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Political vs Everyday Forms of Governance in Uzbekistan: the Illegal, Immoral and Illegitimate Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Rustamjon Urinboyev*, Abel Polese, Mans Svensson, Laura Adams & Tanel Kerikmäe

Abstract

Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Uzbekistan, this article looks at the way official state narratives are challenged by silent, unorganised, often unaware gestures of resistance at the bottom of a society. Footing on a framework suggested by Scott's definition of infrapolitics (2012), we propose to incorporate informal practices in a definition of informality that is more inclusive and better explains the anatomy of a modern state, whose functioning rests on a combination of formal and informal practices. We suggest that this everyday dimension is of particular importance here when trying to understand the governance trajectories, as it allows to look critically, and from a broader perspective, at situations where individual and state perception of events, but also individual and state morality, diverge.

By doing this, we propose that governance in transition states and societies may be regarded as a space where formal institutions and citizens (or informal institutions) compete for power and resources and thereby produce informal, alternative 'legal orders' and mechanisms that regulate public life in a given area. We will suggest that such a space of informal negotiation is vital in contexts where collective mobilisation and public articulation of social claims is not a preferred, or even available, strategy for citizens.

Key words: Central Asia, everyday, governance, informality, Uzbekistan.

Introduction: the art of not claiming your rights

In May 2009, the taxi in which two of the authors of this paper were travelling from Tashkent to the Ferghana Valley, in eastern Uzbekistan, was stopped by the traffic police for a document check. While this might sound relatively commonplace in our world, the situation is noteworthy for its genesis and epilogue. First, in contrast to what common sense would suggest, the car was allegedly stopped because one of the authors had his seatbelt fastened. Seatbelts were made compulsory only in 2010 so, in the words of the driver, "wearing a belt was a sign that a (rich) foreigner was sitting in the car," and would thus attract the attention of some hungry traffic policemen. This was even more likely because the car was riding through the *Kamchik* pass that, being the only entry point into Fergana, was highly surveilled. Second, the policeman asked to open the car's trunk to check its content but, once made aware that the foreigner wanted to be present at the check, he got inhibited and gave up the check. He asked the driver to follow him instead for a private discussion on the car's documents, and upon return the driver angrily reported to have had to pay about the equivalent of 7 euros for this "lack of respect" by the foreigner. By demanding to be present during the luggage check, the foreigner *de facto* challenged the undiscussed authority of the Uzbek policemen, who then decided to retaliate by issuing a fine to the driver who was driving that very foreigner.

The situation would fit well Alice in Wonderland: if not wearing a seatbelt will keep you clear of troubles, then exerting your rights to be present when your luggage is checked will land you in trouble. This situation is not uncommon in transition states and societies like Uzbekistan, and in

the post-Soviet world in general, and this informs the two areas of research this article engages with. The first, rooted in legal and economic studies of corruption, has examined the relationship between corruption and state failure in one or more spheres of management (Acemoglu & Verdier, 2000; Banerjee, Benabou, Mookherjee, & Laffont, 2006; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999; Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2011; Kerikmäe & Särav, 2015; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Critiques of the standpoint above have suggested this is linked to a renewed 'moralism' in political economy (Kotkin & Sajo, 2002, p. 26) and have inspired a thick analysis of "corrupted" practices and situations leading to the contextualisation of a given transaction within a ritual form and the emotional valence of the transaction (e.g. propriety vs. humiliation) (Gupta, 2005; Haller & Shore, 2005; Polese, 2008; Rivkin-Fish, 2005; Urinboyev & Svensson, 2013b; Werner, 2000). Indeed, the uncritical use of the World Bank's definition, "the abuse of a public function for a private advantage," has pushed scholars and definitions into a slippery territory. Elaborations of this definition have gone as far as to deny the Maussian definition of a gift and *de facto* invade the competencies of reciprocity and social interaction studies. In response, an emerging streaming of research has attempted a conceptualisation of informality that can help define a boundary between corrupted and non-corrupted practices. The starting idea being that an informal is something concealed from the state (Routh, 2011) and corruption is only a sub-case (Polese & Stepurko, 2017). Indeed, the wide range of concealed practices can include extra-legal (De Soto, 2003) or socially accepted practices (Granovetter, 1984) that are tacitly accepted or at least not punished by the authorities.

This article is a further study in this direction. Starting from the above debates, it is intended to contribute to understanding the governance processes in transition states and societies through focusing on informal everyday practices and sites where state officials and citizens come into contact on a daily basis. We are inspired by recent findings in what has been called "the everyday dimension" (Edensor, 2002; Fox, 2017; Skey, 2015) and encompasses daily and 'banal' (Billig, 1995) practices of resistance and renegotiation of state and top actors' political measures (Scott, 1985, 2012). By looking at the way official state narratives are challenged by silent, unorganised, often unawares, gestures of resistance at the bottom of a society, we look at the political side of these activities. Footing on a framework suggested by Scott's definition of infrapolitics (2012), we propose to incorporate informal practices in a definition of informality that is more inclusive and better explains the anatomy of a modern state, whose functioning rests on a combination of formal and informal practices (Morris, forthcoming).

By doing this, we suggest that governance in transition states and societies may be regarded as a space where formal institutions and citizens (or informal institutions) compete for power and resources and thereby produce informal, alternative 'legal orders' and mechanisms that regulate public life in a given area. We will suggest that such a space of informal negotiation is vital in contexts where collective mobilisation and public articulation of social claims is not a preferred, or even available, strategy for citizens. This is ultimately connected with our understanding of everyday forms of governance that are a meaningful and useful site for understanding socio-political developments in the process of the construction of the governance system, a system that cannot be limited to what is formally the political sphere but touches a large spectrum of behaviours and situations that are not always acknowledged (Navaro-Yashin, 2002). The everyday dimension is of particular importance here when trying to understand the governance trajectories, as it allows to look critically, and from a broader perspective, at situations where individual and state perception of events, but also individual and state morality, diverge.

Methodology

This paper is based on extensive ethnographic field research conducted between 2009 and 2017 in Tashkent city and the Fergana region of Uzbekistan for a total of fifteen months. The field sites were chosen based on contacts and social networks available to the authors. During these field trips, ethnographic material was collected mainly through participant observation and informal interviews both in the city of Tashkent and in the Ferghana region. Our field site Oqtepa[1], where

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1   The name of the *mahalla* has been changed to protect the anonymity of our informants.

we conducted observations is one of the mahallas (neighborhood community) in the Shabboda village in rural Ferghana and has a population of more than 2,000 people. We regularly visited the mahalla's 'gossip hotspots', such as *guzar* (a community meeting space) and *choyxona* (a teahouse), weddings, childbirth, circumcision ceremonies and funerals and monthly get-together events (*gap*), where most residents come together and exchange information on a daily basis. Most of the residents in this mahalla were *dehqonlar* (farmers) involved in cucumber and grape production. However, due to our research focus, we were particularly interested in two mahalla residents Sardor and Rahmon, who were both state officials and the centre of 'everyday mahalla talk'.

The starting hypothesis was that the way the state is lived at the everyday level is different from the way it is perceived in official documents. In particular, we were interested in exploring the role of the state in everyday life and people's perception of good governance. We looked at, *inter alia*, the way ordinary people talked about and lived the role of state. This was done in order to grasp to what extent people were willing or likely to conform to laws when dealing with state officials, and how people think about the proper social behaviour and law. Our material has informed the preparation of several other studies (Adams, Svensson, & Urinboyev, 2018; Urinboyev, 2011b, 2011a, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Urinboyev & Polese, 2016; Urinboyev & Svensson, 2013b, 2013a, 2014, 2017) that have been used also to triangulate the presented data and in the interpretation of the evidence presented in the next sections. For this specific paper, in addition to several ethnographic vignettes, we present some examples of most relevant observations and two interviews that focus on informal practices in two state institutions: (1) the practice of traffic safety enforcement; and (2) the practice of maternity services. The first interview is centred around Ahmet, a traffic policeman, and the second focuses on Umida, a midwife at maternity hospital in Ferghana. These two key informants were selected on the basis of their daily involvement with the law, knowledge, willingness, and communicability. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the informants' status, location, and time available. Safety precautions both for researchers and informants forced us to avoid all types of apparent documentation methods, such as recording and taking notes. Instead, immediately following an interview, we wrote down our recollections. To protect the anonymity of our informants, their names have been changed.

Between "good" and "bad" governance: introducing the everyday

Governance debates have preoccupied scholars from a variety of disciplines and as high profile as Francis Fukayama (Fukuyama, 2012a), who defines it at the most basic level as the "government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services," and "about the performance of agents in carrying out the wishes of principals, and not about the goals that principals set." This, in some respects, may be regarded as one of the basic conditions for democratic consolidation in a country. It is indeed by asking whether good governance can lead to democracy and executive constraint by rule of law (rather than the other way around) that Fukuyama turns the first set of criteria most international organisations use when talking about comparative governance issues on its head, questioning the causal relationships between these various elements. In turn, this inspired our question about whether good governance reforms in a country such as Uzbekistan can productively precede democracy.

Stemming from the above definition, good governance can be regarded as relative to state capacity, relevant to public administration structures as opposed to politics and policies. It entails, in other words, a focus on output measures with no assessment on the policy goals that the government is pursuing. Fukuyama's approach also follows the good advice to disaggregate the state, acknowledging that some state entities will be more efficacious than others, and that states vary across regions, especially across the urban and rural divide. However, although Fukyama's notion of governance provides useful insights when measuring the state capacity, it is limited in its capacity to provide a clear understanding of the country and of other similar cases worldwide. Attempts to use existing theoretical tools to conceptualise alternative forms of governance have passed through an examination of paradigms engaging with failed states and limited statehood (Risse, 2012). Uzbekistan, nonetheless, can hardly be considered as fitting this framework. Even if not fully in control of all levels of political governance, in contrast to a number of other cases,

the Uzbek state has retained control and governance capacity in a number of cases, with full control of institutions and domestic and national sovereignty. In other words, the Uzbek state is certainly a powerful actor when it comes to using coercion and preventing political instability, but it is weak in terms of enforcing 'rule of law' and service delivery. These are usually phenomena associated with democratic developments of a country. In spite of attempts to look for the roots of good governance in the level of democracy present in a country, governance and democracy are not necessarily correlated. Indeed, not only are some authoritarian states remarkably well governed (see China in Fukyama's example, 2012b), but state performance at the parliamentary level can actually find corrupted or non-transparent practices beneficial. Resting on a number of traditional ultra-liberal and new institutionalist arguments (De Soto, 2003; Leff, 1964), this has been empirically demonstrated in post-Soviet spaces, where blackmailing states have been performing relatively well compared to other cases of the world (Darden, 2008).

Engaging with alternative definitions of governance and its perception (Polese, Rekhviashvili, Kovács, & Morris, 2017), a different standpoint can be adopted. For one thing, the World Bank has defined governance as the mixture of traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised (World Bank, 2018). This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2004). However, in contrast with Fukuyama's definition, it leaves room for the use and agency of informal governance actors. This is not a minor approach linked to practices of development. A growing body of literature has been engaging with the concept, demonstrating the relevance of the concept not only in practice, but in theory, and its usefulness to understanding not only local but global mechanisms of governance (Christiansen, Føllesdal, & Piattoni, 2003; Peters, 2007; Puetter, 2013). The rise of new informal governance mechanisms can also be observed on a global level, where the states increasingly rely on informal practices and arrangements to govern global policy issues (Bueger, 2015). This is due to the fact that formal rules are often inadequate and insufficient when dealing with the complex and dynamic issues and challenges of global politics that require innovative solutions and coordination. Recent works have started to explore informal governance as a mode of international cooperation, arguing that governance relies not only on formal rules and institutions but to a significant degree also on informal practices and arrangements (Christiansen & Neuhold, 2012; Stone, 2009; Westerwinter, 2016).

Starting from an understanding of governance that includes also non-state actors and takes into account the relationship between a state and its citizens, not only its coercive capacity, we can attempt to create a framework that goes beyond the conventional definitions of governance and thereby employ additional tools and concepts if we are to better understand the local dynamics and governance trajectories in Uzbekistan. A concept that thus could better fit our aims is 'good enough governance', forwarded by Merilee S. Grindle in the context of development assistance, and rediscovered in the context of failed U.S. programs to promote democracy abroad (Grindle, 2011; Krasner, 2013). In particular, Krasner argues that a well-functioning democracy is hard to maintain and exceptionally difficult to promote from outside, and a more effective way to promote long-term freedoms is 'to improve the prospects for security and economic growth in the short run — rather than pressing for direct democratic reforms' (Krasner, 2013). Elections may make things worse in terms of prosperity and freedom, and Krasner argues that U.S. policy has been aiming at the wrong target in pushing countries like Iraq and Afghanistan toward consolidated democracy. Instead, Krasner argues that we should start thinking in terms of 'good enough governance', which consists of a state being able to provide for the physical integrity of its citizens (but not their more broadly defined human rights) as well as providing some basic public services, especially in the area of health; to provide public order including a norm of property rights, and some degree of security from transnational threats; to constrain corruption and provide some form of checks on the arbitrary power of the state through media or civil society; and since free and fair elections can produce instability and trigger violence, elections 'would only be useful *if* they ratified and legitimated agreements that had been reached *ex ante* among political leaders with regard to control over security forces and the distribution of spoils' (Krasner, 2013).

As a further help, informality can be used as a further theoretical tool to understand how alternative forms of governance work. Defined as an aggregate of practices, norms and exchanges that take place beyond formal/state regulation (Ledeneva, 2006; Polese, Morris, & Kovács, 2015; Routh, 2011), informality is a phenomenon that has left the economic sphere of life of a state to be considered part of governance (Polese et al., 2015). Informal practices can, indeed, develop in a way to complement or supplement the state (Morris, 2011; Morris & Polese, 2013; Polese, Kovács, & Jancsics, 2018; Polese, Rekhviashvili, & Morris, 2016) in one or more of its functions, as shown in the scheme below.
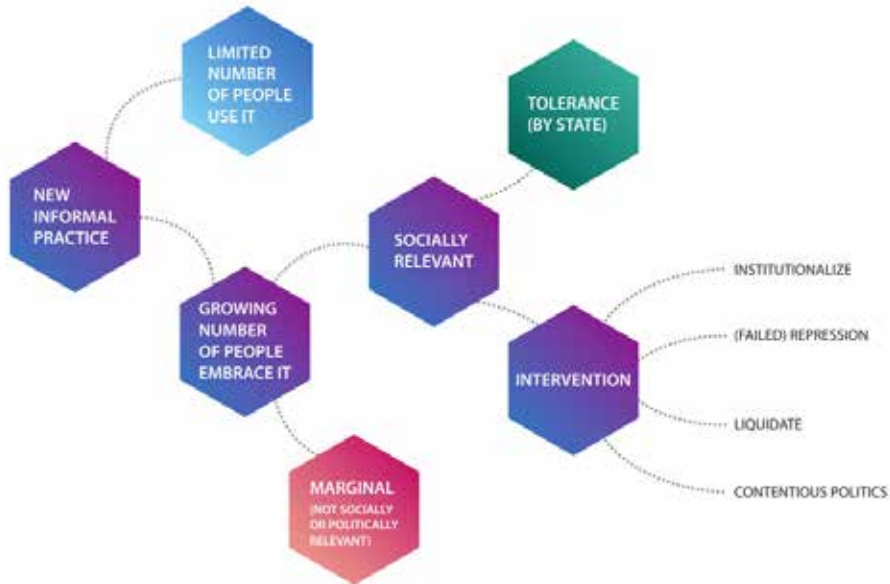

Figure 1: Evolution of informal practices

Source: Polese, 2016

Across regions, the concept of informal governance has been evoked by a variety of scholars and in a variety of meanings. For this article, we use Ledeneva's (2013) understanding of informal governance that can be regarded as intertwined with policy making mechanisms within a state. In line with what Scott calls infrapolitics (2012), we see informal actions, performed at the everyday level by ordinary citizens, as ultimately affecting the way policy measures become acceptable and accepted by a wider variety of actors. Empirical studies have suggested that everyday negotiations of policy measures have an effect beyond the initially-though micro one (see Scott, 1985), and that the agency of middle actors or ordinary people can substantially reshape the way political measures are implemented, mitigate state-led coercive means and eventually lead the state to either limit its sphere of influence or renegotiate its initial intentions (Kerikmäe, Nyman-Metcalf, & Papageorgiou, 2013; O'Beacháin, 2012; O'Beacháin & Kevlihan, 2013; Polese, 2010; Polese et al., 2017; Richardson, 2008; Troitino, 2013). Already Migdal demonstrated the way state and society are interrelated (2001), reproducing a mechanism that Giddens had attempted to define with his structuration theory (1984). Footing on these works, we propose here that people have a wide amount of tools and agency to renegotiate, reinterpret or even distort official political measures in a manner that allows governance to be contributed by grassroot and bottom actors. When bottom actors end up moving in the same direction and endorsing similar values, they can, formally or informally, engage with the production of the political (Kerikmäe et al., 2013; Navaro-Yashin, 2002;

Polese & Kevlihan, 2015). In other words, an informality framework can be used to identify, or at least acknowledge, spheres of life or areas of the state-society relationship where laws and rules are renegotiated by non-formalised actors. Informality thus becomes a space, in the geographical meaning of the term, where the encounter between citizens and state institutions generates an opportunity for informal governance to emerge (Polese, Urinboyev, Rekhviashvili, & Murray, 2018). The relatively large area, allowing resistance and renegotiation by individuals or communities, allows reorganisation of governance actors, practices and their results, proposing alternative models and dynamics that are central to the current article.

Places of resistance to state-led governance

Ledeneva understands "*sistema*" as the aggregate of informal practices, unwritten rules and personal relationships that can be used to manage governance of virtually all aspects of a state (Russia, in her case, 2013). In her view, the relationship between formal and informal actors, and transactions, can lead to an equilibrium with rules that are relatively stable and easy to understand to an insider. Eventually, this generates an alternative system of governance that, illogic or unintelligible to the casual observer, makes perfect sense to those who are embedded in it. The next two sections are an attempt at applying the *sistema* logic to our fieldwork and show the existence of parallel, or alternative (Wanner, 2005), moral orders and systems of references that, taken together, are useful to understanding how governance in Uzbekistan works. During fieldwork, a team including some of the authors of this paper happened to notice a few inconsistencies that are then reported and analysed before engaging with two of the interviews collected, which are reported in the next section.

Fieldwork notes

The first "incident" happened on the first day of the fieldwork, when after breakfast the team members happened to walk around *Alay*, a nearby bazaar, where they were approached by a group of money exchangers, who asked if they needed to buy Uzbek money. This is not unusual in the post-Soviet region, or even in the post-socialist one, and is usually used in two cases. One is to rip off foreigners and the other, more common, is a way to compete with the official exchange rate. In Uzbekistan, but also in Turkmenistan until a few years ago, the official exchange rate was utterly theoretical, meaning that it would be impossible to exchange currency at the official rate, set by the national central bank. The significant gap between how much local money should cost and how much it costs in reality, in addition to making local prices unbelievably high, creates an opportunity for whoever is able to establish a demand-supply chain and exchange at a rate higher than the one offered in local banks. What is surprising here to someone with experience in transitional countries, is that money from the black market was offered in spite of policemen widely present on the territory of the bazaar, who seemed uninterested in these kinds of illegal transactions.

This was not the only time the team encountered this kind of apparent contradiction. When going to official meetings with the administration of one of the universities in Tashkent, regular taxi services were used. Someone would call a number and the taxi would come shortly afterwards. Surprising was the situation where no taxis were available at a given moment, and the team went to the street in hopes of hailing a random taxi just driving around. Not only were they able to secure a car in the space of a minute, in fact, several cars with no taxi sign on the roof stopped to offer their services. Virtually anyone with a car is a potential taxi. They just need to stop and negotiate a price. This ultra-liberalisation of the taxi sector did not seem to interest the traffic police or any other police, who are supposed to take care of street codes or at least take an interest in shadow transactions. Not only has working as a taxi driver become a major source of self-employment in Tashkent and beyond, what is interesting is that these drivers interact with traffic policemen, who are fully aware of their informal job. Taxi drivers were often seen shaking hands with policemen, who could sometimes stop them for breaking traffic rules but rarely, if ever, for working illegally as drivers. Drivers generate income by working informally for people who need to be driven around. Policemen generate income by fining and receiving cash, when these drivers

break the street code.

The evident contradiction here is the conflict between an official state narrative, which designates the boundaries of legality and hires officers to enforce state rules. However, these officers do not seem interested in keeping the social and political order they are hired for. Not only do they go against the state, in that that they turn a blind eye when coming across transactions that, at least in theory, damage the state, and indirectly, its citizens, they actually ascribe to parallel or alternative moral orders (Stepurko, Pavlova, Gryga, & Groot, 2013; Wanner, 2005) that are apparently unintelligible to anyone external. Eventually, the divergence between legality and social acceptability goes as far as to define a different moral order. A member of the team met with Sardor, a high-level state official working as the deputy chief of Ferghana region police, and Rahmon, a district level traffic policeman (a low-level official). In spite of the first having a more prestigious position than the second, in everyday mahalla life Sardor was often described as a 'communist'. This is usually used in a negative shade to indicate law-abiding state officials, who do not share their political influence and resources with their kin and mahalla. As a high-level police official, Sardor had enormous power and he could easily divert the resources of the state to mahalla, but he always rejected the requests of the mahalla and asked them to solve their problems through formal channels. Because of his attempts to keep his public office separate from the private sphere, Sardor was regarded as a 'communist' in the words of many mahalla residents we encountered. On the other hand, 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 mahalla residents, for instance, by helping mahalla residents to avoid or manoeuvre around the state law. Rahmon was especially praised for his ability to act as a bridge between high level state officials and ordinary residents in terms of negotiating the amount of informal payment for jobs or university admission issues, and bending state laws to meet the interests of mahalla residents. Therefore, when invited to weddings, Rahmon was always offered the 'best table' and served more quickly than others. Thus, according to mahalla norms, Sardor was neither a good person nor a good state official due to his law-abiding behaviour and unwillingness to help the mahalla people, while Rahmon was the 'pride of mahalla' due to his sensitivity to the needs and concerns of the mahalla.

Most, not to say all, normative interpretations of the functioning of a state take as a starting position the fact that the state is more important than its citizens. It is up to the state to grant social cohesion, provide welfare, and security to its citizens and, therefore, individual welfare is not as important as the collective one stemming from the official state positions. A state is, however, peopled (Jones, 2011) and history has provided a large array of cases where projects by the state for its citizens have blatantly failed (Scott, 1986). It is, therefore, possible to assume that a state may be "wrong", that is one or more of its policies, designed for the greater welfare of its citizens, is not bringing substantial benefits in practice. This can be due to at least two reasons. One is that the policy is based on an inaccurate or inadequate assessment of a given situation and is, thus, addressing issues that will not necessarily mean the improvement of a given situation. The other one is that a policy, even it may be right in theory, fails in its practical implementation because middlemen officers fail to carry out the right measures. They could fail to understand the intentions and the priority areas of that policy (Morrison, 2007) or simply "boycott it", which is the case presented above and further developed in the narrative below.

Micro-forms of governance and the everyday

Ahmet is a policeman, who agreed to be interviewed and report his work routine, which is far from being simple. Policemen have to socially interact with hundreds of people daily and have no real working hours. To get a job with the police, informants reported that they had to pay an upfront payment of 6-7.000 USD to top officials of the traffic police. Ahmet also explained that although his official salary is around 900,000 som[2], (a bit more than 100 USD), he rarely sees more than 10% of the amount. To touch more than 100.000 som is virtually impossible, since money is hardly ever paid out. There is, however, a well-functioning "outsourcing" system based on perks. His

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2   *Som* is the national currency of Uzbekistan. 1 USD is equal to 8070 *som* (April 2018 exchange rate).

administration provides policemen with "traffic tickets" that have to be "sold" to drivers to earn their salary. In other words, this means that they have full liberty in deciding whom to fine and for how much, and most or all the money collected will count towards his salary. The most common infraction is to drive without wearing a seat belt, since this is visible even without checking the car's documents. However, technical checks are also popular and once the car is found to not meet safety standards, the driver will be fined 12,500 som. This, in practice, means that 70-80 tickets per month earn you as much as you are due by the government, who will turn a blind eye to how many tickets you issue and how much money you make in a given month. In a separate paper, it was suggested that this can be considered somehow useful to society. Policemen get a salary and they fine drivers who do not abide by the rules, so social order is maintained (Polese, 2008). However, a complication is introduced by the quotas demanded by traffic police line managers. As Ahmet reports, they get pressured to issue at least 20 tickets per day if they do not want their job to be on the line. At this pace, we are talking of 600 tickets per month, which is much higher than the amount needed to make a salary, so it is easy to imagine that line managers expect a kickback on the tickets issued every day. Besides, they are expected to issue 20 tickets regardless of whether drivers break traffic rules or not, which means in the long run to impose fines on diligent drivers. In addition, traffic policemen are also expected to pay directly a '*gruz*' (burden) between 50,000 and 100,000 soms to their line managers. At the end of the day, policemen are widely scorned in the country and considered highly corrupt, but in Ahmet's words:

"Ordinary people do not know about these problems and therefore hate us. It is politics. We cannot talk about these problems openly. I know many people look upon traffic police as the most corrupt profession in Uzbekistan. Since we do not receive any salary from the state for our work, the money we earn through selling tickets is completely legal. I am also an ordinary man, like everybody else; I have a family, kids to feed! Instead of giving salary, our bosses force us to earn our salary through selling tickets to drivers. So tell me, how should I feed my kids when the state does not pay me any salary? Were I on a standard payroll, I would not bother selling tickets to law-abiding drivers."

The register used to define transactions is interesting to our reflections. When describing his informal practices, the traffic policeman tends to use the expression 'selling tickets to drivers' rather than saying 'imposing a fine on drivers.' This shows that the work ethics of a traffic policeman is guided by unwritten rules. In addition, his perception of morality did not seem to take into account the fact that imposing and pocketing fines was somehow illegal, at least normatively. Rather than "objective" morality, we could discuss here the perceptions of morality (Gill, 1998; Wanner, 2005; Werner, 2000) in two specific contexts. One is when certain actions, considered illegal by state morality, help a citizen survive (Blundo & De Sardan, 2013; Jávor & Jancsics, 2016; Rasanayagam, 2011; Round, Williams, & Rodgers, 2008; Urinboyev & Svensson, 2013b) and the other, stemming directly from this, is the case when individual and state morality do not overlap. Our interview illustrates that informal practices may have different meanings and logic within different levels of society. For instance, the elite level corruption, rent-seeking, and 'clan struggles' described by scholars such as Ilkhamov (Ilkhamov, 2004) and Collins (Collins, 2006) are not the same as the everyday 'getting things done' practices of low-level traffic policemen that recall the difference between "what I need" and "what I want". Ledeneva warned that this boundary is fluid and that better salaries, usually the first solution imagined by international organisations, do not necessarily help in this case. However, an income that is considered too low can land you in a situation of ineffectiveness, where a state cannot impose its moral standards since it does not function, in fact, as a state (Polese, 2014).

Governance of the health sector

A second informant, whom we will call Umida, reported a similar attitude from a different environment. In a similar fashion, she tended to justify what people perceived as "corrupt" practices by the fact that ordinary citizens failed to understand the complexity of the system they were part of. In her view, most of the shortcomings of the system were ascribable to the state or "the system" (possibly what Ledeneva called *sistema*). She recalled the Soviet period as a moment when the state provided everything for hospitals, and physicians received a good salary. However, after independence the state significantly decreased financing for hospitals, equipment became

scarce, hospitals were overcrowded, electricity and gas cuts became common and, eventually, it all collapsed. Although a number of researchers might not agree with this idyllic view on the lack of informality during Soviet times (Critchlow, 1988; Grossman, 1977, 1989; Treml & Alexeev, 1994), it is possible that the situation has worsened after the collapse of the USSR. Umida mentioned that, given that all maternity hospitals are state-owned in Uzbekistan, giving birth should be free of charge, but it is rarely the case, and most people pay for maternity services. Money is passed through handshakes, slipped into a pocket or left on the table, but it is rarely called anything other than "*suyunchi*" (literally 'joy' in English), where the father or relatives of the new born baby give cash (or sometimes expensive gifts) to the midwife and nurses who deliver the baby. Usually it is in the range of 50,000-100.000 som for easier cases and can get up to 500,000 som for birth complications. Her perception is that:

"I know my actions are illegal according to law, but real life circumstances force me to accept *suyunchi* from patients. Law and real life are completely different things. You will understand what I mean after I explain my work conditions. First, it is very difficult to get a job at a maternity hospital. For instance, if you want to work as a nurse at our hospital, you must pay a bribe of at least 500 USD to top health officials. Second, our salaries are extremely low. A midwife's monthly salary is 800,000 som, around 100 USD, and a nurse's salary is 550,000 som (65 USD). Isn't it frustrating when you pay a 500 USD bribe in order to get a job with a 100 USD salary? Our salary is very low, but I have to feed my kids. I studied for seven years to become a midwife, but I do not receive a high enough salary to live on from the state. Due to my good education, I believe I should earn more money than people who sell potatoes at the bazaar."

She goes on explaining that she finds prices extremely high even at the local bazaar, where meat costs around 35,000 som per kilo and a sack of flour is about 80,000 som. She also regularly needs to buy clothes for her kids, so her official salary (800,000 som) is hardly sufficient to survive a few days. Her argument is not too distant from what, in similar settings, has been used to justify the fact that public workers are not public workers all the time but only for the corresponding part of their salary and with the moral manipulation suggested by a colleague that a voluntary bribe is more a gift (see Polese, 2008, 2014):

"Since the state does not reward me properly, I have the full right to supplement my salary through *suyunchi*. I do not force anyone to give *suyunchi*, but people themselves voluntarily reward me. This is the only way to feed my kids and I do not see any other alternatives. I will not be able to feed my kids if I follow the law. Therefore, it is quite understandable that we expect people to reward us for our efforts."

Trying to make sense of the complicate web of relationship, we can start from street level bureaucrats who, *de facto*, bring harm to the state with their attitude and behaviour. They hijack money from ordinary citizens directly into their pockets, bringing harm to the society, and they fail to declare their income, which takes away from state revenues. They are not alone in this. At a higher level of the scale, not only their managers do not seem to worry about their behaviour, they actually encourage it and benefit from it, fostering the harm to the society, to the state and weakening the perception of the state among citizens. From its side, the state does not really struggle to regain symbolic power, authority or any respect from its citizens. But who is the state? A state and its institutions are a theoretical entity that works only thanks to the work and agency of people working in it, and it is united by the idea and ideology that they contribute to something bigger than their own welfare. If we take the definition of governance involving traditions and institutions by which authority is exercised, we can easily consider both formal and informal attitudes and practices as being part of it. In fact, the way state officials at various levels interact and interpret formal rules can be considered governance or a better a form of governance. True, it has little in common with the way governance is conceived of in a number of countries, where it is considered effective. But it is also true that this is the way it is and that, as anarchy is what people make of it (Wendt, 1999), also the state is what people make of it.

We agree that a state that pays salaries sufficient to subsistence and where civil servants feel little pressure to "outsource" payments, by burdening other citizens with traffic tickets or other tools, sounds more solid than the one described above. However, the question is where should such a transformation start? In figure 1, we have shown that a state can actually purchase a

given practice. Not long ago, some research on informal payments in health institutions suggested that these payments make the health sector *de facto* private (Polese, 2006a, 2006b). In fact, this is not too distant from the situation where in countries like Australia going with a private insurance allows you to be received when you want by the doctor of your choice (Polese 2014), whereas public insurance gives you little rights. The boundary between legal and illegal is defined by normative criteria that change across time and space. Likewise, welfare and good living for citizens are defined according to normative standards that sometimes are simply not applicable to a given situation. What should be one's attitude once this is faced? Deny the whole system of inter-relations or try to make sense of it and propose it as an alternative? We are aware that this does not answer questions but rather introduces new ones. However, our goal here was to show that governance is constructed by bottom actors as much as by top ones (cf. Morris, forthcoming, on deregulation by street-level bureaucrats) and that good governance is not necessarily an objective concept.

Conclusion

To what extent are the stories of midwife and traffic policeman comparable? The professional sphere, amounts of informal payments, ways of bending law, and other details may vary, but both stories reveal the existence of informal, alternative (to the state) governance system that emerge in the course of everyday life, as state officials and citizens engage in transactions of one sort or another, navigating the particular constraints, risks, loopholes or possibilities when getting the things done, securing the basic needs or in the encounters that a taxi driver negotiates with traffic policemen on the amount of bribes. Our study in this sense show that the everyday (micro-level) informal practices and arrangement complement the formal governance system, making up for the incapacity of the state that fails to secure the basic needs of its citizens. Although the state in Uzbekistan might look omnipotent in terms of its coercive capacity, it is considerably weak in terms of enforcing rule of law and service delivery. As a result, the people of Uzbekistan have created alternative, informal ways to run the state infrastructure. Since the state does not pay them, the state officials such as traffic policemen and midwives do not feel any moral obligation to follow the laws of the state, and therefore opt for informal means of survival and service provision. However, these informal coping strategies are considered by international bodies such as the Transparency International and World Bank as instances of 'bad governance', whereas they are more like an ad hoc solution that has been devised by ordinary people in order to keep the infrastructure running. These practices could thus be regarded as an 'everyday forms of governance', as this is the system in place that keeps, for example, the health care system and traffic enforcement running.

We assume that good governance leads to long-term benefits to the common good: bad drivers are punished and become safer drivers; fines go to benefit the community, not a single family; insurance companies and municipal authorities cooperate to produce a broader sense of generalized trust in society. But what are our assumptions about the corruption scenario? We have argued that this kind of 'petty corruption' is far from disorderly and immoral, but are these informal practices also contributing to the common good, as culturally appropriate means of exchange that reinforce sociability and interdependence, strengthening the social fabric? Our answer is a qualified yes, but qualified because it seems equally true that people are making the best of a bad situation where the state has largely withdrawn from all but its capacity to maintain political stability and interethnic peace functions.

This paper reflects the state of everyday life under President Karimov (1991-2016). However, President Mirziyoyev is actively and publicly pursuing a number of simultaneous reforms to change the everyday life norm from "people should serve the government" to "the government should serve the people." To what extent are the current reforms pursued by President Mirziyoyev moving the country closer to, or perhaps beyond, the paradigm of 'good enough governance' that Krasner (2013) argues is the best many societies can hope for? Do they better provide for individual physical security, public order, limited economic growth, security from transnational threats, basic health and sanitation services, checks – or not - on high level corruption, and minimal mechanisms of accountability such as media and civil society? The answer is a cautious "yes," especially in regard to economic growth and accountability mechanisms. Especially relevant for this analysis is that he

began his reforms by asking for input from citizens through online reception systems, commonly known among ordinary people as 'portal' (e.g. https://my.gov.uz/en), that provide information about the government and encourage citizens to report problems with service provision and corruption, and to provide feedback on state policies. However, our recent fieldwork indicates that 'portal' has a very limited impact in the peripheries of Uzbekistan where there are no viable accountability or incentive mechanisms that can make local government officials act in accordance with the centrally-designed policies and laws. Measures adopted to promote good governance should go beyond official proclamations and rhetoric. Accountability schemes need positive and negative incentives that are enforced from above in order to bring about real positive changes in everyday life.

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