

# Preface

The academic study of diamonds is as multifaceted as the precious stones themselves. Mineralogists and geographers have written about them, as have historians and economists and students of art and fashion. They each shine their light on a different aspect of this source of luminous radiance. But who would venture to describe the entire complicated worldwide system starting in the diamond mines of Africa and ending with the consumers of Western metropolises? Social scientists? To them, the world of diamonds has remained a mysterious arena. The diamond trade has always been especially difficult to approach, closed and secretive.

Dina Siegel is a cultural anthropologist who practices her discipline in the field of criminology. With this study, she simultaneously goes beyond two professional roles. As an anthropologist, she might be expected to confine herself to developing countries, ethnic minorities, or small and clearly defined communities. As indeed she does in her field work among the Jewish diamond dealers of Antwerp. Who could do so better than an ethnographer with no fewer than four relevant languages at her command, Russian, English, Dutch, and Hebrew? The topic of her study, however, exceeds this level. The diamond trade, in the words of Charles Tilly, is a system of '*trust networks*', extending all across the globe. These networks are included in the analysis. In this sense, this study might be referred to as global ethnography. Criminologists are expected to keep their sights fixed on street crime, white collar crime, organised crime, and the like. Not that various manifestations of these forms of crime do not emerge involving robberies from diamond dealers or museums, theft by employees wherever diamonds are cut or polished, or the arrests of transnational smuggling organisations. Siegel goes further though and also studies the role of big business (De Beers) in the formation of cartels, and of nations or their rulers in political crime. This study is thus a good example of a new branch of the criminology tree, that is, global crime.

Criminologists usually launch their research on crime in some specific business where one or more scandals have given a certain branch of the economy a bad reputation. Organisational deviance was studied, for example, after court cases and media attention focused on the oil industry, the second-hand car trade, waste disposal, or the pharmaceutical industry. The standard questions are: What are the criminogenic factors and what is the opportunity structure for crime in this economic sector?

Siegel takes the opposite approach. She uses the logic developed by Moore in the anthropology of law with her theory on semi-autonomous social fields. The main question there is: What rules are followed in this branch? And only then can the question derived from it be: Are there risks of crime here? From Moore's perspective, there are separate worlds below the state level where participants adhere to their own customs with their own entrance ceremonies, regulation of relationships, and dispute settlement institutions. A social field of this kind is semi-autonomous because everyone there has to remain within the context of the official law of the land. In this case of commerce on a global scale, it is more complicated because the legal systems of any number of countries need to be dealt with. The professional group of diamond dealers consists of 'middlemen minorities', Jews and Indians from Gujarat, who have organised their networks all across the globe and need to keep the considerable legal differences in mind. But as all smugglers know, these differences and information about them present all kinds of opportunities for financial profits.

First and foremost, the *field* of the diamond trade is a survival system to protect itself from crime from outside. The secrecy and adherence to traditions are functional in fending off all the magpies zooming in on the shiny gems. In this analysis, this would make the diamond trade more an agency of victimology than of criminology. In her discourse on the political context diamond dealers have to operate in, Siegel's description takes an unexpected but essentially classical anthropological turn. After all, how many ethnographers don't wind up defenders of *their people*? After the 1998 Global Witness Report, the branch has been the target of criticism from NGOs able to mobilise the United Nations and numerous national governments to introduce international measures against the trade in conflict diamonds or blood diamonds. That has given the entire branch a bad reputation. 'What is wrong with diamonds anyway?' Siegel seems to be exclaiming when she describes this tendency as moral panic. The dealers themselves don't have that much to do with the negligible percentage of diamonds that are exchanged by warlords and kleptocrats for arms and luxury goods. What is more, the international measures (Kimberley Certification Scheme) have proved to be ineffective. But the most important argument against the conduct of the NGOs, at any rate the one that works best for me, is the objection that organisations of this kind operate without any democratic legitimacy.

This magnificent global ethnography should evoke theoretical as well as political debate.

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