THE SELF BETWEEN POLITICAL CHAOS AND THE NEW POLITICAL “ORDER” IN TAJIKISTAN

Most people who were involved with investigating events in Tajikistan – and the new Tajiki identity – after the collapse of the USSR sought answers to the question “What went wrong?” However, the post-USSR period in Tajikistan is also a time for questioning the values, ideas, ideals and principles which shape our perception of ourselves and our reality in order to find answers to the question “What are we in our actuality?”

Based on interviews and analyses of some of the key events that took place after the collapse of communism in Tajikistan, I argue in this paper that the main reasons for the existential crisis which brought about the civil war, and today’s state of “truththerapy” and schizoid existence where the Self no longer constitutes subjects, are: (a) the Tajiks’ loss of their link with the traditional ways of the constitution of the Self (subject, individual); (b) their exploitation during the Soviet era as instruments; in Heideggerian language Tajik men were “presence at hand” not “readiness to hand,” or mankur” as Aitmatov named this phenomenon; and (c) their isolation from mainstream of the world changes during which Tajiks, as another Soviet people, experienced a different kind of modernity and “humanism.”

During the last three years of teaching and living in Tajikistan I realized the importance of the process (mechanism) of self-knowledge and self-consciousness (Hegel calls it the terra firma of modern philosophy), or, as

1. It is nothing to do with Bernard Lewis’s famous book What Went Wrong?
3. Chingiz Aitmatov, The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years, John French, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 124-35, 136-46. In his novel The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years Aitmatov recalled an ancient Kyrgyz legend about the mankur. According to Aitmatov, “a mankur did not know where he was from. He did not know his name, did not remember his childhood, his father, his mother – to say it more simply, a mankur did not realize that he is a human being.”
4. Peters John Durham, “The Root of Humanity: Hegel on Communication and Language,” in Figuring the Self: Subject, Absolute and Others in Classical German Philosophy,
Foucault calls it, “the technologies of the Self,” for shaping individuals, their identity, their world-view, and their relations with others, and also for bringing change within their societies as well.

These processes of self-cultivation consist of four or more features or components, which are interwoven in this process. The first component is the theory of knowledge (the fundamental topic of philosophy), through which someone will begin their understanding (interpretation), or will enter the game of truth; in other words, in which they will examine the relation between the Self and the surrounding world, which is non-self. The second component of this process is the idea of freedom. This faculty will grow together with the identity of the Self (person, subject), which is significant for the cultivation of the faculties such as will, intellect, sensibility and imagination, where these faculties in this process will remain under pressure, challenge and change. The third feature is that the Self itself creates a dynamic process, or the process of the self-cultivation is dynamic, and based on its experience and knowledge the Self will change and will take on a new shape. The fourth feature is the creating of communication with others, as it was indicated by Hegel that the Self only exists in its relation to another self. Through these four components the Self constitutes the subject, shapes the individual, and if this mechanism is not working it is difficult to claim about the person’s humanity, interpretation, freedom, culture and creativity.

The ways of shaping subjectivity which were developed within different Tajiki (Islamic) schools of thought played a significant role in preserving the uniqueness and peculiarity of Tajiki selfhood and identity, and above all its lifestyle. In particular, the conceptualization of the Self which was developed by Tajik (Islamic) thinkers in the past is important for understanding the progression of self-consciousness, the essence of subjectivity and individuality within Tajiki (Islamic) thought. The selves, as conceived by Tajik (Islamic) have a consciousness of their very being (subjectivity) and self-limitation of the personality (individuality) and its dependence on higher consciousness. History is our witness that sometimes these ways of shaping the Self (subjectivity), or these ways of living, remain under pressure from political regimes, which have tried to destroy these ways of figuring the Self. Alternatively, these ideas sometimes remain hidden, and be-

