

COMPASS Crisis Reflections HAMSOYA'S RESILIENCE

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GCRF COMPASS project (ES/P010849/1, 2017-21) is an ambitious UK government capacitybuilding funding initiative, aiming to extend UK research globally and to address the challenges of growth and sustainability in developing countries. Notably, the COMPASS project led by the University of Kent, in partnership with the University of Cambridge, seeks to establish the 'hubs of excellence' at the top-level Higher Education Institutions in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, to enable them to become the centres for knowledge-sharing and transfer for research integration, impact governance, and sustainable communities. The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) COMPASS project has been shortlisted for the International Collaboration of the Year at the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards 2021, widely known as 'the Oscars of Higher Education'.



HAMSOYA'S RESILIENCE

"If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it."
— Albert Einstein

Taking into account the state's illusion of clarity¹ on virus, it is easier to announce the end of resilience because of uncertainty of Science². However, in such circumstances, these two signposts of our (post)pandemic time, uncertainty and the state's illusion, point to the current of "absurd".

If you agree to set on cast, can we look on the issue from the other side? To be exact, from Sufi (Al Ghazali) and modern philosophy (Derrida and Foucault).

We should start by unpacking *clarity* and the Science knowledge on virus, that coming from Al Ghazali: "*The source of our knowledge, in contrast with the argument put forward by the philosophers, is not based upon experience or sense-perception. Events occur according to a certain habitual course, and our knowledge follows suit*"³. The Sufi reminds us that true knowledge is impossible in the world of unstable and inconsistent things. In that case the state's power is non-permanent either. Power originates from the constant circulations of relations between the state's authority, people, and the go-betweens (legal experts, academics). The constant drifting could bring us back to Einstein's "absurd" with a question: 'Can the pandemic be about finding a middle path, where we need to (re)learn to combine one world (dominated by the Western model of state, based on the Western type of knowledge of everything) with many worlds (created by the non-Western cultures (including Sufi's one))?' If we agree with this "absurd", we need to listen with "the ears of the heart" (*bo gushi dil* in Tajiki-Persian) and remember (whether religious or not we are), our civilization has "Indeed in that is a reminder for whoever has a heart or who listens while he is present [in mind]"⁴.

After the reference to the Qur'an, I will take a chance and invite you to be my virtual neighbor or *hamsoya* (*ham* – together, *soya* - shadow, or literally, it is "those who share one shadow"). It is in my language Tajiki (Tajikistan), as well as some other languages around.

The current *Hamsoya* dialogue might be called a "deconstruction of presence"⁵. Having played along a bit, we could have presented discussions of the topic through the prism of Islamic philosophy, when a "community without a community" is created on the Rumi's principle: where "I am You" and we are *hamsoya*. We are those who are trying to find inspiration from those who are trusted and who are not. I imagined you agreed to have your Afghan neighbour to be *hamsoya*, and we are granted to share a common "shadow". The absurdity of such setting is that we do not reveal "duality" in such a talk, because we have Human connections.

¹ Almond, I. (2003) *The Meaning of Infinity in Sufi and Deconstructive Hermeneutics*.

² Chandler, D. (2020) *Coronavirus and the End of Resilience*.

³ Alon, I. (1980) *Al-Ghazālī on Causality*.

⁴ Qur'an, 50:37.

⁵ Derrida, J. *Of Grammatology*.

When I mentioned Afghan *hamsoya*, I thought for some of us, it may be too much. Right? But... would it be reasonable to ask: didn't the occupation and devastation of Afghanistan, with its delightful ethnic mosaic, not "national" (or precisely not European national) scale at all (began in 1979 by Soviets and accelerated after the intervention of the Americans), gave us a reason to think that "rationality" (both own and alien) without the recognition/accepting of the Other, raises a wave of violence? Don't you think that the current regime illustrates subtext of "one world" (dominated by one type of knowledge on everything, the Western type)? But if we discuss the question as *hamsoya*, we might consider that the setting is about remembering that it is not entirely correct to represent Muslims in a single monochromatic image that currently prevails in the West, with constant border issues. For *hamsoya*, the absurdity of borders is that they cannot be solid and strict.

Perhaps our current covid-cum-lockdown crisis has been given to us to reflect and find out whether it is possible to re-relate and share common "soya" (shadow), or the reflection of the universal ethics of Humanity.

Why do historians need to learn not to ignore "speculation"?

We believe that history "... must start from what happened, the rest is speculation". The quote belongs to the famous British historian Hobsbawm. It reflects a familiar picture of a history full of "struggle" mode, "decorated" with the necessary flags-facts. Perhaps my *hamsoya* is agreed that most of us have been brought up and turn to be paradigmatic historians. It is not an attempt to get an answer on the question of "speculation", it is hardly possible. But will you agree that one of the reasons for this is the persistent institutionalization of all we "touched" before our current (post)pandemic era?

A roughly similar context was presented by Lotman, since his "historian is doomed to deal with texts ... [and he - NN] acts as a decoder. For him, a fact is not a starting point ... he creates facts himself ...".⁶ "Creation" of facts by the "decoder" affects the design of references. Researchers from Central Asia are aware of the need to have to list European researchers at the sections of footnotes, while they in turn "produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western histories, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work. This is a gesture, however, we cannot return. We cannot even afford an equality or symmetry of ignorance at this level without taking the risk of appearing "old-fashioned" or "outdated".⁷

Sometime ago Grzegorz Ekiert, a researcher at the Harvard School of European Studies, presented another version of a "decoder" style. In his lecture, he pointed on the Eastern Europe as "the backward periphery of Western Europe, whose development level was still higher than in Central Asia in the 19th century".⁸ The history, as a rule, must demonstrate a chronic urge to overcome "backwardness", cautioned the presenter. As my *hamsoya*, did you ever think, why any premodern culture that has survived to modern times, should give the impression of inflexibility and stagnation?

On the other hand, we might want to think, why modernity is axiomatically equated with the Western Europe experience? Probably would be right to conclude that both the Eastern

⁶ Lotman, Y.M. (1981) *Tekst v tekste*.

⁷ Chakrabarty D. (2007) *Provincializing Europe*.

⁸ The Third International Conference on Russian and Eastern European research, The University of Tartu, Estonia, June 10–12, 2018.

and Western parts of Europe, and Central Asia - all represent not only the geography prescribed by “historians”, but, rather, the distribution of power throughout Eurasia.

“Who are Tajiks, and their hamsoya?”

If we are still here as *hamsoya*, we are in power to ask Derrida: “Do you know Tajiks?” To orient those who like Derrida, “got confused,” let me introduce Tajikistan. This is a miniature Persian-speaking country, one of the 5 national republics of the Central Asian region. Our “hamsoya” are Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan (all of them Turkic-speaking), and we have those who are behind the post-Soviet space: Afghanistan, China, India. For some of us, a reminder of the good “hamsoya” is the monument to *Yusuf Balasaguni* (c. 1015-1070). It stands in front of the *Kyrgyz National University*, in the capital of Kyrgyzstan, in Bishkek. This scientist is revered as the author of “Graceful Knowledge” (“Kutadû bilik” in Kirguz; or “Ма’рифати саодатовар” in Tajik; “Благодатное знание” in Russian), the first work written by a Muslim Turk. The author begins the narrative with a greeting of “hamsoya”, those who are nearby. These are Arabs and Tajiks, “who [has] a lot of books.”

The acknowledgment that knowledge can be borrowed from each other allows us to return to Derrida, and we decide to rephrase him. It turns out the following: “*Are we Tajiks? Are we Uzbeks? But who, we? Are we (not a chronological, but a pre-logical question) first Tajiks or first Uzbeks? And does the strange dialogue between the Tajiks and the Uzbeks, peace itself, have the form of the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel, the living logic which reconciles formal tautology and empirical heterology...?..Or, on the contrary, does this peace have the form of infinite separation and of the unthinkable, unsayable transience of the other?*”.⁹ For majority of my *hamsoya* such substitution can cause a legal refutation. Besides Derrida speaks on Jews and Greeks (with a completely different history), while our version speaks of *Hamsoya* people, with a very similar culture, history, and common faith (and different languages). Derrida, even in such a complex combination as “Judaism and Hellenism,” speaks of a possible exception (and doing this via the prism of his own personal experience). The above version does not speak of an exception; it is likely a reminder of a different design for *Hamsoya* history of the region.

“Trio” from Enlighteners and “trio” from hamsoya

The current modernity is presented without specifying its location. We might think on it as engineering integration of boundaries that has a 300-year history for us from Europe. However, to some of my *hamsoya*, it is comprehensible that the Eurasian world has functioned as a successful project throughout the history. It was elegantly presented by the Russian-Soviet philologist N.I. Golenishchev-Kutuzov: “There was one line of cultural development from Samarkand to Toledo, that was passed into the hands of Christians with all their Arab libraries at the beginning of the Reconquista”. Those “lines” are formed with the understanding that the people of Eurasia, from Nile to Oxus, did not advance the ideas of the Enlightenment with the self-proclaimed universalist hypothesis of citizenship.

⁹ In Derrida’s (1978) words: “Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? But who, we? Are we (not a chronological, but a pre-logical question) first Jews or first Greeks? And does the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek, peace itself, have the form of the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel, the living logic which reconciles formal tautology and empirical heterology after having thought prophetic discourse in the preface to the *Phenomenology of the Mind*?”.

You would be right, to say that modernity of this type has consolidated a mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But, will you agree, that its worst and most controversial gift of Enlightenment's motto: "Freedom, Equality and Fraternity" is to allow people to believe that they were mostly exclusively people with borders, as Western, or Eastern, Asians or Europeans, Tajiks or Uzbeks. The fact is that on that Enlightenment basis we keep the faith that "the world [which NN] is not a natural state of affairs, it must be created"¹⁰ is formed. In other words, a war is necessary to create peace. The latest example of not excepting European "trio" is Afghanistan.

I assume that *hamsoya* might offer its own "trio": Trust, Hospitality, and Compassion. It has hitherto less studied perspectives but what is important, it cannot encourage us to have borders. The "trio" might commence introducing soft power with altered presentation of border, flexible ones, for people with diverse ethnic, social, cultural, religious identities. The nuances of such matrix are asserted essentially on the shared cultural and historical traditions of the region.

As a conclusion

After reading about speculations from the Historian, Tajik-Uzbek-Kirgiz *hamsoya*, and the "trios", you might ponder that I would prefer to accuse *hamsoya* around. In the current case my possible response would be to point to the (post-)pandemic depressing confusion. But it would be real absurdity, because the conflict between the "self" and my *hamsoya* has a long border history. Sufis named such reality a *Mind-world* (in Arabic *Mulk*). Al Ghazali reflected that it is feasible for human consciousness to merge the *Mind-World* with hidden invisible one – *Malakut* (in Arabic). The plexus of Worlds could help to understand that resilience of Human Being is about an encouraging network that allows both "self" and "other" to interchange alternate identities.

If you are here, till this part, in that case, we are as *hamsoya*, and do not need to talk on what Foucault called "general politics" of truth that has a starting and ending points by borders. We can get back our resilience with necessity to loosen the state's conviction and nationhood spirit of "regime of truth" (again from Foucault). This way we can find out whether it is possible to get back to normal Human relations between *hamsoya*.

¹⁰ Gervas S.(2021) *Conquering Peace: From the Enlightenment to the European Union*.

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