

**Title: Use of language in blurring the lines between legal and illegal.**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter focusses on the role that language plays in legitimating the process of hashish making, from its harvesting to its further sale, in the mountainous regions of north-east Kyrgyzstan. During the late Soviet era, local people were not involved in hashish making and *nashakur*<sup>1</sup> were socially stigmatised; my study, instead, aims to provide a context for understanding how ordinary people had become part of the illegal drug economy since the beginning of the 1990s, the time of Kyrgyzstan's emergence as an independent post-Soviet state. My focus on local hashish harvesting, even though it was not made on an industrial scale such as hashish in Morocco (Decorte et al, 2011) or heroin in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011: 45), has allowed me to concentrate on the issue of how an illegal activity can become part of the local culture (Botoeva, 2015) and economy (Botoeva, 2014).

The current paper further argues that language has played an important role in not just neutralizing the illegal nature of hashish production but in transforming the meaning of hashish harvesting, which allowed people to reflexively question the illegality of this practice. I argue that the words used in describing the different elements of the hashish economy in Toolu not only disguised the illegal nature of hashish making, and therefore neutralizing the feelings of guilt (Sykes and Matza, 1957), but that the naming process allows for a re-interpretation of the illegality of hashish making and helps form new interpretations rooted in the local moral system. Words taken from everyday culture, without negative connotations and links to the criminal culture, are used by people to transform the meaning of hashish harvesting, shifting it from illegal and negative into a grey area, where it could be socially accepted (Heyman, 1999). The 'grey area' between legal and illegal practices is the framework that lets us to develop a nuanced approach to il/legality and suggests that it is not always possible to separate the legal from the illegal and therefore clearly demarcate the boundaries between them.

In other words, the notion of what is legal and illegal, stated and formalised by states, can be contested by other actors. Various studies have demonstrated how illegal practices, despite the pressure from the states and relevant social control institutions, can be legitimated by the

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<sup>1</sup> *Nasha* [hashish] user.

population (Galemba, 2008; Galemba, 2012; Webb et al, 2009; Westermeyer, 2004). The activity could still be illegal, as many groups that practice illegal activities do not hold powers to change and revise the law according to which their actions are outlawed, but could be considered as socially accepted by certain groups of population. Such social acceptance of illegal practices could be seen as a form of a moral economy as they base their judgements on moral principles of what justice means for them (Engwicht, 2016; Thomsson, 1991; Scott, 1985). These principles could be based on local cultural values and contradict the state's definition of illegality. Although, many groups involved in such acts of resistance cannot transform the criminal justice system, they engage in local acts of transformation of the meaning of il/legal.

In the next section, I will first introduce my methods of data collection and then discuss the use of language in developing a legitimating narrative for harvesting of cannabis plants in Toolu. I will pay close attention to how specific words such as 'kara-koi', 'work' and 'Kumtor' are used in naming particular aspects of hashish harvesting, locating and legitimising the practice as part of a local moral economy.

## **Researching hashish harvesting**

Before I started my fieldwork, I decided to conduct my research in the Ak-Suu or Tyup administrative districts of Issyk-Kul oblast as they had larger areas of wild growing cannabis on their territories compared to other regions (Zelichenko, 2003) and more of the local population involved in the production of hashish. According to the survey that mapped the areas with wild growing cannabis plants conducted by the law enforcement with the financial assistance of the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes) at the end of the millennium, the largest areas of wild growing cannabis were found in Djety-Oguz, Tyup and Issyk-Kul administrative districts of Issyk-Kul oblast – with total of 1931.6 hectares of wild growing cannabis comparatively to 278 in Djalal-Abad and 94 hectares in Talas oblasts (Zelichenko, 2003).

Figure.1: Administrative Map of Kyrgyzstan.



Source: Taken from the “World Maps” website. <http://geology.com/world/kyrgyzstan-map.gif>, last accessed on the 24.05.12

During the summer of 2005, I spent three weeks conducting interviews in different villages of Tyup. When I returned for some more fieldwork in 2009, I started in the Ak-Suu district and moved back to Tyup again, where upon I decided to ground myself in one village. It was Toolu village where I spent most of the time between July and December of 2009, and July and September of 2010. In 2005, I collected more than 20 interviews. In 2009 and 2010, I collected and recorded 64 interviews. All of these interviews lasted between one and one and half hours. Some of the interviews, with the key participants, were conducted repeatedly, three-four times to enable to clarify some questions. Overall it took ten months to conduct my fieldwork in different locations of Tyup.

One of the challenges of doing fieldwork was related to the illegal nature of hashish production. As many ethnographic studies focused on drug markets reported, the illegal nature of drug production and dealing made it difficult to collect data at the initial stages (Adler, 1993; Bourgois, 1993; Morales, 1996). Gaining trust was not a straightforward process as people were

cautious, sometime suspicious of being asked about hashish making. It took some time for people to understand that my role was not to inform law enforcement officers about illegal drug harvesting, but was to gather information for academic purposes. Ethnographic fieldwork remained the best methodology to collect the data on an illegal hashish harvesting as it provided me with the space and time to develop trusting relationships with my main gate-keepers and their networks of friends (Adler, 1993; Calderón, 2016). An ethnography was also the best method to learn about the complex nature of social relations and the meanings that the social actors ascribed to their world (Dwyer and Moore, 2010). This method allows the researchers to get outside of existing social theories or perspectives that especially dominate the field of drug studies and allows us to look at the phenomena from a different alternative perspective (Ibid, 2010). Therefore, this methodology allowed me to gather the local voices and narratives on hashish harvesting which become the core of my argument in this and other papers (Botoeva, 2014; 2015). While conducting an ethnographic fieldwork I had various opportunities to observe the everyday village life, listen to the conversations that people had in their everyday interactions. As my fieldworks were mainly conducted during the summer and the autumn, the hashish harvesting seasons, many people talked about hashish, shared information for selling it and strategies of avoiding militia officers with each other. My findings about the use of language in re-interpreting the meaning of cannabis crops and hashish making derived from different sources: conducting interviews with various people in the village, listening to conversations during the informal social gatherings and formal meetings, even talking to people on popular streets where everybody meets and greets each other. Thus, an ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to triangulate the methods of data collection and listen to how people responded to my questions about hashish making in the interviews and how people referred to it amongst one other as in a lot of cases the price of hashish or arrangements for getting together to make hashish in the fields were done in their everyday interactions on the streets or social gatherings.

To ensure that the research respected the participants and the data collected followed ethical principles, I asked for the consent of each participant before starting the interview process (Madison, 2011: 129). I have conducted interviews only with those people who gave their consent to take part of the study. Prior to receiving their consent I explained in detail the aims of my study and that the information they share with me would be kept confidential.

At the end of my fieldwork I had a variety of different types of data to analyze. I had digitally recorded and had written down interviews with people, as well as copious observation notes which were collected during the fieldwork. All the data which I gathered was in Kyrgyz language. The fact that interviews were conducted in Kyrgyz did not create many practical and

epistemological concerns due to ethnography being focused on using interviewees' own concepts from the beginning of the project (Gobo, 2008: 197). Following this approach, I learned during interviews the local concepts and was able to use them in the analysis. During the analysis I matched them with second-level concepts developed in the literature on illegal economies and legitimization of illegal practices.

## **Contextualising hashish harvesting in Toolu**

Certain drugs, such as cannabis and opium, have been present in the territories of Central Asia for a long period of time. Opium was used as a traditional medicine before the beginning of the 20th century (Madi, 2004). However, drug use and production in pre-Soviet (before 1917) societies remains a blind spot in the existing literature. However, the literature reveals that between 1916 and 1974, the territories of what is now one Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan were used to cultivate opium plants to produce morphine for medicinal purposes (Djakishev, 2004). The cultivation of opium in Issyk-Kul region started in the midst of the First World War when Imperial Russia found itself cut off from its opium supply from Turkey. However, the demand for morphine remained and it was decided that it would be produced within the territories of the Russian Empire, specifically in Turkistan region (Ibid, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Later, the successors of the Russian Empire, the leaders of the Soviet Union, decided to retain the production of medicinal opium within the territory of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialistic Republic (Kyrgyz SSR) until it was believed that it was influencing one trafficking of opium to China (People's Republic of China) (Zelichenko, 2003). This region was highly important, as it used to collect 88 percent of the opium produced in the whole Soviet Union, and 16 percent of opium in the whole world at that time (Djakishev, 2004). Therefore, Issyk-Kul region had a long history of official drug production, which significantly accounted for the employment of a large amount of the local population in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>2</sup> Poppies were cultivated around the Issyk-Kul of Turkistan region which happened later to become part of Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast within the RSFSR in 1924, Kyrgyz Autonomic Republic within RSFSR in 1926, Kyrgyz Soviet Socialistic Republic in 1936 (Djakishev, 2004; Amanaliev 2004), and the Kyrgyz Republic independent from the Soviet Union in 1991.

**Figure 2: Man in a poppy field**



Source: Personal blog TerrainKGnita, <http://terrainkgnita.kloop.kg/>, last accessed on 28.08.2012. The photograph of Kojokmatov S. was taken in 1956 in Issyk-Kul oblast.

After the decision was made to stop the cultivation of poppies in the Kyrgyz SSR the law enforcement sources informed about an increase in production of hashish on the territories of Issyk-Kul region. Starting from the 1970s, this region was popular for harvesting cannabis as it had large territories of wild growing cannabis plants, which contained higher THC than in other regions of the country.<sup>3</sup> Law enforcement agencies also reported that mainly people belonging to the criminal underworld were involved in harvesting hashish and marijuana during summer seasons, and transporting drugs to other countries of the Soviet Union. The local population was mainly busy with the agricultural work provided by the state kolkoz and sovkhoz farms, growing wheat, barley, potatoes and other agricultural products. However, the demise of the Soviet Union and the consequent collapse of the economy changed the situation. People that found themselves with no jobs, and subsequently with no salaries turned to hashish harvesting as an illegal but alternative way of earning some money (Botoeva, 2014). However, it was still not an easy process and it required them to learn to overcome their own negative view towards hashish harvesting. Instead of cultivating and therefore increasing the production of drugs, people

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<sup>3</sup> Wild-growing hashish was a constant feature of parts of the Kyrgyz countryside. In 1974, 2.5 thousand hectares of wild-growing hashish were detected, and, in 1984, the identified area increased to four thousand hectares (Amanaliev, 2004). In the late 1990s, a program funded by the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes) conducted a survey mapping the areas of wild-growing cannabis plants. It found 8322 hectares of wild-growing cannabis in Kyrgyzstan alone (Zelichenko, 2003).



continued to harvest hashish and marijuauana from the wild growing cannabis plants, as plants could be found growing on almost any uncultivated patch of land.

**Figure 3: Cannabis plants and hashish harvesting**



Source: Fieldwork pictures, summer of 2009 and 2010

People could find them around the edges of small plots of land between houses, in larger fields outside of the village and higher in the mountains near sheep barns. Harvesting cannabis leaves was done without use of any technology, by rubbing the upper leaves of the plant between the palms, to gain the sticky dark substance. When the substance was thick enough they would peel it off from their hands and put into used small matchboxes, which worked as a measuring unit. This technique of gathering hashish was also useful in the process of re-naming of hashish and its later legitimization, which is the focus of the the next part of the chapter.

## **Re-interpreting hashish making in Toolu**

As well as the hashish making process, different names with various symbolic meanings and ways of interpreting them are ascribed to hashish itself. This has occurred over a comparatively short period of time – within the last twenty five years. The early years of hashish making, during the 1990s, is mostly linked with the attempts to move away from the negative connotations that hashish has had and trying to locate it within local cultural values. The names given to hashish itself and hashish making do not only hide their illegal and immoral nature, but also reflect the role that hashish subsequently assumed in the local economy and culture. In the case of hashish, people knew that it was illegal to make it but they could not simply claim that it was ethical because it did not have any cultural or religious significance, as is the case in India, Latin

American countries and Africa where coca and opium are locally consumed and/or used as part of local religious rituals (Allen, 1999; Coomber and South, 2004; Smith and Thongtham, 1992).

Here the process of re-naming of hashish should be understood in relation to how hashish has been perceived by the local population prior to the country pursuing a new economic trajectory after the demise of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet times, as most of the people were employed as kolkhoz workers and there was no economic necessity to make extra money, people mainly followed the legal approach to the drug with some occasional hashish makers being called drug addicts. However, the early years of independence meant that state owned assets were all privatised and land, livestock and technologies that used to belong to kolkhoz farms were distributed among the population in the region. This economic transformation did not go smoothly for kolkhoz workers and many working in the agricultural sector experienced a rapid decline in their quality of life and therefore an increased necessity to supplement their agricultural work with some alternative ways of making money. In this particular region, hashish making became one such alternative to income diversification for households. Although most of the local population were not involved in this process during the Soviet times, some groups from other regions of the country and even other republics of the Soviet Union used to be commissioned to prepare cannabis and hashish resin during the summer months. However, economic hardship often induced whole families, including the elderly and children to go to the fields to learn how to extract resin from cannabis leaves. This quick shift from the non acceptance of hashish and the stigmatization of hashish users towards families making hashish openly required contextualising in terms of the feelings this produced. In the early years of involvement of local people in harvesting the drug, re-naming hashish therefore, could be seen in light of the 'neutralization' strategy (Matza, 1964). According to Matza (1964), language is an excellent tool, not only to hide the practice of an illegal activity from other people but also to help someone to believe that the activity in which an individual is involved is not wrong. This strategy is used by people when they are unable to deny the fact that they are involved in an activity that is considered as illegal but instead try to interpret it differently. This framework allowed to understand how delinquents used different techniques in suppressing their feelings of guilt and let them hide from other people what they were involved in.

In the case of hashish makers, the agricultural nature of their everyday work allowed people to come up with some neutral words that have been commonly used when referring to hashish harvesting. In many of my conversations people would say 'I went to the fields', 'let's go to 'arkybet' [the other side of the hill], 'let's go to the mountains' or 'let's go to the forest'. As



mentioned before, little matchboxes were used to shape the hashish for measuring purposes, the neutral word ‘matchbox’ become almost identified with hashish in certain conversations.

The law enforcement played a big role in the re-naming of the cannabis plants and the harvesting of hashish. Most people and even the law enforcement officers that I talked to said that by the beginning to the mid 1990s, militia officers mostly tolerated people making hashish as there were not many arrests made.<sup>4</sup> However, in the mid 2000s militia officers were much more present in the fields during the hashish making season time starting from mid summer till the beginning of autumn. They also started making more arrests compared to the 1990s. However, their strategy was more to develop an ‘aura’ of law enforcement (Dewey, 2012; Watt and Zepeda, 2012) rather than actually uprooting hashish production from the local economic and cultural system. This could be seen in their practice of demanding bribes from hashish makers and offering protection to some middle persons that made money by collecting hashish for drug dealers, and usually came from outside of the region. So, in order to hide their topic of conversation from other people and possible law enforcement informants, they simply started using the word ‘it’ to talk about hashish. On a number of occasions, I conducted interviews with people who made hashish and talked about the drug by using only the word ‘it’. This can be seen in a number of quotes from across the interviews; in fact, many people talked about hashish, referring to *it*, without even noticing it.

However, ‘neutralization’ framework has its limitations as it focuses on the denial of responsibilities for breaking the law rather than on understanding the transformative power of renaming which might question the status quo of the law. By mostly focusing on legal and illegal categories, it does not create the space for categories such as legitimate and illegitimate. Therefore, instead of arguing that the ‘neutralization’ was the end goal of re-naming hashish making, I propose that it has helped hashish makers to prepare the grounds for its further legitimization within the community at later stages. By locating hashish, for instance, in the culturally accepted and highly valued sphere of gift-exchange people were able to remove the negative connotation attached to hashish and move it from an illegal sphere to a ‘grey zone’ (Heyman, 1999; Ledeneva 2006).

However, in order to analyse this specific practice of re-naming of hashish ‘kara-koi’, which can be literally translated as ‘black sheep’, we need to separate its meaning into two segments as the first word ‘kara’ makes references to cannabis crops, while ‘koi’ refers to the traditional system of gift giving, referring thus to a much more complex process of rooting

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<sup>4</sup> Similar patterns of almost non-presence of law enforcement in the 1990s has been described by Paoli et al in relation to drug trafficking in neighbouring Tajikistan (Paoli et al., 2007: 966).

hashish within the cultural values of closely knit family relationships. In a society which had century long traditions in herding livestock, sheep was used as one of the traditional gifts that families with close ties used to give each other on big lifecycle events celebrating the birth of children, circumcision of boys, weddings, etc. However, in the 1990s livestock numbers decreased substantially because of its widespread slaughter or sale. Individual households found themselves not able to herd big numbers of sheep that have been privatised by the state following the steps towards the neoliberalisation of economy (Abdurasulov, 2009; Steimann, 2011). Despite the faltering economy, people continued to maintain their relationships with other families that formed their security network for hardship times. Because gifts were exchanged, especially between families, an unreciprocated gift would taint the reputation of the whole family. Gifts given at social celebrations allowed families to develop social ties with other people and obtain social status and prestige (Mauss, 1990).

The practice of gifting hashish also coincided with the period in which traditional gifts such as livestock began to be replaced with cash, even though the importance of livestock did not deteriorate. In order not to violate the social order and be part of social life those with no livestock and no money at hand started taking hashish to social celebrations. While giving hashish they would whisper: 'This is my 'kara-koi' as a contribution to your celebration'. By referring to it as 'kara-koi' they not only renamed it as the conventionally expected gift but located it within the gift giving economy. This made it possible for some of the people to accept hashish as a gift.

Although, re-naming hashish as 'kara-koi' had wider and much more important implications than simply turning it into a gift. I understand this specific re-naming as a symbolic process which was used later for the legitimization of hashish making, as I heard many people referring to hashish as simply 'kara-koi' even though they were not going to use it as a present in social celebrations. Such acts played a huge role in making hashish acceptable to many people in the region: this highly symbolic renaming of hashish to 'kara-koi' or 'black sheep' allowed it to enter the sphere of cultural traditions. Named as a 'black sheep', most importantly, it allowed for the location of an illegal activity among the culturally accepted, shifting from a 'black and white' division between legal and illegal and locating it in a 'grey zone' (Heyman, 1999; Ledeneva, 2006; Smart, 1999).

On the other hand, such renaming also conveys some uneasiness of accepting cannabis plants and hashish harvesting as totally moral. According to the local system of beliefs, cannabis plants and hashish, although not used directly by people and mainly harvested for sale, should be used with caution as money obtained from them could be "bitter" (Shipton, 1989), that is,

money earned through selling morally prohibited products by the community, that could not be enjoyed and could not lead to wealth unless a cleansing ritual was performed. In the case of hashish makers, they should have been careful in making hashish but did not need to perform any cleansing rituals. Instead they needed to follow an agricultural work ethic first. For example, finish all their farming jobs before heading to the fields to harvest hashish. Secondly and most importantly, people should not be greedy and attempt to make a lot of money through hashish. Otherwise, the belief that most of the people shared was, their money would be tainted, which could bring more losses, financial and otherwise to their family. Calling and treating hashish making as their 'work' helped them to believe that they are not going to get the tainted, "bitter" money by making hashish.

The re-naming process did not stop there and people that were involved in hashish making needed some more support in shifting its meaning from an illegal to a licit, more commonly accepted one. For instance, many people also started referring to hashish making as their work locating this illegal practice within the local work ethics (Galemba, 2012). While conducting fieldwork, most of the men and women said that they were going to work when they were going to the fields to harvest cannabis plants. By calling hashish making as their work, people were able to invoke various aspects of ethics of the local moral economy (Thompson, 1991; Scott 1985). First of all, calling hashish harvesting as work was important as the work ethic was rooted in the culture of farmers who were judged according to how well they looked after their land and livestock. This is linked with another interpretation of the work ethic, that it includes coping with difficulties and not waiting for help to be provided, either by other people or the state which is encouraged by neoliberal economic policies and strategies implemented in the country from mid 1990s.

Secondly, by drawing parallels between the work of making hashish and the work done by older generations during the Soviet times, hashish making is re-interpreted as ethical, and the question about its illegality is posed. Tolubai, a man in his thirties, recalled hashish making at the beginning of 1990s, stating that: "Our parents used to cultivate poppies and collect opium. After the state stopped producing opium, they started cultivating beetroots and potatoes. Now *kendir* [another Kyrgyz name for a cannabis plant] emerged, coinciding with our own time" (Author's interview, Toolu village, August 2009). Furthermore, elaborating on this parallel and using the collective and individual memories of red poppies growing on the fields of state collective farms during the Soviet times, people were able to question the illegality of hashish making. For instance, Tolubai continued in his interview 'What is the difference between their and my work?', which meant that all generations did not act differently from each other, they all worked

and continue working on the fields and collect the harvest. It is mainly the state's interpretation that is different here.

However, much younger generation of hashish makers, in their late teens and early twenties, did not feel much the bitterness of hashish money. For instance, during my fieldwork in 2009-2010, I discovered that the younger generation of hashish makers started referring to the fields where they made hashish as 'Kumtor' after the 'Kumtor Gold Company' owned by the Canadian Centerra gold mining company, which has been extracting gold from the mountains located in the Issyk-Kul oblast since 1996. Again, although not all hashish makers were able to earn a lot of money, referring to fields as Kumtor created a symbolic association with gold and wealth. This particular practice of re-naming the fields full of wild growing cannabis plants as 'Kumtor', demonstrates how for a younger generation it meant not only work but work that could bring wealth and success. Although, the majority still followed a work ethic in making hashish and did not make hashish day and night and forget about their other chores, some of the younger hashish makers interpreted hashish making as their way to becoming rich, similar to some drug producers in other parts of the world (Steinberg et al., 2004; UNODCP, 1999). Interpretation of hashish making as work allows them to still perceive it as ethical, which lets them to achieve the culturally desired goal of getting wealthy. In particular, re-naming the fields as 'Kumtor' does not contradict the general logic of legitimating hashish production in the village as this practice meant that the illicitness of hashish making could be concealed and moved to a grey area, where the illegal nature of hashish making became questionable as it provided people with work and subsequently with wealth.

## Conclusion

By exploring how people in Toolu village renamed and reinterpreted the meaning of hashish harvesting, I discuss the role of the language in the legitimation process of an illegal activity. This was possible by shifting the meaning from illegality of hashish making and locating it within the economic ethics (Galemba, 2012) of the local population. Although the re-naming of hashish making is a useful strategy so as not to openly disclose their illegal activities, I argue that it is part of the wider process of legitimation of hashish within the community. It illustrates how renaming hashish and hashish harvesting is not a simple technique of disguising this illegal practice from other people. It is also not just a simple technique of neutralising the social pressure and creating individual shields of protecting themselves from self-blame (Matza, 1964).

It is more a group process of re-interpreting the meaning of hashish, although still acknowledging that it is outlawed by the state, and subsequently licit.

On the one hand, re-naming hashish was used as a strategy to hide illegal activities from the law enforcement officers. While the population of Toolu was engaged in the local re-interpretation and transformation of the meaning of hashish making and its role within the local economic and social relationships, the state has started putting more pressure on people by locating this practice on the illegal side of the equation. The more visible presence of the law enforcement in the region and more arrests done in late 2000s has meant that people used different linguistic codes to hide the fact that they were making hashish. Still, the re-naming of hashish making is a much more complex process than just simply hiding the illegal nature of hashish making. It should be seen in light of 'neutralization technique' strategy used by hashish makers which, in turn, prepared the grounds for shifting the meaning of hashish making from an illicit to a grey area where the illegality of hashish could be challenged and questioned rather than accepted. For instance, by locating the legitimization processes of illegal hashish harvesting within the broader historical framework and linking it with the state controlled, legal drug production in the region during the early years of the Soviet Union this chapter allows us to understand how local responses to the law can be critical of the state's own practices and definitions.

On the other hand, the renaming of hashish is not a static but rather a dynamic process with different names being used at different times. For example, 'kara-koi' has given way to 'Kumtor' over fifteen years. It is also symptomatic of the changes that are taking place regarding ethics and morality that guided the everyday practices of Toolu villagers, as the older generation referred more to their right for work (work that does not necessarily makes someone rich) while talking about hashish making, and younger generation using the term 'Kumtor' referred more to their right to get wealthy. The latter is more in line with the values and at the same time of inequities created by the neoliberal market societies where the marginalised and poor 'can get an access to global wealth that they otherwise would not be able to reach' (Galemba, 2012). Still, despite the fact that they acknowledge and use different economic ethics, such renaming is done within the local moral economy that provides an overarching narrative that hashish should be socially acceptable in times of economic hardships and state not providing much help to farmers (Thompson, 1991; Scott, 1985).

This chapter, thus, highlights the importance of analysing the contributing factors for persistence of illegal economies, and especially focusing on the local population's perception of legality and illegality. It discusses how the construction of alternative narrative to the law is rooted in the local moral economic principles but at the same time a dynamic process inclusive

of different groups of people. It also highlights that legitimization of an illegal activity is not a straightforward process, where everybody accepts the activity as moral. Even the morality of the activity could be questioned, which requires an active interpretation and re-interpretation based on the moral understanding of the role of hashish harvesting in relation to the families' present and future well-being and socio-economic status. By focusing on key local concepts used in re-naming hashish, the chapter provides the cultural, historical and social context under which an illegal practice (Heyman, 1999: 8) such as illegal hashish harvesting could become part of the rural, agricultural economy. The re-naming of hashish and its harvesting among the people of Toolu, thus, should be seen as part of a bigger process of turning it into a licit commodity and activity, thus locating it within the 'grey area' between legality and illegality. Local values and norms are used in embedding this activity within the moral economic relationships. The questioning of illegality of hashish happened within the local system of values and is also symptomatic of the changes and transformations that were taking place within the local culture that does not exist in isolation but rather in conversation with the changes and transformations taking place in the global world.

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