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Trading or Teaching: Dilemmas of Everyday Life Economy in Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union on teachers' life and work in Badakhshan and Osh provinces of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Challenging some of the assumptions of the Soviet studies about the interaction between teaching and other sources of moneymaking by teachers, the paper illustrates continuities and changes in the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet times in terms of role, nature, forms, and ethics of trading and commercial activities in the life of the teachers in the two countries. The paper draws from the two ethnographic case studies carried out in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan between 1999 and 2005. The drastic actual changes in the status and work of the teachers in post-Soviet Central Asia has presented teachers with tough choices. One of such choices was whether to become involved in trading and commerce. Teachers' experience of trading and commercialisation has been contradictory: necessary, possible, rewarding; yet challenging and often disgusting and contrary to the very morality of the teaching profession. The teachers' life and work serves as windows to the larger issues that have both local and global ramifications. The challenges teachers face in the paper speak to basic issues of human experience: dignity, justice, hope, equity, care and humanity. The paper's major argument is that while teachers are increasingly gaining from their involvement in trading, it is the societies that are losing, both by loss of the best teachers and by the implications of trading and commercial activities on the education systems in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The policy makers must make decisions about how teachers could be provided with conditions that enable them to focus on the major priority of their work for the benefit of the future generations of Central Asia.

Keywords: teaching, trading, Central Asia, corruption, post-Soviet education.

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INTRODUCTION

The paper presents a complex picture of teachers' lives and work in Central Asia. It examines how teachers are seeking various means for survival and coping with the multiple challenges they face in their everyday practices in and out of schools. In particular, the paper discusses the role of trading and commercial activities in teachers' lives: how and why teachers have become traders, what effects it has had on their lives and practices as members of rural, post-Soviet societies, and what might the implications of this involvement be for education and society in Central Asia. The paper argues that the teachers' idiosyncratic stories speak to larger issues of continuity and change in societal values and structures. These have both local and global significances.

CONTEXTUAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The data for this paper was collected through in-depth, long-term, qualitative studies in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.² These comprise ancient Central Asian societies, reconstructed as modern states at the onset of the new millennium (Gleason, 2004). Central Asia has lived through many indigenously-produced and externally-imposed statehoods throughout its history. The seventy years of Soviet social engineering aspired to abolish class-based human exploitation and establish an egalitarian society, primarily via eliminating private property and entrepreneurship (Brudny *et al.* 1988).

When Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991, they experienced enormous challenges, stretching from basic feeding and clothing of their populations to creating nation states, dealing with foreign and international pressures, and acceptance by the global community. Despite the popular hopes and populists' promises, neither of the two states was ready for these challenges in any real sense. Accompanied by a grab-and-run mentality, lack of accountability in any form, mafia takeover, destruction of economy and ethics, civil wars, rapidity of changes and lack of any organised forms of response and negotiation, the USSR's break-up became a tragic event for many people; it has brought chaos, despair, and uncertainty to the lives of thousands while enormously enriching a few (Akiner 1998; Keshavjee 1998). Economic crises, unemployment, poverty, conflicts, the return of old diseases and inability to cope with new ones, a decline in education and social services, and dislocations have plagued the former Soviet republics since the early 1990s. The unstable and worsening socio-economic conditions, the miserable income from local economies have caused many people, especially the highly educated and skilled, to seek alternative survival opportunities, including illegal activities and migration from rural to urban settings, and from both further abroad (Allen 2003; Ibraimov 2001).

The Central Asian youth's feeling of abandonment by their governments and

those who used them to gain power has made them angry, desperate and vulnerable, increasing the risk of political instability, state legitimacy and civil and international conflict (Akiner 2005; International Crisis Group 2003; Roy 2000). The general dissatisfaction of young people has resulted in their involvement in such troubling local and international activities as corruption, racketeering, drug abuse and trafficking, prostitution and human trafficking, as well as radicalism and militancy of all sorts. Central Asian youth has been at the core of all violent events in the post-Soviet period (Hanks 1999; Megoran 2002; Polat 1999; Rashid 2002).³

Standing on the major drug trafficking routes, from Afghanistan to other former Soviet countries and Europe, Tajik and Kyrgyz youth have also been drug shuttle intermediaries, and many of them have ended up in jails. It is estimated that there are 80,000 to 100,000 drug users in each of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (UNDP report 2003). Central Asian governments' efforts to eradicate religious extremism and militancy through heavy-handed security policies and coercive measures, coupled with the support and jockeying of superpowers, have been unfulfilled; there is a danger that state restrictions on religious expression will only increase the attractiveness of the underground and fringe movements (Akiner 2005; International Crisis Group, 2003).⁴ Moreover, as an Institute for War and Peace Reporting's (2004) study found, some of the Central Asian leaders 'appear to be using the war on terror as justification for consolidating their power and stamping out dissent,' which 'alienates populations in the region. Coupled with the lack of economic and democratic reforms, this drives many people into increasing poverty and heightens the chances that some will turn to radicalism' (p. 1).

Difficult socio-economic conditions, involvement in illegal activities, including drug abuse and prostitution, shortage of funding for health services, increasing prices for medicine, poor nutrition, inferior water quality, inadequate sewage systems, bad sanitary conditions, and the wide use of agricultural chemicals have contributed to a huge increase in goitre, diphtheria, diarrhoea, anaemia, malaria, cholera, typhoid, jaundice, tuberculosis, scabies, hepatitis, gastritis, measles, sugar diabetes, AIDS and other infectious diseases, both in rural and urban areas (Keshavjee 1998; UNDP 2003; Rashid 2002).

Post-Soviet life has also brought opportunities for entrepreneurship through the provision of a degree of freedom of economic activities and choices, unleashing creative energies for those able and willing to take risks, whether ethically or unethically. Alongside other population segments, teachers, as esteemed professionals, moral guardians and former vanguards of Communist society (Muckle 1990), have also found themselves in difficult socio-economic and morally and ethically uncertain milieu. How they live through these realities will be the focus of discussion below.

Besides a few anthropologically guided studies, Soviet society has never been as monolithic as portrayed in much of the Soviet and Western research,

which was largely based on urban Russia and has often failed to capture the complexity of actual everyday life, particularly in regions such as Central Asia. Our own recent studies (Niyozov 2001; Shamатов 2005) similar to the burgeoning post-Soviet studies (e.g. Humphrey 2002; Kandiyoti 1999; Keshavjee 1998) revealed that both Soviet and post-Soviet societies have been full of contradictory realities and unpredictable trajectories. The shifting landscape of tribal, nationalist, socialist, market-oriented neo-liberal and Islamic discourses and power relations compete and complement one another in explaining the present and predicting the future. While such complexity is not altogether new; its acknowledgement, however, challenges most available portrayals of Soviet and post-Soviet reality, and we hope that the present study, by pointing to the multiple tensions in the lives of a particular category of people (teachers), will illuminate both the achievements, and limitations in Soviet and post-Soviet studies.

Both of us experienced Soviet and post-Soviet education and taught in our respective countries (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan); we also studied, worked and taught in a number of developing and industrialised countries. Our lived experience as well as academic pursuits in these contexts, has brought us to a belief that many of the research claims and conclusions about Central Asian societies during Soviet times, have been shaped by ideologically-driven official Soviet research reports, which impacted on the Western Sovietologists who have had rare chances to conduct actual field work (Brigel 1996; Kandiyoti 1999; Niyozov & Bahry 2006). A considerable number of the portrayals have, as a result, fallen short of presenting the contradictory and contested nature of the Central Asian societies. We are increasingly realising that this complexity is important, not just because it is closer to the reality of any living society, but also because complexity embodies opportunities and possibilities for renewal from within. These possibilities must be considered in any reform agenda, both from within and without the region. The following pages will illustrate this complexity through examining the everyday realities of teachers' professional lives.

In Central Asia, markets and trading have always been part of the cultural tradition; the ethics, forms and purposes may have changed as part of shifting moral discourses, but the practice remained. Trading sites of the Silk Road were rich with all kinds of goods, with local merchants serving not only as material but also as cultural bees between various civilisations.⁵ The so-called 'Soviet system,' in an empirical sense, was never purely Socialist and communist. Similarly, the post-Soviet landscape is not a complete state, reverting to regulated or even value-free economies and societies, as globalisation and anti-communist politicians and educationalists of East and West often seem to have suggested.

The avoidance of this complexity in research and education helps us to understand some of the questions posed in recent research. For example, it partially explains why, given that the market existed in some sense, and from 1985 people thought of the market economy seriously, given that currency inflation was

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already rampant by the late 1980s, with salaries dwindling; given that conflicts and wars were already abounding (Afghan war, Almaty event in 1986; Osh event in 1990, Dushanbe in 1990–1991; Karabakh conflict since 1991); and given that corruption⁶ was rampant anyway, the USSR collapse was so dramatically and tragically perceived both in and outside the USSR. This paper may provide a partial explanation as to why the USSR's break up has been so traumatic for the teachers who were moral guardians, leaders, state servants, and rural citizens. Indeed the further we move into the reality of brutal post-Soviet societies, where capitalism is accompanied not with democratic but with coercive and authoritarian structures and elements of culture borrowed from pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet traditions, the more tragic, mythical, and nostalgia-laden the Soviet past becomes. Connecting this with the way various strata of society have experienced the post-Soviet transitional years, one could prospectively suggest reasons why such a collapse was so dramatic for Central Asian societies and the international community.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a by-product of two qualitative research projects conducted by its authors as part of their doctoral studies. Both studies employed the ethnographic life history case studies approach to examine teachers' work and life. Niyozov studied the life and work of five experienced teachers in Badakhshan province of Tajikistan in 1999–2001 while Shamatov explored the life and work challenges of five novice teachers in Osh province of Kyrgyzstan in 2003–2005.

Both studies involved (i) long-term participant observations (between nine months and one year each, with subsequent follow-ups during later visits to the areas); (ii) extensive observations and interviewing (for example, Niyozov formally observed each of his five core participants between 13 to 15 times, with each observation lasting about 90 minutes; he interviewed each participant about 20 times). The formal observations included classroom practice, while the informal observations involved shadowing the teachers in and out of the schools where Niyozov lived during his project. These interviews comprised: (i) discussions of classroom practices (e.g. 15 such interviews were made by Niyozov with each of the five teachers), (ii) life history discussions (e.g. up to 3 interviews with each core participant-teacher) and (iii) two interviews with each core participant on general education issues. Additional interviews were held with focus groups, school heads, other vocal and critical teachers, community members, and representatives of the education ministries, boards, and expatriate body. Shamatov followed similar procedures (2005: 70–77). This paper uses both data that was included in the above Ph.D. theses and data that remained unused for practical reasons.

The paper's authors themselves hail from the region and have intimate and

nuanced knowledge of the cultures, languages and changes that have happened here. The participants' and researchers' voices were linked with the larger body of published and unpublished literature in the area and on the topic, to show the magnitude and spread of the phenomena under question. The purpose is not to prove any particular argument and theory, but show the contradictions and complexity of teachers' involvement with trading and commerce, and the various implications this has for education and society. This required an adoption of a critical and reflexive approach in order to engage not only with the teachers' perspectives but also with our own, and with the larger literature on assumptions, conclusions, preconceived notions and biases.

Primarily, these qualitative studies explored the following questions: how do these teachers understand their professional practices within the current conditions, why do they teach the way they do, what does their teaching embrace, how do they address the multiple challenges of their daily life and work, and what do they try to achieve by their work in and out of schools? Although trading was not a particular focus of each study, it has become increasingly evident that the teachers both in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan assigned a very important role to trading in their lives and practices. Trading, commerce and trade-like activities affected their whole professional lives in multiple ways, acting as a source of both hopes and frustrations.

As will be inferred further, trading will remain an important force in teachers' professional lives in future. So we ask, how does trading take place, why do teachers see it as important, how does it affect their professional lives, what implications does trading have for society and education, and how could it be reconceptualised as something constructive? These are some of the themes dealt with in this paper. We have brought out the teachers' voices around these themes in order to create a coherent narrative, which speaks of the multiple and messy realities of teaching, illustrates a complex, contradictory, non-dichotomous, and reflexive representation of teachers' lives and work in post-Soviet Tajik and Kyrgyz rural mountainous societies. At the paper's end, we link these voices to the broader issues and complexities of the increasingly globalising world.

TRADING IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET TIMES: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

This section describes how teaching and trading have been seen as contradictory and complementary continuities from pre-Soviet and Soviet times, how trading was perceived during the USSR, particularly by teachers, how these perceptions changed after the break-up of the USSR, and how teachers increasingly adopted trading as a means to escape their misfortunes. Finally, we address how adopting trading has affected teachers' identities and self-esteem.

TRADING IN PRE-SOVIET AND SOVIET TIMES

In accordance with Central Asian pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions, teachers have always enjoyed high status and respect (Afzalov & Rahimov 1994; Akulova 1988). Before Soviet rule was established, trading had been an acceptable activity in Central Asia for centuries. Along the Silk Route, being a trader was a privileged occupation affordable to the fortunate few. Whilst some particular Sufi interpretations that dominated Islam in Central Asia denounced the material world [*dunya*], Islam, however, encourages trading, private property, and profit, whilst banning usury (Ferrara & Saffuri n/d). Nevertheless, trading was rarely seen as an occupation of teachers even at that time, except in the sense that teachers exchanged their learning for all sorts of gifts, food, monetary and material remuneration from the parents, mosques, or madrassahs (Khalid 2000). Given that teachers were not paid by the ruling dynasties, such material and financial solicitations were never seen as unethical.

In the USSR, this high social status, as well as job security, and relatively comfortable remuneration were reinforced by the state, which re-positioned teachers as loyal servants of the state. Providing them with a salary and numerous benefits, the state, however stripped them of their previous autonomy and banned any solicitation of the previous kinds as unethical (Shorish 1972). As promoters of Soviet ideals of public property and state ownership of the means of production, distribution and consumption, teachers actively denounced not only religion, but also any activity that could violate the Communist state's espoused ethical principles. Subsequently, from the 1930s, the Soviets managed to discredit the notion of trading, making it popularly viewed as morally despicable, and ethically incompatible with the notion of good 'Soviet' citizens. Trading became officially an undervalued, very risky job, looked upon with suspicion and it became a prohibited activity, due to its perceived corrupting and exploitative essence. Even state-employed traders were often jailed for alleged corruption, thefts and misappropriations of the public good. Linked with the local tradition, traders of the material goods were also seen as traders of immaterial qualities too, of trust and friendship. Comparing his Tajik fellow-citizens with those of the neighbouring Afghanistan, a Badakhshani Tajik poet exclaimed in popular verses: '*Khu xalqriyum qabul sawdogaram nist*' (I adore my people who are not traders or speculators).

The Soviets *ideologically* associated trading with capitalist culture and selfish motives, antithetical to those of collective-oriented, cooperative, and self-sacrificing Soviet citizens. Teachers *officially* condemned petty trade as unethical speculation and a shameful activity, which prevents one from leading a moral and honest life. A teacher from Tajikistan remarked:

We had books and guides, which criticised America, England, Japan, West Germany and other capitalist states. We said that capitalism was in its last phase

and was going to be replaced by socialism, which was said to be inevitable; competition was bad, trade was a low and immoral thing, and it turned people into enemies (Niyozov 2001: 234).

Another teacher from a Kyrgyz village school, who grew up during the former USSR, remembered life during Soviet times thus: 'we did not worry about life hardships and had a happy childhood. You would not see children selling cigarettes, polishing adults' shoes for money or begging for money at that time.'

As we pointed out, the teachers' *official* dislike of trading was partly due to their traditional culture, and partly to Soviet propaganda and educational upbringing. The *Sufi* traditions of Central Asia despised attachment to the world, secular values and material desires, and endorsed moral and ethical purity. Weddings, burial and birth ceremonies were accompanied with the recitation of the didactic poetry from Rumi, Hafiz, Attar, Nasir Khusraw and others, which reminded people of the thereafter and the day of judgement; it mentioned Biblical and Qur'anic stories of those who went astray in the search of wealth, forgot about humility and God, and were ultimately severely punished for that.

The Soviet ethos embraced hatred of private property and the rich. Soviet practices, which required income verification for anyone purchasing expensive property, such as a car or a house, were seen as a sign of a honest and just policy (which many miss and demand nowadays). Trading was not a productive type of labour, while the notion of the service economy was not formulated as a concept.

Together with tradition, the official propaganda made its impact: some teachers viewed selling soaps, seeds, and cookies as marks of a 'lazy, parasitic lifestyle,'⁷ which was a denigration of their status and profession, particularly in comparison to the productive labour of workers and farmers. Scarcely different from theft and cheating, trade would accordingly turn people into enemies, like wolves. There were those who continued to believe that sharing with neighbours was more appropriate than selling things to them, particularly in small rural communities with a culture of reciprocity, and normative control through the threats of gossip, blackmail and social exclusion. From the example provided below, one can see how a teacher attempted to link Islam and socialism:

During Perestroika and Independence I was a bit worried about the excess of talk about Islam, but then I realised that the major principles of the 'code of the constructor of communism'⁸ are similar to those of '*javonmardi*'⁹ (manliness) in Islam. The problem is how to apply them in practice. I don't see that happening with either of them (Niyozov 2001: 262).

Despite the dominance of anti-commercial rhetoric, in reality, however, teachers were among the most frequent visitors of Soviet bazaars in Central Asia. Their traditional status, often coupled with their students being among the traders, would enable them buy things that were better and cheaper. Their corre-

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spondence students, working for state shops and in the bazaars, often earned their marks by providing their teachers with high quality goods at cheaper prices or for free. Teachers rarely if ever turned these offers down. In addition, there were always a few teachers involved in trading in and out of the local bazaars. One teacher said that he had a considerable herd of cattle and would sell a couple of bulls whenever he needed money, whether to purchase a motorcycle or a car, wed his relatives, and generally improve his already comfortable living conditions. Another teacher mentioned that he gave tuition to those who aspired to enter higher education. Given that most of these clients were from the wealthy families, he used to make three times more than his monthly salary out of tuition for three to four students in a matter of few weeks. Neither of the two felt any ethical breach or guilt for these activities. In the second case, the teacher even believed that he was right to 'milk' the Soviet elite, who, in his view, gave to him the money they had stolen by corruption and appropriation of the public property anyway.

TRADING IN POST-SOVIET TIMES

Being at the top of the social ladder in the communist system, teachers quickly fell to the bottom of the new social hierarchy in the market-oriented post-Soviet economy. This is despite the rhetoric of their high status within the new nation-states remaining the same. In addition to low salaries and frequent delays in payments, teachers now work in impoverished schools, with overloaded curricula and increasing expectations, old, insufficient or difficult-to-teach new textbooks, cold and crowded classrooms with broken or low-quality furniture, inadequately-qualified, inexperienced and unmotivated colleagues, Balkanised and stressful political cultures, harassing inspectors, unhappy parents and dropping-out students. An increasing number of school-age children cannot attend schools because their parents cannot afford to buy the basic necessities such as school materials, textbooks, notebooks and pens, as well as clothes and shoes. Rural parents are often forced to keep their children out of school because they need their help with agricultural work. 'No one feeds us if we stay hungry in the winter, not the state and not the *khazina* [an international NGO]', said a teacher in Wanj Tajikistan in 1999, who often conducted his classes in half empty classrooms. His own teenage son used to miss his classes because he had to take produce to the district markets.

Faced with the new reality where money is all that matters, many teachers *now openly* take on additional jobs outside schools to supplement their income. One such job is business (e.g. farming for sale in rural areas, a small commercial business in an urban setting, or both in both places). This added workload consumes teachers' after-school lives and energy, leaving them with limited time and strength for professional development or any other extra-curricular activity.

A teacher, who felt guilty for her students' poor results during the annual exams, acknowledged that in the Soviet times, she would have improved her students' marks by working with them after the morning shifts. Now she spends that time at her small farm to ensure highest productivity possible. The tensions between her students' results and her own family wellbeing have caused her health to deteriorate. Each year, she spends two months in the provincial hospital. This surely excludes those teachers who work in private and international schools, such as the Aga Khan and Turkish lyceums in both countries.

Observing this worsening of the teachers' professional life, many graduates of the pedagogical institutions avoid the teaching profession. It appears that almost any job pays more than teaching. Many graduates prefer to stay in towns and cities, or leave for Russia for labour, rather than return to schools in the remote areas, creating severe teacher shortage. Schools hire retirees and their unqualified graduates who offer weak instruction.¹⁰ These conditions have forced many teachers to leave public schools. Some found a continuation for their professions by joining newly-established universities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, such as Khorog State University. Working at higher education institutions offers prospects for higher salary and prestige. In addition, there is a possibility to make money through bribery during the entrance tests and exams (Heyneman 2002; Sardor & Kimmatsheeva 2006). Fewer teachers who have mastered English joined private schools such as Aga Khan lyceums in Khorog and Osh, or Turkish schools across the two countries (Balci 2003). There are only two Aga Khan lyceums, one in each of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Turkish schools began operating in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan right independence and by 2003 already had 12 schools in Kyrgyzstan and 5 in Tajikistan.¹¹ These schools offer higher prestige than at the state universities, salaries ten to fifty times more than in the state schools, English medium schooling, and, in some cases, boarding facilities for the children, access to internet services and the best professional development opportunities, including travel abroad, social mobility and better working conditions. Because they are so few and the difference between them and the public schools are so stark, these schools and their teachers have become sources of irritation and jealousy rather than a source of emulation and aspiration. Their presumed modelling effect has proved impossible and is now seen as a political trick. Some of them such as the Aga Khan school in Khorog initiated an Allied School Project where limited cooperation and experience-sharing opportunities with a few state schools were established for a few years. Soros, the Aga Khan and other international foundations have provided valuable support to the public systems to survive the transition hardships in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While some public schools and teachers have surely benefited from these NGOs, these and other organisations have largely focused on teachers' methods, textbooks and classroom practices, avoiding addressing the incredibly stressful conditions and concerns of their daily life. A Tajik public school director's alternative to these activities was as follows:

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You improve my life, increase my salary, create Soviet-like working conditions and give me freedom to work. We can create methods of and resources for teaching ourselves. In our school we have many good ideas, but cannot implement them as all are concerned with daily life and coverage of the official program.

So it is in this situation that many teachers left to join various activities that range from becoming traders to opening their own small business to working as seasonal labourers (in construction or agriculture) inside their countries or abroad. Some joined non-governmental organisations and many fewer opened their own NGOs. Trading, while not a favourite alternative to teaching, became the refuge the majority of teachers opted for. Below we analyze the causes and reasons that forced or encouraged teachers to become traders.

REASONS FOR BECOMING A TRADER

As a principal means of survival for many people in post-socialist countries,¹² trading involved many teachers, either fully or partially, working in urban areas of Central Asia, or abroad.¹³ Gradually, trading has not only offered a way out for teachers, but also affected their status, position, values and reasons for remaining in teaching. Their success, coupled with the persistent apathy of the officials towards schooling, has made those who remained in the profession see trading and commercial businesses as a way out of the poverty while maintaining their dignity and ability to continue teaching, to which, for a variety of reasons, many still remained committed. Schools sometimes have cash flow problems and cannot pay teachers' salaries. A senior teacher from a Kyrgyz village school added that the authorities 'are pushing us to become traders. Instead of a salary,¹⁴ they gave us various materials such as cooking oil or clothes, which we took to the market to sell'. The table provided below illustrates their reasons for becoming involved in trading.

The teachers' above condensed statements illustrate multiple interconnected reasons for their involvement in trading. While most teachers became involved out of dire necessity, many teachers, however, found trading to be a satisfying and worthwhile alternative or complementary to teaching activity; it has pushed teaching to become the subsidiary activity, something they would do as part of their community's expectation and their personal and the society's continuing emphasis and belief in its importance, but increasingly as an adjunct. While teaching is increasingly becoming a burden, trading is now becoming favoured and a pleasure, and it is even encouraged by the new society and its authorities.

Table 1: Classification of Teachers' Reasons for Involvement in Trading

Reasons	Details	Voices of teachers (both who left teaching or remained)
Economic	Basic survival (e.g. paying for food, clothing, heat, health, electricity, building house, and sustenance of household)	<p>In Autumn my priority is not teaching. It is harvesting, collecting wood and fodder for the winter. No one is going to feed me if my children and I are hungry and unclothed. I sell some of my harvest to buy clothes, shoes, sugar and cooking oil;</p> <p>My wife and I decided that she and my daughter would sell gum, cigarettes and cookies so as to make our daily living;</p> <p>If I had money, I would be long gone to do business and leave teaching; Although the law on education talks of covering for electricity and health none of these are implemented; we have to find money to pay for these services;</p> <p>Given that we had neither money nor any means for living, I had to sell my wedding ring to purchase flour, macaroni and tea for myself from Osh; that is how I started my small business;</p>
	Financial inflation and price hike	The day our salaries are raised by 5%, the market traders raise their price by 20%. After a month the value of money goes down. We cannot cope with price hikes and inflation with teachers' salaries alone;
	Realisation that trade is a useful and profitable activity	After seeing how trade (business) has improved my life, I now think how stupid we were to do teaching. I recommend every person/teacher to do business; ¹⁵
Educational	Pay for children's education and after school tuition	<p>Good education has become expensive. Through trade I can afford to send my children to the good schools in Osh town;</p> <p>I am sitting in this market all day and feel guilty about school; but I will make money and send my children to get a good education;</p> <p>I forced my husband to leave teaching and become a trader, otherwise our sons would join others in the village to consume and sell drugs to buy good clothes; they could not bear how miserable we are in comparison to our neighbours;</p>

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	<p>Bribe for diploma, grade and position at the university</p>	<p>One of my students' parents told me, [teacher] do not demand hard work from my son. They said they will buy him the best school certificate, university diploma and even good job in <i>khazina</i> [an international NGO];</p> <p>One of our best teachers left to labour in Russia so that his children can study at the university in Dushanbe;</p> <p>It is impossible to enter university without paying a bribe; it is also impossible to stay there without paying bribes for most of the exams;</p> <p>With dollars in hand, you can hire the best tutor, buy a diploma and bribe for the best job;</p>
Cultural	<p>Maintain one's dignity and honour in the rural tight community</p> <p>Feel empowered</p> <p>Learn other cultures</p>	<p>I cried and felt depressed, because unlike the Soviet times I could not offer even a cup of tea for you when you visited my home; We have to organise a very expensive wedding [lots of food and drinks] so that the neighbours do not gossip and mock us for our poor wedding; Here we would rather stay hungry but make sure that we dress well and look groomed; that is our village mentality;</p> <p>From a seminar last year, I realised that trading has been a part of our tradition; that the prophet was himself a trader. Our Imam (i.e. the Aga Khan)¹⁶ also says we should do trading and commercial activities, but we should also share and not become greedy. His and other international organisations are lending us money to do business; My friends ridiculed my low salary and said: Join us, you will make your monthly salary in two hours here. I now make a lot of money by just sitting in the car and making sure that the goods move from the market to the warehouse in time;</p> <p>One of our teachers left teaching and got involved in the drug trade to help his sister and brother in their education. He felt shame when his mother or sisters were selling in the market to pay for their study at University;</p> <p>We say <i>safar kardan jahon didan</i> [travelling means seeing the world]. During my trade trips to China, Pakistan and the Emirates I learnt a lot. I can talk about those cultures in my classes and in the village with confidence. My students like those stories;</p>

Reasons	Details	Voices of teachers (both who left teaching or remained)
Health	Pay for basic health needs	<p>Unlike in Soviet times, we need to pay for medications and food in the hospital;</p> <p>Because of trade, I was able to send 300 USD for my daughter when she fell ill in Dushanbe;</p> <p>In the hospital, I learnt how actually rich doctors [whose salary is lower than teachers'-SN] become by taking money for every tablet and injection. Thank God I have a relative there who saved me from too much paying;</p> <p>If you don't have money or a relative working in the hospital, you should not get even sick; You have to pay to get good medicine, care and fast healing; Otherwise you will remain there for long;</p>
Political	<p>Restore their community's status</p> <p>Gain independence</p> <p>Change the profession</p>	<p>Today the villagers do not invite teachers because we are poor; They also see us as moralists who do not let them feel free to trade and enjoy life;</p> <p>I become furious when I see the rich villagers who have forgotten that without teachers they would have not been so rich now;</p>
Psychological	<p>State apathy towards teachers and education</p> <p>Feeling of shame at getting involved in trading</p>	<p>Why should I teach when no one cares? When the head of the Education Board says 'to hell with kids, if they do not attend the school.'</p> <p>Unlike at the beginning, we as women do not feel shame trading anymore; Trade has become mainly the women's duty nowadays. We often feel proud now for being the breadwinners for our families;</p> <p>I do not understand when people say we had no market in the Soviet times. As far as my family is concerned, we always had many cattle and good land and we used to sell their products to make money, now I see that as our own experience of market economy.</p>

TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE TRADE ACTIVITIES

Like teaching, trading emerged as a complex process, requiring sacrifice and gain, endurance and joy, bargain and compromise, pedagogy and psychology, frustration and happiness. The intensity, success and failure of this experience depended on the kind of trading teachers were involved with, its compatibility with their own values and communal expectations, and teachers' physical, mental and emotional capacities. Similar to the reasons mentioned about the types of trading activities, we offer categories, fully aware that 'they are not altogether separate from one another on the ground or that the types are fixed and permanent' (Humphrey 2002: 85). Teachers moved from one category to another, depending on their contextual circumstances, without worrying whether there might be any conceptual boundaries between the various forms and types of trading.

Shuttlers

Not all teachers could join this category, as it requires a large sum of money and transport facility to start a business. Those who chose to normally travelled long distances with goods to sell and purchase. While Kyrgyz teacher-traders bought products directly from China,¹⁷ Tajik teachers until recently bought their goods in Kyrgyz markets and resold them back home. Since the opening of border trade zones with China and Afghanistan, trading has become reciprocal with Kyrgyz traders now taking goods from Tajikistan back home for sale. Shuttling requires carrying considerable cash as banking transfers have only just begun to operate and people still do not have much trust in the local banks. Shuttlers often have to work in small groups (mostly family members or close friends) to have a safety net. Trading *shirpotreb*, *shmotki* and *barakhlo* [goods of daily use, clothes and junk/trash] was quite profitable at the early stages because of lack of supplies in the local markets and the breakdown of the local industries. For some, these trips were usually accompanied with heavy drinking, unhealthy diet, smoking and perceived permissiveness. Teacher-traders involved in this group would include male and female, married and single. To combine teaching and trading, some teachers would travel in turn: a primary teacher in Murghab, Tajikistan in 1999 narrated that she would carry out a trade trip to Osh within fifteen days, during which her colleague would cover for her classes. On her return, either the profit would be shared, or her fellow would undertake a similar trip, while she would teach on her behalf too. The large cash supplies taken on the long chaotic trips entailed a risk of loss or being robbed by thieves, racketeers and even theft by fellow traders. Yet, as the benefit overrode the risk, more and more teachers got involved in shuttling.

Only a few shuttlers would sell the products. Because their travels to purchase for a continuing supply were more profitable and prestigious, they usually left the

sale of goods to their family members, or they would sell them to *retail sellers at wholesale prices*. This category would realise the goods in the markets, shops, street intersections and their homes to make profit. Most of the teacher-traders, particularly the married female teachers, belonged to this group. The products could include anything from clothes, to shoes, chewing gum, to food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, to furniture or electronics, and to agricultural products, some of which would be purchased from the local farmers. The farm products included cattle, where teachers as trusted and knowledgeable people would play the role of brokers [*daldalchy, dallo*]. They would leave for the cattle market in the early morning or right after their classes, and then use their communication, pedagogical, and intellectual skills and remaining moral stature to settle the commercial bargains and make a profit from them.

Farmer-traders

The next category the teachers would join were *farmer-traders*. Most of the rural teachers had small farms in Soviet times and these have now become larger due to privatisation of collective and state farms [*kolkhoz and sovkhov*]. Some of the teachers, particularly of biology and chemistry, made good fortunes from their land and skills. A Tajik biology/chemistry teacher in Wanj district in Tajikistan, at whose home one of us spent two full months during his study, amazed the researcher with his knowledge not only of pedagogy, but also of agronomy, veterinary work and even medicine. Using his knowledge and skills, he transformed small hill patches into productive farms. He refused to accept the so-called 'imported better quality seeds' brought in by an international NGO for sale. His annual teaching salary [at that time around \$100 USD] could be equalled by selling just 3 of the 10 bags of walnuts, which he collected that autumn [40 kg each bag]. In addition, he produced around 4 tons of high quality potatoes and 1 to 1.5 tons of wheat from his land. Despite his large extended family to whom he gave a part of the produce, he managed to sell at least 50% of the product, making around \$2000 USD in 1999. This was twenty times more than his annual salary at that time. Monthly he also used to receive a \$200 USD remittance from his son who laboured in Russia. Tracked vehicles would come and take his products for sale to district and republican markets. He ultimately assigned his nephew to sell his produce in a shop opened in the district market by his brother. In addition, he used to provide advice to the local agronomists. They would in turn put some money in his pocket saying 'This is for some tea for my nephews and nieces'; they would also provide him with fertilisers, and take his products for sale.

As more teacher-farmers realised the benefit of retail sale they either left teaching or assigned a family member to sell their goods doubling and tripling the profit. There were also those teachers who simply transformed a room at their houses into a shop (*kamoks, dukon*) or tuition centre, selling goods and services.

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They gradually came to realise that services could be for sale too. In this case, the teachers continued working at schools and kept their businesses running by a family member. Not all teachers, however, were given land and not all those given land had good and large enough plots to farm for sale. Increasingly, as the Central Asian states grew stronger and more centralised, they began discouraging, stopping, and even gradually punishing teachers if they dared to leave their 'noble intellectual vocation' and get involved in the 'manual work' of farming, shuttling, and trading.

There were those who, taking up the Soviet tradition, took on more teaching hours and loads to earn more money through teaching itself. Unlike in Soviet times, however, with this increase in volume they became less caring for the schools and more interested in the tuition. Increasingly, teachers began to see market value in every educational item: marks, books, advice, instruction, tuition, pens, pencils, school property such as trees and chairs and so on.¹⁸ However bright the child was, placing him or her in a good teacher's classroom, awarding a good mark, giving an excellent high school certificate, entering a university, passing exams, getting internships, a high quality diploma or a lucrative job placement, all this from now on cost not only connections but also good money. Teachers reluctantly, unwillingly, and cautiously slid into this path of new values and ethics. De Young *et al.* (2004) quoted a teacher who experienced corruption as follows:

In Bishkek, in the cities, now they take bribes in dollars. They do not even accept *soms*. I do not know exactly the amount of money, I cannot tell you (any specific figures). But I do know that they take only dollars, and it is very expensive. In order to enter (one prominent university), you have to have a very reliable or strong *krysha* ('roof' i.e. protection) to say it in our way. And the higher his position, the easier your chance of entering the university. How many dollars? We are not reaching a thousand, but around that.

In fact, in most of Central Asia, it is not the actual salary of the job, but the collateral benefits one manages to gain from it that makes the job lucrative and therefore worthy of giving a bribe. Teaching too when seen in this light could become such a job in future. Lubin *et al.* (2002) observed that bribing for a job was, though painful, rarely resisted, as the bribed job would not only quickly cover the initial sum given for its acquisition, but also bring much more in the course of work. They noticed that such an approach to obtaining benefits had become a routine that was taken for granted, a local cultural trait, the exercise of which is seen as sign of manliness and the avoidance of which as a sign of cowardice rather than of moral integrity. At the same time, Niyozov (2001), Shamatov (2005), de Young *et al.* (2006), Sardor & Kimmatshoeva (2006) and other studies show that teachers by and large, although themselves implicated in nepotism and other corrupt activities, still considered them as harmful and disgusting. Niyozov (2001) also showed that usually it is the poor, dispossessed

and marginalised that gave bribes. For them this was often the only way to get out of their hopeless situations. The rich and elite people were the receivers of the bribes, taking not only the money, but often other kinds of bribe if money was not available. Shamатов notes that a young town teacher in his study refused to raise her students' grades when their parents came to pressure her to do so. She said, 'But a school is not a bazaar where one bargains for marks like for products.' One of Niyozov's study's participants (2001) expressed her disgust with the corruption, nepotism and bribery that has taken over the education system in Tajikistan:

Imagine a poor child prepares himself all life, works day and night. Then someone else who did not work hard gets to the university through a bribe or connection. I know which of my students is capable of what. I despise those who do all this. I feel humiliated. I wonder how patient people we are. When you see your good student has failed, you curse the Earth and the Sky. I hope the Imam rids us from this in his University.¹⁹

Another informant illustrated the magnitude of corruption:

We collected money from parents for school repair and turned it in to the administrators. But later we found out that the vice-principal used the money as a temporary 'loan' for her commerce. She put that money into her business and wanted to do a couple of deals before she would return the money.²⁰

It is also worth mentioning that a smaller number of former and active teachers were involved in illegal trade-like activities. Similar to corruption, money profits from such acts were arguably seen as forbidden (*harom*) and unblessed (*be barakat*). This included the selling and smuggling of alcohol,²¹ precious stones, metals, rare wildlife, guns, drugs, faked diplomas and even human trafficking (Pravda 2005). Despite the enormity of the profit from such activities, they rarely, if ever, earned communal acceptance and respect. Most of those involved, however, justified their actions by the need for preservation of family honour, integrity and survival, invoking sayings such as: 'God is merciful; he knows that I am implicated because of dire necessity, because of my family honour, and because this is the only way my family would survive. I have no one in the *khazina* or other international NGOs, what options do I have?' Niyozov (2001) suggests that the absolute majority of the teachers in his study tried to avoid or openly fight against these activities (the one exception might be alcohol) because they believed that their complicity would result in students following *en masse*. It was, however obvious how teachers were losing the battle to the local warlords, racketeers, drug and gun dealers, and smugglers who impressed students with their beautiful cars, fashionable houses, fine dress, rich life, ability to get their children admitted to the best schools, and even bribe these very teachers to tutor their children, attend their parties, be masters of their various expensive ceremonies and legitimate them. The commercialisation of every day life seriously challenged teachers' and their students' values, blurring the bound-

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aries between right and wrong; and it threatened teachers' integrity by removing the strong link that previously existed between what teachers preached and what they practiced.

CHALLENGES OF TRADING

One of the challenges for the teachers was psychological. It involved reconceptualising teaching from a moral vocation of selfless service to a detached technical delivery of a possible commodity. Teachers felt they were no longer expected to instill *adab and akhloq* (civility and ethics), but just skills and how-to knowledge: 'Rich people nowadays avoid us. They see us as moralists and preachers.' The diminution of the moral content of education and its reduction to another commodity in the marketplace justified charging money from whoever could pay for learning, ultimately a corrupting view that engenders injustice rather than ameliorating it. Still for many, value tensions between teaching and trading remained a major challenge to tolerate when they got involved in trading. The teachers' cursing of capitalism and trading, portraying them as unethical and inherently corrupting was a continuation of Communism's hatred of profit and exploitation. Given that they had been vanguards of Communist propaganda, it was difficult for them to praise successful traders, be serviced by them, let alone get involved in it themselves. 'People sarcastically ask me what happened to socialism and why my husband is selling in the market,' acknowledged a history teacher in Niyozov's study. Another teacher felt that seeing his students and colleagues as clients and purchasers of his merchandise was something too hard to swallow when he started his small business. However, there are fewer and fewer teachers remaining of this kind.

Lack of starting capital, experience, opportunities, and skills was another set of major challenges for those who wanted to try commercial business. A female teacher in Shamatov's study mentioned that her first investment in trading was the money she obtained as a result of selling her wedding ring. The small business loans from the international organisations were either too insignificant or had too high an interest rate. Raised in a state-owned economy, most of the teachers had insufficient budgeting and bookkeeping skills to manage a business. A Tajik university instructor, now an employee of a loan-giving agency pointed out that:

The foreign specialist rarely listened to our complaints about the geographic and political difficulties of doing commercial business here. He just imposed his East African experience on our situation. He never realised that we needed not only skills, but also a mentality shift. For us taking money from our Imam's [i.e. Aga Khan] institution and being unable to return it was the biggest shame one could

bear. We rather needed to be calmed down and assured that it is OK to make a mistake and lose the money.

As a result, many had negative experiences with trading. A physical education teacher, speaking on behalf of his villagers pointed out that the loan given by an NGO was too small to cover all the real costs of starting any serious business. More than two-thirds of it would have gone on bribing the customs police on the road to Osh and covering one's living costs. Some of the people returned the loans right away, washing their hands of any business project with that very NGO. A few use the money to buy and sell drugs, by which they quickly made a triple profit. They returned the first third to the loan agency and then started business at their own pace and choice without worries. Another teacher, who dropped his business at an early stage, pointed out: 'I worked as a cashier in the Russian military garrison shop in the town [i.e. Murghab]. Due to my inability to say no and refuse to give things on loan, I ran into debt. I had to sell my own items and borrow from my relatives to pay my debts. It was a nightmare. After that, I decided not to be involved in trading anymore. I concluded that I couldn't be a trader.'

Teachers' attempts at doing business also encountered systemic obstacles. This included harassment by police at the customs and by thugs in the markets, harassment by the local education authorities for not spending enough time in teaching, by the loan-givers who used to make the teachers feel guilty for letting down their Imam, and furthermore threatened to take over their homes, cars and land for failure to return the loan's accumulated interest. These difficulties were intensified by the lack of proper financial infrastructure to facilitate early steps in business.

Last, but not least, there was a set of cultural challenges. The Soviet and passive religious vision of life, the traditional image of the Muslim woman, as the caregiver at home who would not travel alone with other men to trade, are among these. 'In this culture, for a woman to go to China, the Arab Emirates or Pakistan to trade without their husbands means they have lost their morality and honour,' said a female teacher. Yet pragmatism often overruled tradition: the men acknowledged that police would not dare do as much harm to women as they do to male shuttlers. Many marriages broke up and infectious diseases have spread as a result of these travels.²²

Two important caveats need mentioning: (i) the challenges are not always negative; and (ii) the teacher-traders did not simply give in to the challenges and obstacles, but often exhibited agency. They gradually learnt how to deal with harassing police and customs, to find loopholes, and to select differentiated approaches. They bribed the bribable and befriended the honest officers. They learnt languages, endured harassment and physical hardship, used connections, negotiated, and created alliances, and found *krysha* (protection) (Humphrey 2002). Today more teachers are involved in petty commerce and solid businesses

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with more success and less stress. A respected Tajik teacher's experience from Niyozov's study is just one testimony among many.

After suffering tremendously from my first trading trip to Osh, Kyrgyzstan, I befriended Kyrgyz drivers who deliver the humanitarian supplies. With them you get less harassment, fewer checks, save time, and can bring extra goods. After two trips with them and sharing the profit, they are the ones who bring me goods now. We just sell them and share the profit. I have made enough money to move out of Murghab to Chkalovsk [northern Tajikistan], buy an apartment there and continue doing business and teaching. I may actually leave teaching.

EFFECTS OF TRADING ON TEACHERS' LIVES AND WORK

Trading and teaching became lived experiences with gains and losses and multiple mutual effects. To an extent, trading improved teachers' economic, cultural, and political status in society and enabled them to fulfil their traditional family and community responsibilities. Some, unable to cope because of incompatibility of values, lack of experience, inability to travel, and bankruptcy, gave in. One teacher spoke of her mother, also a teacher, who opted out of trading:

My mother, a primary school teacher, had to go into trading and my father was left to care for the family in the village. She lost a lot of money in trade because she did not have the skills and the tricks of trading. She ultimately returned to teaching. Many of those teachers who succeeded in trading remained there and gave up teaching.

Yet, there were those who completely enjoyed business and trading and left teaching. Many others are in between: they continue to struggle and learn how to reconcile their personal wellbeing with communal service. They negotiate a way between trade's tangible materialistic and financial gains and teaching's invisible moral satisfaction, between how to succeed in the increasingly corrupting society and how to remain ethically sound, how to get through systemic obstacles and maintain one's honour and integrity. The voices below show the complex nature of the effects of trade.

VOICES OF TEACHERS ON THE EFFECTS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH TRADING

Negative Effects

Shame & Humiliation

- For many teachers, to work like slaves in Russia, or to sell soap and clothes, chewing gum, sunflower seeds, cookies and gasoline in the bazaar, is putting themselves down. It is humiliating for both those who have quit and those who remained in teaching.

- Before we criticised capitalism and businessmen; today we are not only praising them but also have become traders ourselves.
- I feel terrible when my previous students ask me what happened to Socialism and why capitalism did not vanish.
- The recent tribute paid to a major Mafiosi's anniversary by the local leader of a morality-oriented NGO has put us to shame in front of our students and adults and raised doubts about who is respected in our society.

Guilt & Betrayal

- I feel that I betrayed my profession and my values, which were against trading. I am ready to leave this café full of drunken people, if my salary were only half of what I earn here.
- Being involved in trading, I cannot give enough time to teaching and feel bad about it. At the same time, I cannot leave trading because it helps me survive.
- The bureaucracy did not care about us. We had to survive. They should simply thank us and the students for still attending school and teaching.

Abuse and Exploitation

- The administration does not invest in education because it does not pay back the money invested. That is why they give the education funding to the commercial businessmen to make profit.
- Because of being teachers, we are still involved in dozens of compulsory administrative and political activities such as campaigning, censuses, parades, and propaganda, with no payment for any of these activities.

Corruption

- In order to get retirement insurance, some of the teachers give bribes to the school principals to find teacher replacements to work under their names while they go away for trading.
- We cover up for each other's teaching as we carry out trade journeys.
- Observing the contradictions between some of our leaders' 'talk and walk',²³ I have concluded that all the leaders' talk about God, the Prophet, the Imam, Motherland and unity is a cover-up for putting money into their pockets, employing relatives and enjoying themselves.
- When even NGOs and state offices are transformed into family business, we have no other options except doing trade to feed ourselves and not become their slaves.

Demoralised and Cynical

- Why should I teach in a school that has become the head-teacher's private property, when he has been selling its fruits and trees, chairs, and

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even quotas and diplomas? Why should I teach when no one appreciates it?

- ‘Give me a 5.²⁴ I do not need to study your History subject. I can buy the best diploma anyway,’ said one of my students.
- I curse the sky and earth when my best student fails and my weakest gets to university, because of money.

Disrespect for Teachers

- People do not invite teachers to their gatherings anymore
- The people of respect are now those who have a lot of money, cars, guns, and those who work in *khazina* [a local project of the Aga Khan Foundation].

Regret for Choosing Teaching

- By the time I finished university, the Soviet period had ended and teaching became the least respected thing.
- What a stupid person I was to choose teaching. I suggest all teachers become traders.

Lost Status and Role in Society

- Although we [teachers] are the most educated people of the village, people laugh at us. He [Kadyr *palvan*²⁵ who is allegedly making a fortune by drug trafficking and racketeering] barely finished school and he hardly knows 36 letters [meaning he is ‘literate’]. But now he is a hero. Many students want to become like him.
- What kind of society do we envisage when most of the students and parents choose the role of racketeer, thug and trafficker over teacher and even doctor?
- When I asked my students what they would like to become they responded ‘anything but a teacher.’ They see how we are dressed, what we eat, and they don’t want to live like us. In fact, several told me that they would like to become *kommersants* (resellers). They see the successful *kommersants* returning to the village with fancy cars and lots of money.

Decline in Education Quality

- It is the best teachers who left teaching. One owns a factory in Moscow, another is head of wildlife hunting business here. Others joined *khazina*; a third group went in for business. Some have become military commanders. One is now a *krysha* for drug dealers in Moscow. Those who replaced them do not have higher education; many are only school graduates. What kind of education one can expect after all this?
- Earlier I used to spend the whole day in school working with the weak

students to improve them. Now, as soon as the classes are over, some of us run to the markets, others to our farms.

- The good education children get is from the Turkish, Aga Khan's and other private schools. These all charge fees and access is limited; we have no option other than to do trading so that our children get to these schools. Otherwise we would need to buy good diplomas and positions when they grow up.

Positive Effects

Wealth and Independence

- Earlier I used to do farming in addition to teaching. Now I have enough money to hire people to cut wood for me. So I can concentrate on trading and teaching more.
- I want to stay in teaching, because I love children. But I see the Government also using me for all kinds of other activities such as marching in parades, agitation and other community mobilisation without paying for these. Business will help me remain independent. No one can command me what to do or not to do.
- Now people respect you if you have more money. They will listen to you. So, to be respected and independent we need to make money by trading.

Empowerment, Learning, and Fulfilment

- Some teachers made their fortunes by doing business and are now back here. They bought houses in Osh town and now they are sending their children to study in good schools in Osh.
- With dollars in hand, you can get the best education for your children. What have those of you who studied become – except beggars and moral preachers?
- Through trade I got double respect. Earlier I was respected as a teacher, now I am respected as businessman too.
- Now I tell the school head and inspectors things that I was afraid to say before. If they fire me I can continue my small shop.
- During my trips to Pakistan, the Emirates, and Turkey I got to know that, although they call themselves Muslims, many of them have little of Islamic ethics and morality. They trade everything. A lot of women are there for prostitution.
- In China I met my relatives who recognised me. That was a nice reconnecting. I was also surprised that their language is similar to ours and that there are many Muslims there. Sometimes I talk about this in my classroom and my students like these stories.²⁶

Benefits to Family Members

- I can now feed my family and buy clothes for my children. No one will do that for me if I don't work in the market.
- Thanks to trade, I have built a house here and purchased a flat for my daughter in Dushanbe.
- By working in the market, I am now able to get my daughter into university and pay her tuition. I want her to get a good education and in the future, I want her 'bread to be full (rather than half)'.²⁷

A note on the effects on female teachers

Female teachers, the backbone of the teaching profession and traditional families in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Harris 2004; Niyozov 2003), encountered choices similar to men's: either leave teaching and become traders entirely, do not take trading on at all, or combine teaching with their household work and retail trading. The majority of the sellers in market of Khorog city in Badakhshan, for example, are former and present female teachers. Combining trading with teaching and housework, while it may seem on the surface to represent a kind of active life and empowerment, in reality created a triple burden for women in post-Soviet Central Asia (Kanji 2002). Experiencing this triple burden, women teachers are living with tremendous family, societal, cultural and health pressures in post-Soviet Central Asia (Niyozov 2003). Their husbands' long-term departure to Russia, large families, increasing rates of family break-ups, which leave mothers to look after the households, and increasing expectations from the education stakeholders – all of these have further extended and intensified the stresses in their personal and professional life.²⁸ One woman explained this as follows:

Female teachers in the mountains are *beiloj*²⁹ (deprived of solutions and choices, disempowered). We have no time for ourselves. All our life goes in serving others: my students, my six children, husband, old parents, guests and cattle. When we watch the lives of women in the West we feel guilty for being born and living here. It is as if we are punished by God to be born here. What have we been punished for? Why is our life so miserable? We cannot move out of here. The only way to end all this is to die. Even doing a small job, such as preparing tea makes you go through hell, because everything is in short supply and very expensive. We get panicked every time we have to do even a small thing. (Niyozov 2001, p. 231)

In sum, the effects of the teachers' involvement with trading, whether they are male or female, have been harsh, deeply intensive and at the same time also rewarding. As seen above, the spectrum ranges from shame, guilt, and betrayal to apathy and indifference, to new learning, feelings of empowerment and material wellbeing, and even independence, wealth and restoration of their status. Some teachers try to apply their new learning from trading in their classrooms; others

think of involving their friends and cronies in trading and improving their lives. A third group sees itself as becoming able to help their schools financially. Others have realised that teaching could be a business on its own, thus offering tuition and fee-based classes. While getting wealthier, more independent, and self-supporting, most of the teachers in our studies (Niyozov 2001; Shamatov 2005) felt sad and unhappy about the impact of their increasing disengagement from teaching on the quality of education. Anybody could do trading, but not teaching, they believed. Teaching was not only more complex and emotionally draining, it was also intellectually and morally superior and challenging. It required not just specialist training but conditions for ethical and moral integrity in order to sustain the role of the transformative intellectuals of rural, post-Soviet societies, which they still believed they were. A female teacher put it as follows:

Teachers are the most honest, most educated and most important people in the society. They cannot bribe, cannot cheat and cannot make extra money at the expense of the students. If there is a force that could really promote knowledge and ethics in the society, this force is the teacher. (Niyozov, 2001, p. 228)

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADE, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

Trade-like activities have returned to Central Asia for good, with more and more teachers engaged in them for multiple reasons mentioned above. Teachers are beginning to realise that (i) no government salary in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will ever match the money and benefits made from trade; (ii) trade, unlike a government salary, has no political strings attached, (iii) personal business can improve their material life and capital, which in turn provides them with autonomy and independence as human beings. This is almost in accord with the classical Marxist idiom of the base determining the superstructure.

On the one hand, this new reality may lead to reducing the purpose, nature, and value of education to a technical task of subject delivery tested during the exams, a trend obvious in the global scale (Apple 2001). Regardless of the existing rhetoric about teachers' status and humanistic ideals, parents do not expect teachers to inculcate morality, ethics and civility in their children anymore.

Stopping teachers from doing business without providing a comparably beneficial alternative to trading and commerce will bear little fruit. The popular Russian saying, *Solov'ya basnyami ne kormish* (you cannot feed a nightingale with tales) was a favourite proverb used by the Russian teacher in Niyozov's study. What might be possible is to reconceptualise trading and trade-like activities in the context of the contradictory economic and cultural realities prevalent in current Central Asia. For example, what message does one get from teachers who simultaneously hate and enjoy trading, bribing and nepotisation? Could a profes-

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sional and ethical approach to solving each of these issues be a solution? The teachers above suggest that trading, like teaching, as well as other social issues such as corruption must be examined against their conditions, taking into account its implications for social justice, and harmony, equity and equality of opportunity, and respect for pluralism, human dignity, and ecological sustainability. Teachers could and should be viewed as reliable partners in promoting this societal vision. The current trading practices accompanied with corruption, nepotism and selfish ethics may lead to polarisation, fragmentation and impoverishment of the society with negative prospects for the region and the globe.

Teachers' involvement in trading *per se* carries significant implications for education and society in Central Asia. First, the departure of many good teachers, their replacement by unqualified and inexperienced substitutes, the crippling corruption and commercialisation of the education system, as well as the splitting of teachers' time between teaching, trading, family and community, have resulted in the decline in the quality of teaching, especially in public and rural schools. Many of the good public school teachers have left for the rapidly multiplying private schools. These schools serve the *nouveaux riches* and children of the elite, whom the teachers used to disdain as bourgeoisie during the USSR. A parent whose children attend public school predicted that 'public school children will end up serving those who graduate from private schools, bear their arrogance and satisfy their desires'. Second, the erosion of the teachers' role in the larger rural society *vis-à-vis* traders, warlords, drug dealers, and other 'businessmen', has resulted in the devaluation of education, meritocracy, professionalism, justice and ethics (Thomas & Kiser 2003). For an increasing number of people, any talk about national pride, meritocracy, ethics, God, justice, identity, and honesty are no more than hegemonic slogans employed to fool and pacify them into accepting their own marginalisation, oppression and exploitation. The undermining of humanistic societal values is the greatest societal danger in transitional societies where there are no enforced laws and fewer opportunities for social mobility. A teacher observed this as follows:

Nowadays it is difficult to talk about such qualities as honesty, sharing, caring for others, or helping the weak and poor, because our society is becoming more individualistic, and the divide between rich and poor people in the country is becoming wider. I cannot convince my pupils to help others when they see everything contrary outside the school. They see how easily some guys are becoming rich and famous, by illegal means and by avoiding caring and sharing. While the majority of people are struggling: a small number of people are enjoying the changes in the society by spending lavishly and driving BMWs and Mercedes.³⁰

Fourth, together with commercialisation of the system, all the above has resulted in unequal access to good quality education and ensuing inequality in the society, with increasing tensions along social, ethnic, religious, gender, linguistic and clan lines. Some of the local and international offices, whether public or

private, are now increasingly led by privileged families from the dominant ethnic or linguistic groups as *family businesses*. They use the rhetoric of God and other authorities and ideals to fool others for their personal benefit. At the same time, they hinder access and mobility to 'strangers' and potential rivals. The intensity of these tensions is due to the fact that the majority of the elite in Central Asia today had been communist bosses or anti-communist thugs who had made fortunes through misuse of office, drug and gun trafficking, tax evasion, nepotism, racketeering and other Mafia-like activities in the post-Soviet era (Humphrey 2002; Keshavjee 1998). This has become possible due not only to civil war and the hazards of transition, but also because of poorly conceived and rapidly implemented economic and cultural restructuring, as well as the uncritical application of the externally and locally designed development projects in post-Soviet Central Asia. These development activities, implemented unprofessionally, uncritically and unethically, could lead to the destruction of civil society, engendering further lawlessness, criminalisation of society, endemic violence, and all forms of extremist discourse (Humphrey 2002; Ries 2002; Roy 2000; Thomas & Kiser 2003).

Caught between moral disgust at the rampant corruption and unethical activities, the pragmatic pressures of life necessities and tough competition for fewer opportunities, more and more teachers are losing ground as moral guides and becoming complicit in the very activities they hate, see as harmful to humanity, and would like to fight against. On a deeper examination, therefore, these teachers' voices, seemingly private and idiosyncratic, enlighten us about the major issues and challenges that threaten Central Asia. They warn us of what kind of society and citizens might emerge in the near future in Central Asia. While there is much talk about a lost generation, one can also speculate that Central Asian societies may risk becoming failed states, joining the list of the economically undeveloped, politically unstable, culturally impoverished, and spiritually soulless societies within the new world order. The implications of these developments are globally worrying for all of us unless teachers are enabled to remain pillars of society, particularly rural, societies. Consider a teacher's voice below:

My major worry is about where the society is heading. I do not know much about market economy. What I can see is that there is no regulation of becoming rich, everyone does what he wants. There is no accountability. But I cannot tell these students to cheat, steal, kill or sell drugs. We can also sell narcotics and improve our lives. But we know that if we go for it, all the students will follow us (Niyozov 2001: 241).

To be fair, there is a certain level of understanding among current policy makers, government and community leaders in Central Asia about the harmful destabilising effects of teachers' disengagement from their profession, whether through full departure or a combined involvement in trading. Governments, acknowledging the teachers' value for the knowledge-based societies for the

twenty-first century and the development of their rich cultural traditions, are trying to live up to the promises made in the education laws and directives, which allow for certain privileges for the teachers. There is a gradual increase in salary, although it seems to be connected with tightening control over teachers' autonomy, and it never catches up with the inflation rate and the basic needs of a family. There is a slow actualisation of the benefits and loud rhetoric about the status of teachers within Central Asian societies and traditions, with particular reference to the cultural heritage. Without practical application of all this rhetoric, however, all this seems more like rubbing salt into a wound.

In parallel to the existing regional rhetoric of blaming teachers for the failures of education and calls for changing their mentality, this paper suggests the need to change the mentality of both local and external policy makers. There is a need to overhaul the agencies involved in (a) deciding on the genuine priorities of, and approaches, to sustainable development, and (b) promoting the role of high quality and critical education as the best way to achieve development, peace, and harmony in Central Asia and transforming these into viable knowledge-based societies. This requires the realisation at the global level that corruption, irrational thinking, and defeatism are not simply cultural and psychological traits of people in developing countries, but global constructs shaped by the narratives that are undermining the very basis of a humane, just and harmonious societies across the globe (Heyneman 2002).

NOTES

¹The authors would like to thank Stephen Bahry, a University of Toronto's doctoral student for his insightful feedback and editorial assistance on the paper.

²Due to space limitations we do not provide information on the geography, demography and other background information on the two countries.

³Several Islamic movements have appeared in Central Asia since the end of the USSR. For example, the Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party was formed right after Soviet break up in 1991; Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was founded in 1999. Many people also became involved in religious movements such as Hizb-ut Tahrir and Wahhabism (Hanks 1999; Rashid 2002). Though their methods may differ, these movements aim to establish a *sharia* (Islamic law) based state in Central Asia (Polat 1999).

⁴There have been repeated violent actions, allegedly conducted by radical groups and individuals in Uzbekistan since 2003, including a series of attacks in Tashkent and in Bukhara in May 2004 (see Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2004).

⁵See Nanji and Niyofov (2002: 37, 39–41).

⁶The participants used the Russian words *cherez* ('via, through') *blat* and local words such as *wosita*, *qawmbozi* to refer to corruption. Corruption, a complex social phenomenon, has a global nature, with particularly damaging effects on the developing countries and marginalised populations (Heyneman 2002; Hope & Chikulo 2000). Building on Hope and Chikulo (2000: 18) and Heyneman (2002) we define corruption as the individual or collective utilisation of official institutions (e.g. public or NGO) to acquire official and

unofficial positions (e.g. through family, tribe relations) or titles for personal and private gain, the hiring and promotion of family and relatives, appropriating and stealing office property, writing false reports, and ignoring merit and professional standards at the expense of the public good, in violation of established rules and ethical considerations. Among others, Simis (1982) and Heyneman (2002) have revealed the systemic nature of corruption in the Soviet Union and its leadership. The new post-Soviet times have brought a cancerous advancement of corruption and its increasing hold on all spheres of life, including education, a field that is fundamentally ethical and anti-corruptive by its nature, purposes and means. Although corruption is spreading across all regions of the ex-Soviet Union, researchers have not paid it due attention (De Young & Suzhikova 1997; Keshavjee 1998; Sardor & Kimmashoeva 2006; Simis 1982)

⁷A pejorative term for a trader during Soviet period.

⁸The code of ethics of the constructor of communism was a document regulating the principles upon which the ethics and behaviour of the Soviet citizen communist were to be grounded.

⁹The teacher referred to parts of the book *Pandiyati Jawonmardi* (Advice on Manliness), famous among Ismaili Muslims of Central Asia.

¹⁰Part-time education or education by correspondence at the higher education level is popular in post-Soviet Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Given massive unemployment and expensive urban living conditions, many young people choose not to study full-time. They work during the day or do business elsewhere. However, schoolteachers who graduate from part-time or correspondence courses are commonly believed to have poorer subject and pedagogical knowledge; often part-time programmes are easier to enter, easier to study in, easier to graduate from and more thoroughly plagued by bribery than their full-time equivalents (Reeves 2003).

¹¹Balchi lists 12 Turkish schools enrolling 3,100 students in Kyrgyzstan and 5 schools enrolling 694 students in Tajikistan.

¹²See Humphrey (2002) for more on different types of trade activities in post-Soviet states.

¹³Working as a *kommersant* is a risky business in post-Soviet Central Asia. Because these traders travel between towns and cities, both inside and between neighbouring countries as well as beyond to Russia, Kazakhstan and China, they have to deal both with legal (though often corrupt) police and customs authorities and with illegal forces, such as racketeers or bandit groups (see Ries, 2002).

¹⁴During the early years of the post-Soviet era, schoolteachers in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were often not paid their salaries in cash due to shortage of finance in the state budget. Instead, the governments tried to pay salaries in the form of various items, products and materials that were available. The teachers then had to sell those products in the market to get cash. But they were often in a disadvantageous position, because they could not sell the products at the price they were paid as salaries.

¹⁵The word *trading* was not used due to its negative connotation. Instead words such as *business* or *kommersant* were used which were (a) foreign words and had a modern connotation and (b) had much broader appeal than words such as *sawdogar* (Tajik) or *chaikoochu* (Kyrgyz) which meant a person who sells things.

¹⁶Most of the population of Badakhshan in Tajikistan where Niyozov (2001) conducted his study are members of the Shia Ismaili interpretation of Islam and the Aga Khan is their Imam.

¹⁷The new routes to China from both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have been opened lately

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and have become a major route for supplying all kinds of goods. They have reduced dependency on the markets in Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Iran.

¹⁸Village teachers reported that some teachers took Russian textbooks to a market in Osh to sell when the Russian-medium classes were closed after the break-up of the USSR.

¹⁹By 'Imam and his university' the teacher referred to the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the worldwide Ismaili community to which she belonged. The teachers hoped that the Aga Khan who espoused meritocracy, ethics, learning, professionalism, honesty and hard work, as principles of Islamic ethics, would not allow corruption to take place in the University of Central Asia (UCA), established in 2003. The UCA is an international higher education institution, located in three Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (for more on the UCA see www.uca.org).

²⁰In the current conditions of rising inflation and lack of cash, many people who have money do business by purchasing wholesale products and re-selling. Some office managers illegally 'borrow' the salaries of their employees to invest in some business and pay them back after a delay. In the meantime, they make a fortune on their employees' money.

²¹Although officially alcohol sale is not allowed in the bazaars (open markets) of Tajikistan (except in the special liquor shops), such drinks are among the cheapest products available in the markets.

²²Family members usually break-up due to scandals or disputes related to shortage of finance, unsuccessful trade and losing money, or they often spend long periods far away from each other because of trading.

²³A popular phrase in Tajikistan to describe a person who only talks and does not back up the talk with deeds.

²⁴The mark 5 is the top mark in the Soviet and post-Soviet assessment system.

²⁵A strong man in the southern dialect of Kyrgyz. It is usually used to address traditional wrestlers. In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, there have been many cases of traditional wrestlers becoming involved in criminal activities.

²⁶This teacher in this particular case is referring to a visit to Tashkurgan county of Xinjiang province of China, where the people speak similar languages to those in Tajik Badakhshan.

²⁷A popular Kyrgyz phrase that indicates one's sense of material independence or good life.

²⁸For more on the plight of women in Central Asia see Colette Harris (2004).

²⁹*Beiloj* literally means 'powerless' in Tajik, a person who is desperate and has no solution at hand.

³⁰In Central Asia, 'high-end' foreign-made vehicles generally indicate wealth and social status. In the context of low salaries, many people associate foreign-made cars with an illegal source of income such as corruption or drug trafficking.

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