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Empires of Graft and Enclaves of Pleasure: Sovereignty and Secession as *Causa Sui* among Serious Fraudsters

Keywords: fraud, acquisitive criminality, neoliberalism, late-capitalism, criminal sovereignty, criminal identities, ultra-realism.

Abstract

Those convicted of acquisitive criminality are often understood to be driven by greed, or to embody dominant neoliberal value systems of self-interest. From such perspectives, acts of economic predation are understood to be the result of exclusion from dominant value systems, or, to be driven by a new form of 'inverted' morality. However, data gathered through conversations with those convicted of serious fraud, indicates that acts of serious and sustained economic predation were neither the outcome of moral deficit, nor of a reoriented, neoliberal form of morality. Rather, fraudsters were aware of the implications of their behaviours but viewed them rather dispassionately. Such behaviours were considered as undesirable, but necessary as a means of surviving within the world in its current form. Surviving, within this context, meant the avoidance of symbolic annihilation, or the failure to exist. Following the Enlightenment and the collapse of religious belief systems, the pursuit of immortality projects has become restricted to the realm of earthly existence and, within the context of consumer and neoliberal cultures, has become overwhelmingly focused upon engagement with financial rewards and consumer symbolism. Thus, fraudsters were deeply concerned with their identities as successful businessmen - self-made men who had constructed empires of graft through their ability to navigate the risky world of business with acts of monumental effort and Odyssean trickery. They were also deeply immersed in the need to craft highly considered consumer identities which reflected their role as successful businessmen. Their preoccupation with the need to achieve physical and symbolic separation from the herd through their economic and consumer achievements represented the way in which their *causa sui* was determined by notions of sovereignty and secession and, in turn, how criminality plays a pivotal role in the avoidance of annihilation.