
January 2009

Book Notes: McMafia: A Journey through the Global Criminal Underworld, by Misha Glenny

Steve Molnar

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/ohlj>

Book Note

Citation Information

Molnar, Steve. "Book Notes: McMafia: A Journey through the Global Criminal Underworld, by Misha Glenny." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 47.1 (2009) : 181-182.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.1171>

<https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/ohlj/vol47/iss1/11>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Osgoode Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Osgoode Hall Law Journal by an authorized editor of Osgoode Digital Commons.

**Book Notes: McMafia: A Journey through the Global Criminal Underworld, by
Misha Glenny**

Book Note

McMAFIA: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GLOBAL CRIMINAL UNDERWORLD, by Misha Glenny¹

STEVE MOLNAR

THE GOAL OF MISHA GLENNY'S *McMAFIA* is to provide a worldwide tour of organized crime in the era of economic globalization. The substance of the book derives from hundreds of interviews conducted with current and former mobsters, government officials, law enforcement agents, and legitimate businessmen. Glenny begins by explaining the emergence of organized crime in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. He makes clear, however, that mobsters in the Balkans are no different from those in Brazil or British Columbia: they have all mastered the central tenets of capitalism (hence the book's title), albeit in pursuit of profit in the black and grey markets.

The book consists of fourteen chapters divided into four parts. Part I discusses the emergence of organized crime in the former Soviet bloc. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many former state employees, such as secret police, border guards, and counter-intelligence officers, found themselves out of work. Glenny offers numerous examples of criminality and the ease with which it is seamlessly incorporated into the legitimate economy. Organized crime thrives on economic distress, and there has been plenty of this created by what Glenny, in chapter two, terms the "myopic policies" of the West. Economic sanctions, and even simple policy instruments such as tariffs and quotas, provide a disincentive to legitimate enterprise and drive individuals towards smuggling and trafficking in stolen and/or illicit goods. Organized crime pays, writes Glenny, largely because Western Europeans and Americans enjoy consuming the drugs, contraband cigarettes, prostitutes, and trafficked labour that are provided.

Part II primarily discusses financial crimes, in particular money laundering. In chapter five, Glenny notes that, in addition to the collapse of the Soviet Un-

1. (New York: Knopf, 2008) 375 pages.

ion, the most significant event that contributed to the internationalization of organized crime was the deregulation of financial markets, which has made it easier for criminals to convert money earned on the black market into legitimate funds. Chapters six and seven discuss the necessity of money laundering in organized crime, and the importance of the Middle East, particularly Dubai, to this process. Part III shifts to a discussion of drug trafficking, profiling organizations in British Columbia and Colombia. Glennly notes that an estimated 70 per cent of the money available to criminal organizations derives from the drug trade. This informs his advocacy of the legalization and regulation of illicit drugs, which he believes will have a trickle-down effect on the other types of crime discussed. Glennly accurately describes the War on Drugs as “an attempt to repeal the economic law of supply and demand, and therefore doomed to failure.”² Glennly also rightly points out the (obvious) contradictions between the wars on drugs and terror, the former providing the resources necessary to sustain the enemy combatants in the latter. So long as the United States persists in the War on Drugs, says Glennly, the War on Terror can never be won.

In Part IV, Glennly takes us to Asia, discussing the rise of the yakuza in Japan and the Triads in China, and the trafficking of human labour and counterfeit goods for which that region has become known. Again, Glennly observes that labour smuggling and counterfeiting of everything from designer handbags to DVDs is tied to the illogicality of globalization. One lesson from capitalism that has not escaped the yakuza is the value of outsourcing: Japanese mobsters compensate for declining demographics by contracting out the riskiest parts of their business to the Chinese Triads. The book concludes with an example that restates Glennly’s introductory premise that organized criminals are essentially capitalists run amok.

While an interesting read, *McMafia* suffers perhaps from the scale of its ambition: as the scene shifts from region to region, the root causes of organized crime become less clear. The book is also wholly descriptive, leaving the reader wanting for more thorough analysis. The only solutions Glennly proffers are the unoriginal recommendation for increased international financial regulation and the (regrettably) impossible call to abandon the War on Drugs. That said, the book sheds important light on organized crime, and deserves careful reading by all who seek solutions to the problem.

2. *Ibid* at 224.