educational and academic resources. There are only few serious research projects in philosophy, epistemology of education or critical social theories. The knowledge perceived by the local academic circles consist of the direct reflection of the reality (nature, society, personal life etc.), of the outcome of Leninist view on knowledge and of the reflection of the outside world (Kantian and Hegelian theories of active and creative role of reason/intellect acknowledged, but not seriously interpreted and implemented in practice by Leninist as idealistic theory)<sup>10</sup>. There is no deep debate on the nature of knowledge itself, how it is constructed by interests of different social groups or how manifold the world can be interpreted, constructed and deconstructed. The correlations between knowledge and interest, the role of communication in development of rationality and other aspects of epistemology are not being discussed within the local educational communities in depth. In sum, similar to soviet time, when humanities served as a basis for communistic ideology,

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<sup>10</sup> Reading Hegel's writing, Lenin in his Philosophical Compendiums (Philosfskie Tetradi) emphasized the statement: "...intellect not just reflects, but create the word around us". Unfortunately, this concept was not well developed further.

now they are forced to carry the same function for new nationalistic (but in reality ethnocentric) ideologies. Currently, depending on the modes of different political ruling elites, there is the “battle” for national heritages between different Central Asian nation states (for example, Alisher Navoi or Ibn Sina: who should belong to which nation?), but there are no serious discourses on the important universal topics on humanities. Such work could inspire modern generations to be more creative, open and tolerant to the others. After the collapse of the soviet system a mystical cognitive system for the teaching and research in humanities has been constructed in the region with only some exceptions.

In Muslim countries the orthodox religious scholars pursue the narrow dogmatic closure, legal and militant units promote dogmatic ideology, whereas some theologians develop the mystical cognitive system. In fact, the natural and mystical cognitive systems should be a part of religious theory and practice. However, considering the separation of religion and state Durkheim noted, that “... God, who was first present in all human relations, pulls our progressively, leaving the world to men and their conflicts. Or, if he continues to control them, he does so from on high and from afar” (Arkoun, 1994). Some scholars call this approach as reductionist theory of religion and suggest to go beyond it, when it comes to Islam, where God is present at every level of social existence. Nevertheless, as noted by Arkoun “...Islamic thought, still imprisoned in dogmatic closure, is not familiar with educational experiments and pragmatic solutions carried out in” (ibid), and it is no normal condition for any culture. This is what he called as “unthought” in Islamic tradition. He invites the scholars for comparative studies of Islamic thought with scientific methods, even if the ordinary Islamic discourse rejects the principle of such comparison and spiritualist’s speculation about the “values”. Islamic thought should be part of sociological and anthropological religious studies. In order to benefit from the tools of social sciences it should get out of dogmatic closure. According to modern thinkers, due to the political and militant movement in beginning of 1970, “epistemological displacement within the cognitive system [is] unique to Islamic thought: the principle of returning to the texts is maintained...but the semantic and discursive manipulation of the texts is entirely subordinate to ideological ends to the exclusion of all “scientific” procedures (syntax, semantics, history, even philosophy)” (ibid). Nowadays the concept of “unthought”, as an epistemic phenomenon is not just specific to the religious studies, but became part also of secular education in humanities. During workshops on Humanities in 2005, in the north part of Tajikistan some participants refused to participate in the discussion on one scientific article devoted to Quran. They thought, that not everyone has the right to discuss the points of the sacred book, as this would be the prerogative only of specialists and religious authorities. One participant even noted, that not everyone has the permission to even read Quran itself. The bad side of the orthodox, narrow ideologist and spiritualist interpretation of Islam is the attempt to transform the mind from open religious discourse into closed cognitive system with simplified right or wrong outcomes.



These cases show the need of region for very serious supports and financial assistance devoted to research on philosophical aspects of education and epistemology. The social theories conducted by Frankfurt School in Germany in recent decades, especially the writings of Jurgen Habermas and other thinkers in Europe have to be translated into local languages and included into curriculum at universities in Central Asia.

The modern education can't move further without understanding and implementing the concepts of diversity and pluralism. They are especially important for the instructors, faculties and scholars in Central Asia. Despite a very rich pluralistic heritage, Central Asia is for now not so open. In the name of the "national state building" the national or rather ethnical borders are isolating and marginalizing the region. In this regards there is a need to involve more actively the experience of European universities and the heritage of modern philosophical researchers like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida etc.

Currently many international NGOs are working on education reforms, but for now their focus usually remains in boundaries of political sciences, international relations or law. The education needs a broader investment, involving more research in different areas of humanities. The support has to be provided not just in form of money, but also as exchange programs for the students and scientists.

#### **4.2 Dichotomist thinking: Manichaeian Trap should be removed**

The origin of dichotomist thinking (polarizing the issues of the world into two, good vs. bad, right vs. wrong etc.) is an old epistemology, transmitted from one generation to the next. As an instrument of creating of the image of the "Others", it was politically supported. Theoretically the concept was founded by the ancient Persian thinker by the name of Mani. The gnostic teaching of Manichaeism started to work in different ways in all monotheistic religions, so that gradually this type of thinking became a part of the cultures in East and West. However, the main source of this type of thinking is political interest, implementation of which one can very often see in international relations (Junker , 1995). The liberation of knowledge is not just needed for the sake of knowledge itself, but for human liberation, which should not be just the emancipation from the oppressive structure of society, but from one's ego (Giri, 2004). Emancipating from the dogmatic views is a necessary work for current education. So called "Manichean trap", the dichotomist type of thinking, creates the misperception of the reality. In the practical way this problem disturbs the development of humanities in Central Asia. Depicting Islam as an aggressive force combating the western norms is the worst invention created by some misleading western scholars together with the extremist groups in Muslim countries. One can call it as "Strauss-Politik", created by both sides for very narrow political purposes. The image of the Islamic civilization, portrayed as military religion by some authors like Bernard Louise, Max Weber, Samuel Huntington etc., is spreading around the world as a contradictory approach in political sciences with the title "clash of civilization". This

“Manichean Trap” has been created for concrete political purposes and was accordingly funded by some military services. Therefore, it has nothing to do with the reality and with the nature of Islamic culture. Nevertheless, many people start to believe in this theory. It is obvious, that the militant religious groups are not the product of Islamic civilization, but were servants of the big political projects. After collapse of the Soviet Union, the investigation agencies, founded during the Cold War, became jobless. The religious extremism was part of colonial era (Wahabbism) and the Cold War project (Taliban), but not the direct product of Islamic religion and culture. Nevertheless, the voice of extremist groups within Muslim communities is now louder. They seem to play their part well enough with their counterparts in the West. The best example of this approach was the professor of Islamic philosophy Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941-89), from King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia, who is the author of the sentences like “Jihad and the rifle alone”, “No negotiations, no conference, and no dialogues”. He was the theoretical father of Al Qaeda (Aslan, 2006). On the opposite side there are hundreds of progressive scholars of Islamic studies showing the wrongness of these approaches saying, that “not only defied the example of Muhammad but also violated one of the most important principles in the Quran: that “there can be no compulsion in religion” (Aslan, 2006). However the voices of these scholars are not much popular among the ordinary people. They developed theory of rational contextualization, which does not allow the implementation of the old cases to modern situation because of different historical contexts and shows the limits of analogy as a cognitive method (Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Giragh Ali (1844-1895), Mahmud Shaltut (1897-1963)etc.).

The understanding of Islam as a kind of force confronting western norms affects the activities of the agencies working in the field of education reforms directly or indirectly. The workshops organized by UCA AKHP sometimes experience very sharp debates and are objects of severe offensive attitudes. Some participants express their concern, that western democratic values could threaten their national traditions. The same resisting approach of local communities can be observed toward some other modern values like human right, democracy, civil society and so on. Some participants of the seminars call these and other notions as parts of “big political games”. Cold War ideology, dichotomist thinking categorizing everything as good and evil, right and wrong, West and East, progressive and regressive seems to be still alive in the consciousness of people. It has just transformed its manifestation.

It is obvious, that this “Manichean Trap” should be removed from the political and academic scene as soon as possible. Instead of it, there should be the possibility for productive dialog and communication, but not for political or cultural hegemony or speculative games. Some European scholars know well, that this confrontation is meaningless. According to Habermas (2002), the western civilizations are no longer confronting other cultures as aliens since their structure still reminds them of their previous phases of social development. What they do encounter as alien within other cultures, is the stubborn distinctiveness of their religious co-

res. Many scholars think, that the even the religious cores should not be the object of concern. It is obvious, that Islam, as Abrahamic religion, has common religious roots with Judaism and Christianity.

One should appreciate the fact, that the most attractive concept developed in Islam is the notion of the "People of the Book", which includes all communities living together in Muslim counties: Jews, Christians and Muslims. Moreover, it was suggested to have one joint community for all of them. As the modern scholar of History of Muslim faith and civilization Aslan (2006) emphasizes, the Quran suggests and the constitution of Medina explicitly affirms, that Muhammad may have meant by the concept of the Umm al-Kitab not only, that Jews, Christians and Muslim shared a single divine scripture, but also, that they constituted a single divine Ummah. The Jews and Christians were "People of the Book" (ahl al-Kitab), spiritual cousins, who, as opposed to the pagans and polytheists of Arabia, worshipped the same God, read the same scripture and shared the same moral values. Although each faith comprised its own distinct religious community, together they formed one united Ummah.

It was a common belief, that the sacred book of Muslims is the continuation of the previous books. The scholars argue, that the Quran, as holy and revealed scripture, repeatedly reminds Muslims, that, what they are hearing is not a new message, but the "confirmation of previous scriptures" (Quran,12:111). It is interesting to note, that the biblical prophets are 140 times mentioned in Quran. Even if Muslims believe, that Quran is the final revelation, in fact it intends to complete the previous scriptures. The distortion of the original meaning of Quran occurred relatively recently. According to Aslan it is "...the Muslim scriptural and legal scholars of the following centuries rejected the notion that Jews and Christians were part of the Ummah, and instead designated both groups as unbelievers. These scholars did it in the same way as did it early Christians dissociated themselves from Jews and demonising them as a killers of Jesus". Unfortunately, the same demonization of the Islam can be observed in the western countries nowadays.

The well-known German philosopher Habermas sees the solution in more rational discourses and communicative interactions. Habermas suggests new epistemology of social and political processes as a social theory, which can effectively promote social evolution. He thinks, that such social evolution is possible only through the development of cognitive abilities. As in psychoanalysis the illnesses in individual consciousness emerge because of distortion and misrepresentation of the events outside and the doctor has to find in the deep levels of patient's mind the sources of psychological pathology by the help of dialog and conversation, the same procedures need to be implemented in social and political theory. Social theory has to overcome the communicative distortions and misrepresentations of real world, other cultures and civilizations, which occurred during the long time of history under different circumstances. Such an evolution and liberation of ideological stereotypes could be implemented by the way of dialog, using communicative ethics. Habermas excludes the transcendental dimensi-

on from such dialog. According to him, the knowledge consists of itself and of the society, but not of the discussion on sacred, which already has lost its aura (Giri, 2004). Although this statement is partly true, one should admit the fact, that it is not true everywhere in the world. The modern philosophers of Islamic world (Muhammad Arkoun, Resa Aslan, Omid Safi) are willing to concede the same possibilities for communication and dialog (Safi, 2004). Some of them assert, that western scholars show weaknesses with the implementation of democracy, secularism and pluralism outside of Europe and United States. According to them, it is not necessary for the new democratic systems in Muslim countries to accept secularism. Democratic ideals, such as constitutionalism, government accountability, pluralism and human right are widely accepted. However, the distinctly western understanding of religion, the separation of the state and religion, the idea, that the secularism must be the foundation of a democratic society (Aslan, 2008) is accepted to a lesser extent. One should make difference between two notions: secularism and secularisation. The first one means the isolation of religion from the public sphere or life. The secularisation however, intends to allow the transfer of certain responsibilities from religious to political authorities. In the case of democratic development in Muslim contexts, it is important to make accent not on secularism, but on pluralism. Based on the finding of Protestant scholar Arvey Cox, a scholar from United State, Reza Aslan thinks, not secularism, but the pluralism should be the foundation of democracy in these regions. "A democratic state can be established upon any normative moral framework as long as pluralism remains the source of its legitimacy" (ibid). The Islamic civilization and its sacred book are rich of the notions and the practices of pluralism. The foundation of Islamic pluralism can be found in the following verses of Quran: "There can be no compulsion in religion"(Quran, 2:256), "The truth is from your Lord", it says: "believe if you like, or do not" (Quran, 18: 29), "Can you compel people to believe against their will?" (Quran, 10:100), "To you your religion; to me mine" (Quran, 100: 6);

Some intellectuals from other eastern countries like Aurobindo admit, that the human liberation lies in the emancipation from one's own ego. Amanta Kuma Giri, the scholar from India, compares Habermas's conception of knowledge with Aurobindos one. Noting the positive sides of Habermas suggestion, that the cognition and empathy must be integrated into the quest for the knowledge, he also shows the limits of Habermasian communicative rationality following Aurobindo's concept. He criticises, that Habermas still continues to think within the regime of pervasive dualism and is at the same time passionately advocating a non-dualistic dimension in the logic of truth. According to Aurobindo "...the reason which is to be universally applied... cannot be the reason of a ruling class" (Giri, 2004). He thinks, that one needs the knowledge, which brings a cross-civilization dialog and which means not only rational finding, but "not excludes of other practices of self-cultivation, such as listening, silence and self-emptying vis-à-vis one's will to power and will arguments, and connectedness with the world, not only Human, Social world, but also with the world of nature and transcendence"

(ibid). According to the author, such kind of concept of critical social theory can help to understand the limits of knowledge and human interests.

In reality there is not the clash of civilization, but as noted by some scholars and spiritual leaders, it is clash of ignorance and ignoring of the others. We live in a very complicated world and we can't ignore each other any more. Interestingly, modern European thinkers like Habermas understand the importance of tolerance as a distinction between political and ethical social integration (Thomassen, 2006).

Fortunately more and more scholars in the West gradually come to the conclusion, that like all the other civilizations, the Islamic one has the potential to link up with the modern understanding of human rights and democracy through cultural reforms. Moreover, they understand, that the existing image of Islam is not the same as the reality of Muslims. "Even the prominence of Islamic fundamentalism is just the product of a current development. For, since the 1970s, there has been a tremendous shift in the relative influence and weight among the various factions participating in the political discourse within Islam in almost all the countries concerned" (Meyer 2005). Today many prominent scholars (like, Shabestari, Soroush, Arkoun etc.) from Muslim countries are working on mentioned directions.

The issues of pluralism and democracy are challenging topics for the societies of Central Asia, although all countries of this region formally announced, that they had chosen these values as central for their development. The feedbacks from the workshops on humanities show, that it will be more preferable for these countries to be engaged, using the words of J. Habermas, in "deliberative self-legislation democracy" instead of "militant [wehr-hafte] democracy" (Thomassen, 2006). These two types of engagement on democratic processes clearly have been shown in J.M Ferry's article on American democratic imperialism and European legal cosmopolitanism. Democracy should be long and internal process. It can't be imposed by armed forces. It is better to promote these values through the culture of "dialogue, coordination, cooperation and discussion designed to establish consensus or compromise"(Ferry, 2009). Aggressive or democratic imperialism makes any progressive efforts, especially the reforms on education and dissemination of new knowledge in this region impossible.

May be it is worth to mention, that, according to a prominent Russian general, one of the reasons of the failure of Soviets in Afghanistan was the ignorance of local traditions and culture. Accordingly, EU needs to do something with this misperception concerning binary opposition of mentioned civilizations.

## **5. CONCLUSION: RETHINKING OF THE ROLE OF HUMANITIES**

Concluding this article, the importance of the rational discourse in modern classes and local forums in contemporary Central Asia should be mentioned again. The liberation of knowled-

ge should be a permanent part of educational initiatives in this region, which is on its long journey from one party autocratic system to the democratic pluralistic one. During this transition some few things should be central. 1. All innovations on education, including the revising role of humanities should be based on the indigenous traditions and the long history of the region including Islamic, Jadid's tradition, but also soviet experiences in the last century (historically inherited German system). Furthermore, the modern international experiences on humanities should be not only superficially implemented from outside, but thoroughly integrated. The development of independent and creative thinking of the learners (students) should be always central for reform initiatives. 2. The revised concept of knowledge and cognitive system has to be based on new epistemology with broader perspective, including all the types of knowledge. These different types of knowledge include not just so called "rationalistic" one, which in fact often serves the interests of ruling classes, but also the experiences of all slices of societies, as well as the cross-civilization approaches, which open the way of dialog and communication with others. 3. It should be suggested to remove the dominating dichotomy type of thinking, escape Manichean dualistic concepts in order develop new bodies and research areas of humanities, based on pluralism (but not on secularism only). Communication and collaboration with the educational and research institutions of developed countries like EU and US would be essential for achievement of the desired goals and implementation of projects.

During a conference on higher education in developing countries with focus on Muslim regions organised by the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilization AKU ISMC in February-March 2005 in London one participant pointed out the importance of mentioning the indigenous Islamic educational heritage like memorization in Central Asian education. Regarding this remark, the questions arises, whether the memorization is the only real indigenous Islamic heritage in education. In this case what is the role of memorization in Muslim philosophy, arts, sciences, other creative professions? Was memorization essential for such Muslim scholars and encyclopaedists from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries like Avicenna, Abu Raikhan Biruni, Nasiriddin Tusi and Mirzo Ulughbek, artists like Kamaliddin Behzod or esoteric teachers such as Sufis like Jalaliddin Rumi etc.? Memorizing was not the only learning method in Muslim culture. According to his autobiography, Avicenna read Aristotle's 'Metaphysics' 40 time, but not only for the sake of memorization, but mostly to find its adequate meaning. Every time time, when he understood the meaning of this book with help of Abu Nasr Farabi's comments, he celebrated this event by sending charity to the people in mosque.

The memorization would be essential, if one accepts Islam only as religion, but not as culture and civilization. Of course, memorization has an important role in education, but only at the beginning, in elementary and secondary schools, but not at the universities. It is a useful tool for teaching and performing of religious rituals, for poetry and other humanities, as well as for medicine (for example, the formulation of the treatments in poetic form as in Urjuza fi-t-tib,

Ibn Sina). Memorization in Muslim culture was the way to refer to the other sources, as scholars used to cite by memory, not by direct copying of the sources.

It is well-known fact, that humanities have played an important role in Muslim civilisations (Goodman, 2003) and they had a strong impact on other cultures, especially, western European. Many scholars agree with the statement, that Muslim humanistic traditions was transformed by Europeans and served as one of the sources of humanism and renaissance. Recent scientific works on humanities have redefined the disciplinary organization of teaching and research and have introduced wider variety and new areas, such as gender or minority issues, studies of cultural diversities etc. However, many American scholars nowadays are worrying about the decline of humanistic research (Kernan, 1997) and about the shift of curriculum from university to “multiversity” and to “demoversity”.

It is necessary to analyse, rethink and spread the positive experiences of Jadids and AKHP, as well as to motivate and encourage humanities teachers for innovations. Central Asian scientists in humanities have wide field for new research area. There are so many unknown (unthought) slices of culture (formal, informal), which never have become the object of research because of the political correctness, ideology, religious, ethnics or gender superstitions. Central Asian universities need to develop new research programs in humanities, similar to the well-known works by Martha C. Nussbaum (2000, 2004), Peter N. Stearns (1993) and others in USA. However, these kinds of works depend on investments, which cannot be provided by the current central state budget due to corruption, turbulent financial crisis and economic stagnation. Regarding this issue, one should think about new projects for collaboration and integration with EU.

The courses in humanities with new approaches in arts, literature, sociology, philosophy, religions, political sciences, research in gender, cultural, religious and minorities issues, as well as analysis of such human behaviour like disgust, shame or hatred are important for liberation of thinking process in order to develop new generation of leaders in the region. Only the modern values, based on indigenous roots can help to build new and good society. However, this should not be implemented artificially.

Currently several educational programs organised by EU for Central Asian countries, like Tempus, Erasmus Mundus etc. are working in the region. Last years the majority of Central Asian countries joined Bologna-process of education. The dialog between higher education institutions is important and the communicative ethics (the notion of J. Habermas) play a central role in this exchange. More effective support in form of scholarships, research programs, training projects for teachers and the students will have a very positive influence on Central Asia with regard to the broader mutual understanding and democracy promotion.

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