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Market, State and Community in Uzbekistan: reworking the concept of the informal economy¹

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Abstract

Socialist and post-socialist societies are often described as having state and shadow economies, or formal and informal sectors. Such dual economy models, however, do not always take full account of the complex character of economic activity as it is actually practised, and it is often difficult to make a clear distinction between separate sectors. In this paper I offer an alternative way of conceptualising business and economic activity. I propose a model of economic spheres where the focus is on boundaries which are the product of state power and local moral categories. I suggest that this more clearly reflects lived experience. It allows us to see how people experience and interact with the state in the context of economic activity, and to explore their judgements about what the ideal form of this relationship should be.

¹ This paper is based on material collected during research in the Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan between August 1999 and July 2000. Part of it comes from material gathered in Andijan, a city with a population of about half a million people, and in a nearby Uzbek village. The village has a population of just under 4,000. The main local employers were a collective farm, controlling around 1500 hectares and growing wheat and cotton almost exclusively, an automobile assembly plant and a cotton textile factory. I would like to thank Joachim Otto Habeck and Tilo Grätz for their valuable comments on drafts of this paper.

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Introduction

The origin of the term informal economy has been attributed to papers written by Keith Hart in the early 1970s. He used it to refer to the irregular income earning opportunities of the urban poor in Ghana. In the typology he worked out at the time, formal income opportunities were made up of public and private sector wages and transfer payments, while informal opportunities encompassed the wide range legal and illegal activities which fell outside the organised labour force. These included activities such as farming and market gardening, self-employed commodity production, petty trade, smuggling, theft and prostitution (Hart 1973: 69). Hart developed this analysis to challenge the assumption, widely held at the time, that those not holding formally registered jobs were simply and passively unemployed.

The concept of the dual economy, in the sense of a segmented labour force, has been explored by a number of anthropologists and sociologists since then, although the actual terms used are sometimes different.² The concept is used in connection with the former Soviet Union, where the terms state or official economy refer to the production of goods and services within the socially owned sector subject to central planning. Activities undertaken by individuals for private gain, both legally sanctioned and illicit, which were not subject to the central planning process are characterised as having belonged to the unofficial or shadow economy (Grossman 1977; Treml & Alexeev 1994). Here, the duality refers to much more than the nature of the labour force. It is inherent in the larger ideological and institutional framework within which economic activity took place. With the collapse of socialism a number of analysts have once again applied a dual economy model, sometimes discussing the extent to which the second economy of socialist societies has been transformed into the informal sector in the post socialist context, with the latter most often defined as consisting of those activities which take place outside state regulation (Johnson et al. 1997; Kurkchiyan 2000; Sik 1992).

In the case of the former Soviet Union, however, it can be difficult to make a clear distinction between state and shadow economies, since they were each dependent upon the other and formed two aspects of a single economy rather than two separate economies (Humphrey 1998: 146ff; Kotkin 1995: 274). In a previous article I argued that in post socialist Uzbekistan too, the business and income generating activities of individuals, households and larger enterprises cannot easily be categorised as being formal or informal (Rasanayagam 2002). In practice a single operation may involve both legal and illegal transactions or contain

² Holström (1984) uses the terms organised and unorganised sectors, while Portes and Sassen-Koob (1987) use formal and underground economy. M. Estelle Smith (1989) provides a good general account of how anthropologists have developed the concept of the informal economy.

elements which could be classified as pertaining to both state and non-state sectors. In this paper I carry the argument forward by offering an alternative model which I hope can cope more effectively with this lived reality. I want to contribute to the broader issue within anthropological studies of the economy, of how to talk about impersonal transactions undertaken on the basis of an instrumental calculation of costs and benefits on the one hand, and those embedded in social relations and local systems of value on the other. This addresses the relationship between individual and community, whether that community takes the form of the household, local associational group, or the nation, and a key theme in this paper is how people experience their relationship with the state.

In a reappraisal of his earlier work Keith Hart has suggested that the informal economy is a “market-based response of the people to the overweening attempts of bureaucracy to control economic life from above. The social forms capable of succeeding state capitalism are likely to be grounded, at least embryonically, in that response” (Hart 1992: 223). The unregulated market economy is embedded in forms of association based on kinship, region, political patronage, criminal fraternity and so on, but at the same time individuals attempt to follow their own personal interests without being overly restricted by a system of rules. This expands our understanding of the informal economy to include an account of local systems of value, and also begins to address the way in which the state is experienced in the context of economic activity and how individuals negotiate their relationship with it.

Rather than continue with an informal economy model, however, I offer an alternative which draws its inspiration from the concept of economic spheres as developed by Bohannan and others (Barth 1967; Bohannan 1959; Hutchinson 1996; Parry & Bloch 1989). Attention is focused on boundaries between spheres that are the product of moral systems and the exercise of political power, and the means by which resources move across boundaries. This not only provides a clearer picture of economic activity than the concept of the informal economy, but allows us to address the broader issues I have identified, how the relationship between individual and community is constructed.

Stephen Gudeman (2001) has done this by arguing that the economy consists of two realms, the community and the market. The community refers to “real on-the-ground associations and to imagined solidarities that people experience” while the market realm “designates anonymous, short-term exchanges” (Gudeman 2001: 1). Market and community complement one another, as no market system exists without the support of communal agreements. Gudeman’s intention is to develop a language for discussing economic processes cross culturally, but he encounters difficulties when he tries to place socialist societies within his scheme. He notes certain similarities between centrally planned socialism and his community

realm, such as the fact that resources are transferred by allotment, but admits that it does not fit into either of his two realms. The centrally planned economy (and those sections of the economy dominated by the state in present day Uzbekistan) is characterised by strong political control, tribute taking and top-down decision making. It constitutes a mode of economic activity distinct from the community and market although it articulates with them. In this paper I aim to develop a model of economic spheres which can extend Gudeman's scheme to encompass all forms of economic activity in Uzbekistan, and which I hope has relevance for other post socialist societies. I want to use this model to study how people experience and interact with the state in the context of economic activity, and to explore their judgements about what the ideal form of this relationship should be.

The Fuzziness of Actual Practice

At first sight the terms formal and informal might seem applicable to economic activity in Uzbekistan. Since the country became independent in 1991 a number of economic reforms have been implemented. Consumer prices have been largely liberalised, small scale enterprises, particularly those in the retail sector, and some larger ones have been privatised as well as most of the housing stock, and entrepreneurial activity is now legal. As a result there has been a mushrooming of small scale trade activity, household commercial production such as shoe and knife making, private retail shops and stalls and other micro businesses.

However, the central government retains a large measure of control over strategic sectors of the economy. Cotton has historically been an important export crop for Uzbekistan and state procurement plans continue to be issued for its delivery by collective farms, as well as for wheat. State monopolies are maintained over strategic commodities such as gold, oil and gas, as well as over the processing of raw cotton, and the central government retains effective control over large enterprises even if they have been partly privatised. In general, small scale business activity and trade conducted at little above the level of a single individual or household has developed greatly since independence, and is largely conducted along free market principles, while larger enterprises and the large scale exploitation of resources are subject to varying degrees of central government control. When private enterprises operate above the level of the household, they often engage in a range of illegal transactions in order to circumvent the restrictive tax and regulatory system.

Despite this, dual economy models as they have been applied to socialist and post-socialist societies in the past do not capture the full complexity of the situation. I will illustrate this with two case studies. The first is a factory employing about 450 people. During the Soviet

period it specialised in producing a component used in the processing of raw cotton, and was part of a network of such factories in Uzbekistan supplying a parent factory in Tashkent which produced the finished product. Supplies of metal and other inputs were obtained from throughout the Soviet Union and their products were distributed within Uzbekistan and to other republics which produced cotton. Since independence it has been privatised, 25% of the shares have been sold to the workers and management, 50% to local investors, and the central government has retained a 25% share. The factory has to be financially self sustaining as it no longer receives state funding. It has continued to produce the same output as before, although now it must find its own sources of metal. It buys this from private firms which obtain supplies from Russia and the Ukraine through barter deals for fruit and vegetables produced in Uzbekistan.

At a shareholder meeting at which a government vice-minister was present, one of the workers appealed for support from the state budget to help cope with the factory's financial difficulties. The minister replied that the factory now belonged to the shareholders, not the state, that the government did not fund enterprises anymore but they had to be independent and earn the money themselves. He added that they, the shareholders, were the real owners and that their managers worked for them. However, central government exercises significant control over the factory's activities. While the factory obtains its supplies from private sources, the central government is in effect the sole buyer of almost all its output. 90% of this output consists of parts used in raw cotton processing, almost entirely a state monopoly, and is bought by a 51% state owned company (formerly a government agency). Furthermore, the factory's production plan has to be approved by central government authorities in Tashkent who can veto it. In theory, the factory management works out the production plan and submit it to shareholders at a general meeting for approval. When I asked a senior manager what would happen if the majority of shareholders insisted on voting for a plan which the government opposed, he said that the government would use the law enforcement agencies to force a change of management. I am not sure about the legality of such a course of action, but the manager's comments indicate that the former Soviet practice is still in effect, of self government of cooperatives on paper but ultimate central government control of policy decisions.

The result of enterprise reform has been to transfer the financial burden for operating large enterprises from the state budget onto the enterprises themselves with the central government retaining a large measure of control over their activities. Thus, while formal ownership of the factory is predominantly private it is difficult to define it as a private enterprise operating within a non-state sector. Some of its transactions are with private firms within a free market

context, albeit conducted through barter deals, while others are with state controlled enterprises. A similar situation exists in agriculture where collective farms remain largely under government control, subject to state procurement plans and obtaining much of their supplies from state controlled organisations (Ilkhamov 1998).

Small businesses engage in a combination of legal and illegal transactions and I was often told by traders and entrepreneurs that it was impossible to operate completely within the law at all times. The case of a privately run *oshkhona* (a cafeteria-type restaurant serving Uzbek cuisine) serves to further illustrate the inadequacies of the informal sector model. The owner of this *oshkhona* reported how a gas inspector only gave him authorisation to operate two gas fired cauldrons instead of the four needed so that he could collect bribes to ignore the operation of the other two. The owner claimed that he paid a *patent*³ for some of his employees, the two main cooks, but not for the other workers who were thus employed illegally. In addition, he had been refused a licence to run the *oshkhona* until he paid a bribe of US\$1000 to the city *hokim* (governor) or his deputy which he had not done, so he was operating without official registration. While the *oshkhona* was operating openly and the owner was acting within the law in many respects, at the same time a large part of his business was technically illegal. Moreover, this ambiguous status was largely engineered by the state regulatory officials themselves.

The problem with a dual economy model is that it focuses attention on the nature of ventures themselves, classifying a particular enterprise, business or an individual's income generating activity as clearly or predominantly falling into one or another sector. It does not allow for the more complex character of economic and business activity evident in lived experience. In its place I want to develop a model of economic spheres. In this model the focus will be on the political, regulatory and moral *boundaries* which separate distinct spheres rather than on the nature of the activities which take place within them. An enterprise, household or individual entrepreneur may operate alternately in one or other sphere, or in multiple spheres simultaneously. An advantage of this approach is that we can classify economic activity using criteria which are generated locally, be they the product of state power or local moral systems. This is likely to generate a picture which reflects local reality more closely than that achieved using universal categories such as formal and informal. In addition, it allows us to observe how people experience the state and negotiate their relationship to it. By focusing on boundaries between spheres we can see how the exercise of state power creates different "regimes of value", to use Appadurai's term (Appadurai 1986),

³ A *patent* is a tax in the form of a fixed monthly fee. Micro business run by one person or household (*fzicheskoe litso*) pay this form of tax, and by law a *patent* must be paid for each worker in the café.

and how people negotiate between them in transferring resources across boundaries. By including local moral classifications into the analysis we see how people themselves envisage their relationship with the state, as this actually exists and how they feel it should be.

Economic Spheres: an alternative approach

When discussing business activities in the village in which I conducted research with Tohirjon, a teacher in one of the village schools, he mentioned that one of his neighbours was a businessman, but it was not worth while interviewing him because he was not a real businessman, just a speculator.⁴ Tohirjon considered his neighbour to be a speculator because he bought building materials from what he called a ‘state enterprise’ (in fact a privatised former state enterprise) in a nearby city and sold it on for a profit locally. This is just the sort of activity which would have been illegal in the Soviet period and would have been classified as speculation, although since independence private trade has been legalised. In discussing the issue further, Tohirjon expressed the view that the price of ‘state’⁵ produced goods should be the same throughout Uzbekistan, and condemned factories for just waiting for private traders to buy their products and sell them on at a mark-up. However, he did not consider cross border trade or trade more generally as speculation and in the past he himself has traded flour in a similar way, buying from a mill in a nearby town and selling in the village in order to earn a living when his teaching salary fell to too low a level. In addition, Tohirjon and other villagers routinely utilise resources legally or illegally obtained from the collective farm and other enterprises which he would classify as ‘state’, in their household plot production and other income generating activities.

What is interesting about Tohirjon’s views is that he considers certain enterprises as state ones irrespective of their formal ownership status, whether they have been privatised or are directly funded from the state budget. As well as reflecting the fact that they had formerly been state enterprises during the Soviet period, I will argue that this is a moral judgement on his part about where to draw the boundaries of his community. By ‘community’ I do not mean a territorially defined unit like a village or neighbourhood. I use the term to refer to an ideal of interaction among a contextually determined group of people and institutions. Tohirjon applies a certain set of moral values to activities which take place in the context of this community, and others to activities undertaken for private gain.

⁴ During the Soviet period ‘*spekulyatsiya*’, buying and selling state produced goods outside of the official distribution network, was illegal.

⁵ I put the word ‘state’ in inverted commas because many of the enterprises Tohirjon would consider as state enterprises in this context have been privatised.

It is possible to identify three economic and moral spheres. The first of these, the communal sphere, is the product of local moral systems. Local actors make judgements about the moral criteria which should be applied to economic or business activities depending upon whether they include those activities within the boundaries of the community or place them outside. The second is the market sphere, which is marked by high levels of monetisation, little or no direct involvement by state organs, and where transactions are carried out with the aim of the maximising of material gain. These correspond to some extent to Gudemans community and market realms. The main difference is that the communal sphere, as I am defining it, is constituted by a specific mode of interaction. Stated crudely, those individuals, groups and institutions included within this moral sphere interact on the basis of ability and need, receiving what they need and contributing according to their means. Money, material goods, labour and other services can be exchanged on these terms. Even land, work in enterprises associated with the state and pensions can be conceptualised by people in this way if they are including the collective farm or the nation as a whole within the boundaries of community.

The third sphere is created through the exercise of state power by central government authorities, who use the state regulatory organs, law enforcement and legislative structures to fix the boundaries of what I will call the state sphere. It is characterised by low wages, low levels of monetisation where many transactions are carried out through barter deals⁶, and a high degree of central government control of decision making irrespective of formal ownership status (although the degree of control varies from enterprise to enterprise). This sphere bears a resemblance to the command economy of the Soviet Union, in that it is extractive and redistributive. Central government extracts resources from some industrial and agricultural enterprises for its own budgetary purposes, and redistributes resources in the form of salaries, transfer payments and welfare services.

These spheres are each constituted through different processes. The communal sphere is a product of local agency and the application of local moral systems, while the state sphere is created by the exercise of power by central government authorities, and is experienced by local actors as an externally imposed entity within which they attempt to negotiate to their best advantage. The spheres should not be seen as constituting three sections of a single pie, as it were. Rather, they are alternative angles of observation from which to view often the same economic activity. When describing the three spheres I will not devote a separate

⁶ Barter transactions within Uzbekistan are legal only so long as the goods bartered are used within the enterprise and not sold on. Barter is legal with foreign partners, though the foreign partner must pay the Uzbekistan government 15% of the value of the transaction in their own currency which will be converted at the official rate and passed on to the local partner. Thus, in a barter deal with a Russian company, the Russian partner should deliver 85% of the contracted amount in goods, and the remaining 15% will be paid to the Uzbekistan government in roubles. In this case the goods can legally be sold on within Uzbekistan for cash.

section to the market sphere. Instead, I will deal with it in relation to the communal and state spheres, as the nature of these spheres becomes clearer in contrast to the market sphere.

The Communal and Market Spheres

Returning to the comments of Tohirjon the teacher I referred to earlier, the seeming double standard, by which trade in commodities produced in former state enterprises is condemned as speculation, whereas cross border trade by individuals is not, results from the fact that a different system of values is being applied in each case. In certain contexts, for example within a household, people act as a single unit of consumption, production or expenditure, where members contribute what they are able to the common pot and receive what they are perceived to need. Interaction on these terms also takes place in certain other contexts, for example when the residents of neighbouring streets participate in a road improvement scheme with each household contributing according to their means while all equally benefit, or when the parents of children attending a school contribute to renovation projects on a similar basis. On occasion people in my village research site talked of the collective farm as a whole in these terms. The creation of commercial farmers who are granted collective farm land on a rental basis is sometimes criticised because this privatises what should be a communal resource, and people expressed the view that they had a right to use collective farm resources whether they were formally employed within it or not, because it was there for the benefit of the whole village (Rasanayagam 2002).

One way to think about the communal sphere is as an ideal type or moral framework which can be applied at a number of levels simultaneously. It exists as an *idea* of how relations within a community of participant members should be organised, of what constitutes a community. Entities such as the household, *mahalla* neighbourhood unit, and collective farm exist as institutional forms independent of their construction by any individual at the local level. The household is a family unit or group of family units which live as a unit of consumption and expenditure, the *mahalla* is a territorial unit centred on a mosque with a range of personnel elected by residents, and the collective farm is an agricultural enterprise operating to state procurement plans. All these entities can be created as the community or included within it by local actors through incorporation within the moral framework of the communal sphere.

In contrast to this, most business and income generating activity takes place within a moral framework of individual freedom and responsibility, the market sphere, where people attempt to maximise personal gain and where success and failure are attributed to an individual's own

personal strengths or failings. A view often expressed to me was that if people were poor it was because they were lazy, since most people in rural areas had access to land and if a person had at least 10 *sotok* (from the Russian word *sotka*, meaning 0.01 hectares) in the Fergana Valley they would be able to survive. A 20 year old graduate living in my rural research site stated that only those who worked hard and had a “broad outlook on life”, who were open to new things, would be successful. He contrasted this sort of person with people who were lazy, who “earned just for their stomach”, and gave as an example a family where the father drank a lot and the sons only had secondary school education. They managed to earn enough money for day to day expenses through casual work in the village such as making mud bricks, but they could not make enough to save for extra expenses such as marriage celebrations. He conceded that connections with people in a position to help were important, but hard work was essential to success.

In similar vein, an entrepreneur living in the city proudly stated that there was a lot of private economic activity in the Fergana Valley, people “work like ants, they never stop”, and that everyone was involved in private business from the *hokim* down. He claimed that people in the Fergana Valley were more hardworking than in other parts of the country. “In Karakalpakistan if a field is flooded the owner will just leave it, here they will drain it and grow crops.” Another entrepreneur told me that “money is lying on the ground” in Russia, but people there did not know how to make use of it. In Uzbekistan, by contrast, people were willing and able to engage in business even at the simplest level. Uzbeks would collect empty bottles and sell them, whereas Russians would not do this.

These contrasting sets of values are not hard and fast rules which are applied by everyone in the same way and in all situations. At the same time they are not ‘just’ ideologies which people use in bargaining and negotiations. They are rooted in actual modes of interaction within households and the wider community. In a particular situation people often have a choice as to which set of values to apply, and others might contest their choice by appeal to the alternative system. An individual who lent money for interest in the village seemed to have withdrawn from participation within the community on the basis of joint contribution and benefit. My host had invited him to visit in the evening so that I could interview him, and when he arrived we were still having dinner. Instead of joining us, as other people invited for an interview had done before, he went away and came back later after we had finished, something my host pointed out, adding that the money lender never had any visitors and kept to himself for the most part. “He doesn’t ask anything from his neighbours and doesn’t give

anything.” Money lenders give short term loans for very high interest⁷ and so it is perhaps not surprising that he withdrew from the circles of mutual consumption and expenditure which would have made it difficult for him to carry on his money lending business effectively.

Entrepreneurs face a similar problem of balancing the conflicting ideologies of the communal and market spheres. A large trader in my rural research site was described to me as ‘*oros*’ (Russian) because he calculated every *Sum* in his business dealings with other villagers. Some criticised him for being stingy and tight fisted, whereas others valued this trait, saying they preferred working with him because their dealings were always straightforward and well organised. Outside his business dealings this trader contributed financially to community projects such as repairing an electricity transformer in his neighbourhood, and as a result was respected for his participation within the community.⁸ A successful businessman in my urban research site claimed that he had lent money to friends and relatives who had not paid it back in time or at all. He had in the past lent US\$2000 to a friend to pay for a trading venture in return for a share of the profits, but the goods had been held up in customs and he had to miss out on a profitable deal as a result. He said that an “honest” person would have sold his house or done something to pay back the money and not just come up with excuses. He added that friends or relatives expect to be given leeway because in Uzbek culture money is not as important as social relationships. The good side of this, he said, was *hashar*, where friends, neighbours and relatives help out in building a house or with some other labour intensive project, but the bad side is that “people don’t have a market mentality”. In reply to my question as to why he continued to lend to friends and relatives, he said that if he did not he would suffer socially, people would think him a miser. While people are free to choose to apply the morality of the market in their income generating ventures, they cannot completely ignore appeals by others to the alternative ideology of the communal sphere if they are to maintain their position as a member of their community, whether this means funding community projects or granting unsafe loans to people with social claims upon them.

Entrepreneurs and households can operate in both the communal and market sphere simultaneously, applying the morality of each at a different level. Ilkhomjon is 38 and worked as an irrigation engineer until the collapse of the Soviet Union after which he became an entrepreneur. He learnt shoemaking while at school and in 1992 he bought ex-factory machinery in a second hand goods market in Tashkent, hired some workers and went into

⁷ The loans are usually in US Dollars at high interest, around 20-30% for one or two months.

⁸ Myriam Hivon (1998) gives a similar account of the conflict between private business and local moralities in rural Russia. She describes how villagers resent the fact that former collective farm land has been given to private farmers as this deprives them of the informal access to it that they previously enjoyed, and contravenes their moral concept of the fair allocation of resources within the village community. Those farmers who continued to provide access, however, were viewed more positively by their neighbours.

business. The capital for this venture came from a first cousin who took two thirds of the profits for three years until the capital had been paid off, after which they shared profits equally. Ilkhomjon and his cousin are partners in a deeper sense than just business partners in that they now share equally in the profits of all their business ventures, whether they take part jointly or not. Even if one of them is not involved in any way in a particular project the profits will be shared, and they meet up once a year during Ramadhan to settle accounts.

In their dealings with each other, Ilkhomjon and his cousin act within the morality of the communal sphere, benefiting equally from each other's ventures irrespective of their separate contributions. When I asked him why he needed such a partner he stated his reasons both in moral and economic terms. He asserted that sharing equally with his cousin was a moral duty since social relations were more important than material considerations. This relationship is qualitatively similar to that with the rest of his family, where contribution and benefit are based on ability and need. At the same time, he claimed that having a partner helped him to cope with the uncertainties associated with business. Businesses are not stable enough for people to rely on just one venture, entrepreneurs always have to be on the lookout for opportunities and seize them when they present themselves so it is advantageous to share the burden with partners.

As a unit, however, Ilkhomjon and his cousin operate within the market sphere aiming to maximise returns on their business ventures. Similarly, a household acts within the morality of the communal sphere with regard to interaction between its members but as a unit it aims to maximise profits with relation to those outside it, and the morality of the market sphere is invoked when the poverty of a household is blamed on the laziness of its members or the fact that the father drinks too much. Thus, people may operate within the moral systems of both the communal and market spheres at the same time, applying each system of values at a different level.

I stated in the introduction to this paper that I wanted to use the model of spheres to explore how people experience and conceptualise the state. Akhil Gupta (1995) has argued that the discourse of corruption is an arena where the state, as well as the idea of what it is to be a citizen, is imagined and constituted. How people talk about corruption, what they classify as corruption, and the moral categories into which they place acts which could be viewed as corruption, independent of their formal legality, is important for understanding how people conceptualise the boundaries of the state and themselves in relation to it. Following Gupta, I will explore this relationship by looking at how people apply the morality of the communal sphere to actions which could be classified as corruption.

The abuse of authority and position by officials is often characterised as corruption which harms both the individuals targeted and the state as a whole. During a conversation with a group of villagers, the topic turned to how a private farmer, present at the time, was being forced to pay one ton of wheat to court officials to avoid a possible prison sentence, and to corruption in general. One of the villagers declared that government officials were equivalent to the mafia if they stole money from the state. They went on to discuss how officials misreported production figures and Tohirjon, the teacher I introduced earlier, stated: “In the West no one needs false information, but we do here. Because of this there’s no cotton oil or flour in the shops.” On another occasion Tohirjon condemned nepotism in hiring and promotion at the local cotton processing plant. He said that this sort of corruption impeded the development of the country and described bribery as a national illness. The characterisation of the greed of officials as corruption that is bad for the country was expressed by others. A history teacher in the village condemned *kolkhoz* (collective farm) officials for creaming off all the farm’s profits while the workers were not paid. “Many people don’t know their rights and officials (*chinovniki*) benefit from this”.

While people condemn such behaviour as corruption, they often engage in similar sorts of activity themselves. On one occasion Tohirjon overheard his elder brother telling me about a case he had seen on TV of a young man who had been given a heavy prison sentence for stealing some bread. “Here *kolkhoz* officials steal much more, by that scale they should all be shot.” Tohirjon intervened, saying that although his brother was so indignant about corruption, he would be the first to engage in it if it benefited his family and Tohirjon himself had bribed the *qishloq* committee⁹ to grant his family poverty relief for six months. He also bought fertiliser illegally from the manager of the *kolkhoz* warehouse, a common practice in the village.

Tohirjon distinguishes between earning money on the side through use of resources available through work (*levie dengi*) and *pora* (the Uzbek word for bribery), although he claimed that he does not judge the morality of either situation and the buyer of the services is certainly not doing any wrong in his opinion. He described his actions of buying fertiliser (*levie dengi* for the warehouse manager) and bribing to be registered for poor relief as “finding a way” (*yol topmok*) and “entrepreneurship” (*tadbirkorlik*). One of his plans was to produce a crib to sell to students sitting the university entrance exams, and he had overheard a student at the vocational college where he taught offer another teacher US\$100 to sit one of his exams for him. That teacher refused, asking US\$200, and Tohirjon told me he would be

⁹ *Qishloq* is the Uzbek for village. The *qishloq* committee is a subdivision of a district (*raion* in Russian, *tuman* in Uzbek). The Russian word for this subdivision is *sel'sovet*.

willing to do it if the student's parents could protect him from the authorities. He viewed these activities as business or money making ventures, similar to the private university entrance test preparation courses he offered, or growing crops on his plots for sale. He did not seem to distinguish between his legal and illegal ventures, they were all part of his household money making strategy. I asked him if he considered producing the cribs as corruption and he replied that it was a "little corruption", it did not hurt anyone. When I asked if it was fair on the students who did not cheat, he said "it is a time for entrepreneurship." Intelligent students who were not "capable" enough to get a crib would not succeed in the real world anyway, since now money is the only important thing and stupid people with money are the ones who succeed.

This echoes sentiments expressed by a newly graduated student who said that before he became a student, he believed that an intelligent person could do whatever he wanted, but now he knew that only money counted. He was trying to get a job in America and had heard of an agency which would arrange it for US\$1500. Another recently graduated student expressed the opinion that earning *levie dengi* was not immoral but *pora*, for example bribing teachers for grades, was. He included the bribes doctors received for treatment in the former, 'legitimate earnings' category. In contrast, another student related how her appendix had played up and they had called the doctor who had refused to treat her unless the family paid 20,000 *Sum*. Her mother asked the doctor to accept 10,000 *Sum* immediately and the rest when her husband returned, but the doctor refused and the student remained untreated. She definitely considered the doctors actions immoral.

How can we make sense of these seemingly contradictory attitudes and behaviour? It might be argued that people do not apply morally absolute definitions of corruption, but that they approach each situation instrumentally. A doctor demanding bribes for treatment would see himself as just doing what he had to in order to survive on a low salary, and those connected with the patient would view him as illegitimately exploiting their vulnerable position. This is to argue that moral values are not applied at all, which I do not believe to be the case. People do hold and apply moral values, and we need an analytical framework through which we can examine how these values are expressed within the practical complexities of everyday life.

I suggest that different moral criteria are not being applied in different contexts. Rather, the same morality is applied but what varies in each case are the boundaries of the community within which a particular act is judged. When the group of villagers were sympathising with the farmer who was being victimised by the state prosecutor they invoked the state as a whole as the context within which they judged the act. The officials were characterised as a mafia which was exploiting individual citizens as well as stealing state assets which should be used

for the benefit of everyone. When villagers complain about land being given to private commercial farmers, they are creating the collective farm as the community and criticising private farmers for obtaining an unfairly large share of communal resources. When Tohirjon buys fertiliser or sells cribs to help students to pass the entrance exams he places these actions within the context of his own household life strategies which incorporate both legal and illegal activities.

Different people can of course view the same act differently depending on their own particular interests and circumstances, each invoking a different frame of reference with which to judge it. The illegal sale of fertiliser from the *kolkhoz* warehouses can be characterised as depriving the community as a whole of resources, or alternatively as finding a way to do the best for one's own household. The doctor and patient can each regard bribery for receiving adequate medical attention very differently. However, no matter how widely or narrowly the boundaries are drawn in any particular case, the ideal of community and the proper mode of interaction within it is always present. It acts as a common moral framework within which people can engage, supporting or disputing each other's actions. In any particular situation people might set the boundaries of the community within which they are actively operating in fairly narrow terms, for example the household, and perhaps this could be called the 'effective' community. At the same time, however, people can simultaneously conceive of multiple circles with different degrees of inclusion which exist 'at the back of their minds', which are not the product of personal interest.

Of course, in lived experience the state is usually not treated as falling within the communal sphere, but is placed outside the boundaries of the effective community which is constituted in any particular situation. It is experienced as an externally imposed entity within which people attempt to negotiate to their best advantage. It is this aspect of how the state is experienced that I explore through the discussion of the state sphere.

The State and Market Spheres

Educational and health care institutions funded from the state budget, state and former state enterprises such as collective farms and the factory I described above operate predominantly, although not exclusively, within this sphere. Transactions between enterprises are often conducted through barter deals and salaries are often delayed or paid in kind in the case of enterprises which are officially privatised (and so no longer fully financed by the state such as

state farms and most industrial enterprises).¹⁰ People working in institutions such as schools and hospitals which are funded directly from the state budget tend to receive salaries regularly and in cash, although these salaries are very low and have to be supplemented by private earnings. During my research the factory I described above was in severe financial difficulties because the state-owned company, its main customer, was delaying placing an order. Workers had not been paid for several months and in the end were forced to take a month's holiday as the factory suspended production. Workers in other privatised former state enterprises reported similar non-payment, delayed payment or payment in kind. Enterprises and other organisations within the state sphere cooperate in avoiding the need for cash through the transfer of debts and barter.

The distinction between the state and the market sphere is clearly evident if we view the situation through household income generating strategies in my rural research site. Most households include members who work at least part time within the local *kolkhoz* or other state institution, but the bulk of their income and subsistence is generated from household plot production and commercial ventures, in the market sphere. Even during the Soviet period, when the *kolkhoz* was a much larger economic and political presence households were not completely dependent on the *kolkhoz* for their income. Poliakov (1992), a Russian ethnologist who has written extensively on Central Asia, estimated that a large proportion of the rural population in the region, up to 70% in some areas, was not employed in the state sector at all, and that the income from household plots and trade was often higher than that from official salaries. Villagers I interviewed stated that before independence, income from their plots was about equal to official income.

Since independence the *kolkhoz* has not been able to pay salaries in cash to most workers. The proportion of farm wages in total income has become much smaller as a result and most officially registered *kolkhozci* (*kolkhoz* worker) only work part time. As an example, one brigade I was familiar with was responsible for farming 35 hectares of land (16 for wheat and 19 for cotton at the time of my research) and had 80 people officially on its books. However, only four of these worked full time. These were the only workers within the brigade who were able to make a significant income from *kolkhoz* work as they were each allocated four hectare plots on which to grow wheat by contract. It is worthwhile looking after the large wheat plots as the worker can keep any wheat in excess of the contracted amount to be delivered to the *kolkhoz* at the relatively low state price, and a full time *kolkhozci* told me that he had received

¹⁰ See my earlier discussion about how privatised enterprises can still be subject to significant state control, and how people can continue to view them as state enterprises.

two tons of surplus wheat in this way, worth about 160,000 *Sum* (US\$320)¹¹ on the open market.

Working cotton land is not so profitable, however. The brigadier divides this land among his part time workers, mostly women, in small, 0.2 or 0.3 hectare plots so that everyone has at least some land to work. Cotton land is ploughed, planted and fertilised as a unit by the brigade's full time workers using tractors while the part time workers are responsible for the manual work of weeding and harvesting cotton on the small plots allocated to them. The benefits from working such plots are minimal. *Kolkhozci* earn a small income from harvesting the cotton (usually about \$10 for the whole harvest), and they have the right to use the cotton plant stalks for winter fuel. Within the collective farm wages are not paid in cash, but recorded in cash terms and this can be used as credit to pay off gas, electricity and other charges for state provided utilities. Workers might also receive a sack of wheat (50kg) and other vegetables such as onions or potatoes for the year's work.

An important incentive for people to work within the *kolkhoz* despite low returns is that to qualify for child support and other state benefits people have to be employed in an official organisation. Moreover, undertaking *kolkhoz* work does not take time away from other occupations. Part time workers I interviewed estimated that their *kolkhoz* work took up only about 50 days a year outside the harvest period, and as it is shared by all the women in the household it does not stop people from engaging in other income generating or subsistence activities. When I asked an older female worker why she continued to work for such little return, she replied that the cotton stalks she collected at the end of harvest would be enough for most of her household's winter heating and cooking needs, and that if she was busy her *kelin* (daughter-in-law) could do the work for her.

In contrast to this, most household income is generated within the market sphere. In addition to agricultural production on household plots for sale and home consumption, a household might engage in a range of private income generating activity. Craft production in the form of shoe making, leather tanning or knife making is common. Typically the enterprise is run by an *usta* (master craftsman) with a number of *shogird* (apprentices) who work for little or no pay. Many villagers are house builders and decorators or carpenters and work locally, in Tashkent, or in neighbouring countries. Other ventures include small shops, chicken farms with up to 200 hens for egg production, cotton seed oil production, or small scale flour mills. People who engage in trade either transport agricultural produce, mainly tomatoes, peppers and fruit, to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan or Russia, or buy consumer goods from Tashkent or neighbouring countries for resale locally. A significant income generating and savings strategy is the raising

¹¹ A school teacher's monthly salary at the time was around 10,000 *Sum* (about US\$20).

of livestock, mainly bull calves. These goods and services are sold directly in local bazaars or through middlemen in more or less free market conditions.¹²

Households adopt a multi-stranded strategy which incorporates work in the *kolkhoz* and other state institutions or enterprises such as schools or hospitals, agricultural production for subsistence and market sale, trading and private entrepreneurial activity. However, these activities are qualitatively distinct. Whereas households engage in private ventures in order to generate cash incomes which are calculated in terms of monetary costs and benefits, the returns on work within the *kolkhoz* are minimal by comparison. Engagement within the state sphere is more about gaining access to resources which are available within this sphere, such as social welfare provision and land.

Central government authorities exercise state power to define the boundaries of the state sphere, including within it certain resources (including land and water for irrigation), institutions and enterprises whether or not they officially fall within direct state ownership. Viewing economic activity through the lens of the state sphere, we obtain another picture of how the state is experienced, one which shows how people negotiate across the boundaries created by state power to their best advantage, in effect, how they negotiate their relationship with the state. I will explore these processes through the strategies used to gain access to land by people in my rural research site. By law¹³ all those employed in the *kolkhoz*, as well as doctors, teachers and other specialists are entitled to household plots (in Russian – *priusadebnyy zemel'nyy uchastok*, in Uzbek – *tomorqa*) of up to 0.35 hectares from collective farm land.¹⁴ Although land is publicly owned, villagers have use rights over these plots for their lifetime, and they can be passed on to their descendants, and people talked about household plots as if they were their own property. Land can be rented from the *kolkhoz* for a few months after the wheat harvest in June, when production for the state plan has been completed, until the next planting of wheat or cotton in late autumn, and villagers approach the brigadiers directly for this land. A villager can also apply to the *kolkhoz* management and *raion hokim* (head of the district government administration) for land to become a private commercial farmer.¹⁵

However, in practice access to land is not straightforward. Katherine Verdery (1999) uses the term “fuzzy property” to describe the “indistinct, ambiguous and partial property rights” in a decollectivised farm in post-communist Romania. In societies such as Uzbekistan where

¹² This state of affairs has prompted Alisher Ilkhamov (2000), a sociologist from Uzbekistan, to characterise the rural economy as being divided between a state controlled export oriented sector and a household one.

¹³ Law on *Dehqon* Farming of 30/04/1998 articles 7 and 8.

¹⁴ In practice the actual amount allocated is left up to the *kolkhoz* and local government authorities.

¹⁵ Deniz Kandiyoti (1999; 2002; 2003) has written extensively on different strategies by which people gain access to land in Uzbekistan.

use rights are separated from ownership, and control over land is devolved to a number of different actors (the *kolkhoz* management, local government officials, and households) property is also likely to be “fuzzy”, as is illustrated by a case from my fieldwork of the illegal sale of land by *kolkhoz* officials.

Rifatbey lives with his wife and mother in the main family compound which has six *sotok* attached. He also had the use of a further eight *sotok* for a period of ten years up until 2000. In 1998 he approached the *kolkhoz* chairman for an extra ten *sotok* household plot since people are entitled to this upon marriage, but was refused on the grounds that since he lived in the parental household he would not need an extra plot to build a new house. Some time later, he met a member of the *viloyat* (provincial) land commission by chance at a bus stop in a neighbouring village, and as they chatted it turned out that the commissioner came from the same village as one of Rifatbey’s work colleagues. Rifatbey told him about his need for an extra plot and the commissioner agreed to help. Six months later, the commissioner’s brother, who was also a member of the land commission, visited Rifatbey and agreed to arrange for him to be granted land for a bribe of 50,000 *Sum* (about US\$100 at the time) for ten *sotok*. The commissioner arranged things with the *kolkhoz* chairman, district and *viloyat* authorities and in the end Rifatbey received eight *sotok* for which he paid 40,000 *Sum*. This is legally and permanently his land now as it is registered at the *qishloq* (village) committee in his name for land tax purposes. In this transaction what is being ‘bought’ for the bribe is the official registration of this land as Rifatbey’s household plot (*priusadebnyy uchastok/tomorqa*).

The next year he and many other villagers were approached by the *kolkhoz* management offering to sell more land and this time he paid 85,000 *Sum* for two 10 *sotok* plots. Before this land was registered with the *qishloq* committee, however, the *kolkhoz* chairman was replaced and the new chairman, under pressure to fulfil the state production plan for cotton and wheat, threatened to reclaim all the land which had been illegally sold. Because of the large number of people involved who had all paid substantial amounts of money (I was told that about 500 people had bought land in this way but this is hard to verify) he did not immediately reclaim the land, but reduced the plot allotments from ten to six *sotok*, and froze the granting of further household plots for married couples. The *qishloq* committee was refusing to register the land in the new owners’ names so they had no legal right to it. At the end of my field research the situation was still unclear, as the land remained unregistered and villagers did not know if they would be allowed to keep the plots permanently or whether they would be reclaimed after a year or two. This affair was not restricted to the *kolkhoz* management as sellers and villagers as buyers. Decisions to transfer land to use as household plots must be ratified by the district and *viloyat* authorities so the relevant officials in those bodies also had

to be involved, as the involvement of the *viloyat* land commission officials indicates, and the *qishloq* committee had to register the land in the villagers' names.

A number of the conflicting claims over land are evident in this case. People have no title deeds to their property in the village. The only record of holdings is kept by the *qishloq* committee for purposes of land tax, so the fact that the land villagers bought from the *kolkhoz* was not registered means their rights were not legally recognised, but only founded on the informal recognition of their claim by the new *kolkhoz* chairman. At the same time, the chairman's formal control over the land is circumscribed by strong and widespread popular sentiment in the village, as well as the claims of central government in the form of the state procurement plan. I was informed that the previous *kolkhoz* chairman had initiated the land sale in order to raise money to make up for shortfalls in production as well as for his own profit, and that he was removed because of his inability to fulfil the plan. When the new chairman took over he had to balance the needs of households, and their dissatisfaction if he re-appropriated all the land, with the demands of the state plan and so reclaimed much of the land that had already been 'sold', leaving the remainder unregistered and in an ambiguous status. *Kolkhoz* management and local government officials assert private claims over land as a valuable resource under their control from which they seek to obtain personal profit through the illegal transfer of rights over it. Finally, local norms whereby one son remains within the parental compound is recognised and incorporated by *kolkhoz* management into the decisions as to whether to grant land upon marriage.

Ties of kinship and reciprocity or shared interest are useful in obtaining access to rental land from the *kolkhoz*. A teacher negotiated on behalf of his sister with a brigadier to rent some post-wheat harvest land. The teacher said that he was more likely to be granted the land than his sister, and might even be given an extra ten *sotok* for free, because he was experienced at growing carrots, the brigadier was a distant relative and also because the brigadier had a daughter in his school who might later attend his university entrance test preparation courses. As the teacher put it: "We will work together". I was told that the best land was rented out to people close to the brigadiers or *kolkhoz* management, and to "useful" people like a doctor who was given 20 *sotok* rent free. Doctors are valued members of the community if they are willing to perform consultations for free. In one of the families I stayed with, in the course of a few months a doctor who lived in a neighbouring street was consulted twice, once when one of the young daughters had caught her finger in a door and the wound had become infected, and the second time when the grandmother was suffering from back pain. No payment was involved in either case.

Central government creates the boundaries of the state sphere, and decides what resources and institutions are encompassed by it. At the local level it is experienced as a provider of low paid jobs and a minimal level of welfare, for example when people work in the collective farm, school or other state institution. However, these boundaries are porous. Officials with control over resources within this sphere might dispose of them for their own personal gain. Others use bribery, kinship or other relationships to gain access to them. This is, of course, a double edged sword. By transgressing state law people are placed in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis state authorities. Ledeneva (1998) uses the term “suspended punishment” to describe the condition of living in the Soviet Union, where the regime and bureaucracy claimed to envelop the whole of society, but where in practice individuals exercised a degree of freedom by following unwritten rules. The resulting uncertainty created a feeling that a person’s very existence was unauthorised or illegal. Nancy Lubin (1984) describes a similar situation in Soviet Uzbekistan. Since engagement in illegal economic activity was pervasive everyone lived “under an economic pistol”. She argues that this discouraged people from engaging in political opposition to the regime since the authorities could use an individual’s illegal economic activities as a pretext for arrest and conviction for other reasons. The regime made a bargain with the populace whereby it tolerated a degree of corruption and private accumulation of wealth in exchange for political compliance.

In post independence Uzbekistan a similar bargain seems to operate. The state is no longer conceived of as enveloping the whole of society, providing jobs, housing and comprehensive social services for all, which it could not afford to do in any case. Politically, however, the central government is just as dominant as it always was, and just as intolerant of opposition. By turning a blind eye to a certain level of corruption the central government absolves itself of the responsibility for looking after the basic material needs of the population while at the same time these illegal activities render individuals vulnerable to official sanctions as before.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ilkhamov (2000) writes that in post independence Uzbekistan the central government tolerates wide spread corruption in order to secure the loyalty and obedience of provincial elites, while at the same time carrying out periodic selective purges to prevent too many resources being diverted to those elites. He argues that the central government recognises that the redirecting of resources through corruption from the state to provincial economies has the beneficial effect of allowing the population of provincial *viloyats* to survive more independently of direct government support, and of softening tensions caused by the concentration of resources in the capital.

Conclusion

At the start of this paper I set out two aims. The first was to offer an alternative to the concept of the formal and informal economy and to dual economy models in general. I am not suggesting that economic activity is not segmented in Uzbekistan or in other post socialist societies. It is just that dual economy models as they have been applied to socialist or post socialist societies tend to focus on the nature of the activities themselves, attempting to identify certain activities as taking place within a field of state regulation and others as existing outside of it. However, this is too static an approach to account for the lived reality how enterprises, households and entrepreneurs actually operate in Uzbekistan. A single business or a household's income generating ventures often contain a mixture of formally legal and illegal elements so it is impossible to categorise them as pertaining to one sector or the other. A similar problem arises in suggesting the existence of state and household or private sectors. Most importantly, by focusing solely on the economic or legal nature of activity the interesting issue of the relationship between the individual and the community is left outside the model. I have attempted to address this problem by suggesting a model of economic spheres. Rather than attempting to fix the nature of enterprises, businesses and household ventures, I identify a number of separate legal, political and moral frameworks within which they operate, shifting between them or operating in multiple spheres simultaneously. This, I hope, conforms more closely to actual practice.

My second aim was to follow Hart and Gudeman in studying economic activity to explore how relations are constructed between the individual and the community, specifically the state. The state and communal spheres offer alternative views on this relationship. Using the lens of the state sphere we can observe how people manipulate and negotiate boundaries which are the product of state power, in effect, how they negotiate their relationship with the state. Some people might use their official positions within the state administrative structure or the management of enterprises to transfer resources across boundaries, or they might use personal networks or barter transactions. Others might fall victim to state regulatory officials extracting bribes to ignore the inevitable infringements of the law, or they might only enter the state sphere as employees with low pay and prestige. Whether the state is encountered as a resource to be exploited, or as something to be avoided or endured, a model of economic spheres offers a much richer picture than is possible using a dual economy approach.

In addition, by incorporating the moral categories of local actors within the model I hope to extend the analysis beyond reference to the official legal framework and the exercise of state power. Central government lays down a large part of the ground rules with which local actors

are confronted, but their own moral frameworks and concept of community also shape their business and income generating activities. The moral framework of the communal sphere provides criteria with which to judge the legitimacy of certain types of activity and shapes the interaction between actors and institutions judged to fall within that sphere. When local actors extend the boundaries of their community to include enterprises or collective farms, or the nation as a whole, they are making a moral judgement about the terms in which transactions should take place between themselves and these entities. By taking account of local moral classifications, we explore not only how people negotiate within a set of rules which is presented to them 'ready-made', but also their own value judgements of how the state should behave, and what their own relationship to it should be.

In this paper I have suggested that the nation as a whole can be constituted as the community by local actors through its inclusion within the moral framework of the communal sphere. As a final speculative comment, perhaps it is the legacy of Soviet rule which allows local ideals of community to be applied to larger institutions such as the *kolkhoz* and the state. The Soviet ideology of contribution to national goals through participation within local work collectives, and the reality of social welfare provision through the network of state enterprises and collective farms, blurred the boundaries between the individual, local community and the state. The social contract operative within the Soviet Union created the expectation and reality of material support for citizens from state enterprises and the state itself. The ideology of the communal sphere, of contribution and benefit on the basis of ability and need, was to a large extent realised within Soviet institutions and this is perhaps what allows people to apply local moral categories to the present day nation state.

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