



The Program on Governance
and Local Development
at Gothenburg



Everyday Corruption and Social Norms in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

Rustamjon Urinboyev

Working Paper
No. 19 2019

The Program on Governance
and Local Development



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

Front Cover Image: Local residents discussing informal practices and everyday coping strategies, Shabboda, Uzbekistan (Source: Author's own)

Rustamjon Urinboyev
Lund University, Sociology of Law Department, and
University of Helsinki, Aleksanteri Institute

rustamjon.urinboyev@soclaw.lu.se

Funding Acknowledgement

This research is supported by several funding agencies: University of Gothenburg Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD-G), Swedish Research Council [grant number 437-2013-7344], Kone Foundation [grant identification code f577aa], European Commission / Horizon 2020 MSCA IF-EF-ST [grant number 751911] and European Commission H2020-MSCA-RISE-2017 “SHADOW” (grant number 778188)

1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the scholarly debates and efforts to understand and diagnose corruption and its societal implications. It probes the ways in which certain informal, nonlegal practices and transactions are driven not always by kleptocracy, individual greed, or survival strategies; they may also reflect people's desire to fulfill their family and kinship obligations, socialize and maintain membership in their networks and community, avoid gossip and social sanctions, gain or preserve social status and reputation, or obtain more moral and affective support from those around them. This implies that informal, nonlegal practices and transactions may encompass a wide range of moral and affective repertoires that go beyond mere economic interest and cannot be sufficiently explained by a mainstream view of corruption that tends to see any unrecorded transactions as corrupt (e.g., Kaufmann 1998, Della Porta and Vannucci 1999, Rose-Ackerman 1999, Acemoglu and Verdier 2000, Nye 2002, Johnson 2005, Heidenheimer and Johnston 2011, Rothstein 2011). Hence, the paper puts forward the claim that informal practices and transactions should be understood not simply as illegal, immoral, or illegitimate, but rather as parallel legal orders in their own right, because they are not just spontaneous actions—they represent institutionalized social practices that are part and parcel of everyday life. Understanding and accepting the existence of such legal orders implies not necessarily that they are societally beneficial, but that they may be structures that deserve empirical and theoretical investigation. My approach is to focus on society's informal norms, everyday micro-level power relations, and nonmonetary considerations as an additional lens for understanding the emergence, explanation, persistence, and ubiquitousness of corruption (cf. Gupta 1995, Humphrey and Sneath 2004, Haller and Shore 2005, Rivkin-Fish 2005, Wanner 2005, Nuijten and Anders 2007, Polese 2008, Humphrey 2012).

These questions will be explored in the post-Soviet context using the case of Uzbekistan, of which, due to the authoritarian nature of the political regime, only a limited amount of information and data is available. Moreover, Uzbekistan is an internationally significant (yet under-researched) case, given its position as one of the twenty most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2017). I present the results of extensive (socio-legal) ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley between 2009 and 2018, in a village I call

“Shabboda.” I focus on two social associations, *maballa* (neighborhood community) and *urug* (kinship group/extended family).

The paper proceeds in the following manner. The next section focuses on previous research, placing this study within corruption research and presenting a framework for understanding my perspective on corruption. Part three presents the socio-legal context of Uzbekistan, which is important for understanding the political and social fabric of Uzbek society. The paper then provides the theoretical framework, using the concept of living law and legal pluralism. I then discuss the methodological considerations and present the results of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Uzbekistan. Finally, the paper draws out the implications of ethnographic material for broader corruption literature and highlights the most important findings and contributions of my study.

2. Review of the Relevant Literature

There have been extensive discussions in academic circles of why corruption remains a persistent and pervasive phenomenon in many parts of the world (Leys 1965, Heidenheimer et al. 1989, Rose-Ackerman 1999, Acemoglu and Verdier 2000, Sampson 2005, Rothstein 2011). The initial view that “corruption greases the wheels of economic growth” in the newly independent states of Africa and Asia (Leff 1964, Huntington 1968, Scott 1972) seems to have lost its validity in light of the ever-growing global anti-corruption movement, spearheaded by Transparency International (TI) and the World Bank (Sampson 2005). According to these international bodies, this whole debate is now closed: Corruption, as they confidently assert, is “the abuse of public office/entrusted power for private gain” and thereby “sands the wheels of economic growth” (World Bank 2002, TI 2007). This rests on the assumption that, primarily affecting “weak” states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, corruption is the main cause for poverty and inequality, distorts public expenditures, increases the cost of running businesses, deters foreign investors, leads to uncertainty and lack of trust among citizens, and undermines rule of law and democracy (World Bank 2013). It is not surprising, then, that much of the scholarly literature, either explicitly or implicitly, regards corruption as a sign of social instability, weak rule of law, and bad governance, an idea reinforced by the frequent use of disease and cancer metaphors to describe corruption (Della Porta and Vannucci 1999, Rose-Ackerman 1999, Acemoglu and Verdier 2000, Langbein and Knack 2010, Rothstein 2011).

Despite unrelenting global anti-corruption initiatives, it seems quite obvious that there is no such a thing as a cure for this “cancer.” The complexity of this endeavor can largely be explained by the fact that most definitions of corruption are Western-centric and rest on the separation between the state (or its agents) and the rest of society, where salaried public officials, politicians, bureaucrats, and judges are expected to draw a sharp distinction between their personal interests and the public resources they administer (Haller and Shore 2005, Nuijten and Anders 2007). This view is especially prevalent in economics and political science, the two disciplines that have contributed most extensively to the corruption literature (Della Porta and Vannucci 1999, Rose-Ackerman 1999, Acemoglu and Verdier 2000, Johnson 2005, Heidenheimer and Johnston 2011, Kaufmann et al. 2011). Departing from a set of highly normative overtones, both economics and political science focus on state-centered and macro-level factors, such as the behavior of actors in particular public-office settings, the system of formal rules and institutions, how the ruling elites are composed, what kind of competition exists among them, and how accountable they are. Any deviation from the formal rules and duties of a public role in favor of private gain is interpreted as an act of corruption. The quantitative analyses of these processes lead to a set of correlations between certain factors and corruption, which form the basis for prescriptions against corruption.

However, these approaches reduce corruption to a problem of kleptocratic elites and corrupt civil servants who use their office as a private business. They are also based on the assumption that the public-private dichotomy is fixed and can thus be applied universally to measure corruption across countries. Given that traditions, moral codes, and social norms vary across cultures, it is possible that various cultures could have very different ideas of what constitutes corruption (Pani 2016). Likewise, what is termed corruption from an outsider’s perspective is often linked to a code of values and behavior that is widely known and accepted from an insider’s perspective (Lomnitz 1995, Pardo 1996, Werner 2000, Morris and Polese 2014). Challenging the mainstream view that tends to see any unrecorded transaction as corrupt, anthropologists have long recognized that the boundary between public office and the private sphere is not clear-cut and that even the meaning of the word *abuse* varies according to local legal and cultural standards (Gupta 1995, Haller and Shore 2005, Nuijten and Anders 2007, Polese 2008). These processes are particularly visible in Gupta’s analysis of state officials in northern India, in which he shows that “One

has a better chance of finding them at the roadside tea stalls and in their homes than in their offices” (1995, p. 384). Another relevant example is Haller and Shore’s (2005) edited volume *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, in which the authors challenge the validity of universal definitions of corruption for the analysis of corrupt practices, arguing for the need to consider local categories, needs, and practices, especially those in which gifts are distinguished from bribes. Haller and Shore suggest that “a key task for anthropology is to explore how people classify behavior as appropriate/inappropriate, moral/immoral and legal/illegal in the specific cultures we study, and analyze these in the context of local standards and practices.”

These arguments bring us to the “diverse economies” perspective developed by Gibson-Graham and her collective (Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008), who deem it necessary to consider the multifarious nature of economic activities when studying corruption and informality in different parts of the world. The central claim Gibson-Graham makes is that monetary transactions do not necessarily include or explain economic activity. Indeed, in addition to economic perspectives, informal/illegal transactions may also be driven by alternative currencies such as trust, respect, and reputation (Pardo 1996, Urinbojev and Polese 2016), and even the meaning of money may differ depending on the social and economic norms of a society (Parry and Bloch 1989, Thomas 1991). For example, in African societies, monetary exchanges may just be the modern equivalent of exchanging gifts. Therefore, some social scientists see corruption in Africa as merely an infusion of a culture of traditional gift-giving into the bureaucracy (De Sardan 1999, Harrison 1999, Hydén 2006). Similar patterns have also been observed in post-socialist societies (e.g., Werner 2000, Rivkin-Fish 2005, Wanner 2005, Rasanayagam 2011, Humphrey 2012, Urinbojev and Svensson 2013). In her anthropological work, Humphrey (2012) showed that informality in places such as Russia also manifested as cultural and moral values, enabling actors to enhance a sense of self-worth within relevant social circles, and as a source of esteem for ordinary people in social settings.

Consequently, these arguments beg the question of whether we should re-evaluate the nature of informal, nonlegal practices and transactions (“corruption,” from a legal standpoint), viewing them not only as instances of individual greed and personal venality but also as reflections of society’s informal rules, everyday power relations, and cultural and affective repertoires. We cannot rely on mere economic-based explanations or legal

centralistic approaches as standards against which to evaluate whether or not informal practices and transactions are corrupt. Rather, when analyzing the nature, forms, and meaning of informal practices, we should also consider the everyday power relations, informal norms, and moral and affective repertoires that constitute the basic social fabric of society. Accordingly, informal, nonlegal practices and transactions that would be considered corrupt from a supranational and/or nation-state law perspective may be legitimate practices according to a society's informal norms and moral codes. These micro-level legal orders make any efforts toward combating corruption a complex endeavor and potentially counterproductive from a societal perspective. However, when these micro-level orders are perceived as corrupt and battled, the risk is that the basic social fabrics of society are weakened and distorted, possibly leading to social instability. Likewise, any anti-corruption strategies should be built on a deep knowledge of these micro-level legal orders that determine the rights and wrongs of everyday social behavior. Thus, this paper will demonstrate the empirically grounded account of these processes and their implications for (anti-) corruption literature. Before doing so, we will provide a brief overview of the socio-legal context of Uzbekistan, which will be instructive for understanding the ethnographic material in the next sections.

3. Socio-Legal Context of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan became an independent state in 1991 following the fall of the Soviet Union. The political leadership of Uzbekistan, like other newly independent countries, has proclaimed a strong commitment to promoting democracy, the market economy, and rule of law, as well as its intention to break the stronghold of clientelist culture and (Soviet-style) kleptocratic practices (Perlman and Gleason 2007). However, the unstable political situation in Central Asia in the 1990s (e.g., civil war in Tajikistan, ethnic conflicts in southern Kyrgyzstan), for different reasons, made the government skeptical toward real democratization and market reforms. Therefore, Uzbek authorities made it clear from the beginning that the big bang or shock-therapy approach to transition would not be suitable for Uzbekistan (Ruziev et al. 2007). Instead, Uzbekistan proclaimed a gradualist approach, maintaining Soviet-era welfare policies and centralized control over the priority sectors of the economy (Spoor 1995). As a result of these gradualist policies, Uzbekistan's cumulative decline in GDP between 1989 and 1996 was the greatest of all the former Soviet republics. Thus, preserving the stability of the economy and of social and political order has since become an overarching rationale for rejecting all manner of economic and political reforms

recommended by international institutions, and for developing a strict border regime (Fumagalli 2007).

However, though the gradualist approach to transition contributed to a prevention of sharp output loss and a consequential rise in unemployment and social unrest during the early years of transition, by 2000 it became evident that the economy was simply stagnating (Ruziev et al. 2007). This was due largely to active government intervention that created significant administrative barriers and a high tax burden, thereby causing high transaction costs for national business and the prevalence of an informal economy (Ergashev et al. 2006). As Kandiyoti (2007, p. 44) maintains, the partial market reforms that the government of Uzbekistan implemented in pursuit of stability paradoxically resulted in inefficient resource allocation and widespread corruption that required an increased recourse to coercion. These developments eventually led to a significant retrenchment of the welfare state in Uzbekistan, since tax revenue was very little compared to the scope of the social welfare programs promised by the government. At the same time, the government took a series of severe measures to liquidate, or formalize, informal economic activities (bazaars and petty cross-border trade) that provided alternative means of survival for hundreds of thousands of people (Ilkhamov 2013). Although the Uzbek economy is said to have been experiencing above-trend rates of growth (7 to 8 percent) since 2004 (IMF 2012), these indicators hardly reflect the everyday realities in Uzbekistan, where many people, especially in rural areas, are compelled to secure their livelihood needs through informal practices. The failure of the gradualist model was finally acknowledged by the new Uzbek leadership in 2018, following the death of Islam Karimov, who ruled the country with an iron fist for 27 years from late Soviet times (Buckley 2018).

These developments had significant repercussions for governance trajectories in Uzbekistan. As the state retreated from its social-welfare obligations and failed to provide formal income-earning opportunities, citizens reacted by devising informal coping strategies based on unwritten rules that did not conform to laws, escaped monitoring by state officials, and were mostly pervasive and informal in nature. Many commentators now argue that Uzbekistan made little or no progress in promoting rule of law and good governance, and that many formal institutions of government have achieved a mere showcase quality. According to the international indicators of good governance and rule of law, such as Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (TI 2016) and

the World Bank governance rankings (World Bank 2014), Uzbekistan is among the ten most corrupt countries in the world. Although Uzbekistan acceded to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2008 and adopted an anti-corruption law on January 4, 2017, no significant success in reducing corruption has been seen. The latest policy report, “Tackling Corruption in Uzbekistan,” commissioned by the Open Society Foundations Eurasia Program, shows that Uzbek authorities’ recent anti-corruption drives largely reflect political maneuverings in the elite rather than a genuine attempt to combat corruption (Lewis 2016). It remains to be seen whether the anti-corruption measures of the new Uzbek leadership, namely an online “virtual reception hall” in which citizens are encouraged to lodge complaints against the authorities, will produce any tangible results.

Academically, literature on Uzbekistan’s governance trajectories is extensive. Much of the scholarly literature, especially anthropological accounts, demonstrates that corruption permeates all levels of state and society, from daily interactions between ordinary citizens and low-level state officials to kleptocratic practices involving high-level state officials (e.g., Taksanov 2000, Wegerich 2006, Ilkhamov 2007, Kandiyoti 2007, Perlman and Gleason 2007, Trevisani 2007, Markowitz 2008, Rasanayagam 2011). Much of this research concentrates on macro-level topics and state-centered approaches, focusing on authoritarianism and the persistence of a Soviet-style administrative culture, predatory elites, a dysfunctional public administration system, illiberal economic policies, clan politics, post-Soviet agricultural reforms, corrupt law-enforcement structures, and inadequate ways of dealing with corruption on the part of state authorities. These authors argue that the struggles among various state actors to gain control over scarce resources have resulted in inefficient resource allocation and contradictory state policies, thereby making corruption and bribery part of the governance mode in Uzbekistan. At the same time, these studies also claim that there is a need to distinguish between the informal practices of kleptocratic elites, which have nothing to do with “survival,” and the informal coping strategies of ordinary citizens and low-level officials. Another body of scholarly works suggests that it is the penetration of clans and regional patronage networks into official structures that depletes the state’s organizational powers and causes corruption in state institutions (Kubicek 1998, Pashkun 2003, Luong 2004, Collins 2006, Ilkhamov 2007). Others have explained the ubiquity of corruption in Uzbekistan as an outcome of its communist past (Staples 1993, Gleason 1995, Ergashev et al. 2006).

The above studies share two common features in terms of analyzing corruption in Uzbekistan. First, they explain the ubiquity of corruption with reference to the authoritarian nature of the political regime. This idea is consistent with the mainstream corruption literature, in which a strong state is seen as the key driver of widespread corruption, especially when the state tends to function as a totalitarian and monopolizing agent (e.g., Varese 2001, Sun 2004, Johnson 2005). Second, they reflect the “corruption of the weak” approach, in which informal or illegal practices are seen as a survival strategy that provides alternative means for ordinary residents and low-level state officials to secure their basic needs (e.g., De Sardan 1999, Sneath 2002, Polese 2008, Ledeneva 2013). While recognizing the importance of “strong state” explanations, I argue that they are not sufficient, and that they run the risk of aggrandizing the role of the state as being the prime mover of widespread corruption, as if it alone shapes the basic patterns of economic life and determines the parameters of daily social relations. Moreover, survival-strategy explanations cannot satisfactorily explain the nonmonetary and affective dimensions of informal transactions. Of course, economic motivations play a major role in informal transactions, but the fashion and ritual in which they take place show a high degree of embeddedness in social norms, traditions, moral codes, and the affective logics that mere survival-strategy arguments cannot fully explain. Hence, I argue that if we want to better understand the nature, causes, and forms of corruption, we need to go beyond state-centered approaches and the survival-strategy perspective and resituate the focus on the legal orders operating at the micro-level.

This article explores these micro-level legal orders in the context of Uzbekistan and argues for the need to consider traditions, moral codes, and values when studying corruption. Studies have shown that a large portion of Uzbek society, especially the rural inhabitants who account for roughly 63 percent of the population, are still strongly devoted to traditions, collectivism, family, kinship, and religious values (Poliakov 1992, Kandiyoti 1998, Khalid 2003, Pashkun 2003, Rasanayagam 2011). Hence, it is actually the behavioral imperatives, expectations, and social sanctions emanating from these micro-level legal orders that determine the rights and wrongs of everyday life and social relations. These processes become especially visible when we ethnographically attend to everyday life and social interactions on a micro level. With this in mind, in the empirical section I focus on two basic social associations of Uzbek society— neighborhood community (*mahalla*) and extended family (*urugʻ*)—in order to describe the socio-legal context that informs the

meaning of corruption. Before moving to the empirical section, I will present theoretical framework for analyzing the ethnographic data.

4. Living Law and Legal Pluralism

The theoretical premise of this study is based on the understanding that there is no single, integrated set of rules in any society, whether codified in law or sanctified in religion or established as the rules of daily social behavior. Quite simply, there is no uncontested universal normative code that guides people's lives and actions—the very nature of the legal order is determined by the outcomes of the struggles and the interplay between plural normative orders. Hence, supranational law and nation-state law are not opposites but are in tension or coexistence with other formal and informal norm structures and associations (e.g., social, religious, or customary) that promote different types of sanctioned behavior. This implies the need to devise a legally pluralistic framework that examines corruption within the nexus of law, social norms, and everyday (micro-level) power relations.

Eugen Ehrlich was one of the first scholars to recognize fully the plurality of normative orders. His living-law theory remains a useful tool for studying the normative pluralism inherent in different working normative orders. In *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*, Ehrlich (1912) distinguishes between the law created by the state (juristic law and statutes) and informal norms produced by non-state social associations (living law). Ehrlich claims that the living law is not directly linked to the state or its legal system but to the inner order of various social associations. By “the inner order of social associations,” Ehrlich means society's reflexive web of expectations that give power and meaning to norms. For Ehrlich, it is not the state law but the living law of various social associations that dominates everyday life, even though it has not been posited in legal propositions and has emerged independently from the state law out of the inner order of associations (Banakar 2008, Urinboyev 2013). In this connection, Ehrlich advises that if we want to better understand the coexistence and clashes of different normative orders, we should attentively observe everyday life, the relations of domination, and actual habits of people, and inquire into people's thoughts on the opinions of the relevant people in their surrounding environment, and on proper social behavior.

Ehrlich's idea that the state law is not the only regulator of social, economic, and political life is also reflected in the current literature on legal pluralism (Moore 1973, Griffiths 1986

and 2003, Merry 1988, von Benda-Beckmann 2002, Nuijten and Anders 2007). Legal pluralism emphasizes the coexistence and clash of the multiple sets of rules, or legal orders, that mold people's social behavior: the law of the nation-state, indigenous customary rules, religious decrees, moral codes, and the practical norms of social life. This means that state law is merely one among many other legal orders in society. Classic legal anthropology studies and the more recent legal pluralism scholarship have demonstrated the emergence of "semi-autonomous social fields" or "non-state forms of normative ordering" with their own forms of regulation and informal norms, many of which contradict state law (Moore 1973, Tamanha 2000, Roberts 2005, Pirie 2006). Hence, from a legal pluralism perspective, informal/illegal transactions that would be labeled corruption from a state law and/or supranational perspective may very well be considered morally accepted practice according to local morality, social norms, and traditions.

Drawing on the abovementioned theoretical perspectives, we could infer that the analysis of corruption should go beyond economic-based approaches or legal centralistic approaches and deal with the everyday power relations, conflicts, contradictions, social sanctions, and norms that constitute the basic social fabric (living law) of society.

5. Methodological Considerations

The methodological approach for this paper is ethnography. It is based on extensive ethnographic field research conducted between 2009 and 2018 (for a total of 16 months) in the Fergana region of Uzbekistan, in the village of Shabboda. Due to my Uzbek ethnicity, village origin, and cultural competence, I had extensive contacts and social networks that enabled me to participate in the daily life of Fergana, thereby becoming *svoi* ("one of us, those who belong to our circle"), a term widely used in the post-Soviet context to refer to a person who has internalized the norms and values of a particular social group.

The primary method of data collection during the fieldwork were observations and informal interviews. These were conducted in the village's social spaces and at events at which most residents come together and exchange information on a daily basis. Namely, I regularly visited such gossip hotspots as *guzar* (community meeting space) and *choyxona* (teahouse) as well as life-cycle events, rituals, and socializing events such as weddings, births, circumcision ceremonies, funerals, and monthly get-togethers (*gap*) of the village residents. These hotspots are public and open to all village residents and guests. My

informants in the village were a diverse group of people with a variety of social positions; they were people of influence and ordinary residents. I classified the following social groups as “people of influence” who negotiated and shaped local politics: (a) mahalla leaders who administrated daily affairs and arranged mutual aid practices and life-cycle events; (b) religious leaders who provided religious and moral guidance to the local community; (c) wealthy, successful entrepreneurs and families in the village who exported village-produced fruits and vegetables to Russia; (d) local-level state officials (both high-level and low-level officials) and their family members who lived in the different mahallas of the village; and (e) female leaders of the village and mahallas who led and arranged rituals; established the standards for gift-exchange during weddings, births, and circumcision ceremonies; and adjudicated domestic violence and family conflicts. The informants who did not belong to the above categories I classified as “ordinary residents” in the study. It should be noted that this group nevertheless indirectly shaped local politics by spreading gossip, rumors, and stories.

These strategies allowed me to gain a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted meanings and morality of informal transactions and practices within different social groups and actors in Uzbek society. I collected a rich stock of ethnographic material on the role of law and informal rules and norms in everyday life and, either directly or indirectly, in both state and non-state arenas, by looking at, for example, how state officials enforced and talked about laws, the extent to which people conformed to laws or informal rules when dealing with state officials, villagers’ perceptions of corruption and bribery, local definitions and interpretations of legal/illegal and moral/immoral binaries, everyday coping strategies, values and moral obligations, and the perceived role and image of the state in everyday life. I also learned about local narratives and stories about corruption, following the everyday rumors and gossip centering around the informal transactions between villagers and state officials. I regularly met and interacted with both people of influence and ordinary residents when I visited the village’s gossip hotspots and life-cycle and socializing events. My informants openly and freely talked about their understanding of what constitutes corruption and shared their stories and adventures involving their interactions with state officials. This was possible because I was a native and possessed cultural competence and extensive social networks in the field site. As I met more than ten village members on a daily basis, it is difficult to specify the exact number of people I spoke to during the field trips. Thus, the narrative I provide in the next section can be seen as a collection of the

voices of hundreds of villagers whom I encountered during my daily visits to these gossip hotspots.

The informants were fully informed about the purpose, methods, and use of the research. Due to safety precautions, I avoided all types of apparent documentation methods, such as recording and taking notes. Instead, I wrote down my recollections immediately after an interview or observation. In order to ensure maximum anonymity, I have changed the names of informants, villages, and mahallas, and provide only the most general information about the field site. For this paper, I have chosen to present (1) some examples of my most relevant observations and (2) two empirical case studies that focus on the following two main social associations within Uzbek society: (a) neighborhood community (mahalla) and (b) extended family (urug'). Hence, this paper focuses on a small segment of the empirical data collected within the larger project. In the following sections, I present the fieldwork context (Shabboda) and the two empirical case studies.

6. Fieldwork Context: Shabboda Village

Shabboda, where I conducted my fieldwork, is a village (*qishloq*) in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan with a population of more than 18,000 people. Administratively, Shabboda comprises 28 mahallas (neighborhood communities). In turn, each mahalla contains 150 to 300 immediate families (*oilalar*), which consist of around 20 to 30 urug' (extended families/kinship groups). The income-generating activities of the village residents are made up of multiple sources, ranging from cucumber and grape production, remittances, raising livestock for sale as beef, and informal trade to construction work, daily manual labor, fruit-picking jobs, and brokerage.

Guzar (village meeting spaces), *masjid* (mosques), *choyxona* (teahouses), *gap* (regular get-togethers), and life-cycle events are the key social and administrative spaces in which villagers meet on a daily basis and conduct the bulk of mahalla information exchange. Typically, it is possible to find at least 12 to 15 residents sitting in *guzar*, regardless of whether it is the morning, afternoon, or evening. Since the *guzar* is a male-only place, women's socializing and information exchange activities usually take place either in the streets or inside the household. Another important social site at which all villagers come together is wedding ceremonies. In Shabboda, most weddings share similar characteristics: they are open to all residents and are attended by 400 to 500 guests on average. Wedding

ceremonies exhibit key features of the social norms and hierarchies in Shabboda: men and women sit separately at different tables and “best tables” are often reserved for people of influence, such as state officials, police officers, highly educated people, successful businessmen, and wealthy relatives and friends. By observing the placement and treatment of guests it is easy to compare one’s social status and reputation with that of others.

In Shabboda, these spaces and rituals are key social arenas in which local politics and norms are formed, negotiated, and reshaped through rumors, gossip, and reciprocal relationships. Since mahalla residents meet regularly (often daily) at these social spaces and attend most of the socializing events together, they have a relationship of mutual dependence. These daily heavy social interactions produce a general expectation that villagers should help their family, kin, or mahalla whenever assistance is needed. Villagers who ignore or fail to comply with mahalla norms face social sanctions, such as gossip, ridicule, loss of respect and reputation, humiliation, and even exclusion from life-cycle rituals. Thus, money is not everything in the village: respect, prestige, and reputation are equally important. The fact that the villagers meet one another on a daily basis and regularly interact at social events acts as a guarantee that social pressure and sanctions can be applied to an individual or his family or kinship group if they do not act fairly or do not help their neighbor or mahalla. Hence, give-and-take rituals constitute an integral part of everyday interactions in Shabboda.

Daily conversations in Shabboda revolve mainly around economic problems, remittances, gas and electricity cuts, and life-cycle rituals. Given the existence of job opportunities and fairly good social-welfare services during the Soviet times, villagers in those days felt that the state indeed existed and was present in their daily lives through generous social-welfare policies. The villagers had expected things to further improve in the post-independence period as the “wealth of Uzbek people would no longer be sent to Moscow but be retained locally and used for the welfare of the people.” However, very few villagers reaped the rewards of independence. Instead, many households in the village are heavily reliant on migrant remittances and send their male members (husband or sons) as migrant workers to Russia and Kazakhstan. In addition to migrant remittances, villagers increasingly rely on social safety nets and mutual-aid practices within their family, kinship, and mahalla networks. These practices serve as a shock-absorbing institution for many villagers, enabling them to secure their basic needs and gain access to public goods, services, and

social protection unavailable from the state. In fact, very few wedding feasts, funerals, irrigation building, road asphaltting, medical operations, or house constructions are conducted without family, kinship, or mahalla support. These mutual-aid practices create strong moral and affective bonds in family, kinship, and mahalla life. Therefore, villagers actively engage in such mutual-aid activities, since these practices enable them not only to meet their livelihood needs but also to provide space for participation in everyday life and social interactions. It should, however, be emphasized that the Shabboda village is not a bounded, homogenous social space in which loyalty to mahalla and family traditions explains all kinds of actions and transactions that may possibly fall under the rubric of corruption. This means some village members, such as Sardor and his family members (see his story under Empirical Case Studies below), take position and, most importantly, consider certain acts and behaviors moral or immoral, appropriate or inappropriate, legal or illegal, depending on the circumstances. These processes will be illustrated in the next section.

Through my observations of village life over the last nine years, I feel that the role and legitimacy of the state has diminished significantly. As the state in contemporary Uzbekistan no longer provides jobs and all-encompassing social-welfare services, it is virtually absent in villagers' everyday lives. Many of the people I encountered in Shabboda talked about unaffordable health-care costs, unemployment, inflation, and declining public services. In the villagers' view, most of these economic problems were due to widespread corruption in the higher echelons of the government. As seen in other contexts (Gupta 1995, Lazar 2005), the topic of corruption was at the center of village talk, a lens through which villagers imagined the role of the state and reflected on their daily experiences with state institutions. Wherever I went and whomever I talked with, my interlocutors quickly brought up the subject of corruption. Stories and anecdotes on informal transactions involving the traffic police were the most popular. I feel that petty everyday corruption was an open secret in Shabboda, as villagers openly talked about situations in which they had given bribes to state officials.

The villagers also had their own interpretation of good and bad corruption. When they talked about corrupt state officials, they usually referred to those who used their "oily position" to enrich themselves rather than share some of their wealth with mahalla and village people. If the state official stayed accountable and generous to his community, he

was not seen as a corrupt official. But as soon as the officials distanced themselves from the people and showed no accountability to locals, they were perceived as the other—representatives of the kleptocratic elite. This is where locals drew a boundary between good corruption and predatory practices. Villagers knew that almost all state officials were corrupt and “took” on a regular basis. As the state was absent in everyday life, and as its officials charged with enforcing rule of law were themselves breaking the law, the villagers felt that they too had no moral obligation to act in accordance with state law. They were of the opinion that state officials should “steal with a conscience” and share part of their accumulated wealth and political influence with their wider community.

The case of Ahmadboy, a village member and director of a state-owned factory, is a relevant example in this respect. Ahmadboy was one of the richest residents in the village; his family owned fancy houses, expensive cars, more than 30 hectares of land, and many other properties that state officials (even high-level ones) could not legally afford in contemporary Uzbekistan. It was an open secret in the village that he would not have been able to accumulate so much wealth without engaging in corrupt practices. Despite this, he was loved and respected by many people there. In the villagers’ view, unlike many greedy and selfish state officials, Ahmadboy was not a self-centered official. He shared his income with both his family and the wider community. This made him known locally as *taqsir*—a title that has historically been used to address highly respected state officials, rich people, and religious leaders. When poor families could not afford an urgent medical operation or had nothing to eat during the cold winter months, rather than asking for help from the local government and social-welfare office in charge of such issues, they usually visited Ahmadboy’s house for help. At 6 in the morning it was normal to see four or five people standing outside Ahmadboy’s house, waiting to be invited for a reception. In other words, Ahmadboy’s house was an informal social welfare agency from which needy villagers could obtain support. When I asked villagers if they considered Ahmadboy a corrupt official, many ironically replied, “Tell us, who doesn’t ‘take’ these days? Who follows the law? Ahmadboy is totally different from other state officials whose wealth is *harom* [unlawful in Sharia law]. Of course, he steals from the state but he is a ‘conscientious thief’ [*insofli o’g’rzi*] and shares his wealth with everyone in the village. Therefore his earning is *halol* [lawful in Sharia law].”

Ahmadboy's case is a good illustration of the existence of the alternative (to state law) informal norms and standards in Shabboda that regard illegal transactions as morally accepted and halol practice, given the state's inability to secure the basic needs of citizens. From a legal standpoint, the Uzbek Criminal Code would classify most of the transactions, practices, and interpretations described above—theft by appropriation or misuse (Article 167), misuse of authority or office (Article 205), abuse of power or functions (Article 206), receiving a bribe (Article 210), and making a bribe (Article 211)— as instances of corruption and illegality. However, in the eyes of the locals and according to local needs and standards, Ahmadboy was a good state official.

These observations remind us of the living law of the Bukowina that Eugen Ehrlich (1912) described a century ago in *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*. One important insight I gained was that state law is almost nonexistent in everyday life in Shabboda. The village is instead regulated by informal norms that promote an alternative version of how people should behave. Hence, the state law (and supranational law) is in tension with the “inner orders” (living law) of other social associations in contemporary Uzbekistan. From a legal standpoint, most of the transactions, practices, and interpretations observed in the Shabboda context can be classified as instances of corruption and illegality, according to the Uzbek Criminal Code. My informants were aware that Ahmadboy would not be able to build so much wealth and cater to the needs of poor families if he strictly abided by state law and relied on his official salary. Interestingly, the villagers interpreted Ahmadboy's action from a religious perspective, as evidenced by their use of religious terms. The use of halol/harom binaries was commonplace in the village, whereas only a handful of the villagers I encountered discussed corruption in terms of legal/illegal binaries. Although the living law described here can be interpreted as an instance of corruption according to international (Western-centric) legal definitions of corruption, it is, however, accepted within the rural communities in Ferghana as a legitimate practice—regardless of whether the actions involved are legal or illegal. My observations enable me to argue that the behavioral instructions promoted by the living law influence social behavior and everyday life more effectively than the laws of the state.

This pattern is not unique to Uzbekistan. Similar situations were also observed in Mexico and Bolivia, where corruption was morally accepted if state officials showed generosity to and solidarity with the people (Lomnitz 1995, Lazar 2005). However, the above

observations should not be seen as an attempt to make a case for the “culture of corruption” thesis (De Sardan 1999, Shore 2005, Smart and Hsu 2007). Rather, I observed that the villagers took a clear stance and showed a different attitude when discussing high-level corruption cases. From my conversations, I learned that they distinguished between low-level (petty) and high-level (systemic) corruption. This was visible in the way that villagers distinguished between “good corruption” and kleptocratic practices (*porabo’rlik*). They frequently referred to corruption scandals in the higher echelons of the government (e.g., Gulnara Karimova’s case). Some of the villagers were even aware that Uzbekistan was ranked by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Referring to the fact that the state officials themselves broke the law on a daily basis, most villagers stated that they felt no moral obligation to obey the laws or report corruption cases to anti-corruption bodies. So, people’s willingness to challenge corruption was also affected by the extent to which they had confidence in the rule of law and government’s anti-corruption measures (Gong and Xiao 2017). Malfunctioning of state bureaucracy and the “unrule of law” were thus locally perceived as the main drivers of corrupt practices and behavior.

Despite the villagers’ condemnation of corruption, I observed the existence of conflicting morality, through which they distinguished between low-level/petty corruption that was needed for “getting things done” (*ish bitirmoq*) and high-level systemic corruption and kleptocratic practices (*porabo’rlik*) that had nothing to do with survival. The locals used various terms and categories when I asked them to describe the difference between petty corruption and high-level corruption. For example, they used the expression *hursand qilmoq* (making happy) or *til topishmoq* (finding a common language) when they talked about how they bribed the utility fee collector to avoid high electricity bills, whereas they used the term *porabo’r* (corrupt) when talking about their experiences with the public prosecutor’s office or judges.

My observations thus enable us to argue that corruption has different meanings and logic within different levels and associations in society, and that there is a difference between the masses of low-level officials and the smaller group of kleptocratic officials and elites. Without making a distinction between different types and levels of corruption, we run the risk of labeling the diversity of informal, illegal practices under the rubric of corruption, regardless of their motives and functions. Thus, in line with Nuijten and Anders (2007)

and Blundo (2007), I argue that classifications and typologies can provide useful points of departure and much-needed orientation in the study of complex phenomena such as corruption, which is often prone to becoming grounded in juicy stories and anecdotes.

7. Empirical Case Studies

In this section, I present two empirical case studies that focus on relationships and norms within two social associations in Shabboda: mahalla and urug'. The first case study is constructed around two mahalla members: Sardor, the deputy chief of a provincial police department (high-level state official), and Rahmon, a district-level traffic policeman (low-level official). The second case centers around Ahmedov's urug'. It should be emphasized that these two case studies were possible due to my capacity to build trust and maintain regular contact with the informants over a long period of time (2009–2018). As I was socially and physically immersed in the field site, I regularly visited gossip hotpots and life-cycle events. I also had direct, regular conversations with the main heroes of my case studies, Sardor, Rahmon, their family members, and with members of Ahmedov's urug' during the field trips. Before moving to the empirical case studies, some additional clarifications regarding mahalla and urug' are needed in order to help the reader better distinguish between these two social associations.

The term mahalla is commonly used in Shabboda (as well as in other parts of Uzbekistan) to refer to neighborhood community. Most people in the village identify themselves through their mahalla. If a village resident is asked where he or she comes from, the answer is "I am from mahalla X." This means villagers use the term mahalla to refer to the neighborhood community in which they live. Thus, mahalla includes all the people living in the same neighborhood, regardless of their familial or kinship ties.

The term urug' is mentioned when villagers talk about their larger kinship group/extended family members who are related by blood, a common name, and ancestry. Urug' includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and nieces from both patrilineal and matrilineal family. Normally, urug' members do not live in the same household, but they live close to one other, for example, in the same mahalla or village. Thus, urug' is a collection of several oilalar (immediate families) that live in the same mahalla or village.

Mahalla

Oqtapa, where this case was constructed, is one of the mahallas in the Shabboda village in rural Ferghana. It has a population of more than 2,000 people. Most of the residents in this mahalla are *dehqonlar* (farmers) in cucumber and grape production. However, due to my research focus, I was particularly interested in two mahalla members, Sardor and Rahmon, who were both state officials and the subject of everyday mahalla talk.

As the deputy chief of a provincial police department, Sardor was a very high-level state official, whereas Rahmon was a district-level traffic police officer. However, in everyday mahalla talk, Sardor, despite having such a high official status, did not have a decent reputation. Many of the mahalla residents I encountered at guzar and weddings called him a communist, a term that carries a negative connotation and is used to describe law-abiding state officials who do not share their political influence and resources with their kin and mahalla. This social pressure rested on *mahalladoshlik* (shared mahalla origin) obligations and mutual-aid practices that constituted the backbone of social relations. The mahalla members frequently talked about how they had helped Sardor or his family in the past, when he did not yet possess such legal and political influence. Due to this, they felt that Sardor should support his mahalla members when they experienced problems with the law; for example, cases involving traffic-law violations, when “just one phone call” from Sardor could relieve his neighbors from having to bribe a traffic police officer. Given that the local government no longer provided funding for road asphaltting, mahalla roads were uneven and bumpy. Given the economic realities in the post-Soviet period, the mahalla simply could not afford to asphalt its roads. The mahalla members took a clear stance, insisting that Sardor, as a member of the mahalla, had a moral obligation to cater to their needs, and, if he really wanted to help, he could easily solve the problem by ordering local government officials to asphalt the roads.

As a high-level state official, Sardor had substantial power and could easily divert resources to the mahalla, but he always rejected their requests and asked them to solve their problems through the formal channels. Because of his attempts to keep his public office separate from the private sphere, Sardor was regarded as a communist by many of the mahalla members I encountered at guzar and life-cycle rituals. They felt that, due to his law-abiding behavior and lack of willingness to use his power for the mahalla’s benefit, Sardor was neither a good mahalla member nor a good state official. The pressure was also felt by

Sardor's family members, who encountered sarcastic remarks on the mahalla streets, and at guzar and wedding ceremonies.

In contrast, low-level official Rahmon was a man of respect and enjoyed a very high social status and reputation in the mahalla. Unlike Sardor, Rahmon provided patronage to the mahalla residents by helping them avoid or maneuver around the state law. Rahmon was especially praised for his ability to act as a bridge between high-level state officials and ordinary residents, by negotiating the amount of informal payments for jobs or university-admission issues and bending state laws to meet the interests of the mahalla residents. Rahmon's capacity to address the needs and concerns of his mahalla members not only placed him in a higher social position but also accounted for the enhanced prestige his family members and kinship group enjoyed at the mahalla's social events. While observing the mahalla's wedding ceremonies, I noticed that Rahmon and his family members were always offered a "best table" and served more quickly than the others. Rahmon's high status and reputation was also visible in the daily talk at the guzar: Residents often commented on his *odamgarcbilik* (humanity and care), a trait that many state officials lack in Uzbekistan. Hence, due to his sensitivity to the needs and concerns of the mahalla, Rahmon was the pride of the mahalla.

Legally, according to the Uzbek Criminal Code, Rahmon's actions could be classified as criminal acts and were therefore punishable under Article 206 (abuse of power or functions) and Article 212 (intermediation in bribe). But according to the mahalla's living law, Rahmon's illegal acts had nothing to do with corruption, as they were not driven by egoism or greed. There was no formal reason why Rahmon should have helped mahalla members at the expense of breaking state law. Rahmon was aware that his actions could cause him legal problems. A number of empirical studies (Lazar 2005, Mino0 2017) have shown that social sanctions such as gossip, rumors, and ostracism may be related to outputs and productivity. As Rahmon's social prestige and reputation were related to both mahalla and the state, he realized that loss of reputation, gossip, and social ostracism were too harsh to face. Hence, here, the corrupt acts were "not merely selfish and private but profoundly social, shaped by larger sociocultural notions of power, privilege, and responsibility" (Hasty 2005, p. 271).

Sardor's decision not to follow mahalla norms reveals that Shabboda was not a bounded, homogenous social space in which loyalty to and respect for the mahalla explained all kinds of actions and transactions. Even though Sardor (and his family members) faced mahalla pressure, he made his position clear, drawing a sharp line between his public position and private life. As a result, he was a "communist" to the mahalla members but a *chestniy odam* (honest man) to his family and kinship group, who respected him for his law-abiding behavior. Thus, mahalla law is a social process in which the interpretation of certain acts and behaviors as moral/immoral, appropriate/inappropriate, or legal/illegal is not static but changes according to situation and context.

Urug'

This case study focuses on Ahmedov's urug' and their strategies to reassert their high social status in the village. Ahmedov's urug' consisted of five immediate families that lived in different mahallas of the Shabboda village. Even though each of these five families lived in a separate household (*xo'jalik*) and managed their finances independently (*alobida ruzg'or*), they were all in a mutual-dependence relationship. Like other kinship groups in the village, Ahmedov's urug' met regularly. During life-cycle events and holidays (Eid, Navruz) all urug' members gather and catch up on one another's lives. However, urug' members also get together during emergency situations, such as when someone from the urug' gets sick, needs a large amount of money, or gets into trouble that may jeopardize the reputation of the entire urug'. In such circumstances, the urug' tries to make sure that all its members are taken care of. The urug's capacity to provide for its members not only creates solidarity inside the kinship group but also enhances the urug's prestige and reputation in the village. Hence, money is not the issue, and when the urug's *obro' etibor* (reputation) is at stake, all its members unite and do their best to reassert their status. As I show below, these urug'-based moral and affective repertoires have important implications for re-contextualizing the role and meaning of informal/illegal transactions.

Ahmedov's urug' was one of the most reputable and richest kinship groups in Shabboda from the late 1990s until 2009. This was due to the fact that one of the members of the urug', Nodirbek, worked in key positions in provincial government and was later promoted to the Ministry of Agriculture in Tashkent. This situation changed shortly after Nodirbek's removal from the government in 2009, something that negatively affected the social status of the urug' in the village. Following these developments, Ahmedov's urug' lost its high

social status and reputation in the village. This change was also felt by Nodirbek, as he was no longer offered a best table when invited to wedding feasts. Ahmedov's social status was further damaged when Bakhtiyor, one of the urug's rising stars, failed to be admitted to a prestigious law university in Tashkent. This event led to speculations that Ahmedov's urug' would never be able to recover and regain its social status.

These events forced the urug' members to mobilize their economic resources and invest them in Bakhtiyor's education, hoping that he would restore the urug's reputation in the future. During the urug' gathering, each of the families contributed U.S. \$3,000, for a total of U.S. \$15,000. The idea was that this money would be given to the people of influence in Tashkent, so that they would guarantee Bakhtiyor's admission to the university. Thanks to his many years of work in the public administration, Nodirbek had many connections and networks (*tanish-bilish*) in Tashkent. Through these connections, Nodirbek was able to secure Bakhtiyor's admission to law university. Ahmedov's urug' also used marriage to boost Bakhtiyor's career after graduation. As Bakhtiyor was studying at such a prestigious law university, he had a good chance of marrying a girl from a powerful family. After the urug' members' zealous matchmaking efforts, Bakhtiyor married the daughter of a high-level state official in the neighboring village. As a result of these strategic moves, a few years after his graduation Bakhtiyor became a judge at one of the district courts, something that eventually reasserted Ahmedov's high social status and reputation in the village.

This case study highlights two main issues. First, the illegal practices described in the case study (e.g., a bribe made to enroll Bakhtiyor at the law university) encompass a wide range of moral and affective repertoires that go beyond mere economic interest. We also need to consider the role of affective repertoires and alternative currencies—such as respect, prestige, and reputation (Pardo 2006; Zanca 2003)—when analyzing the role and meaning of informal illegal practices and transactions. This allows us to suggest the existence of a nonmonetary economy deeply embedded in micro-level social structures. It also implies that we need to go beyond the legal/illegal, licit/illicit binaries and, in particular, the argument that petty corruption serves as a survival strategy for ordinary citizens and low-level state officials. Second, the case study provides useful insights into the nitty-gritty of everyday life and social relations in Uzbek society, in which different social associations compete for status, power, influence, and privileges. Given that the abovementioned kinship groups and their status-based interactions form part of the institutionalized

practices embedded within everyday life and social relationships, it is not appropriate to label them as instances of corruption or as a cancer that need to be eradicated. These kinship-based practices need to be situated in a broader socio-legal context, because they are not merely spontaneous actions on the part of the participants; they also represent the institutionalized social practices or living law that are part and parcel of everyday life. Perceiving these practices as corrupt and then attacking them risks undermining the basic social fabric (the living law) of society, and possibly eroding social solidarity and stability. Thus, the study of corruption should be sensitive to the inner orders of these micro-level social associations.

8. Concluding Remarks on Social Associations, Living Law, and the Nonmonetary Economy

I have argued that informal or illegal practices (corruption, from a legal standpoint) not only mirror kleptocracy, individual greed or survival strategies, but also reflect society's informal norms and nonmonetary currencies such as respect, prestige, social status, solidarity, trust and kinship norms that constitute the basic social fabric or living law of society. As such, I have challenged the usefulness of economic-based or legal-centralistic approaches to combating corruption in a given context in comparison to approaches that consider the role of informal norms and noneconomic motivations. These questions were explored in the post-Soviet context, drawing on extensive (socio-legal) ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Uzbek part of the Fergana valley between 2009 and 2018. Accordingly, my findings can be summarized in the following three main points.

First, the role and image of the state (and its legal system) need to be considered when analyzing the meaning and morality of “corrupt practices” in places such as Uzbekistan, where society consists of numerous social associations, the state being only one of them. The state is rarely the only actor in society and faces enormous resistance from other (informal) social associations (e.g., mahalla) in implementing its policies and laws. These associations interact and struggle with one another over material and nonmaterial issues, attempting to impose their own norms and symbols on everyday social relations. Even though the state in Uzbekistan may appear to be omnipotent due to its infrastructural and coercive capacity, as my results show, it has very little meaning in everyday life at the local level. Observing local-level interactions in Uzbekistan makes it difficult to experience the state or its laws as an ontically coherent entity. What we see instead is an enormous degree

of informal exchange of money, material goods, and services that is carried out through uncodified but socially reproduced informal rules—the living law. The value system enshrined in the Uzbek legal system has not been internalized; it is external to the everyday legal order I observed in Shabboda. The more the focus moves from Western-centric perspectives to ethnographic (contextual) analyses of everyday life and socioeconomic conditions, the more discernible it becomes that informal transactions may also be driven by noneconomic motivations that allow people to build personal, social, and professional relationships. The case studies reveal that informal or illegal practices reflect not only kleptocracy, individual greed, economic interests, or survival strategies but also the social norms generated through kinship, social status, hierarchies, affection, reciprocity, and reputation. When these micro-level structures are perceived as corrupt and battled, the risk is that the living law of society may become weakened and distorted, which in turn can lead to social instability. Any anti-corruption strategies should be built on a deep knowledge of social norms and local context.

Second, this study contributes empirical evidence to the growing anthropological literature on the role of (corruption) narratives and everyday practices in the constitution of states (Gupta 1995, 2005, Sharma and Gupta 2009), revealing society's informal norms, nonmonetary currencies, and micro-level power relationships to be an everyday legal order that promotes alternative (to state law) versions of how people should behave. My findings show that everyday discourse on corruption is a key lens through which the notion of the state is imagined, reconstructed, and enacted in Uzbekistan. In line with Gupta (2005), I argue that anti-corruption agencies need to think not only about incentivizing state officials so that they are not tempted to use their office for private gain but also about altering the corruption narratives through which the state is constructed. If we extend Gupta's advice to a socio-legal field, anti-corruption is also about changing the living law in the micro-level arenas in which the rights and wrongs of everyday social behavior are determined.

Third, by emphasizing the existence of noneconomic and nonmonetary motivations to engage in informal practices, I have further attempted to bring corruption beyond the explanations of kleptocracy, dysfunctional institutions, dishonest officials, or survival. My study contributes additional empirical evidence to previous research and shows that informal transactions ("corruption," from a legal standpoint) are a means of gaining social status (Pardo 1996), a way of life (De Sardan 1999), a means of socialization (Rivkin-Fish

2005), and create dependencies and debts that may build a lifelong bond (White 1994). As such, I challenge the usefulness of economic-based or normative approaches to combating corruption in a given context, in contrast to approaches that consider the role of social norms and solidarity. Some choose to engage in informal practices not only to satisfy their economic needs but also to obtain more prestige or moral and affective support from those around them.

The intrinsic message of this study is that any measures adopted to combat corruption should go beyond a merely economic view (the abuse of public office for private gain) and that, to convince people to act within the realms of state law, a structure should be put into place that both replaces economic opportunity and reduces the gap between state law and living law.

Note on Transliteration

Throughout the paper, Uzbek and Russian words are spelled according to the standard literary form. Their use is based on the following two criteria: (1) whether an Uzbek or Russian word or phenomenon is central to the study; (2) if an English translation does not fully capture the meaning of the Uzbek/Russian word or phenomenon. Uzbek and Russian words are presented in italics on first mention.

References

- Acemoglu, D., and Verdier, T. 2000. The choice between market failures and corruption. *American Economic Review* 90(1):194–211.
- Banakar, R. 2008. The politics of legal cultures. *Scandinavian Studies in Law* 4(23):151–175.
- Blundo, G. 2007. Hidden acts, open talks. How anthropology can “observe” and describe corruption. In M. Nuijten and G. Anders (Eds.), *Corruption and the Secret of Law: A Legal Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 27–52). New York: Routledge.
- Blundo, G., and Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. 2013. *Everyday Corruption and the State: Citizens and Public Officials in Africa*. London: Zed Books.
- Buckley, N. February 13, 2018. Once-repressive Uzbekistan begins a post-Karimov opening. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/6c37419c-0cbf-11e8-8eb7-42f857ea9f09>, accessed May 19, 2018.
- Collins, K. 2006. *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Della Porta, D., and Vannucci, A. 1999. *Corrupt Exchanges: Actors, Resources, and Mechanisms of Political Corruption*. New York: De Gruyter.
- Ehrlich, E. 1912. Das lebende Recht der Völker der Bukowina.” In M. Rehbinder (Ed.), *Eugen Ehrlich, Recht und Leben* (pp. 43–60). Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Ergashev, B., Iusupov, I., Pogrebniak, A., Korenev, I., Allaev, B., Gaibullaev, O., Usmanov, S., Gasanova, N., and Saifulin, R. 2006. Public administration reform in Uzbekistan. *Problems of Economic Transition* 48(12):32–82.
- Fumagalli, M. 2007. Introduction: Stability, sovereignty, and the resilience of politics under authoritarian rule. *Central Asian Survey* 26(1):1–6.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2006. *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2008. Diverse economies: performative practices for “other worlds.” *Progress in Human Geography* 32(5):613–632.
- Gleason, G. 1995. Corruption, decolonization and development in Central Asia. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 3(2):38–47.
- Gong, T., and Xiao, H. 2017. Socially embedded anti-corruption governance: Evidence from Hong Kong. *Public Administration and Development* 37(3):176–190.
- Griffiths, J. 1986. What is legal pluralism? *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 24:1–56.
- Griffiths, J. 2003. The social working of legal rules. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 35(48):1–84.
- Gupta, A. 1995. Blurred boundaries: The discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state. *American Ethnologist* 22(2):375–402.
- Gupta, A. 2005. Narrating the state of corruption. In D. Haller and C. Shore (Eds.), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 173–193). Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Haller, D., and Shore, C., Eds. 2005. *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*. Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Harrison, G. 1999. Corruption, development theory and the boundaries of social change. *Contemporary Politics* 5(3):207–220.
- Hasty, J. 2005. The pleasures of corruption: Desire and discipline in Ghanaian political culture. *Cultural Anthropology* 20(2):271–301.
- Heidenheimer, A. J., and Johnston, M. 2011. *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Heidenheimer, A. J., Johnston, M., and LeVine, V. T. 1989. *Political Corruption: A Handbook*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Humphrey, C. 2012. Favors and “normal heroes”: The case of postsocialist higher education. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(2):22–41.
- Humphrey, C., and Sneath, D. 2004. Shanghaied by the bureaucracy: Bribery and post-Soviet officialdom in Russia and Mongolia. In I. Pardo (Ed.), *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology, and Comparative Society* (pp. 85–99). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Huntington, S. P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hyden, G. 2006. *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Ilkhamov, A. 2007. Neopatrimonialism, interest groups and patronage networks: The impasses of the governance system in Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey* 26(1):65–84.
- Ilkhamov, A. 2013. Labour migration and the ritual economy of the Uzbek extended family. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 138(2):259–284.
- International Monetary Fund. 2012. *Republic of Uzbekistan and the IMF*. International Monetary Fund.
- Johnson, M. 2005. *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power, and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kandiyoti, D. 1998. Rural livelihoods and social networks in Uzbekistan: Perspectives from Andijan. *Central Asian Survey* 17(4):561–578.
- Kandiyoti, D. 2007. Post-Soviet institutional design and the paradoxes of the Uzbek path. *Central Asian Survey* 26(1):31–48.
- Kaufmann, D. 1998. Research on corruption: Critical empirical issues. In A. K. Jain (Ed.), *Economics of Corruption* (pp. 129–176). New York: Springer.
- Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., and Mastruzzi, M. 2011. The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and analytical issues. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 3(2):220–246.
- Khalid, A. 2003. A secular Islam: Nation, state, and religion in Uzbekistan. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35(4):573–598.
- Kubicek, P. 1998. Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or cure? *Third World Quarterly* 19(1):29–43.
- Langbein, L., and Knack, S. 2010. The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Six, one, or none? *The Journal of Development Studies* 46(2):350–370.
- Lazar, S. 2005. Citizens despite the state: Everyday corruption and local politics in El Alto, Bolivia.” In D. Haller and C. Shore (Eds.), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 212–228). Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Ledeneva, A. V. 2013. *Can Russia Modernize?: Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leff, N. H. 1964. Economic development through bureaucratic corruption. *American Behavioral Scientist* 8(3):8–14.
- Lewis, D. G. 2016. *Tackling Corruption in Uzbekistan: A White Paper*. New York: Open Society Foundations.
- Leys, C. 1965. What is the problem about corruption? *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3(2):215–230.
- Lomnitz, C. 1995. Ritual, rumor and corruption in the constitution of polity in modern Mexico.” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 1(1):20–47.
- Luong, P. J. 2004. *The Transformation of Central Asia. States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Markowitz, L. P. 2008. Local elites, procurators and extraction in rural Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey* 27(1):1–14.
- Merry, S. E., 1988. Legal pluralism. *Law & Society Review* 22(5):869–896.
- Minoo, A. 2017. Social mechanisms of the counterpublic sphere: A case of a coffee farmers’ cooperative in LAO PDR. In A. Polese, C. C. Williams, I. A. Horodnic, and P. Bejakovic (Eds.), *The Informal Economy in Global Perspective* (pp. 255–276). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moore, S. F. 1973. Law and social change: The semi-autonomous social field as an appropriate subject of study. *Law & Society Review* 7(4):719–746.
- Morris, J., and Polese, A. 2014. Informal health and education sector payments in Russian and Ukrainian cities: Structuring welfare from below. *European Urban and Regional Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776414522081>.
- Nuijten, M. 2003. *Power, Community, and the State: The Political Anthropology of Organization in Mexico*. London: Pluto Press.
- Nuijten, M. 2004. Between fear and fantasy: Governmentality and the working of power in Mexico. *Critique of Anthropology* 24(2):209–230.
- Nuijten, M., and Anders, G. 2007. *Corruption and the Secret of Law: A Legal Anthropological Perspective*. Farnham: Ashgate.

- Nye, J.S. 2002. Corruption and political development: A cost-benefit analysis. In A. J. Heidenheimer and M. Johnston (Eds.), *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts* (pp. 281–300). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. 1999. A moral economy of corruption in Africa? *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37(1):25–52.
- Pani, N. 2016. Historical insights into modern corruption: Descriptive moralities and cooperative corruption in an Indian city. *Griffith Law Review* 25(2):245–261.
- Pardo, I. 1996. *Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action, and Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Parry, J., and Bloch, M. 1989. *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pashkun, D. 2003. *Structure and Practice of the State Administration in Uzbekistan*. Discussion Paper No. 27. Budapest: Open Society Institute.
- Perlman, B.J., and Gleason, G. 2007. Cultural determinism versus administrative logic: Asian values and administrative reform in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. *International Journal of Public Administration* 30(12–14):1327–1342.
- Pirie, F. 2006. Legal complexity on the Tibetan plateau. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 38(53–54):77–99.
- Polese, A. 2008. 'If I receive it, it is a gift; if I demand it, then it is a bribe': On the local meaning of economic transactions in post-Soviet Ukraine. *Anthropology in Action* 15(3):47–60.
- Poliakov, S. 1992. *Everyday Islam: Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia*. New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Rasanayagam, J. 2011. Informal economy, informal state: The case of Uzbekistan. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 31(11/12):681–696.
- Rivkin-Fish, M. 2005. Bribes, gifts and unofficial payments: Rethinking corruption in post-Soviet Russian health care. In D. Haller and C. Shore (Eds.), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 47–64). Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Roberts, S. 2005. After government? On representing law without the state. *The Modern Law Review* 68(1):1–24.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. 1999. *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rothstein, B. 2011. *The Quality of Government: Corruption, Social Trust, and Inequality in International Perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ruziev, K., Ghosh, D., and Dow, S. C. 2007. The Uzbek puzzle revisited: An analysis of economic performance in Uzbekistan since 1991. *Central Asian Survey* 26(1):7–30.
- Sampson, S. 2005. Integrity warriors: Global morality and the anti-corruption movement in the Balkans. In D. Haller and C. Shore (Eds.), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 103–130). Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Scott, J. C. 1972. *Comparative Political Corruption*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Sharma, A., and Gupta, A., Eds. 2009. *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Shore, C. 2005. Culture and corruption in the EU: Reflections on fraud, nepotism, and cronyism in the European Commission. In D. Haller and C. Shore (Eds.), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 131–155). Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Smart, A., and Hsu, C. L. 2007. Corruption or social capital? Tact and the performance of guanxi in market socialist China. In D. Haller and C. Shore (Eds.), *Corruption and the Secret of Law: A Legal Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 167–190). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Sneath, D. 2002. Reciprocity and notions of corruption in contemporary Mongolia. *Mongolian Studies* 25:85–99.
- Spoor, M. 1995. Agrarian transition in former Soviet Central Asia: A comparative study of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 23(1):46–63.
- Staples, J. 1993. Soviet use of corruption purges as a control mechanism: The Uzbekistan case. *Past Imperfect* 2:29–48.
- Sun, Y. 2004. *Corruption and Market in Contemporary China*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Taksanov, A. July 14, 2000. 'Tsentral'naya Aziya: Piramida Korruptsii Zdes' Prostoit Tysiacheletiya' (Central Asia: The pyramid of corruption will be standing there for ages). *Internet-Gazeta Navigator*.
- Tamanha, B. Z. 2000. A non-essentialist version of legal pluralism. *Journal of Law and Society* 27(2): 296–321.
- Thomas, N. 1991. *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Transparency International. 2007. *Global Corruption Report 2007: Corruption and Judicial Systems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Transparency International. 2017. Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017. Accessed December 5, 2018.
- Trevisani, T. 2007. After the kolkhoz: Rural elites in competition. *Central Asian Survey* 26(1):85–104.
- Urinboyev, R., and Polese, A. 2016. Informality currencies: A tale of Misha, his brigada and informal practices among Uzbek labour migrants in Russia. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 24(3):191–206.
- Urinboyev, R., and Svensson, M. 2013. Living law, legal pluralism, and corruption in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 45(3):372–390.
- Urinboyev, R. 2013. Living law and political stability in post-Soviet Central Asia. A case study of the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan. Ph.D. dissertation, Lund Studies in Sociology of Law. Lund University, Lund.
- Varese, F. 2001. *The Russian Mafia: Private Protection in a New Market Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von Benda-Beckmann, F. 2002. Who's afraid of legal pluralism? *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 34(47):37–82.
- von Benda-Beckmann, F., and von Benda-Beckmann, K. 1998. Where structures merge. State and off-state involvement in rural social security on Ambon, Eastern Indonesia. In S. Pannell and F. von Benda-Beckmann (Eds.), *Old World Places, New World Problems. Exploring Issues of Resource Management in Eastern Indonesia* (pp. 143–180). Canberra: Australian National University.
- Wanner, C. 2005. Money, morality and new forms of exchange in postsocialist Ukraine. *Ethnos* 70(4):515–537.
- Wegerich, K. 2006. 'A little help from my friend?' Analysis of network links on the meso level in Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey* 25(1–2):115–128.
- Werner, C. A. 2000. Gifts, bribes, and development in post-Soviet Kazakstan. *Human Organization* 59(1):11–22.
- White, J. B. 1994. *Money Makes Us Relatives: Women's Labor in Urban Turkey*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- World Bank. 2002. The new anticorruption home page. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/brief/anti-corruption>. Accessed June 19, 2017.
- World Bank. 2013. World Bank Governance Studies: Corruption. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/WBI/EXTWBIGOVANTCOR/0,,contentMDK:20725263~menuPK:1977002~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:1740530,00.html>. Accessed June 19, 2013.
- World Bank. 2014. *Worldwide Governance Indicators: Uzbekistan*. Washington, DC.