



# Zones of Entrapment and Impunity: On the Constitution of Vague and Strange Regimes of Power

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## Abstract

This article challenges a tendency prominent in critical theory—one that holds that being “vague and strange” constitute qualities of life opposed to the grid-like systems of coercive control intrinsic to the operation of modern power regimes which, by their ascriptive nature, are compelled to suppress all life which exhibits these traits. Consequently, vagueness represents not only the antithesis of modern power, but a source of resistance against it. This article contests this assumption by exploring the vague regimes of power (which, following William Burroughs, we call “interzones”), which also exist within the fabric of the administered order. The article examines how these interzones function and explores two incarnations: *zones of entrapment* and *zones of impunity*.

*Definitive Bulletin: The Sender will be defined by negatives. A low pressure area, a sucking emptiness. He will be portentously anonymous, faceless, colourless. He will – probably – be born with smooth disks of skin instead of eyes. He always knows where he is going like a virus knows. He doesn't need eyes.*

(Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*, 2005: 74).

## Introduction

According to Scott (2009), when the modern State “looks” at the social body and confronts life-forms that it experiences as vague and strange (e.g., beggars, gangs, homeless people, subcultures, travellers), it feels not only antagonistic towards them but impelled, in Scott’s terms, “to bring them to heel.” The State accomplishes this, he argues, by imposing strategies of coercive control designed to pacify cultural forms it comprehends as antithetical to its nature. (Scott 2009). If we reflect on the source of this antagonism, then, for commentators like Scott, this antagonism arises first, because modern power and vague life

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are considered mutually exclusive and thus diametrically opposed; second, because when confronted by forms of vague life that depart from the agreed “norms” to which pacified citizens are expected to conform, vagueness will invariably be registered by the State as an existential threat, contrary to its nature.

This reading of “the vague”—as a force diametrically opposed to a power that “fixes” and “encloses”—has long enjoyed traction in critical theory. Located away from formal power structures—betwixt and between them—vague, liminal spaces and their associated life-forms have long been understood not only as the antithesis of State power but as posing an existential challenge to the fully administered State. This reading of “the vague” as something both suppressed by the State and simultaneously an antagonistic force which, in its alterity and otherness, can contest it, leads Carney and Miller (2009) to suggest that vague life and its associated practices pose not only a challenge to the totally administered state but contain within them the capacity to resist it.

The theme of vague, disorderly margins, bordering a hard, administrative order which they contest and resist, has many powerful and influential advocates. Take, for example, the distinction Raban (1974) draws between the administered order of control and surveillance characteristic of what he terms the “hard city”, with its grid like bureaucracies and the unruliness of public life in the “soft city” which, he argues, sits beneath and opposes it. Or, to cite another example, take Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) evocation of a “nomadology,” which they pose as an emancipatory alternative to the grid-like forms of control integral to the operation of what they term the “arboreal” Western State. Within critical criminology, this theme is perhaps best exemplified in the cultural criminological field. Its presence can be felt in the work of the “Birmingham School”<sup>1</sup> in texts like *Resistance through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (Hall and Jefferson 1978), *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime* (Presdee 1999) and, most recently, in Jeff Ferrell’s (2018) work, *Drift: Illicit Mobility and Uncertain Knowledge*.

In this article, we propose to challenge the assumption that modern States eschew vagueness. While not disputing that “the strange” and “the vague” might well pose an existential challenge to the ascriptive and enclosing tendencies of the modern State—and while not disputing that the trajectory of modern State development has been to evict and control vague life and its associated practices (e.g., borderless existence, drifting, wandering)—we nevertheless argue that vagueness, far from being the antithesis of modern power regimes, can also be mobilized as a technology of power by them. Indeed, the powerful routinely avail themselves of vagueness in order to reproduce the conditions of their rule. Far from existing where hegemonic power is not, vagueness, as this article argues and in the Machiavellian (1985) sense of the term “power,” constitutes an important strategy through which the interests of the powerful are projected and protected.

In what follows, we will develop this argument by examining the properties of the vague regimes of power that also reside at the heart of the modern State. William Burroughs (1989) provides us with an interesting way to comprehend their nature in his conception of what he terms the “interzone.” These are strange spaces governed by regimes that function in illegible and confusing ways. The term, “interzone,” first appeared in Burroughs’s early

<sup>1</sup> Here we refer to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (“CCCS” or “the Centre”), established at the University of Birmingham in England. See Carrabine, Eamonn. 2017. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. In Avi Brisman, Eamonn Carrabine and Nigel South, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Criminological Theory and Concepts*. Pp. 154–58. London and New York: Routledge.

fiction in Tangier (Morocco), where he was then an addict. The “*interzone*” constitutes the existential terrain through which the actors that populate later work, like *Junky* (Burroughs 1953)<sup>2</sup> and *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs [1959] 2005), navigate. Interzone is a carnivalesque space where normal rules that govern conduct appear suspended and inverted. It is a nightmarish space of addiction and control, where every desire and perversion is both possible and permitted: drug taking, promiscuous sex, sadomasochism, self-destruction, and excess of every kind finds expression in interzone. While interzone might appear unregulated, this would miss Burroughs’s point because interzone is also a repressive “soft machine,” policed by “control junkies” who operate the levers of power within it. Addictions are not acts of tolerated self-debasement; the “soft machine” produces them. In interzone, the cops are everywhere and they are always being fed.

Here, we will deploy the term “interzone” in a restricted sense to designate those deliberately vague and illegible power regimes we find constituted periodically within the fabric of distinctly modern, administered societies. As we shall see, in the vagueness and illegibility of the State interzone, things normally precluded within “normal” life become possible. What becomes possible has a nightmarish quality as well. We will consider this.

Interzone, we will argue, is characterized by an operation of power that reverses the attributes around which modern administered orders usually function—orders that work to produce rational, predictable, homogenous modes of regulation. In interzone, power functions, but does so vaguely. This does not mean that law is absent, only that the governing rules that are constituted appear diametrically opposed to those that the State might otherwise claim to pursue. Within interzone, ruling regimes constitute vague regimes that enable them to project power (considered, here, in the Machiavellian sense of the term) in ways that fall outside those normally sanctioned in the modern juridical order.

To develop our argument, we begin by identifying the characteristic features of distinctly modern, administrative power regimes. We then examine the general characteristics of interzone that reverse them. We conclude by examining two manifestations of interzone (we accept there are others): the *zone of entrapment* and the *zone of impunity*. We conclude by drawing out the implications of this mode of power for critical criminology.

## Modern Ascriptive Power

Since Weber (1976) equated modernity with an iron cage, it has become customary for critical theory to equate the exercise of distinctly modern power regimes with fixed, legible and transparent rules and with pacified and regulated spaces. Here, social action is rendered patterned and predictable, and it proceeds according to specified norms of conduct that stress efficiency, affective neutrality and adherence to the rule of law. As we have already noted, modern State power can also be characterized by its tendency to homogenize and suppress everything it encounters and comprehends as unruly and “heterogeneous”, to use Bataille’s (1988) terminology.

Some examples can be cited to illustrate the trend.

The suppression of the medieval carnival with its inversion of rational norms and its celebration of profanity is one testimony to the arrival of the State embarked on a

<sup>2</sup> Burroughs originally published this work as *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* under the pseudonym William Lee.

project of radical homogenization (Bakhtin 1941), as well as the brutal suppression and regulation of working class leisure, charted by E.P. Thompson (1963) and his colleagues (Hay et al. 1977). As Storch's (1975) work has demonstrated, the modern police were created not only to suppress the organized working class, but performed, from the outset, a crucial goal in regulating their leisure. In this incarnation, as "domestic missionaries," their work would continue into the twentieth century in what Cohen (1979) terms the "policing of the working class city." In the process, forms of behavior that no longer equated with the emerging norms of a rational State committed to the cult of efficacious behavior were evicted or subject to censure and regulation.

For Foucault and Sheridan (1979), this process went hand in hand with the arrival of the societies of discipline that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Deleuze (1996) saw modern society (in the form that peaked at the end of the twentieth century) as constructed around "environments of enclosure"—total institutions, such as the asylum, the factory, the prison, and the school. These were effectively social molds—the "closed environments" through which individuals passed, each with their own laws, governed by experts, mobilizing scientific knowledge within them. Within these enclosures, people were subject to processes of normalization where aberrations from the norm were identified and suppressed in the name of a new regime predicated on positive production.

First the family; then the school ("you are no longer in your family"); then the barracks ("you are no longer at school"); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the preeminent instance of the enclosed environment (Deleuze 1996)

At the juridical level, modern power works by bringing those subject to the regime of law under the law. Modern power, then, is inclusive in relation to its operation in so far as it produces juridical subjects who exist within a rule of law that they, in turn, agree to obey as citizens. The contemporary juridical citizen is subject to law but acquires rights in relation to how law is exercised. Indeed, the rise of the sovereign territorial state governed by the "rule of law," as such, already pre-supposes subjects who will obey it. Over time, as the modern State develops, the vague spaces of the outlaw are reduced as those who dwell beyond the jurisdiction of law come eventually within its ambit. This process is co-determinant with the arrival not only of a sovereign territorial State, but one whose sovereignty is co-determinate with the territory it claims. Modern societies are modern then to the extent to which sovereign power could be accomplished predominantly through administrative bureaucratic control exercised over pacified subjects.

Modern power, in summary, and to echo Scott, in its "normal" trajectory, does operate via a grid-like logic of bureaucratic regulation and control, producing formal grid-like regimes and homogenous spaces where disorderly conduct (the corporeal, the unruly, the spontaneous) have been evicted or suppressed. As the modern State evolved, so the spaces of law increased just as the spaces of the outlaw decreased. In the process, spaces and social forms which were unruly and which stood outside of the law and thus formal regulation (the "King's Peace" or *pax regis*) were eventually brought within it. At the same time, older spaces of tolerated illegality were eventually suppressed while wayward deviant individuals (criminals, the insane) were pushed into the new society of enclosures. And so, the sovereign State, conceived as a unitary, territorial and legibly regulated unit, was born. In such formations, power predominately

assumes a legible and familiar form while vagueness becomes reduced to a property of the margins.

## Vagueness as a Strategy of Power

In relation to the way modern power operates, vagueness does not, therefore, appear consistent with its normal grid-like operation; indeed, vagueness would appear to equate with precisely that which the rational order must *expunge* as a condition of its self-actualization. Vagueness, in this sense, constitutes a characteristic feature of the excessive and unpredictable power of absolute rulers typical of the *ancien régime*, which the modern, predictable, classifying order of due process and rights would work to eliminate.

Here, we develop an opposing view. What we will now seek to demonstrate is that many of the properties we might associate with vagueness, not least of which is that of being ambiguous, indeterminate, and murky, constitutes the means by and through which power is often exercised, projected and reproduced.

In developing this argument, our approach also coalesces with that of other scholars who, in various disciplines and in different ways, have also produced work that challenges what, following Weber, we might term the myth of “occidental rationalism”—that is, the assumption that Western states are intrinsically committed to establishing legible and rational social orders. What unifies this body of work is the recognition that, while formally committed to rational norms of conduct, states routinely engage in a range of strategies that entail non-compliance with their own legal rules and administrative practices. These range from condoning informal economic activities and corruption (Portes, Castells and Benton 1991), the “forbearance” of illegal actions (Holland 2017), commitment to a “standoffish rule” that eschews all legibility (Slater and Kim 2015), the creation of “counter-law” which opposes law (Ericson and Haggerty 2006), to the creation of a state of exception in which “normal law” is wholly suspended in the creation of “exceptional law” (Agamben 2005). As these authors have shown, the suspending or failing to observe law can be a deliberate strategy of power.

In what follows, we want to contribute to this important body of work by moving the argument in a slightly different direction. We want to suggest that power, today, while rational, in part also operates through the production of vague “interzones.”

## Interzone

The operation of interzone is strange. It is not lawless but the application of (normal) law is vague or rendered vague in the act of its constitution. When interzone is called into being, existing laws and conventions are not applied, or laws that are applied normally might be suspended suddenly or, indeed, a new regime of rules might be applied but never formally declared. In such regimes, the powerful may conduct themselves in ways not usually considered legitimate. At the same time, whatever rights the subordinate believes it may have may be suspended, superseded or, alternatively rendered meaningless.

In interzone, a subject’s status may well change and he/she/they may not be aware that it has. Citizens may find themselves stripped of their presumed rights, while those whose lives unfold within the law may find themselves related to the status of being “outlaw.”

Those who seek to become citizens under the law may find themselves instead relegated to the status of denizens between law.

In interzone, control junkies pull the levers of power in ways that are never clear, legible or transparent—in other words, discernibly modern and grid-like. In interzone, only the control junkies know what the levers are and in which direction they are being pulled. This deception enables power to function vaguely.

To evoke the language of Agamben (2005), interzone mandates the creation of a state of exception in the fabric of the modern administered order. To put it another way, the state of exception functions as a kind of “get out” space for the powerful—an anomic, radically heterogeneous, carnivalesque space (at least, in part), where they, the control junkies, may perpetrate acts otherwise prohibited in “normal life.” When such regimes of power are constructed (and the manner of their construction will be considered below), forms of social action that might otherwise be prohibited under the law or which might otherwise provoke moral condemnation may be licensed. Physical violence may well be mobilized but, as we shall see, interzone is associated with many other forms of harm as well. Interzone then, like the liminal spaces of the margins, can also be equated with strange and unruly forms of behavior normally precluded in distinctly modern state formations. In other words, behavior that is distinctly... vague.

## Literary Representations

Before we consider actual examples, and differentiate between the divergent forms Interzone can take, it is worth drawing attention here to some literary examples, as these can help further illuminate their character.

The juridical regime that K confronts in books like *The Trial* (Kafka 2008) and *The Castle* (Kafka 2009) is one that carries all the hallmarks of interzone. In *The Trial*, K finds himself a victim of a relentless judicial order which pronounces him guilty of a crime that is never made apparent to him—a crime for which he is never able to defend himself because the regime is inherently incomprehensible and subverts every attempt K makes to reason with it. Likewise, the regime that a Land Surveyor confronts in *The Castle* also exemplifies the disturbing logic of interzone. Here, he aspires to little less than seeking a formal designation of his job description, but in the context of a world populated by remote authorities who never confirm it.

A similar refrain also unfolds within Margaret Atwood’s (2009) dystopian novel, *The Handmaids Tale*. The novel is set in a distant American future where fertility levels have fallen disastrously to the point where they threaten reproduction of the species. A totalitarian, right-wing theocracy rules absolutely. Within this order, fertile working class women are awarded to the families of the infertile rich as “Handmaids” where they are raped by their masters in order to provide heirs. The regime is pleasureless and puritanical—in principle, at least. But, as the novel progresses, we discover that the patrician overclass have created their own interzone, where they allow themselves access to all the decadent sensual pleasures their regime otherwise prohibits, including alcohol, permissive sex and sexual conduct otherwise condemned by them as perverse.

There may be many interzones but here, we conclude by identifying two. These we designate respectively the *zone of entrapment* and the *zone of impunity*. They are not totally distinguishable and their boundaries are vague.

## Zones of Entrapment

When the druggist sells me my daily ration of Eukodal, he smirks, like I have picked up the bait to a trap. The whole zone is a trap and someday it will close. Not snap shut but close slowly. *We will see it closing but there will be no escape, no place to go.*

(Burroughs, *Interzone*, 1989:75).

We find instructive and powerful Burroughs' reading of interzone as a trap in that it allows us to describe one instantiation of the vague characteristics of interzone—what we propose to term the *zone of entrapment*. The *zone of entrapment* is constituted by control junkies within a ruling power regime, designed to deceive victims who unintentionally spring the trap waiting for them when they enter. Laying a trap, it must be emphasised, is always a pre-planned and carefully choreographed operation. In a trap, a space is created where a victim suddenly finds himself/herself at the mercy of those who set the trap (the control junkies) and who now control the situation, possessing the victim's time, establishing the limits to his/her mobility, and effectively manipulating his/her emotional states.

Entrapment is much broader than simple situational manipulation. The powerful design scenarios and spaces, deliberately planned to ensure that their victims lose their capacity for purposeful action, thus becoming weak. The powerful establish the script and their victims do not know what it is. Often, they (their victims) believe another regime of rules apply. Walking into a trap means finding oneself in a place which is not what it seems, where the stakes are set against you. This is precisely its vagueness.

A trap constitutes a site of maximum power, depriving victims not just of capacity, but often of any inclination to resist. Unlike pure force, which is direct, immediate, and purposive, a trap creates a space where power can be exercised at leisure. In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti (1973: 378) argues that, unlike pure force, power can be ceremonious and slow. Using the example of a cat and a mouse to illustrate his point, Canetti (1973: 327) explains that by playing with the mouse, the cat does not use immediate force:

It lets it go, allows it to run about a little and even turns its back; and, during this time, the mouse is no longer subjected to force. But it is still within the power of the cat and can be caught again. ...The space which the cat dominates, the moment of hope it allows the mouse, while continuing however to watch it closely all the time and never relaxing its interest and intention to destroy it – all this together, space, hope, watchfulness and destructive intent, can be called the actual body of power, or more simply, power itself.

*Zones of entrapment* do not proclaim themselves openly. Their victims often become aware of their nature only after having walked into them, which is when they are sprung. As we shall now see, the police technique of kettling exemplifies this. One such operation took place in the London during the Group of Twenty (or G20) conference in 2009. The protestors (including the authors of this article) were, for all intents and purposes, doing no more than exercising their rights as free citizens in a liberal democratic society. They had gathered in order to object to the excesses of the global financiers who had brought the global system in 2008 to a state of crisis. The protest, which involved the mass occupation of London, was not violent. Indeed, the police allowed thousands of protestors and many bystanders to move freely through the city along designated roads. Because of its symbolism, thousands of protestors converged to occupy the space in front of the Bank of England. The police made no move to restrain or prevent them from congregating there.



Then, at a prearranged time, a trap was sprung as a crowd numbering about 4,000 people found themselves “kettled” (forcibly contained) in the area adjacent to the bank. Riot police closed down the streets that the demonstrators had used to enter the area, while blocking off other exit routs. And so, a *zone of entrapment* was created. Within it, the crowd quickly discovered that the rights they had presumed they held as citizens had been suspended. They were now, simply, to evoke Hillyard’s (1983) term, a “suspect community,” and this defined how they were then treated. They were detained by force for five hours, and were offered no explanation by the police justifying or explaining the actions they were taking. Police photographers meanwhile filmed the crowd. In response to what the protestors, with justification, perceived as unfair treatment, sections of the crowd pushed against police lines. The police response was to systematically reduce the spaces available to the demonstrators by initiating violent baton charges against them; as a result, crowd density increased alarmingly, making the space ever more dangerous by creating panic among the protestors (Neil, Opitz and Zebrowski 2019).

While much of the discussion of the police actions regarding this particular protest has centered on violation of the rights to assembly and free expression and to the deprivation of liberty (see, e.g., Penny 2010a, 2010b; Mead 2012; Wall 2016), we want to focus upon the deliberate entrapment of citizens that kettling operations entail. Instead of prohibiting a demonstration or targeting the violent elements in it, the police set out to trap all the citizens involved, even though they were participating in a legitimate exercise of their rights.

A less dramatic but illustrative example of the *zone of entrapment* would be the treatment the poor receive when they visit benefit offices in neoliberal societies, where welfare has mutated into coercive forms of workfare. They may well enter such offices believing that they will be met by people who are there to help them receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Unbeknownst to them, however, they are assumed to be and thus treated from the beginning as would-be welfare cheats, as opposed to claimants with legitimate claims (Bond and Hallsworth 2017). The benefit regime has built within it a wonderfully vague degree of discretion that enables street-level bureaucrats to impose often draconian sanctions (welfare cuts) on claimants for minor violations. To cite one example used by Bond and Hallsworth (2017), claimants were sanctioned for not looking for work, even though the labor market for jobs they could apply for did not exist in a town locked in near permanent recession. In addition, claimants being ordered to look for work meant having to sit in a so-called “job centre” for hours looking for work online that did not list the manual, low-skilled work for which these predominantly poor claimants could apply, even if they did exist. The claimants were set up to fail, while the staff were under undisclosed pressure to sanction where they could. The claimants thus entered with the expectation that they have a right to be helped but found a repressive regime that pulls and pushes them in an altogether undisclosed and different direction.

Laying traps can also involve disarming victims by displays of generosity and good will. Joseph Stalin was a grand master of such games. One of his favorite practices was to recall a prominent Soviet diplomat from a foreign assignment or offer a position in Moscow to a regional party boss, and then invite that person to the Kremlin in order to express his deep admiration and gratitude for their good work. Unbeknownst to them, Stalin would have already sanctioned their subsequent arrest and liquidation. Many Russian emigrants were also lured back to Moscow by promises of financial and other rewards—before being arrested (Ionin 1997). Commenting on the Stalinist regime’s treatment of the Soviet cultural elite, Morrison (2013) remarks, “The power of the regime was absolute in the sense that it followed no consistent rules.” One could not reason with the regime because within interzone, victims do not know what the real rules are.



*Zones of entrapment* can be found materialized in all spheres of life where power operates; they are not solely a practice of the State. Hospitalization in a mental institution, for example, can proceed according to the dynamics of a trap. In *Asylums*, Goffman (1968) described how a patient's rights, relationships and identity are dismantled during the process of admission. Goffman's "betrayal funnel" exemplifies entrapment. Friends and relatives, together with medical staff, conspire to commit a patient to an institution while persuading that person that he/she/they will be entering a space of assistance and compassion. The patient agrees to enter unaware that one will lose all the freedoms and rights enjoyed in the community. Moving through a "betrayal funnel" means walking into a trap which is finally shut once the person has been admitted.

None of this means that the technologies and techniques of control mobilized in establishing a trap might not also appear distinctly modern. The generosity of Stalin used to disarm and mislead victims worked to deliver them into the hands of a distinctly modern repressive apparatus. The benefit office, for all intents and purposes, is a distinctly modern institution: beneath its manifest function sits an undeclared set of latent functions, undisclosed to victims. This is the property of the vague spaces to which we wish to draw attention. Victims are presented with something that is not what it seems; something deeply menacing is inscribed in its operation, unknown and undeclared... until the trap closes: when the riot police hem you in; when your benefits are cut; when the NKVD walk in and take you away; or when you find that the hospital is not what it seems.

## Zones of Impunity

There is a nightmare feeling in interzone with its glut of nylon shirts, cameras, watches, sex and opioids sold across the counter. Something completely menacing in complete *laissez-faire*  
(Burroughs, *Interzone*, 1989: 78)

It is a well-established tendency on the part of the powerful to exercise their will free from oversight and accountability—to maximize their interests where they can and by all means possible. It is in the objective interests of the powerless to constrain this "will to power" on the part of the powerful. They (the powerless) consequently seek to place constraints on the rule of the Masters (the powerful) to rein in the latter's tendency towards excess. Masters, in turn, aspire to free themselves of such constraints on their will to power. The *zone of impunity* is an interzone where their will is allowed free rein—freed, that is, from all external constraints that might delimit their desire.

*Zones of impunity* are constituted when a regime is created where "normal," distinctly modern conventions governing oversight are suspended or rendered vague and ambiguous. Typically, they are regulation-free regimes where regulations are applied weakly (if at all) or are left grey, fuzzy and vaguely drawn. Where the *zone of entrapment* involves a regime of indeterminacy in which normal law is suspended in order to pacify and control the powerless, in the *zone of impunity*, the powerful can seek advantage free from efficient democratic scrutiny. These are zones which are not transparent but opaque, and within them business proceeds without external scrutiny. *Zones of impunity* work this way because control junkies ensure that the gaze of those who would rein them in is kept at a distance and that what transpires remains impenetrable to prying eyes.

Freedom from accountability represents a positive instantiation of power—a generative power in the Foucauldian sense, which can be opposed to the form of repressive

power mobilized in the *zones of entrapment*. Two contemporary case studies can be cited to illustrate such zones: first, the parliamentary expense scandal that engulfed the British political establishment in 2009; and second, just preceding this, the ‘regulation light’ regime that permitted global financial elite to literally destroy the global economy. As we shall see as we study each, it is not that either are in some way anomalous. All organizations have expense regimes. All economies have regulatory regimes. But in the *zone of impunity* that both became, we witness a mockery, carnivalesque in its own way, of these modern regulatory regimes. In both, we also witness another characteristic feature of Interzone—the radically heterogenic life forms that pure deregulation gives birth to, exemplified, as we shall see, by the behavior of the feral banking overclass.

The British political establishment had, for many years, considered itself underpaid for the services it renders. The political costs of seeking to reward politicians with higher pay was, by and large, deemed to be too high to concede by successive governments, however. Under the New Labour regime of Tony Blair (but with bipartisan support), an alternative means of rewarding politicians began to emerge, only without any public disclosure surrounding it. In effect, it amounted to the creation of an expense regime where the rules governing what could or could not be claimed were left purposefully vague and in which effective oversight to ensure probity was kept purposefully minimal.

Expenses, including the cost of accommodation, could be claimed for any and all expenditure “wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred for the performance of a Member’s parliamentary duties” (House of Commons 2009). What this vague category facilitated was an unprecedented degree of permissive interpretation as to what constituted a “necessary expense.” Under an oversight process where regulation was delegated to the speaker of the House of Commons (in other words, another Member of Parliament (or MP)), MPs quickly discovered that they were onto a proverbial “gravy train” in a *zone of impunity*—free from any outside scrutiny. Most took advantage, with many subsequently defending their acts on the basis that they were “working within the rules” and, as such, had not broken any. Such permissive interpretation would work to allow them to evade tax they might otherwise have paid, make money on second homes they often rented out, engage in property speculation and, not least, furnish properties while submitting expense claims that were never checked.

Such largesse was, in turn, reinforced by systematic attempts on the part of the political establishment to maintain this status quo. What this amounted to in practice was seeking to prevent any and all disclosure of parliamentary expenses, not least when challenged by investigative journalists using Freedom of Information legislation to force disclosure. This would lead MPs in May 2007 to vote in favor of a Freedom of Information (Amendment) Bill which sought to exempt MPs from the 2000 Freedom of Information Act. Even though this tactic was ultimately unsuccessful in so far as the House of Lords refused to support it, MPs still sought to appeal the decision of the Information Tribunal to release details of the MPs expenses. In 2009, Harriet Harman, Leader of the House of Commons, again tabled a motion which would exempt MPs’ expenses from being disclosed under a Freedom of Information request. Labour MPs were placed under a three-line whip (mandatory requirement to support the legislation) to force the motion through the House of Commons. In a wonderful exercise in a technique of neutralization, David Walker, the Commons Director General of Resources, went on public record to state that “things have gone far enough and further intrusion into members’ private lives may actually damage democracy.” Oversight would, he added, “prevent people from wanting to be politicians” (BBC 2011). Taking the argument of a poor victimized community to perhaps its most ludicrous level, in 2009, MP

Nadine Dorries equated the exposure of MPs expenses with the McCarthy-era witch-hunts against communists (Mulholland 2009).

The de-regulated global financial marketplace that was constituted in the lead up to the financial crisis of 2008 exemplifies another even more terrifying *zone of impunity*.

According to neoliberal logic, free markets, by their nature, require a free circulation of goods and capital. Regulation or “red tape” had long been considered an obstacle to economic development by neoliberal governing elites both within the financial sector and in government (Harvey 2011). Since the 1980s, financiers have long pushed for deregulation and governments have been alarmingly happy to deregulate, conceding to Wall Street or London an unprecedented degree of power. As a direct consequence, banking in the United Kingdom (UK), together with Wall Street, became reconstructed in the 1980s as a global *zone of impunity*. Within it, the banking elite were provided with what then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown happily described as a “regulation lite” environment, wherein financial innovation could proceed apace free from scrutiny, regulation and meaningful accountability. This would create the preconditions for the credit driven boom that would end disastrously with the sub-prime crisis of 2007 and the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 (Callinicos 2010).

It was not only that the financial elite were allowed untrammelled opportunity to ruin everything, but any and all obstacles to them doing so were systematically dismantled. As early as 1997, Alan Greenspan, chair of the Federal Reserve in the United States (US), had successfully worked to defend a fully deregulated derivatives market, even as the over-the-counter trade in derivatives, such as credit default swaps, escalated. Self-regulation of the over-the-counter derivatives market was confirmed when the US government enacted the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000. This act, however, was only one of several that were passed by the US government deregulating the banking sector. Almost twenty years earlier, in 1982, the Garn–St. Germain Depository Institutions Act was passed which, in effect, began the process by freeing banks from what were presented as undue restrictions on their trading capacity. This was followed by the 1999 Gramm–Leach–Bliley Act, which effectively repealed sections of the 1933 Glass Steagler Act, which had reduced the separation between fiscally prudent commercial banks and risk-taking investment banks and which now allowed a single institution to act simultaneously as a commercial and investment organization (Coghlan et al. 2018).

In the meantime, regulators liberalized their policies, allowing depository banks to move their assets and liabilities “off balance” into structured investment vehicles, thus obscuring the real financial situation of the banking sector. In 2004, the US Securities and Exchange Commission relaxed the net capital rule, which enabled investment banks to substantially increase their level of debt. Just as the formal banking sector was being deregulated, at the same time, the exponential growth in the power and trading capacity of the shadow banking sector was allowed to proceed with no formal regulatory oversight at all.

Absence of regulation, coupled with the development of complex, opaque financial instruments, transformed the financial system into a vague, incomprehensible, laissez-faire regime. It became interzone. By the time Lehman Brothers had collapsed, a global *zone of impunity* had been constructed that enabled the financial sector to regulate itself in a world where external regulation no longer existed and where the regulatory systems that had previously existed to minimize harm had been, for all intents and purposes, dismantled entirely. As with the expenses crisis, it was not simply about the constitution of a deregulatory regime freed from oversight that constituted the *zone of impunity* as an interzone. Rather, it created the preconditions for what we might see as an important component of interzone: the carnivalesque, radically heterogenic behavior that subsequently unfolded

once deregulation had occurred—nowhere better exhibited than in the behavior of the feral banking elite as they led the world into a devastating economic meltdown.

## Conclusion

Interzone, then, is organized around a wholly different logic from what we find associated with distinctly modern power regimes. Whereas modern power works to produce homogeneous, predictable, rule-bound spaces governed by legible and familiar modes of regulation, within interzone, power operates in heterogeneous and, crucially, ambiguous, indeterminate and vague ways. If the trajectory of modernity was to bring those who were outlaw within the rule of law, interzone reverses such logic; its modus operandi is to render those who dwell under law into a state where they find themselves out-law. With the suspension of law, subjects that may have enjoyed protection by law may also find themselves stripped of its protection while, conversely, those whose activities are nominally regulated by law (the global financiers) may find themselves freed of all regulation. Interzone thus represents a murky strategy of power that is very different to what we typically associate with modern power regimes, even if in appearance Interzone masquerades as distinctly modern and mobilizes distinctly modern techniques and technologies.

We have already shown how *zones of entrapment* operate in our discussion about the “kettling” techniques used against protesters in the UK, but the analysis could be extended. The regime of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and the processes of extraordinary rendition that supplied it with victims was entirely consistent with the vague properties of the Interzone as we have sought to define it. Victims were literally kidnapped without any recourse to human rights and subject to a legal process devoid of all and any due process—spirited away to Guantanamo Bay, where they were detained and tortured with no formal charges laid against them. Take as well the case of Iraq. Once Paul Bremer, at the behest of the US, dissolved the Baathist state following the American invasion, an entire society was reconfigured into interzone.

If our analysis challenges how we think through the dynamics of modern administrative power, it also asks us to rethink the politics of resistance, at least as this appears in many streams in critical criminology. It invites us to be very wary of equating “vague and strange” margins with counter-hegemonic struggle alone. The elements of interzone considered here are clearly vague and strange; maybe we might want to consider them zones of liberation and resistance as well. Only if they are, they sure are not working for the powerless.

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