



# The Offshore World: Sovereign Markets, Virtual Places, and Nomad Millionaires

*Ronen Palan*

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The atlas of contemporary capitalism is curious indeed. A desperately poor and civil-war-wracked nation, Liberia, is the world's shipping superpower; the Cayman Islands the fifth-largest financial center in the world; land-locked Zurich a venerable "offshore" banking center. Indeed, it is estimated that half of the global stock of money passes through tax havens. The logic of the offshore world, where millionaires and corporations roam in search of financial advantage, is slippery. It challenges many conventional assumptions about power and economics. In the single most comprehensive account of the offshore economy, Ronen Palan investigates the legal spaces, unregulated and yet maintained and supported by the state system, that have emerged for purposes of international finance, tax havens, export processing zones, flags of convenience, and e-commerce. The offshore economy had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, saw early development after the First World War, and metastasized in the 1970s. Palan believes that a rapidly expanding offshore economy is now producing a new market in sovereignty; states have discovered that their rights to write law may be used as a commercial asset. This commercialization of sovereignty, he asserts, undermines the legitimacy of the nation-state and supports a form of nomadic capitalism.



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