

Is There Honor Among Crooks?  
On the Importance of Trust in Criminal Relations

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# Is there honor among crooks? On the Importance of Trust in Criminal Relations

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## INTRODUCTION

According to conventional wisdom, trust is an essential feature of organized crime. Because criminals have no recourse to the judicial system in the event of contract violations and deceit, they have to rely largely on trust to cope with the risks that are inherent in interactions with others under conditions of illegality. Because trust is a necessary component of criminal relations, it is further argued, organized crime tends to be embedded in ties of kinship, ethnicity, and ritual kinship within Mafia-like fraternal organizations (Black et al., 2001:58; Bovenkerk, 1998:122; Kenney and Finckenauer, 1995:43; von Lampe, 1999:220-1; 2001b; Lupsha, 1986:33-4; Paoli, 2002:84).

Others have cast doubt on the general validity of these assumptions by arguing that organized crime is better characterized by a lack of trust (van Duyn et al., 2001:99, 127), as people who tend towards criminality are unlikely, in the words of Gottfredson and Hirschi, “to be reliable, trustworthy, or cooperative” (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990:213). Even life in the Mafia, as Diego Gambetta has stressed, is fraught with uncertainty, distrust, suspicion, paranoid anxiety and misunderstanding (Gambetta, 1996:152).

In our research on the illegal alcohol market in Norway (Johansen, 1994; 1998) and the illegal cigarette market in Germany (von Lampe, 2001a; 2002), we have come across myriad criminal networks that cover more or less the entire spectrum from criminal relations embedded in strong social ties to ad hoc contacts established across ethnic and cultural boundaries. These findings have given us the impetus for a closer examination of the significance of trust for the emergence and continued existence of criminal relations. Despite the broad attention that has been paid to this issue in the organized crime literature, no efforts have been made yet towards a systematic analysis.

The purpose of our paper is to take a cautious step in this direction by providing a tentative conceptualization of trust in the context of organized crime and to discuss its empirical relevance with regard to the two illegal markets for highly taxed goods that we are studying. Our data are derived primarily from interviews conducted with participants in the bootleg liquor market in Norway, and court files related to the contraband cigarette market in Germany.

## A DEFINITION OF TRUST

The most appropriate frame of reference for discussing trust in the context of organized crime, we would like to argue, is a network approach. We view trust as a property of dyadic relations that form the basic elements of criminal networks. Criminal networks, in turn, constitute “the least common denominator of organized crime” (McIllwain, 1999:304) and should therefore

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be taken as the key empirical referent of the concept of organized crime (Hobbs and Dunnighan, 1998; Ianni, 1975; Johansen, 1996; von Lampe, 2001b; Morselli, 2001).

The dyadic relations we are concerned about involve a trusting person P and a trusted other person O. To the extent O can be trusted, he or she may be called trustworthy or loyal. Conversely, O might place trust in P. But given the fact that neither theoretically, nor empirically trust needs to be mutual, and in the interest of clarity, we limit our attention in this paper to the perspective of P as a person who places trust in O.

Trust is a controversial issue in the social sciences, as reflected by the wide range of competing definitions used to describe it (Huemer, 1998; Laucken, 2001). For the purposes of our discussion, we define trust as the expectation of P, under conditions of uncertainty, that a) O will not harm P, even though b) O could harm P (see Gambetta, 1998:219).

Trust generally involves an element of risk (Misztal, 1996:18), but this is especially true in the sphere of illegality where no recourse can be taken to judicial institutions to seek compensation in the event that expectations of loyal behavior are violated (Paoli, 2002:84), and where every accomplice is a potential informer and hostile witness (Reuter, 1983:115).

The quintessential situation in which trust is an issue is that of a collaborative criminal venture involving P and O as co-offenders. By saying that P trusts O, we are implying that P expects that

- O will not violate the specific terms stipulated in the particular explicit or implicit agreements regarding the venture, that
- O will not violate general expectations of considerate behavior, and that
- O will protect the secrecy of the venture.

But co-offending is not the only constellation we need to consider. We believe that from an analytical perspective a broad spectrum of situations has to be taken into account that also encompasses more passive relations, even to the extent that criminal actor P deals with O as a mere bystander. Here the trust P places in O relates to the expectation that

- O will not interfere with P's actions, and that
- O will not alert others to P's actions.

Between the two poles of cooperative relations on the one end of the spectrum, and passive relations on the other, there are several intermediate constellations imaginable. For example, that relating to communication relations through which criminally relevant information is passed on between P and O.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRUST

Having laid a conceptual foundation by selecting criminal relations in a broad sense as the key empirical referent, the first step in the investigation is to examine if there really is a basis of trust connecting P and O. The potential alternatives to a trust based relation would be a relation characterized by either a lack of trust or by mistrust.

Lack of trust refers to a situation in which P perceives that O could harm P, but P has no basis on which to determine whether or not O will harm P. In contrast, mistrust exists when P perceives O to be capable and willing to harm P.

Provided there is a basis of trust in the relation between P and O, the crucial question is: on what grounds does P expect O to act in a way that will not cause harm?

This question leads to a comprehensive examination of the relation between P and O, including their personalities, as well as an analysis of the socio-cultural setting in which the relation is embedded.

We propose a fourfold typology that distinguishes trust with regard to the foundation on which P's expectation about O's behavior rests. In the first category, P's trust is based on perceptions of individual dispositions of O. The second type pertains to trust based on a perception of the functioning of an overarching structure in which P and O are integrated. The third constellation involves trust relating to the predictability of routine situations in which P and O interact. The fourth category includes expectations of loyal behavior that are dictated by affections P has towards O.

### Perceived Individual Dispositions

#### *Personality based trust*

The first category corresponds at least in part with the concept of trustworthiness or loyalty on the part of O. The notion of loyalty pertains to the propensity of O to conform with the interests and expectations of P beyond the boundaries of any institutionalized or agreed obligation (Parsons, 1951:98). P trusts O because P believes in the prevalence of certain individual dispositions that guide O's behavior for the benefit of P. This belief may have different foundations.

The most obvious foundation for such a belief is past observations of O's behavior and the resulting expectation that O will behave in a similar fashion in the future. Criminal actors have various opportunities to prove themselves and build up a reputation for being reliable, be it, for example, in the activities of a delinquent peer group, in prison life, or in a situation which is specifically arranged to serve as a test for someone's reliability. Even the media may have a trust-building function to the extent they portrait individual criminals as reliable in underworld terms.

The belief in the prevalence of certain individual dispositions may also be linked to certain character traits ascribed to O, for example an emotional bond tying O to P or an adherence to certain norms and values that suggest that O will behave in accordance with these norms and values and thus in the manner desired by P.

In all of these instances we speak of personality based trust.

#### *Calculative trust*

A second subcategory of trust that is tied to the perception of individual dispositions is calculative trust. P expects O to be loyal because P expects O to respond rationally either to rewards for loyal behavior or to sanctions for disloyal behavior.

These positive and negative incentives may be external to the relation of P and O, or they may be conditions that P has purposefully set to influence O. In the latter instances, trust is based on the expectation that O's behavior can successfully be manipulated. The most significant means in this respect seem to be financial reward and the threat of violence (Reuter, 1983:116).

### *Abstract basis of trust*

The expectation of loyal behavior may also be derived from generalized assumptions about certain groups of people that are defined by some common property such as social position or ethnicity. In these cases P trusts O because P expects O to behave in the same way as any other person like O. One might speak here of an abstract basis of trust.

One example for abstract trust can be found in the relation between German customers and Vietnamese vendors of contraband cigarettes. The latter have dominated the illicit street sale of cigarettes in East Germany since the early 1990s. It seems plausible to assume that there is a general belief among Germans that these Vietnamese vendors can be trusted, particularly because they are unlikely to be covert customs officers given the marginalized status of the Vietnamese community in East Germany (von Lampe, 2002).

Another, closely related example is provided by the business relations between Polish wholesale suppliers of smuggled cigarettes and Vietnamese dealers. From the available evidence it seems that Polish suppliers of contraband cigarettes have initially taken the risk of directly approaching potential Vietnamese customers without prior introduction by a third party or any other preceding connection. Originally, in the early 1990s, Polish suppliers typically established these contacts by soliciting customers in front of housing projects occupied by Vietnamese. Apparently, both sides were similarly confident that members of the respective ethnic group would be trustworthy. In a legal business context, relations across ethnic and language barriers are generally believed to be difficult to establish and maintain (Neubauer, 1997). Interestingly, however, the opposite may be true in the case of illegal business since the respective other's status as a foreigner often rules out the possibility of his or her cooperating with the authorities.

### Overarching Structures

The second major category pertains to trust that is placed not – or not only - in a person but in the functioning of overarching structures like kinship, fraternal organizations (ritual kinship), deviant subcultures, and ethnic communities within which the relation of P and O is embedded. These structures are perceived to insure loyal behavior regardless of the particular persons involved because disloyalty would have repercussions beyond the given dyadic relation.

#### *Kinship*

Kinship provides a basis of trust to the extent that it creates a natural bond of cohesion among relatives. As Anthony Giddens has pointed out, “kinship people can usually be relied upon to meet a range of obligations more or less regardless of whether they feel personally sympathetic towards specific individuals involved” (Giddens, 1993:295).

Of course, reflexively, kinship, and the other overarching structures we are considering here, can be expected to instill a sense of reliability that is attached to concrete individuals. Insofar, there is an empirical overlap between our categories of personality based trust and trust placed in abstract social entities. Still, we would like to maintain that for the purpose of a concise analysis, the distinction is useful and heuristically valuable.

In our research, kinship is not a predominant aspect. Among alcohol smugglers in Norway, the most common kinship based patterns of cooperation are father and son relations, sometimes on equal terms.

One interviewed Norwegian bootlegger explained: “Dad, who used to be a workingman, did start on his own in the 50s with tobacco and fruits, mostly black. Later on he went on with booze, and asked me to drive. He had no driver’s license. Here you see the coincidence of life.”

In some instances, smugglers have been found to receive moral and logistical support from their wives or families.

Another Norwegian bootlegger recollected in an interview: “My wife and I, we have always been together. I go nowhere or do nothing without her. We did our first deals in the 50s - went to the loan shark with our wedding rings to raise money for our first investment in cigarettes and booze... But my son, by the way, is a doctor.”

In other instances, family ties have turned out to be a source of risk when abused wives and disgruntled relatives volunteered information to the authorities.

Perhaps more significant trust factors than the immediate family are close-knit, local communities in rural Norway where moonshining is widespread and disloyal behavior would be directed not only against a business partner but against the entire community.

Similar mechanisms could be observed in the context of legal associations such as athletic clubs. One informant reported that his soccer coach used to sell liquor to his team on a regular basis. Another informant recalls: “We used to buy booze from a guy who was a member of our athletic club. Nobody grassed on him. That would be unthinkable!”

#### *Fraternal organizations and deviant subcultures*

Trust among members of fraternal organizations such as the American Cosa Nostra probably results from a general sense of predictability. Members of fraternal organizations can be expected to adhere to a set of mutually understood rules of conduct which in turn are ensured by selective recruitment combined with a period of testing and schooling, rigid enforcement of discipline, male bonding rituals, and secrecy (Haller, 1992:3-4; Jacobs, 1994:102).

Secrecy, as Georg Simmel has stressed, can have a binding force in and by itself by blocking members from outside interference (Simmel, 1992:448).

Conversely, not to trust a fellow member of a fraternal organization is likely to be seen as an insult, and in any case would fundamentally undermine the internal legitimacy of the organization.

Bonds of trust similar to those linking members of fraternal organizations can bind members of a deviant subculture. Yet they tend to do so to a lesser degree. By definition, members of a deviant subculture share a set of norms and values and are likely to harbor feelings of solidarity in view of a hostile outside world. This has been noted, for example, in the case of the Western European drug cultures of the 1960s and 1970s (see Ruggiero and South, 1995:134). Another classic example is found in the community of professional thieves described by Edwin Sutherland (Sutherland, 1937:202-206).

In the illegal markets we study, neither fraternal organizations nor deviant subcultures seem to play a significant role. What we do find in some areas are criminal networks that are embedded in ethnic minority communities.

### *Ethnicity*

The role of ethnicity as a trust producing factor has been a matter of some debate. In many instances where bonds of trust are attributed to ethnic cohesion, the actual foundation may be found in social relations like kinship, friendship or community ties (Ianni, 1975:282; Kleemans and van de Bunt, 1999:25; Potter, 1994:121).

However, ethnicity cannot be completely ruled out as a trust variable, considering that the marginalization of certain ethnic minority groups may eliminate moral precepts while at the same time creating internal solidarity. These factors may be reinforced by social norms of keeping matters secret from outsiders and by a high cultural value placed on loyalty (Bovenkerk, 1998:121-2). As such, P may come to trust O simply on the grounds that they share the same ethnic background.

An illustrative example of the relevance of ethnicity is provided by the Vietnamese involved in the sale of contraband cigarettes in the Eastern parts of Germany during the 1990s (von Lampe, 2002). As a legacy of East German politics, the Vietnamese community was concentrated in large housing projects isolated from the German population. Within these dormitories, whole sale and retail dealers could openly store, transport and sell untaxed cigarettes without fear of being reported to authorities by their fellow countrymen. While in the instance of a particular apartment, for example, the other occupants might have been loyal based on family and friendship ties, a general sense of solidarity seems to have prevailed among all the Vietnamese living in these dormitories. No cooperation was sought with the German authorities despite the inconveniences connected with the frequent searches of the premises that were conducted by the customs service.

The same factors that characterize the relations between a marginalized ethnic minority community and its host society may play a role in the asymmetric relation between two countries, one of which - typically a disadvantaged, underdeveloped country - serves as a base of operation for the commission of crimes in the other - typically a developed and affluent country.

In the analysis of cigarette smuggling ventures undertaken from Poland to Germany, for example, a typical pattern that has emerged is that projects seemingly could be discussed and planned with no concern for secrecy even among casual acquaintances.

### Routine Situations

The third type of trust refers to certain situational settings in which routinely repeated interaction takes place. In these cases, P trusts O because P expects every person in the same situation to behave in a certain way. This category corresponds with Harold Garfinkel's conception of trust (Garfinkel, 1963:190).

It may apply, for example, to the routinized exchanges between illicit street vendors of contraband cigarettes and their customers. These exchanges are publicly repeated in the same fashion over and over again so that a given customer will most likely not anticipate any deviation from this norm.

## Affection

All of the constellations discussed thus far are linked by the fact that they involve an element of rationality in the prediction of another person's behavior, be it derived from personal characteristics or the social context. But there may also be something like emotional trust when trusting behavior is motivated primarily by a strong affection towards the object of trust (Huemer, 1998:121). Put in another way: P trusts O because P wants to trust O out of sympathy.

## Mediated trust

Finally, an important constellation in the context of criminal interaction that needs to be taken into account is the case of mediated trust where no direct bond of trust exists between P and O. Instead, P and O are connected through bonds of trust to a third person. P trusts O because P trusts X who places trust in O and therefore vouches for O.

## LEVELS OF TRUST

As defined here, trust is essentially an expectation of how another person will behave in the future. This expectation can be based on a variety of more or less reliable perceptions, assumptions and attitudes that pertain to the trusted person and to the social context in which the trusting person and the trusted person interact. The same is true for the level of trust. The level of trust hinges upon the perception of the probability with which the expected behavior will occur. Here again, it is not necessarily a matter of purely rational calculation. Relevant aspects may be ignored or misinterpreted as a result of limited and distorted information or irrational processing of information.

## ARENAS FOR ESTABLISHING TRUST RELATIONS

These psychological factors notwithstanding, however, it seems safe to say that the emergence of trust and the level of trust are linked to certain social conditions which directly or indirectly, and with more or less intensity, give rise to the expectation of a trusting person P that another person O will be loyal.

So far, we have discussed the various bases of trust in isolation from each other. This analytical sophistication seemed necessary in the interest of clarity. But neither can our classificatory scheme claim any explanatory or predictive power, nor does it imply that the various aspects we mention are empirically independent. On the contrary, trust building factors can be expected to coincide.

There are, in fact, a number of social arenas within which a combination of trust building factors can be expected to be at work and therefore provide especially fertile grounds for relations of trust and, accordingly, for criminal networks. Our hypothesis is that, all other things being equal, criminal networks are more likely to exist the more trust building factors combine in a social location.

These arenas have been found in both illegal and legal spheres of society, spanning family, peer groups, and close knit neighborhood communities on the one hand, and the underworld

milieu and prison subcultures on the other (see Ianni, 1975; Kleemans and van de Bunt, 1999).

All of these settings have in common that they are characterized by more or less intense cultural cohesion, patterns of repeated interaction, and transparency through social and geographical proximity. They are also likely to be linked by a well functioning internal communication system for the quick and easy dissemination of information. In such an environment, trust can be expected to be the result of a combination of factors like affectionate bonds, direct and indirect observations of personal conduct, and the reliance on shared norms and values.

In the illegal markets for alcohol and cigarettes in Norway and Germany, respectively, all of these different types of social arenas are relevant for the emergence of criminal networks. However, one social sphere that is not included in this list and is rarely mentioned in the organized crime literature, is of particular significance here: networks of business relations that have developed in the context of legitimate economic exchange.

Both bootlegging in Norway and the trafficking in untaxed cigarettes in Germany are closely linked to legal business, namely the transportation sector. In our research we have found criminal relations growing out of existing or previous employer/employee relations, and between independent business partners.

In several instances, we found that employees were gradually introduced to illegal activities taking place under the guise of legal business activities after they had initially been kept ignorant of the criminal background of their employers.

In one case a businessman invited several of his workers to go into alcohol smuggling after his legal firm went bankrupt.

An example for the exploitation of legal business contacts is provided by one interviewed Norwegian alcohol smuggler who stated that he took advantage of the reputation he had gained as a legal entrepreneur for paying his debts on time for obtaining credit in the bootlegging business.

A second example stems from a case involving the distribution of several container loads of contraband cigarettes organized by a network expanding from the Netherlands and Germany to Poland and Lithuania. The illegal activities in this case apparently took place parallel to the cross-border trading of legal products such as salad oil.

Yet another essentially legal business relation with potential relevance for illegal transactions exists in Norway between customers and retail stores, e.g. grocery stores, which sell bootleg liquor on the side. Trust stems from experience, and from the perception that the retailer has a reputation to protect. For if the grocery store were to sell poor quality liquor, this would have repercussions not only on future illicit sales but also on the sale of legal products, and on the reputation of the store keeper within the community.

## VIOLATION OF TRUST

It is a matter of further research to explore how the different social arenas relate to the emergence of trust relations and different levels of trust. What seems clear, however, is that no basis of trust is strong enough to rule out the possibility of betrayal (see also Zaitch,

2002:278). Accordingly, the analysis needs to focus not only on trust, but also on the conditions for, and the consequences of, the violation of trust.

### No Consequences

Our research, as well as that on organized crime more generally, strongly suggests that the violation of trust can have very different consequences – which means that the overall picture becomes even more complicated.

In fact, in some instances, the violation of trust may not entail any consequences. Consider a situation in which the trusting person P remains unaware of the disloyal behavior of O, or a situation in which P is aware of some foul play but does not attribute it to O.

The “Mr. Big” of Oslo’s bootleg liquor business during the 1990s provides an illustrative example. Members of his network continued to cooperate despite relatively poor results because they failed to realize that the reason for their failures was that “Mr. Big” himself occasionally informed on accomplices in order to fend off criminal investigations directed against him.

But even in cases where disloyal behavior is recognized, the transgression does not automatically trigger any response.

The reasons for not responding can be manifold, including a lack of motivation, capacity or positive incentive on the part of P for seeking retribution. But it may also be the case that P has no alternative to continued cooperation with O.

In the illegal alcohol market in Norway, where informing on others seems to be the exception rather than the rule, we were able to obtain information on market participants who have been known grassers for years and yet who remained untouched.

### Responses

Likewise, when P does react to disloyal behavior of O, the response does not necessarily consist of a termination of the cooperation with O, either by severing the ties to O or by eliminating O. Intermediate reactions include continued interaction with O on a lower level of risk, for example, by reducing the stakes of cooperation. Otherwise, retribution may be aimed at ensuring a more successful cooperation with O in the future.

The level of violence is low in both the illegal alcohol market in Norway and the illegal cigarette market in Germany.

In Norway, some cases of violence and threats of violence are documented in connection with debt collection and the sanctioning of police informers.

In Germany, violence has played a role in the extortion of street vendors of contraband cigarettes. Other isolated cases involved rip-offs and the mock execution of a suspected police informer. Apart from that, only one case of violence could be found where disputes between market participants might have been an issue (von Lampe, 2002:157).

The share of violent-prone actors is likely to be relatively small among participants in illegal markets that display some overlap with legal spheres of business and enjoy a certain level of tolerance in society. This would explain the absence of violence associated with the bootleg business in Norway and the illegal cigarette market in Germany.

A Norwegian bootlegger seems to represent a common view by stating, “Make yourself a killer just because a guy turned you down on half a million? Stupid!”

## COOPERATION WITHOUT A BASIS OF TRUST

Just as there are patterns of cooperation that endure violations of trust, we also find cooperative relations among criminals that either lack an initial basis of trust or are characterized by outright mistrust.

Many of these relations have a short time horizon, either because the participants lack the talent and patience to establish continuous, long-term operations, or because carelessness and outright dishonesty leads to failure. In fact, it would not come as a surprise to find most criminal ventures end in a fiasco.

At the same time, it should be noted that cooperative criminal ventures undertaken by disloyal and careless partners can be successful against all odds, for example, because law enforcement agencies lack the capacity to follow up on leads.

From the participants’ perspective, it seems that the potential risks that lie in such fragile, cooperative ventures are often simply ignored, and where they are recognized, they may be accepted as an unavoidable fact of life. In some instances, criminals may feel that they simply have no choice in the face of adversities but to “trust” other criminals (McCarthy et al., 1998), in some instances, the acceptance of risks may be the expression of a gambler’s thrill-seeking mentality (Adler, 1985:85).

Several interviewed Norwegian alcohol smugglers, for example, expressed a lack of concern for the dangers emanating from the collaboration with unreliable accomplices. “Sooner or later all crime operations will come to an end,” one said, “but if you have a swell time before you are caught, it’s worth it.”

More risk-conscious actors take precautionary measures to safeguard against disloyal behavior. These measures include procedural arrangements, anonymity and segmentation.

In the study of the illegal cigarette market in Germany, a number of cases were found in which very coincidental acquaintanceships evolved into the basis for criminal cooperation, though mostly in connection with subordinate tasks. For example, people were approached in places such as bars with an offer to make some money from transporting or unloading contraband cigarettes. In these cases, safeguards against deceit were anonymity of the recruiting persons vis-à-vis the recruits, and sometimes a disguising of the true nature of the activity until the last moment. In one case, the recruits had been told they were hired to unload a truck full of vegetables. As it turned out, the vegetables only served as a disguise for a large shipment of smuggled cigarettes.

Interestingly, persons that have been recruited on an ad hoc basis prove to be willing witnesses, but the evidence they are capable of providing is typically insufficient to identify and prosecute those in charge.

In the bootleg business in Norway, risk-conscious illegal entrepreneurs place the most emphasis on finding recruits with certain personal characteristics that ensure that they are capable of coping with the temptations arising from handling alcohol and large amounts of money.

A moonshiner stated in an interview: “The human factor is the number 1 problem in illegal booze”. He reported negative experiences with a number of assistants who had either failed to hold up under police interrogations or had drawn attention to the moonshine business through erratic behavior caused by excessive alcohol consumption

Finally, one precautionary measure that criminals with a broader time horizon can be expected to adopt, is to seek to establish trust as a basis for future cooperation by testing and schooling potential accomplices.

## CONCLUSION

Going back to the initial working hypothesis about the importance of trust for criminal cooperation, the conclusion from our observations is as follows.

First, that trust is an empirically and theoretically significant variable for understanding organized crime, but that criminal cooperation may also occur in the absence of trust or even between mistrusting actors.

Second, that where trust provides a binding force for criminal relations, the foundations on which that trust is based may be quite diverse. Kinship, ritual kinship in fraternal organizations, and ethnicity are only some of the aspects that need to be taken into consideration.

Third, the violation of trust does not necessarily entail a drastic response in the form of a termination of the criminal relation or the elimination of the disloyal actor.

Finally, from a researcher’s perspective, we find the concept of trust heuristically valuable since it raises a number of questions that deserve closer attention. We believe that these questions require the combination of different perspectives on organized crime, including psychological, anthropological, and sociological approaches, since trust appears to be a function of both individual and social variables. For example, P’s expectation that O shall be loyal is influenced by factors such as O’s personality and previous actions, the norms and conventions that govern O’s and P’s behavior, and P’s ability to obtain and rationally process relevant information on O.

Two of the key questions that remain to be answered concern the comparative strength and vulnerability of different bases of trust, and the conditions under which criminal cooperation occurs despite a lack of trust, mistrust or a violation of trust. Analysis of this question requires considering both sides in a dyadic criminal relation. Varying levels of intensity in law enforcement, and the degree to which different criminal activities are socially accepted, need also be acknowledged.

It must be stressed that the illegal markets we are studying exist in environments that are characterized by relatively low degrees of hostility. We hypothesize that under favorable social conditions even negligent and foolish actors have a good chance to succeed in

cooperative criminal ventures, whereas in hostile conditions the negligent and foolish are weeded out more quickly.

Regarding international comparative research, we believe it would be worthwhile to explore whether actors belonging to “low-trust cultures” are better prepared for operating in a criminal environment than actors molded by “high-trust cultures” (Fukuyama, 1995) such as those found in Norway and Germany. The underlying notion is that people socialized in “low-trust cultures” may be naturally, better endowed to cope with the absence of trust. At the same time, they may develop “instincts” to determine who to trust and who to mistrust. Finally, bonds of trust that do exist under these conditions could be particularly strong and strain resistant.

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