

## Book Note

---

*Global Outlaws: Crime, Money, and Power in the Contemporary World.* By Carolyn Nordstrom. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Pp. 256. \$21.95, paperback.

*Global Outlaws* is an anthropologist's attempt to examine the intersection of crime, finance, and power in daily activities across the globe that produce something of worth, whether monetary value, social and cultural capital, power, patronage, or survival. The book discusses major illegal commodities as well as the illicit fortunes created from the sale of common commodities. In Nordstrom's words, "worldwide dynamics ultimately rest on a compendium of individual exchanges . . . ." These exchanges range from the sale of a cigarette to a multi-billion-dollar deal. In her book, Nordstrom explores what she refers to as the "il/legal," or the overlap of legality and illegality and how an individual enacts each action across this spectrum.

The book provides an interesting look at the global trade market, including the activities of merchants, truckers, traders, militaries, and smugglers, and examines methods of transport, shipping, ports, and international business. Each chapter focuses on a specific point along the path of the global market process, spanning local and transnational relations. The first section is set in Angola and presents the stories of a war orphan selling cigarettes, the store owner who fronts the cigarettes, the military that runs the country, and the average people who create informal economies. The second section focuses on international trade and examines border posts and African ports. The third section showcases intercontinental trade and security by focusing on the port of Rotterdam and the drug market of both narcotics and pharmaceuticals. The fourth section discusses the ethics and culture of criminals and law enforcement officers. The last section follows the voyage of a transatlantic freighter to the ports of California to show how security and illegality work in transport and trade. Nordstrom's stated goal is to "craft an understanding of the world of the extra-legal in total—not just the arms and drugs, not just the trafficking and criminal organizations—but the universe of thought and action that falls beyond the scope of the legal."

Nordstrom first poignantly describes the situation of the war-ravaged and impoverished economy of Angola, where television screens and cars are within reach, but the only commodity worth any real value to people is food. This paradox raises questions about the distinction between legal and illegal economies. The distinction between the legal and illegal seems distinct, but the reader is prompted to think in new ways about the very existence of this division. For example, Nordstrom discusses the sale of

smuggled cigarettes. According to the book, about 50 percent of all cigarettes are smuggled, which shows just how difficult it is to enforce laws, customs, and borders, yet how easy it is to smuggle goods (such as arms, drugs and pirated technology) along certain routes. Smuggled cigarettes may provide the only source of income for a war orphan in Angola attempting to earn enough money to buy bread for the day. This fact leads us to ask, where does legality end and illegality begin? We are forced to think about situations in which illicit activity saves lives, provides food and medicine, and becomes the only way to make a living.

The vast global smuggling networks encompass goods ranging from cars to endangered species of fish that fetch high prices on the Asian and European markets. With shipments of endangered fish, smugglers can easily include beer, diamonds, cigarettes, and components for technology. At the other end of the spectrum are the international businesspeople who manipulate multi-country and offshore businesses and create unrecorded profits that both build and demolish economic structures throughout the world. In Angola, a place marked by depleted resources and displaced refugees, powerful political and military factions manipulate both INGOs and their own people in order to reap monetary benefits while also restructuring and offering a safe haven for people to start new lives. These relationships mean that while people abroad are enjoying cheap tomatoes from Africa, they may also be enjoying the results of military battles, forced relocation of displaced villagers, unpaid workforces, aid money misused by government elites, and deals with commercial airlines resulting in free transportation. For instance, international airlines fly military supplies into Angola and fly resources out from the country. The profit margin on air cargo is large, so a number of airlines bid for the rights to service Angola. The government elites who have taken over certain towns and farmlands then make deals with the airlines to transport produce for free in exchange for the rights to service the country. From the perspective of the airlines, they were assisting a war-torn country by providing free services while also bringing low-cost food to Europe.

Corruption is the way in which such countries are run. Corruption is not understood in the traditional sense as a personal endeavor, but is manifested through the exercise of control over a country's resources. Often when people in a given country don't have the salaries to sustain a reasonable lifestyle, almost everyone becomes corrupt, and corruption is accepted and even encouraged. Huge volumes of trade happen in commodities like diamonds and beer, thousands of dollars are made, and the government allows such activity to continue for the sake of national profits. The process is defined by the intersection of the legal, illegal, and mundane. The term "mundane" is how Nordstrom defines everyday transactions that may be linked to illegal activity through smuggling but seem legitimate because they can be as day-to-day as food, cigarettes, or medicine. The illegal is so basic to com-

merce that the law only captures a small percentage of this activity. Judicial systems cannot easily separate unregulated business from formal business, and deciding where to draw the line is a real challenge for the law.

Nordstrom's book takes the reader through a path describing the intricacies of economies, showing that the elements that we would like to deem illegal are simply a part of the larger picture and, given the way the system operates, cannot be viewed in isolation. Nordstrom concludes that there is virtually no way for security to exist in practice in the world today. Legality in the context of trade is a fluid concept. She suggests that those who engage in this trade do not view the state as important and these extra-state actors may be the prism through which we can understand new ideas of power and authority.

—Noga Firstenberg