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## **Central Asia**

Issues, Problems, and Perspectives



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# Part I

## Nationbuilding, Modernisation, and Political Identity in Central Asia





# REASON AND FAITH IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE MODERN DISCOURSE AND THE CHALLENGES OF FUNDAMENTALISM

SUNATULLO JONBOBOEV

*“O Moses, wherefore have you driven my servant?  
Your office is to reconcile my people with me,  
not to drive them away from me.”*

Jalaliddin Rumi: Moses and the Shepherd

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The parable in the epigraph belongs to Jalaliddin Rumi, the famous Persian poet (12<sup>th</sup> century), where he is discussing the case when revelation came to the Prophet Moses while Moses met the man, the shepherd in desert, worshiping God, but proposing to serve God in a way as usually do human beings. Addressing God, the shepherd was asking God “what can I do for you, for example, I can graze your cattle, part your hairs, do that and that (...)”. Moses prohibited the man to worship God in this way teaching that God does not need to be served in such human way. It is assumed that the words above are the answer from God.

The meaning is that nobody has the right to be an arbiter between the people and the Absolute, to decide for them and moreover- if we include the contemporary context – to commit violence in the name of God and the Holy Scripture. Many ordinary people are disappointed with the current world development, with the existing social and political injustice, with devastating geopolitical clashes, which are destroying countries and old civilizations. It is sad that now the young generation, which did not get sufficient education and has no social protection, is waiting for the instructions coming from increasing and influential radical movement like Salafism / Wahhabism, the movement which has been transforming into the destructive once called “Islamic State”, terrifying the rest of the world by creating new government based on middle ages mentality and serving this type of thought sharia law. Currently they try to teach a new code of behavior for all humans, they demand to identify what is right and what is wrong in religious matters, and all lifestyle – especially in Islam – challenging the existing traditional Islam and democratic secular system of political and social order in Middle East, Central Asia, and even in the rest of the world. Bad news for Central Asia is, that many representatives of the youth are participating and getting training in the war in Iraq and Syria.

Some authors like William Connolly and Edward Lemon link radicalization of Central Asian youths with the strict secularist policy of states, where “secularism prioritizes non-religion



over religion. Despite claiming to pursue the goals of diversity and freedom, secularism slips into the realm of intolerance by asserting it as the only legitimate form of living”<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, this is part of the truth but not all of the truth. One sees how much religious freedom people in Europe and Middle East enjoy, but still they produce a number religious extremists. Central Asia is not a direct nursery but the last destination of such radical religious programs.

The following is an invitation to think, i.e. its main purpose is to stimulate and motivate to think and be open for rethinking. These notions are very important for the contemporary Muslim world as it was emphasized recently by Egyptian President El-Sisi, who was inviting the religious authorities at Egypt’s historic Al-Azhar University to challenge the accepted and existing dominating code of thinking in Islam. He noted “(...) that thinking, I am not saying “religion” but “thinking” – that corpus of texts and ideas that we have sacralized over the centuries, to the point that departing from them has become almost impossible, is antagonizing the entire world. It’s antagonizing the entire world”.<sup>2</sup> Current Sisi’s urge was for religious revolution in Islam and to free the Islamic way of thinking from jihadi programs. Of course, this is not an easy task; this approach needs decades and fortunately if it would possible to be practically implemented, materialized. But nevertheless, his invitation to think has universal importance for all Muslims – including Central Asians. It should be noted that the invitation to think is not new phenomenon within the Islamic context. Many Islamic scholars are seeking for moderate and rationalistic view on Islam. One of prominent scholar advocating Islamic modernism, secularism, and humanism was Mohammed Arkoun.<sup>3</sup> Also the liberal and humanistic traditions of Islam have deep roots in the Central Asian popular culture. So, the mission of modern intellectuals is to remove dichotomist way of thinking instead to implement integrative approaches.

So, the main task of this argumentation is to avoid panic and to think how to harmonize three main existing and contesting attitudes towards the cultural heritage in Central Asia or three diametrically different interpretations of cultural heritage, based on three types of solidarities: to Ethnos / Nation, to Umma, and belonging to Global human “village”:

- The secular and nationalistic, serving the national idea is to generate patriotic feelings, to bring up the generation of the citizens, who can be tolerable, endurable to the existing political systems in Central Asia through inspiring young people for devotion to national symbols, values, and the states.

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<sup>1</sup> William Connolly “Why I am not a Secularist”. Edward Lemon, “Tajikistan Takes On the God Squad: [www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/229775341](http://www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/229775341), last visited 01.02.2015.

<sup>2</sup> Sisi urges religious revolution in Islam to fight terrorism: [www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4317918.ece](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4317918.ece)

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common questions, Uncommon answers*, today, Westview Press, Boulder 1994. *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, London 2002. *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert*, London, 2006.



## Reason And Faith In Central Asia

- The fundamentalist shows broader form of solidarity, belonging to global Islamic community, its exclusiveness to the pre-Islamic, Soviet heritage, and the period of independence.
- There is emerging another form of interpreting Cultural Heritage, which is more pluralistic, integrative, being universalistic by its nature, serving the idea how to inspire people for development and serving the idea of indigenous democratic development of the region.

Nevertheless of the broad debate of the topic mentioned, this argumentation limits the discussion to the interpretation of Islamic heritage in a radical and fundamentalist way within the academia, at the same time trying to examine some finding from local experiences. It shows options for coexisting and collaboration of three mentioned attitudes, transforming them from the object of contesting into the foundation for mutual respect and inspiration for the development. Such initiatives in Central Asia are striving for harmonization and transforming the common heritage as a source of producing new knowledge. The integrative and interdisciplinary curriculum of Aga Khan Humanities Project of the University of Central Asia, others new initiatives are used just as an example. Such initiatives need more support of local authorities and dissemination among the institution of academia. Discussing the issues regarding the tides of Fundamentalism in Central Asia and how integrated humanities curriculum, which can serve as a soft remedy, is just one option. For doing this one needs to identify what is the object of research: “Fundamentalism”, revivalism, or Islamic activism? Then it is important to know whether it is a religious project or a political one? After that one can move to the statement that fundamentalism is a challenge of nation-states in Central Asia and all over the world and it pretend to be the next ideological revolution within the nation-state – if the world is not able to find some sorts of immediate solutions. Education is such mechanism of transformation. So, the educational system and academia can cultivate the pluralistic integrated Humanities curriculum as a respond to raising religious fundamentalism and coming from it radicalism or the terrorism based or pretend to be an Islamic. As a part of such educational program one need to show the role of pluralism and diversity within the Islamic culture as minimum.

Contemporary students of secular and religious universities in Central Asia need to know that such pluralistic tradition exists within the Islamic culture; it has its clear phenomenon and prominent representatives. Though it is not easy task, within the organized courses it is possible to organize debates between different views and types of interpreting of Islam, showing that extreme form of interpretations of Islamic tradition is not total, but just one form of very rich thinking tradition in Islam. Modern rational discourses, reconsideration of Islamic thinking tradition (exoteric, esoteric etc.), implementing historical approaches and new research methodologies can to some extent limit the tides of fundamentalism in Central Asia. If not well-organized cultivating of rational Islamic studies together with modernist rational discourses within secular societies there is possibility for new ideological revolution as it happen



## Part I: Nationbuilding, Modernisation, and Political Identity in Central Asia

in Middle East. Conservative approaches and prohibition of such debates can contribute to and promote the process of radicalization of society.

Methodological approaches follow the idea that religious violence, radicalism, and extremism are clearly the heritage of Middle Ages and nowadays are not accepted or cannot be justified by any reasonable or logical arguments as tool for political discourse. If something is difficult to explain through logical justification, then it can be viewed as mystical phenomenon or just mental diseases. In case of fundamentalism, it should be noted, that at the moment the followers of this movement show weakness and not strength. As Slavoj Žižek notes, "(...) how fragile the belief of a Muslim must be if he feels threatened by a stupid caricature (S.J.) in a weekly satirical newspaper?"<sup>4</sup> The reaction has been shown by the group committed political violence in Paris demonstrates not their superiority, but – in opposite – their inferiority.

The main methodological instruments for reading and analyzing publications for the topic, personal observations, interviews, discussion during the seminars, workshops, and reports conducted in Central Asia in recent years, when the author was responsible for the faculty development program are the views of the leading theorists and philosophers. The data has been summarized and verified during the final analyses. At the same time it was important to verify the application and contextualization of some popular theories, for instance, constructivist and post-structuralism, neo-Marxist epistemological, political, philosophical, cultural and religious studies theories, including developed by Juergen Habermas' theory of communicative action, the role of rational discourses for social and political issues, discussions on truth and objectivity (Habermas), sociology of knowledge, co relationship of knowledge and the power suggested by Foucault, Karl Mannheim, Sarah Amsler, Chad Thompson etc. In dealing with fundamentalism it is worth to assess the findings of some western scholars specialized on Islam, like Bernard Louis etc., and modern Islamic intellectuals, like Muhammad Arkoun (on Rethinking Islam), Abdurhaim Soroush (on correlation of Reason, Democracy and Islam), Riza Aslan (on the role of rationality and pluralism in Islam) etc. Finally, in order to touch upon the issues of self-censorships, self-marginalization it is healthy to examine the theory of domination of Edward Said, the theory of isolation, alienation developed by Michail Foucault, and the issues of Inclusion of the Others by Habermas.

It is worth to mention that the application of different theories developed in the particular socio-cultural environment into the social, political, and cultural lives of Central Asia is problematic as always: not all findings of classical or regional theories are relevant and applicable, some suggested paradigms are limited within the time and space, some of them can lead to the reduction of the phenomenal cases by the demand of imposing the old paradigms on

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<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žižek on the Charlie Hebdo massacre: Are the worst really full of passionate intensity? [www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-zižek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity](http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-zižek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity)



new cases etc. Nevertheless, the useful adoption of some concepts from different theories does not obstruct further findings, the chosen integrated approach even allow to show some complexities of the problems we are facing in implementation of integrated curriculum in Central Asia. Now let one start discussing the history and epistemology of the culture of education in Central Asia and the importance of its reform for modern development of 'good' or in other words 'civil society' in this region.

## **2 CHALLENGES OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA: IN THE "LINES OF FAULTS" OR THE NEXT REVOLUTION WITHIN THE NATION STATE?**

All of us see the dynamic of the contemporary world – it is moving now very fast. It is in the search for a new order since the existing forms of mutual international and intercultural communications are not sufficient. The current world movement is unpredictable; it gives people some hopes but sometime leads them to the real depression or even big severe tragedies. Generally artificially created and purposefully fabricated by the world powers there has been a politization of confessional-religious feelings during Cold War and in the last decades of the Cold War period – especially, to be more precise, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when first Mujahidin and then Taliban movements have been created by CIA and Saudi-Pakistan as alternative powers to battle with Communism and as replacement for ideological contention of developed and developing world, which became one of the main trouble for the new generations, polarizing the minds, and pouring the worlds into two-three pieces. This kind post-colonial description of world political configuration is also one of the main disturbances for the implementation of free-from-ideology development projects, for cultivating pluralistic views, and for overall cultivation of democratic values, protecting human rights, empowering individual initiatives, protecting emancipation of women, supporting the projects giving wider access for education of children in the world, challenging poverty and providing more people with good social welfare system etc. New political foretellers say that the world already changed and never be able to return back to the previous situation: according to the Huntington, the lines of faults are moving from the confrontation between nation-states or ideologies (liberal – communist etc.) towards the clashes of civilizations. The situation now changed – thinks Huntington – because the nations of non-Western civilizations are not any more the object of the Western colonial politics but together with the West started to move and to create the History. This author thinks that not the territories, the lands, and the economies but the values and the notion of identity is becoming the main object of contention.<sup>5</sup> So – according these new foretellers – logically the Islamic fundamentalism is grist to the mill of new theory, namely the 'clash of civilization'. It seems that such kind pro-

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<sup>5</sup> Em. Huntington. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order; 1996)





jections show very pessimistic approaches, have no any vision of human progress, and are happy with re-establishing the middle age's lifestyle and propagating it for the unknown (perhaps, hidden global) purposes. The chaos created by the old-fashion-minded fundamentalists and on the support of the world international criminal, financial, or political powers shows that how unpredictable and dangerous can be the outcomes of such political projections for the ordinary citizen in modern world, without the difference of faith, believes, belonging to different civilizations or club of interests.

Speaking precisely about Islamic fundamentalism one should be clear about the notion and use of this term, since namely and formally the origin of the word "fundamentalism", according to Bernard Lewis<sup>6</sup>, is a Christian tradition, this term and used by Protestant churches with literal divine origin to oppose the liberal modernist theologians. If one allowed running ahead, one can say that in Islamic context fundamentalism, if one can accept it, raises mainly not within theologians but it has mostly political implementation. John Esposito<sup>7</sup> suggests using the term of 'revivalism' concerning Islam, but it is possible to speak about it as Islamic activism. Although some scholars – even within Muslim context – support the term of "fundamentalism" (as return to Islamic basics), which allow us to use all of them with the meaning of revivalism.

It is a well-known fact that the collapse of Soviet system brought Central Asian to the religious revival and nostalgic feelings about the Islam which can be viewed as 'natural' form of development after decades of ideological repressions of religion: new mosques are opening and new religious schools are establishing. According the 2010 data available from media, for instance, in Tajikistan 27 central mosques, 325 general mosques, and 3.334 Friday mosques are now functioning. If we calculate this statistics in another way this means that Tajikistan with more than a 7 Million (now 8.5 Million) population has one mosque for each 2.000 citizens. If the process of revival of Islam goes in Central Asia as local cultural-spiritual phenomenon but not as international and global project it can be easily understood and viewed as positive process.

Nevertheless, the lack of knowledge on religion and the evolving process of radical interpretation of Islam coming outside of the region, mainly Wahabism and Salafism from Pakistan and Arabic countries (particularly from Saudis) makes the religious revival very complicated. Some reports confirm that the most active role in radical revivalism and extreme form of fundamentalist interpretation of Islam is practiced by Jamoat Tabliq with a Salafi agenda. The Russian analyst Shustov confirms that:

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.117, n.3.

<sup>7</sup> John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1992)



“(...) in last two years, the Tajik authorities have convicted several hundred Islamic activists, including members of the radical Jamoat Tabliq, many of whose leaders had received training in the madrasahs of Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates”.

The Jamoat Tabliq has Salafi Jihadist goals and it wants to lead all Muslims back to “the true Islam” and ultimately secure “the Islamization of the entire planet.” He continues that there are currently “according to various assessments ‘about five to six thousand’ followers of this movement in Tajikistan.”<sup>8</sup>

Though some leaders of Islamic moderate revivalism in Tajikistan – for example, Haji Akbar Turajonzade, one of the religious leader of Tajikistan and former of opposition leader – reject radicalism among the followers of this movement and argue that they have just enlightenment mission and that there is no concern about ‘the entire planet’. This opinion is supported by Kadyr Malikov. He thinks that Tabliqi Jamaat is not radical, it is more close to esoteric teaching of Sufi Brotherhood with the mission of to enlighten<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, some researchers think that the big challenge for humanities and social disciplines, moreover, for existing nation-state and democracy in Central Asia is the fast-growing fundamentalism, Islamic activism, or extremism, which, according to them, can be the next revolution within the nation state with connection to religion. Some others assume that in reality it can be understood just as some type of search to find guarantee for political identities because of the total domination of Western countries in Middle East and in the world. Not many, but some participants of Aga Khan Humanities Project of UCA (AKHP)<sup>10</sup> workshops in Central Asia explain the rise of religious extremism with new Great Games: they think that the superpowers fight terrorism in parallel to different forms of assistance and investment for the maintaining the security, social infrastructure, business in developing countries, and at the same time use hidden forms of wishes for domination in the region and initiating a double standard / game, including the push for religious extremists: the real aim of superpowers is to come close to the border of young Central Asian states and to start to explore the big oil and gas resources. Definitely this is not a deep but superficial explanation. The so-called “Arabic spring” in North Africa in recent years, which started with the slogans for democratization and liberalism, their opposition backed by some western powers, unfortunately transformed into the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, is the most dangerous political metamorphose and it needs a very careful explanation. In spite of all different explanations the fact is that the fundamentalist movement

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<sup>8</sup> Georgian Daily Independent Voice, [http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19822&Itemid=72](http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19822&Itemid=72)

<sup>9</sup> [www.islamrf.ru/news/umma/islam-world/2218](http://www.islamrf.ru/news/umma/islam-world/2218)

<sup>10</sup> Aga Khan Humanities Project, multicultural and multidisciplinary project cultivating pluralism and diversity people, culture and ideas, currently is part of the University of Central Asia. Previously it was part of Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



and trends are in the process of blowing and there is need to counter such development for the region with dominating secular style of life and juridical democratic political order.

### **3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASPECTS: TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND HOPE FOR NEW INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES**

To understand Central Asia and its intellectual potentials one needs to know the epistemology of its education and research and the diversity of tradition of knowledge production in this region. Even before the appearance of Russian and emerging Soviet system traditional Islam presented time to time diverse types of schools of thoughts and different sources of producing knowledge and fundamentalism was not as dominated one. It is possible to list some of them:

- Literal interpretation of tenets of Islam by main religious schools (madhhabs) of Islam: not going deep to the meanings: for example, the issue of polygamy in Islam would be interpreted word to word from the sacred books;
- Rationalistic and esoteric interpreting of Qur'an beginning from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, rationalistic school of Muttazilla (Group of rationalist religious thinkers in Islam); Kalam (rationalistic tradition justifying Islamic dogmas through logical argumentations);
- Esoteric traditions: Suffis (Ibn al Arabi, Jalaliddini Rumi, Abdurahmani Jami, Alisheri Navoi etc.), Anthropocentric school of thought, discovering moral and deep existentialist values of Islam as a culture of human perfection;
- Allegoric interpreting of Qur'an by the kalam of Ismailia's, justifying learning and discovering of the laws of nature and society as a main purpose of Qur'an and Islam; the Nature perceived by this school of thought as the Second book to be read and discovered by human being;
- Islamic philosophers-mashaiyun (eastern Peripatetic, the followers of Aristoteles in Islamic culture, like Abunasr al Farabi, Avicenna, Ibn Rushd etc; the teaching based on rationalistic interpreting of the laws of Nature and religious sources according to the ideas of Aristotle and neo-platonic);
- Islamic naturalists: Al Beruni, Al Khawarismi, Ibn Hazm, Tusi, Omar Khayyam etc.: this school of thought made one of the great contribution to the world civilization, especially on the sciences and technology, such as math, astronomy, medicine, geography, optics, history, anthropology etc.
- Orthodox – Ahmad Hanbal (780-855), who did not allow rational discourses and logic regarding religious issues; Hanbal rejecting reasoned religious rulings (Ijtihad) which he considered to be speculative theology (Kalam); his guiding principle was that the Quran and Sunnah are the only sources of jurisprudence, and are of equal authority and should be interpreted literally in line with the Ash'ari creed. Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), the Wahabi and Salafi groups, emerging nowadays are the followers of Ahmad Hanbal;



## Reason And Faith In Central Asia

- Radical interpretation – Abdulla Vahhab (1703-1792), one of the ideologists of Saudi Arabia and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), one of the leader of Muslim brotherhood and the author of the concept of 'jahiliya', the state of so called 'ignorance', identifying the time of human history before the rise of Islam and modern time according to the view of the followers of Wahhabism;
- Liberal: Said Jamal al-Afghani (1838-1897), the role of Reason and Science in Islam, Abdulla Bubu (1871-1922), the time of Ijtihad is not over, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the evolution of Islamic thought; Muhammad Arkoun (1928-2010)-rethinking Islam, Abdulkarim Soroush (dynamic reason);
- Living Islam, which mix with the local cultural traditions of the people in Central Asia. One example of type of living Islam and esoteric knowledge will be demonstrated in the following.

Though this pluralistic culture worked just for few centuries, especially during the Golden Ages (10-11<sup>th</sup> century), moreover by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the collapse of Silk Road's traditional trade roots across this region Central Asia became as one of the most backward corners of the world. In addition to that traditional orthodox Islam was looking at innovation as bid'ah – or heresy, i.e. a big religious sin! – and the reformist movement initiated by Jadids (modernists) in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century failed and this gave opportunity for Tsarist Russia to invade and then to modernize it, integrated this region into the industrial centers of Russia. The Soviets just continued the modernization of the region and the elimination of religious traditions from public sphere but providing relatively strong secular educational system and sciences.

It is clear that real and current educational poles in Central Asia are many, but one has to focus on two or three of them as they were formulated by some researchers. It was emphasizing by some researchers the novelty and courageousness of some emerging innovative initiatives, like the Aga Khan Humanities project's mandate<sup>11</sup>, emerging from the integration of two fixed poles, which according to them were two radically different approaches towards the policy for educational reform in Central Asia: one is autochthonous regional culture originated from all traditional education and traditional authorities, including "pirs", "khalifa", "myurids", "tribal leaders" ( in case of nomadic nations of Central Asia) and the other is focusing on the legacy of the Soviet higher education. This represents the oscillation between two fixed poles in international scholars' attempts to come to terms with educational cultures in the former Soviet Union, and Central Asia in particular. The one pole is positioned a fusion of Eastern / Islamic / Asian / traditional practices within which Central Asian education and research is assumed to operate, a tradition seamlessly re-sutured over the Soviet

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<sup>11</sup> Chad D. Thompson 2008, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Nippising University, North Bay, Central Eurasian Studies Review, Vol. 7, No.2, Fall 2008 [the author is the former regional coordinator of AKHP]



interregnum. In the other pole lies the assumption – emphasized within the Soviet era – that only the Soviet educational models have left a mark and that education must be positioned in a strictly utilitarian context, wherein the purpose of education is to provide “courses that should prove useful to the regional economies”.<sup>12</sup>

One can agree with experts and think that the two mentioned poles of the culture of education in Central Asia actually are fixed. But in reality they are more and they were not in severe mutual confrontation, although there was always a particular competition between both. Moreover the elements of the culture of pluralism or multiculturalism existed in Central Asia for the centuries even if it was in latent form. Though it was active during Islamic golden ages, it was distorted and reshaped during the Soviet time in result of forceful cultivation of atheism, but even at that time it went through Soviet modernization toward ‘internationalization’ (namely so called ‘Westernization’ and ‘Russification’) and now has some perspectives because of Western culture and educational standards are flourishing in the region through the joining Central Asian universities to the Bologna system. So, since the region was always in crossroad of history, Central Asian cultures were not static but heterogeneous by nature and presenting one symbiotic Turko-Persian culture based on Islam and Soviet heritage. The problem is that today not all people engaging in Central Asian issues want to see that diversity of Central Asia and always try to bring this diversity into confrontation, to superficial “unity” on behalf of all negotiating different cultural and political subjects, but the unity based on just one of its component and replacing others.

### 3.1 Educational Episteme, Components, and Segments

So, it is important to note that in reality both mentioned poles of the cultural and educational components in different composition were negotiating in this region for centuries. The evidence for middle ages (10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century) is the prospering science in Central Asia, the works of the famous scholars and scientist, like Beruni, Al Khwarezmi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and so on. It seems strange that natural sciences were not studied at official schools such as mad-rasas but they studies in different learning and academic centers (the Ma’mun Academy in Khwarezm, the Academy of al-Ma’mun in Bagdad, the University and Dar-ul-Ilm in Egypt during the time of Fatimids, the schools of Nizamiya in Iraq and Iran), also were successfully taught at private schools, in families – like the education, which got Avicenna at home, through invitation of the best scholars and teachers provided and sponsored by his Ismaili father. It is important to mention the fact that in classical period the sciences, arts (painting), the music in so-called Islamic countries were never excluded from so called “the public

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<sup>12</sup> Chad D. Thompson, *ibid.*



sphere” (Habermas<sup>13</sup>), though it was the time of domination of religious ideology. Something in opposite happened in the Soviet times: the fact is that during the Soviet times and domination of atheism religious education was diminished but the Soviets were not successful in destroying the system completely. Religious education went to private houses and survived (the example, of Hindustani, who got education in India and back to Central Asia, organizing hidden private, home schools). Otherwise the religious and scientific education and cultures were changing their positions from time to time in Central Asia: if in Islamic times so called “religious sciences”(ulumi naqli) were in position of a dominating disciplines within the main official educational institutions of that time – the madrasas –, the natural sciences “rationalistic”(“ulumi aqli”) were taught out of the official educational system (madrasas) at private homes or in academies (special learning centers- Dar-ul-ilm). Special place or niche had at that time esoteric knowledge cultivating by scholars with mystical orientation, like Sufies etc. at special learning centers, like “khanaqas”and zawiyas or in artisanal guilds. Esoteric dimension of Islamic knowledge will be discussed further in the following.

But the first attempt to bring together different types of knowledge and to organize their public debate and negotiation belonged to the Muslim modernists – Jadids (innovators) – operating in different Muslim countries, including former Central Asian emirates and khanats at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They initiated to establish new schools with mixed religious and secular disciplines integrating new technology of teaching to the learning process including printing books, newspapers, theatres etc. Later on after the Bolsheviks came to the power all of them were involved into the revolution process to establish new system, and after that they were purged in the 1930’s as “bourgeois elements”. During the Soviet time, as it is mentioned above, religious knowledge and practice were officially transformed into nearly the museum relicts (according to the atheism religion as rudiment of the primitive past) but unofficially it went to underground, again to the clandestine or private houses, where it was taught but not much noticed. Good or bad but interesting to note is that Humanities and Social disciplines at that time were included into the state ruling ideology as an instrument for controlling the minds; Social and Humanities studies were part of a “messianic, fundamentalist, and apologetic ideology”<sup>14</sup>. The main goal was to create citizenry that identified itself as part of a modern polity” and it would assist in “creation of politically quiescent population throughout the Union that feel stronger allegiance to the central government

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<sup>13</sup> Habermas J. 1992, Further Reflections on the Public Sphere/Habermas and the Public Sphere. Ed. C.Calhoun. Cambridge, Mass.1992.

<sup>14</sup> Andreas Umland 2005, St. Antony College Oxford, Teaching Social Sciences at a post-soviet university: a survey of challenges for visiting lecturers in the former USSR. European Consortium for Political Research. P.219-229



and would more readily accept governmental control”<sup>15</sup>. For the emerging Soviet educational system after the civil war the political concerns were more important than the “economic strategy”, it was important ‘to save the people from bourgeois ideas’.

### 3.2 Disintegration of Humanities Disciplines

The most dramatic change, which happened at this time, was the disintegration of human disciplines from the real social and cultural roots and the separation of knowledge production from the ways of its dissemination. Scientific “truths” were creating somewhere in the top level within the offices of CPSU responsible for the ideology<sup>16</sup> and were sent for their “approbation and justification” down to the universities. There was an extreme form of division of labor when the technical and natural sciences were ordered to serve mainly the socio-economical needs, but Humanities and Social Sciences were obliged to shape the “new individual” and the “harmonically advanced person” according to the mentioned “messianic” ideology. Thus, Soviet epistemology and pedagogical technologies based on this division of labor separated producing new knowledge (first within top political institutes then within Academy of Sciences) from the transmission of knowledge (through the universities)<sup>17</sup>, and it fact it was the isolation of teaching from research. That is the explanation why universities were presenting the reproduction of knowledge, which reflected on the whole process of learning: teaching, studying, and researching. Even recently, during a conversation one student noted the case from her class when her classmate started his presentation from words: “I think....” he was immediately stopped by the Professor: “We don’t have so much interest on your opinion; just tell us what is written in your course book”!<sup>18</sup> This statement was not an exception but in opposite it was a common case during the past, especially in humanities classes. Of course, the Soviet controlling system never succeeded to fulfill the imagined ideal, there were many other original studies on Humanities produced by numbers of scholars in spite of the very strict rules created by the system. Like the works of Leo Vigotsky (on Psychology of Arts), Mikhail Bakhtin (Cultural Studies), Losev (the History of Philosophy and Esthetics) in Russia and many other good works based on original research in regional cities and capitals of Soviet republics – including Central Asian: For exam-

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<sup>15</sup> Norma Jo Baker and Chad D. Thompson 2010, Ideologies of civic participation in Central Asia: liberal arts in the post-Soviet democratic ethos. *Ecsj –Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 5 (1) 57-71.

<sup>16</sup> Institute Marxisma I Leninizma under the CPSU (the Institute of Marxism and Leninism in Moscow), the academic entity responsible for current class ideology (responsible for researches).

<sup>17</sup> Dahrendorf, R. 2000, *Universities after Communism*. Hamburg: Koerber Stiftung. p. 13; Norma Jo Baker and Thompson: Ideologies of civic participation in Central Asia;

<sup>18</sup> From the interview with Gulru, student from Medical Institute in Dushanbe).



ple in Tajikistan one can mention works of ethnologists or in Soviet notion- the ethnographs – like Andreev, Pisarchik, ethnomusicologist Nizom Nurjonov, historians like B.Iskandarov, B.Gafurov, some others on Folklore, or philosophers, like M. Dinorshoev, Kh. Dodikhudoev, etc. The classical music and ballet, theatres, literature etc. succeeded some level of progress – of course with considering some necessary ideological norms and passing through state censorship<sup>19</sup>. The case of Soviet technical progress in the 1960's and 1970's (including the "Russian phenomenon" of launching of the first "sputnik") also demonstrates some successes. But nevertheless the way for free exploration, or expressing scholarship on Humanities and Social disciplines was not so easy.<sup>20</sup> The foundation for repressing of social sciences was the decree in 1936 issued by Stalin identifying 'Dialectical materialism' as an official philosophy for all communist states in the world. Humanities and social sciences were tested for the "(...) strict accordance with a crude misrepresentation of 'historical materialism'" (the part of Marxism-Leninism philosophy describing social phenomenon with dialectical method). These tests served as a cover for political suppression and to terrorize scientists, who engaged in research labeled as "idealistic" or "bourgeois"<sup>21</sup>. The sociology of knowledge and the interconnection between knowledge and power in history and during the Soviet past studies well and current debates on politics of social sciences in Central Asia can be understood within this context<sup>22</sup>.

#### **4 LIVING ISLAM: EXISTING ESOTERIC TRADITIONS OF ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA: AN ALTERNATIVE FORM OF INTERPRETING ISLAM**

Sufism is a form of teaching in Islam as inner esoteric experiences and knowledge. Such as demonstration of mystical dimension of Islam and as an instrument for human moral development is traditionally very popular in all contemporary Central Asian countries i.e. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and also in Pakistan and India. It should be mention that Sufism after violent invasion of this region by Arabs

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<sup>19</sup> Masha Gassen, My Grandmother: The Censor." Granta 64. URL: [www.granta.com/extracts/655](http://www.granta.com/extracts/655). This article also included into the AKHP course "Introduction to Humanities", Dushanbe, 2004. pp. 35-38.

<sup>20</sup> Sunatullo Jonboboev (2010):[50] Humanities in Transition: Liberation of Knowledge in Central Asia and the Potential Role of the European Union: [www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/zentren/zeu/Forsch/Publi/publi2](http://www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/zentren/zeu/Forsch/Publi/publi2)

<sup>21</sup> See more in: Loren R. Graham 2004, Science in Russia and the Soviet Union. A Short History. Series: Cambridge Studies in the History of Science. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Amsler, The Politics of Knowledge in Central Asia. Science between Marx and market, London – New York. Pp. 13.