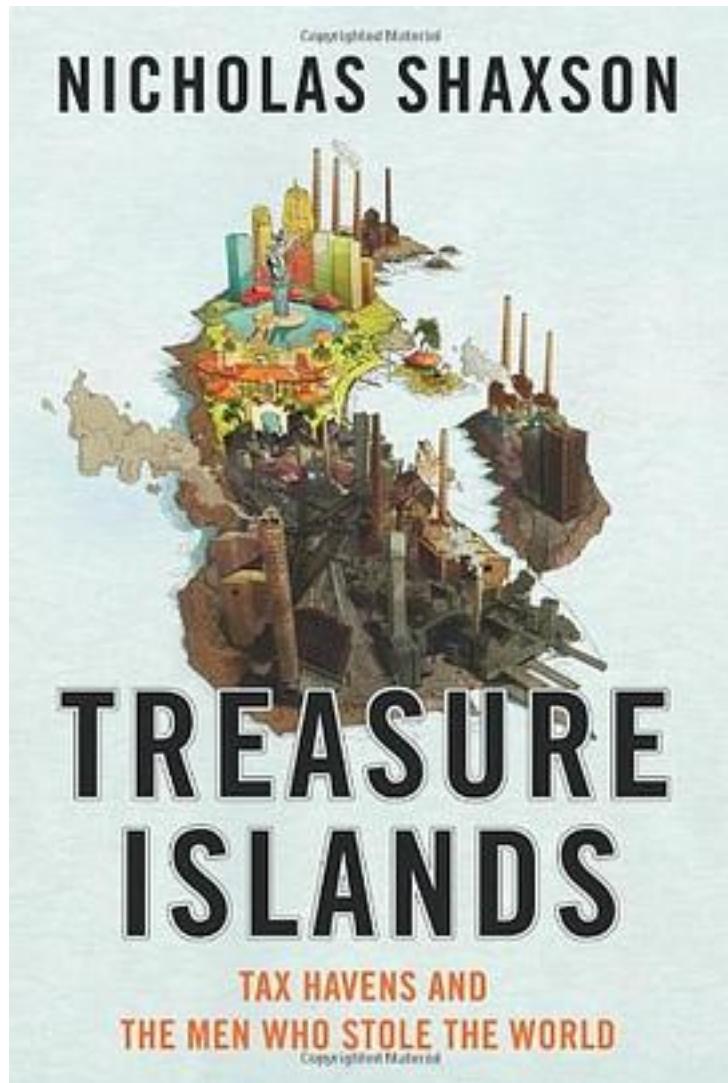


Treasure Islands



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出版者:Bodley Head

出版时间:2011-1-6

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9781847921109

Millions of people have a queasy feeling that something is not right in the global economy – but they struggle to put their fingers on what exactly the problem is. Treasure Islands at last tells the real story of where it all went wrong. This is the great untold story of globalisation.

Tax havens are not exotic, murky sideshows at the fringes of the world economy: they lie at its centre. Half of world trade flows, at least on paper, through tax havens. Every multinational corporation uses them routinely. The biggest users of tax havens by far are not terrorists, spivs, celebrities or Mafiosi – but banks.

Tax havens are the ultimate source of strength for our global elites. Just as European nobles once consolidated their unaccountable powers in fortified castles, to better subjugate and extract tribute from the surrounding peasantry, so financial capital has coalesced in their modern equivalent today: the tax havens. In these fortified nodes of secret, unaccountable political and economic power, financial and criminal interests have come together to capture local political systems and turn the havens into their own private law-making factories, protected against outside interference by the world’s most powerful countries – most especially Britain. Treasure Islands will, for the first time, show the blood and guts of just how they do it.

Tax havens aren’t just about tax. They are about escape – escape from criminal laws, escape from creditors, escape from tax, escape from prudent financial regulation – above all, escape from democratic scrutiny and accountability. Tax havens get rich by taking fees for providing these escape routes. This is their core line of business. It is what they do.

These escape routes transform the merely powerful into the untouchable. “Don’t tax or regulate us or we will flee offshore!” the financiers cry, and elected politicians around the world crawl on their bellies and capitulate. And so tax havens lead a global race to the bottom to offer deeper secrecy, ever laxer financial regulations, and ever more sophisticated tax loopholes. They have become the silent battering rams of financial deregulation, forcing countries to remove financial regulations, to cut taxes and restraints on the wealthy, and to shift all the risks, costs and taxes onto the backs of the rest of us. In the process democracy unravels and the offshore system pushes ever further onshore. The world’s two most important tax havens today are United States and Britain.

Without understanding offshore, we will never understand the history of the modern world.

Poverty in Africa? Offshore is at the heart of the matter. Industrial-scale corruption and the wholesale subversion of governments by criminalised interests, across the developing world? Offshore is central to the story, every time. The systematic looting of the former Soviet Union and the merging of the nuclear-armed country’s intelligence apparatus with organized crime, is a story that unfolds substantially in London and its offshore satellites. Saddam Hussein used tax havens to buttress his power, as does North Korea’s Kim Jong-Il today. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s strange hold over Italian politics is very much an offshore tale. The Elf Affair, Europe’s biggest ever corruption scandal, had secrecy jurisdictions at its core. Arms smuggling to terrorist organisations? The growth of mafia empires? Offshore. You can only fit about \$1 million into a briefcase: without offshore, the illegal drugs trade would be a fraction of its size.

Private equity and hedge funds? Goldman Sachs? Citigroup? These are all creatures of

offshore. The scandals of Enron, Parmalat, Long Term Capital Management, Lehman Brothers, AIG — and many more? Tax havens lay behind them all. The rise of multinationals, the explosion of debt in advanced economies since the 1970s is substantially an offshore tale. Complex monopolies, frauds, insider trading rings — these corruptions of free markets always have tax havens at their heart. As *Treasure Islands* explains in vivid, thrilling, horrifying detail, every big financial crisis since the 1970s – including the great global crisis that erupted in 2007 – has been a creature of the tax havens.

These problems all have other explanations too. Tax havens are never the only story, because offshore exists only in relation to elsewhere. That is why it is called offshore.

Without understanding the tax havens, or the secrecy jurisdictions as I often prefer to call them, we cannot understand the world. *Treasure Islands* at last starts to fill this gigantic hole in modern history.

In short, it is the most important exposé of tax havens ever published.

作者介绍:

Nicholas Shaxson is a British writer, journalist and investigator. He is author of the acclaimed 2007 book *Poisoned Wells: the Dirty Politics of African Oil*, an Associate Fellow of Chatham House (the Royal Institute of African Affairs in London) and, following completion of *Treasure Islands* in 2010, a full-time writer and researcher for the Tax Justice Network, an expert-led group focused on tax and tax havens. Since 1993 he has written extensively on global business and politics for the Financial Times, Reuters, the Economist and its sister publication the Economist Intelligence Unit, International Affairs, Foreign Affairs, the American Interest, the BBC, Africa Confidential, African Energy, and a wide range of others.

He was born in Malawi in 1966 and has lived at various times in India, Brazil, England, Lesotho, Spain, Angola, South Africa, Germany and the Netherlands. He currently lives with his partner and their two children in Zürich, Switzerland.

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评论

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