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# **ON BANDIT ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR (IL)LEGITIMACY: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND ILLUSTRATION**

## **ABSTRACT**

Outlaw organizations are neglected in organization studies. This is understandable given the presumption of illegitimacy they attract. Our paper challenges the presumption by positing the concept of ‘bandit organizations’, demonstrating how some can build impressive levels of legitimacy among their audience. The case of Christopher “Dudas” Coke, a philanthropic Jamaican drug cartel leader, and his ‘Shower Posse’ gang, is used to investigate how contemporary bandit organizations foster legitimacy. By placing ‘shadow economy’ organizations like this in the spotlight, we seek to extend scholarship on organizational legitimacy, while avoiding any undue romanticization of criminal organizations.

**KEY WORDS:** bandit organizations, crime organizations, drug cartels, Eric Hobsbawm, organizational legitimacy, violence.

## INTRODUCTION

In late May 2010, after sustained pressure from US authorities, the Jamaican security forces stormed Tivoli Gardens, an impoverished neighbourhood in West Kingston, Jamaica, where they believed the notorious drug trafficker, Christopher “Dudus” Coke, was hiding. Fearing that the operation would fail, the Jamaican Prime Minister, Bruce Golding, appealed to the “law-abiding residents of Tivoli Gardens” to immediately evacuate the area. Despite the warnings, most residents remained loyal to Coke. He was regarded as their rightful leader or ‘Don’. A few days later, thousands of women took to the streets of downtown Kingston with placards reading, “Taking Di Boss is Like Taking Jesus”, “After God, Dudus Comes Next” and “Jesus Die for Us. We Will Die for Dudus”. The author Marlon James would later draw on this extraordinary environment in his prize winning novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, capturing the unhappy paradoxes that define a world ruled by gangsters with scruples, criminals with morals, wanton violence and community spirit.

Illicit organizations such as the one led by Christopher Coke are conspicuously under theorized and researched in organization studies (see Parker, 2008; Parker, 2011). This is somewhat problematic given the sizable presence they reputedly have in international trade and geopolitical relations, albeit within a ‘shadow economy’ characterized by violence (Glenny, 2015). According to some estimates, organized crime makes up almost quarter of annual global GDP (Glenny, 2009). And a United Nations report speculates that in 2009 organized crime laundered approximately US\$1.6 trillion, which, if correct, would account for 8% of all international trade in merchandize (UNODC, 2013).

Despite their considerable influence, these organizations are probably neglected by researchers because of their highly *illegitimate* status. Despite a few exceptions (e.g., see Vaccaro, A. & Palazzo, G. 2015; Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2012) organization studies has

understandably gravitated towards institutions that hold widespread credibility, even when investigating the global economy (e.g., Vaara and Tienari 2008; Henisz and Zelner, 2005) and non-state/non-corporate actors (e.g., Scherer and Palazzo, 2011). However, herein lies the compelling ‘mystery’ (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013) our paper seeks to explain. It appears that Christopher Coke and his ‘Shower Posse’ (so named after how enemies were ‘showered’ with bullets) did actually maintain considerable levels of organizational legitimacy in parts of Kingston, even overshadowing the Jamaican State. Coke was no doubt a dangerous gang leader, but also a proactive philanthropist who made considerable public investments in an otherwise penurious community. The case therefore provides a challenging and yet timely opportunity to significantly extend our knowledge of organizational legitimacy by investigating its presence in a context where we might assume it least likely to exist: in and around a violent criminal institution.

Solving this mystery is made difficult in light of the research that does explicitly discuss criminal organizations and gangs. Although they may count for nearly a quarter of global GDP, they tend to be studied from a sociology of deviance perspective. Gilman, Goldhammer and Weber’s (2011) influential ‘deviant globalization’ thesis epitomizes this approach. They argue that with the rise of globalization and subsequent liberalization of national economies, ‘deviant entrepreneurs’ (e.g., drug dealers, international traders of illegal sex, protected species, and human body parts, etc.) have stepped into the vacuum left by a shrinking nation-state. Such organizations are defined by the moral “yuck factor” (Gilman et al., 2011: 14) they inspire in us. Notwithstanding the problematic historical narrative underlying this argument (as if criminal gangs never existed before the advent of neoliberal capitalism), viewing Christopher Coke, for example, as a ‘deviant’ would miss some of the rather conventional ways his organization attempted to build legitimacy. Indeed, Liazos’s

(1972) enduring criticism of the biases in deviance studies also applies to much research on outlaw organizations:

... (1) Despite the attempt to show that the “deviant” is not different from the rest of us, the very emphasis on his identity and subculture may defeat that aim. (2) Certain forms of “deviance,” especially by the economic and political elite, are neglected. (3) The substantive analyses of sociologists of deviance contain no exploration of the role of power in the very designation of “deviance,” despite their many statements to the contrary (Liazos, 1972: 103).

We do not profess to totally overcome such biases. To lessen their influence, however, we turn to an alternative literature. Christopher Coke and his organization fits the description of what the historian Eric Hobsbawm (1959, 1969) termed the *social bandit*. These are frequently violent “outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported” (Hobsbawm, 1969: 17).

This is arguably a romanticized rendition of the bandit. And according to Hobsbawm, social bandits are premodern peasant movements that largely disappeared with the rise of the modern nation-state. However, drawing on Hobsbawm and others, we develop the concept of the *bandit organization* and argue for its utility in grasping the legitimacy processes they deploy. This theoretical platform provides a more reliable way to study how organizations like the Shower Posse manage (or mismanage) legitimacy, especially in light of the limitations underlying the sociology of deviance literature.

The paper is structured as follows. First we define bandit organizations and discuss four ways they can be perceived, using dimensions posited by Hobsbawm (1969) (i.e., the social versus anti-social bandit) and Olson (2000) (i.e., the stationary versus roving bandit).

Then the concept of organizational legitimacy is introduced. We draw mainly on Suchman's (1995) widely cited study for a number of reasons. Given its generic qualities, his framework can be applied to a wide range of organizations, which is obviously helpful in this case. And given its substantial influence on scholarship to date, the approach offers a very familiar language to discuss an extremely unfamiliar phenomenon in the academy. This will hopefully encourage future research.

The rise and fall of Christopher Coke and his Shower Posse organization is then presented as an example of organizational banditry. The case is doubly relevant not only because of Coke's success but also eventual failure. The subsequent demise of Coke's empire reveals how the legitimacy of bandit organizations is fluid, involving multiple audiences and seldom static as circumstances change.

The discussion directly tackles our research question concerning how bandit organizations like this might build legitimacy. And lastly we unpack the implications our findings have for future organizational research.

## **INTRODUCING THE BANDIT ORGANIZATION**

### **Ways of Seeing the Bandit**

We suggest that the concept of the bandit or what we term 'bandit organizations' provides a useful vehicle to explore how legitimacy is created (or not) by institutions that most scholarship considers illegitimate by default. The word 'bandit' tends to imply a type of individual rogue. But it actually refers to a mode of social activity, derived from 'band' or *banner* in Old English (a form of human association), that is legally and/or politically 'banned' (from the word *bandito* in Old Italian) and/or occupies a banned territory (Hobsbawm, 1969).

Modern connotations often impute bandits with a certain moral superiority or what some call the ‘Robin Hood effect’ (Antony, 1989). They are seen to be officially outside the law but nevertheless morally above it because bandits champion the interests of those oppressed by official authority. Criminal scoundrels to the state, heroes to a popular audience, what the ‘Robin Hood’ style of bandit signifies is clearly, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder.

We define the bandit organization as a form of association or ‘band’ (frequently led by a charismatic individual) that occupies a space *outside* national and/or international credibility but *inside* the everyday practical and moral organization of specific audiences. This is often marked by popular adulation, heroes who stand up ‘for the people’, but by no means always (Blok, 1972). Indeed, given the allusions to Robin Hood it is easy to see why bandits can be unduly glorified, a process that tends to occur among later generations who did not directly witness the violence enacted by them (see Cassia, 1993). We attempt to avoid this romanticization by developing a non-essentialist approach to bandit organizations. Rather than illustrate different static ‘types’ of bandits (as Hobsbawm [1969] does), we posit different *ways of seeing* them. For what we are analysing “rests not so much on the actual deeds of the bandits as on what people thought them to be, or, more precariously, on how they were reported by balladeers” (Chandler, 1978: 241).

This helps explain why the same bandit organization can signify different things to different or even the same audience. Unlawful to some. Expedient to others. An outright hero for others yet. The approach is also useful for capturing the dynamic nature of organizational legitimacy since it is seldom fixed or static across time and/or audiences (e.g., see Aguilera & Cuerdo-Cazzura, 2005). Moreover, the perspectival framework on legitimacy helps us partially transcend the ‘mainstream vs. deviant’ dualism that can be conceptually

constraining. Below we use Hobsbawm (1969) and Olson's (2002) influential categories to posit four ways of seeing the bandit organization.

### *Social vs. Anti-Social Bandits*

In his seminal study of the topic, Eric Hobsbawm (1969) differentiates between 'social' bandits and other types of banditry, particularly 'anti-social' bandits. The distinction is made in terms of "power i.e., of the control by governments or other power centres over what goes on in the territories and among the populations over which they have control" (Hobsbawm, 1969: 11). To simplify somewhat, anti-social bandits are outlaws who exploit and even reinforce the dominant power structure to maintain their interests. They are not necessarily 'for the people' but opportunistic, leveraging official gaps in governance, as do Robber Barons, gangster capitalists and elements of the Mafia. However, even though anti-social, they still have sources of legitimacy, as we shall soon argue.

Social bandits, on the other hand, are outlaws who are also considered subversive to the powerful (be it the state, economic elites, internal regulatory bodies, etc.). What differentiates them from simple criminals is the ability to channel popular discontent, often through acts of violent retribution. Being a Marxian historian, Hobsbawm emphasized class inequality as the primary backdrop from which the social bandit emerges. The more pronounced a bandit's opposition to the ruling elite, the greater its degree of sociality; the more the bandit is perceived a correlate of the prevailing power bloc, the less social it is thought to be.

Hobsbawm concentrates on social bandits and distinguishes three types. First are 'primitive resistance fighters' (Haiduks). They are defined by constant mobility as they hijack trade routes and state emissaries. Their acts of popular justice are not meant to be revolutionary since they have no intention of replacing the state. Second are 'terror-bringing

avengers' who are characterized by their liking for egregious violence. In Hobsbawm's (1969: 58) words, "they are heroes not in spite of the fear and horror their actions inspire, but in some ways because of them". They use force to raise awareness about societal inequalities. And that is the basis of their respect, "proving that even the poor and weak can be terrible" (Hobsbawm, 1969: 58). And third are 'noble robbers'. They gain local trust by actively trying to replace state functions: "whatever the actual practice, there is no doubt that this bandit is considered an agent of justice, indeed a restorer of morality, and often considers himself as such" (Hobsbawm, 1969: 44).

It is tempting to protest that Hobsbawm glamorizes the social bandit. But he was ultimately sceptical about their capacity to become sustainable agents of justice. According to Hobsbawm (1969: 24), the erratic organizational qualities that define the bandit make them poor substitutes for a sustainable governing body. The avenger destroys rather than constructs; resistance fighters refuse enduring ties with a community; and the noble robber, while deeply caring for the community, often loses interest in the mundane business of civic management. Notwithstanding this, bandits "can unintentionally increase social welfare by opposing unpopular laws, by providing checks against government predation, and by providing legal services and protection when government does not" (Curott and Fink, 2012: 45).

#### *Roving vs Stationary Bandits.*

The social bandit is clearly Hobsbawm's main focus. They win loyalty by appealing to an idea of justice, if only in relative terms, and generally display a short-term interest in their immediate environment. This theory has been significantly extended by Olson's (2000) economic model of bandits and helps us address the question of legitimacy.

Olson adopts a far less romantic understanding of the bandit than Hobsbawm, emphasizing that their main *raison d'être* is larceny. However, he also recognizes that bandits must gain and maintain legitimacy over time, typically by exceeding their own narrow and immediate self-interests. Olson directly probes the issue of legitimacy by distinguishing between *roving* and *stationary* bandits. The rational reaction of a community is to want as little theft as possible. If banditry is inevitable, then bandits who appear and disappear quickly would seem preferable. Yet, according to Olson, that is not always the case. As he puts it, “why should warlords who were simply stationary bandits continuously stealing from a given group of victims be preferred, by those victims, to roving bandits who soon departed? The warlords had no claim to legitimacy and their thefts were distinguished from those of roving bandits only because they took the form of relentless tax theft rather than occasional plunder” (Olson, 2000: 7).

For Olson (2000), the problematic feature of the roving bandit is their profligate disregard for the damage they inflict. Contrary to the stationary bandit, its roving counter-part does not have what Olson (2000) terms an ‘encompassing interest’ in its audience. This long-term bond, whether based on morality or self-interest, is what allows the stationary bandit to forge deeper bonds of legitimacy among its community: “the encompassing interest of a stationary bandit leader who can continue to keep out not only other criminals but outside tax collectors as well gives him an incentive to behave very differently” (Olson, 2000: 8). This implies an important paradox. Stationary bandits have “an incentive to provide public goods that benefit this domain and those from whom his tax theft is taken. Paradoxically, he provides these public goods with money that he fully controls and could spend entirely on himself” (Olson, 2000: 9)

#### **Four Perspectives on the Organizational Bandit**

Combining Hobsbawm and Olson's analyses allows us to map the variety of perspectives through which we may regard the organizational bandit.

First, we can evaluate the extent to which a bandit is social or anti-social. Following Hobsbawm, the more clearly a bandit organization represents the 'people', and positions itself *against* what is perceived as an oppressive or ineffectual power (the government, corporations, etc.) the more social they are. If, on the other hand, they are perceived to be informally aligned with the official power structure, they are regarded as disloyal by the people they seek to represent, and hence anti-social.

Second, we can evaluate whether a bandit is stationary or roving. Following Olson, this depends on their level of investment in the community. Bandit organizations that take a long-term and encompassing interest are regarded as stationary bandits, whereas those who only take a short-term interest are considered roving.

Combining these two dimensions yield four perspectives or ways of seeing the organizational bandit (see Figure One). These are not static *types* of bandits defined by essential qualities. Rather, we emphasize the shifting perceptions of the target audience; the same bandit organization might be portrayed in all four ways by the same or different audiences over time. We do this because organizational legitimacy too is audience-specific (Suchman, 1995) and thus better suits addressing our research question.

The first way we might see the bandit is as *hero*. Here the organizational bandit is considered resolutely against the official power holders of society. Its 'social' character is derived from the ability to capture and express the discontent experienced by its audience. Typically, this would comprise of socio-economically disadvantaged groups who feel abandoned or oppressed by dominant institutions. From this perspective, the bandit organization represents a material and symbolic gesture towards community welfare and

justice. For example, vigilante groups in Mexico like Autodefensa who have taken up arms against drug cartels are often seen from this viewpoint. Autodefensa are considered rebuilders of society by Michoacán locals, frequently deploying extra-judicial violence in a manner that pits them not so much against the cartels (i.e., the Knights Templar) but the Mexican nation-state itself (*BBC*, 2015, also see Bakker [2015] and Vaccaro & Palazzo [2015] for other analyses of vigilantism).

A second lens through which we might view the bandit organization is as *autocrat*. Contrary to the hero, this bandit is closely aligned with official institutions, and hence anti-social in Hobsbawm's terminology. Meanwhile, they are assumed to have a long-term interest in the community, making them stationary in Olson's (2000) framework. For example, the Russian mafia are considered bandits by many Russians, almost functioning as an informal arm of the nation-state (Volkov, 2002). Their community interests are 'encompassing' as they exploit their stationary position in society. In contrast to Hobsbawm's social definition of the bandit, Volkov (2002: 59) suggests that "current Russian usage refers to the stationary urban bandit well integrated into commercial activity but armed and always ready to resort to violence".

The third way bandit organizations can be seen are as *marauders*. These organizations are not strictly acting on behalf of the people. Marauders are opportunistic, self-interested and behave in an *ad hoc* fashion. They have no long-term interest in the community and exploit power vacuums and ambiguities to make a profit. In this respect, they are anti-social and roving. For example, people smugglers (not to be confused with 'people traffickers') are likely to be seen as marauders, having no long-term relationship with their audience and thus anti-social in nature. They adapt to changing geopolitical situations, constantly seeking to exploit financial opportunities as they provide 'services' to communities who feel abandoned by the official authorities (UNODC, 2015).

Seeing the bandit organization as *rebel* is the fourth perspective. The impertinent rebel organization is not driven by long-term relationships. They unpredictably move out of the shadows of mainstream society, engage and then retreat. These organizations rove. Nevertheless, rebel bandits still display a distinct social element because they are perceived to hold values opposing the official establishment. In an abstract sense at least, these bandit organizations visibly side with the oppressed against a perceived oppressor. Hence, rebels are both roving and social. A good example is the hacker group Anonymous. While acting outside the law, they are regarded by some as ethical crusaders who have declared war against various contemporary evils, whether Western Corporations or the Islamic State (Coleman, 2015).

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### **Bandits and Organizational Legitimacy**

There is no question that bandit organizations are deemed illegitimate by the dominant and official establishments they flout. And we suggest this appraisal is quietly mirrored in studies about how criminal organizations function, especially in sociologies of deviance. However, it is difficult to imagine bandits (like the Shower Posse) thriving on sheer violence alone given how their constituents evidently see them, partially at least, as desirable and acceptable actors in the community.

What do we mean by legitimacy and can it be theorized in relation to bandit organizations? To help frame this question, Suchman's (1995) influential paper on the topic

is a useful starting point. Organization legitimacy is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995: 574). Suchman is keen to highlight how organizational legitimacy is socially constructed rather than a natural attribute of institutions. This makes the socio-cultural context crucial since legitimacy is dependent on what he terms an ‘audience’s’ changeable perceptions.

According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy can be managed in three ways. Organizations might generate credibility by either *conforming* to the dictates of a pre-existing audience, *select* (from multiple options) an audience more likely to give support or *manipulate* its environment to create new and favourable audiences. However, not all types of organizational legitimacy are the same. Suchman presents three types. The first he terms *pragmatic legitimacy*, which “rests on the self-interested calculations of an organization’s most immediate audiences” (Suchman, 1995: 578) so that the organization is perceived as indispensable for securing particular objectives. This entails an exchange or transactional relationship and depends on the organization’s capacity to influence the wider environment to help its audience achieve specific goals.

*Moral legitimacy* is the second type. It “rests not on judgments about whether a given activity benefits the evaluator, but rather on judgments about whether the activity is ‘the right thing to do.’ These judgments, in turn, usually reflect beliefs about whether the activity effectively promotes societal welfare, as defined by the audience’s socially constructed value system” (Suchman, 1995: 579). This kind of legitimacy has four further subcategories related to the “prosocial logic” (Suchman, 1995: 579) that underpins it. Organizations with moral legitimacy rely on a positive evaluation of a). ‘outputs and consequences’ (the social effects of its activities), b). ‘techniques and procedures’ (how it arranges its practical routines), c). ‘categories and structures’ (the overall purpose and role the organization plays in the

community) and d). ‘leaders and representativeness’ (the charismatic goodwill and gravitas of an idiosyncratic overseer).

The third type is *cognitive legitimacy*, which rests on the “acceptance of the organization as necessary or inevitable based on some taken-for-granted cultural account” (Suchman, 1995: 582). When an organization builds this kind of legitimacy it is simply “unthinkable” (Suchman, 1995: 583) to imagine life without it. Cognitive legitimacy further consists of ‘comprehensibility’ (whereby its narrative is so plausible that the audience fear disruptive chaos without the organization) and ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (where the organization simply becomes part of the general order of things).

Suchman’s (1995) framework is persuasive and provides a useful entry point for theorizing how bandit organizations build legitimacy. Especially pertinent is the suggestion that legitimacy “reflects a congruence between the behaviours of the legitimated entity and the shared (or assumedly shared) beliefs of some social group” (Suchman, 1995: 574). Is it reasonable to expect bandit organizations to garner such legitimacy in their social network? Clearly there is one complication here. Suchman (1995) never considers the legitimacy of organizations that are officially judged felonious. Hence our objective. Bandit organizations clearly build impressive levels of legitimacy among certain audiences. How exactly do they do this and what are the implications for organization studies?

### **A BANDIT ORGANIZATION IN JAMACIA – THE CASE OF CHRISTOPHER COKE AND THE ‘SHOWER POSSE’**

To address this question we explore an illustrative case of the Jamaican drug cartel Shower Posse and its leader Christopher ‘Dudus’ Coke. We chose this example because it (a) demonstrates what Hobsbawm regards as a bandit (in both the social and anti-social meanings of the term); (b) evidences both stationary and roving bandit characteristics as

described by Olson (2000); and (c) provides an overt or ‘extreme case’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of legitimacy building, making it easier to observe the processes involved.

We identified approximately 85 newspaper articles, reports (including film/TV documentaries) and scholarly sources that discuss Christopher Coke and the Shower Posse. For obvious reasons, most reports emerged after the dramatic arrest of Coke. Using our theory as a guide, we manually coded these data along four preset criteria: 1). relevant background information, 2). ‘ways of seeing’ the bandit, 3). evidence of organizational legitimacy (or otherwise) and 4). internal organizational processes underlying the cartel. We present the data chronologically to give a more nuanced idea of how significant events unfolded.

Regarding the fourth coding criteria - internal organizational processes - little information was available about the management structures used by the Shower Posse organization (e.g., membership roles, strategy, logistics, accounting systems, etc.). Moreover, and as we shall soon note, its organizational boundaries are often difficult to discern. The Shower Posse’s ‘business model’ overlapped with legitimate enterprises in the financial and construction industries among others. This could make it a kind of ‘partial organization’ (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2010) or a ‘network organization’ (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Thompson, 2003) whereby functions are internally missing, distributed or outsourced to legitimate concerns. Even some years after Coke’s incarceration, forensic investigators admitted that unraveling exactly how the organization functioned has proved “extremely complex and challenging in light of the fact that Coke had legitimate income through businesses that he operated” (*Jamaica Gleaner*, 2014). Nevertheless, we do know that the Shower Posse was widely considered a distinct ‘organizational entity’ in Jamaica and US (*Economist*, 2012), with Coke as its chairman. And we can infer some rough contours of this

organizational form based on the legitimacy building techniques it developed to render itself 'comprehensible' (Suchman, 1995) to its audience, an issue we return to later.

### **The Making of a Drug 'Don' – the Neo-liberalization of Jamaica**

By the late 1990s Jamaica had become a central trafficking nodal point for narcotics bound from Latin and South America to the U.S. This occurred almost simultaneously with the dismantling of its 'socialist state' as trade liberalization and IMF loan conditions sought to stem economic recession (Gray, 2004). When Jamaica gained independence from the UK in 1962, the economy expanded rapidly with an annual growth rate of 3% from 1960 to 1972, fuelled by foreign direct investment in the bauxite and aluminium industries. However, the country was extremely vulnerable to import and export fluctuations, and displayed the classic symptoms of a dependence economy with vast income inequalities (Huber & Stephens, 1992).

In 1972, Michael Manley, the socialist leader of the People's National Party (PNP), was elected Prime Minister. Under his leadership, the PNP initiated a five-goal socio-economic strategy based on democratic socialism. It sought to a). reduce international economic dependence through trade diversification, b). create a mixed economy with the state playing a leading role, c). extend social equality, d). deepen democratic institutions, and f). promote a foreign policy based on cooperation between Third World countries, especially Cuba (Huber & Stephens, 1992). By introducing a new levy on the bauxite companies, the government's revenues increased sevenfold, making it possible to make extensive investments in health, housing, education and literacy improvement.

By the mid-1975, the economy began to stagnate and in 1976 Manley began negotiations with the IMF to receive financial support. The 1978 IMF agreement carried strict

austerity conditions (Huber & Stephens, 1992). While the PNP had decided to abandon their democratic-socialist agenda and implement neoliberal economic reforms, they repeatedly failed to meet the targets set by the IMF. In late 1979 the government decided to reject IMF conditions entirely because, as Manley explained, the party “was not prepared to accept a path that meant greater hardship for the working people without offering any hope of their future well-being” (PNP 1980, 2, as cited in, Wilson, 1996).

Michael Manley and the PNP lost the 1980 election to Edward Seaga, leader of the Jamaican Labor Party or JLP. Seaga, who was more sympathetic to the IMF and the World Bank, sought to “create a market system of economics and shift unnecessary public enterprises to the private sector... [and the] progressive liberalization of import restrictions leading eventually to the elimination of all licensing requirements” (Mills 1989, 386, cited in Wilson, 1996). With U.S foreign policy exerting influence on the country during this period (they had no desire to see another Cuba emerging), the Jamaican state drastically reduced spending in public health, law and order, transport and education, prompting a wave of mass strikes and social unrest in 1985 (Wilson, 1996).

When Michael Manley was re-elected in 1989, his PNP bore little resemblance to the socialist party it was during the 1970s. He intensified the neoliberal policies that had been launched by Seaga (Wilson, 1996). This included the dramatic deregulation of the economy and the removal of food subsidies and exchange controls. Closely overseen by the IMF, the state’s role in the economy was also reduced, divesting 90% of its public spending in only three years (Wilson, 1996). According to Manley, the “private sector operating in market conditions provides the best means of economic growth and development” (*Jamaica Outlook*, 1991: 2).

As foreign corporations took advantage of deregulation, especially in the mining

industry, there was also a noticeable rise in organized crime, slowly emerging as an economic and political force in the 1980s. By the mid-1990s a number of cartels had considerably strengthened their influence (Gray, 2004; Johnson and Soeters, 2008). This was precipitated by three factors.

First, the immensely unpopular IMF policies meant that the two major political parties had to solicit support from criminal leaders to gain votes from the ghettos. Politicians became more reliant on community leaders, or ‘Dons’, to win over these districts (Gray, 2004).

Second, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in Cuban economic aid immediately ceasing. As result, governmental spending ceased too. A power vacuum opened in the heart of Jamaican society and wealthy drug ‘Dons’ swiftly filled it, including neighbourhood governance roles. As the economy floundered and state budgets cut, the state began to rely on these dons to provide basic services to poorer districts (Johnson & Soeters, 2008).

And third, the U.S ‘war on drugs’ escalated during the Clinton administration. Traditional trafficking routes were more tightly policed. Columbian narcotic producers thus required alternative intermediary organizations to deliver its produce to the U.S market, and Jamaica was ideal for political, economic and geographical reasons.

Against this backdrop stands the rising prominence of the drug ‘Don’ Christopher Coke and his Shower Posse cartel. It is tempting to conceptualize Coke as a ‘deviant entrepreneur’ (Gilman, et al., 2011) or even ‘rouge leader’ (Johnson & Soeters, 2008). But these terms carry the restrictive biases that mar deviance studies, making it difficult to theorizing organizational legitimacy. So we propose instead that the Shower Posse is better understood as a bandit organization. Indeed, what made the cartel so remarkable was its overt provision of public services, including civic infrastructure, healthcare and education. As a Jamaican journalist put it, “where the government has failed the people, he [Coke] has filled

the gap” (Annu, 2010).

### **The Rise and Fall of Christopher Coke**

Christopher Coke made international headlines in May 2010. After almost one year of intense political pressure from the Obama administration, the Jamaican government, then led by Prime Minister Bruce Golding of the JLP, reluctantly agreed to extradite Coke. Obama demanded the extradition in order to demonstrate Jamaica’s commitment to combatting drug trafficking. Mexico was by then a lost cause. But Jamaican could still be reined in. Apprehending the leader of the Shower Posse would be no easy task given the fierce loyalty he inspired in Tivoli Gardens. A month of violence followed, resulting in 74 civilian deaths. Coke was finally captured attempting to leave the country using an Afro-American wig as a disguise (a backup pink wig was also recovered from the get-away-car). He was sentenced to 23 years in a New York Federal Prison for drug trafficking.

Christopher Coke was born in 1969 and raised in Tivoli Gardens, a garrison community built just a few years prior to his birth. The district was redeveloped in the early 1960s to replace the notorious Back-O-Wall district, known for its deplorable standards (no plumbing and two bathrooms serving 5,000 residents). The idea was to plan a neighbourhood “befitting of decent human beings” (*Jamaica Observer*, 2004). Coke’s father was the leader of the Shower Posse organization during this period. He controlled Tivoli Gardens with fear and was suspected of over a thousand murders in the U.S. during the 1980s.

After his father’s unexplained death while being extradited to the U.S (he was burnt alive in a small prison cell), the 22-year old Christopher Coke inherited the organization. He quickly expanded the business internationally and started to make significant investments towards rebuilding the much-neglected Tivoli Gardens. The Shower Posse was highly

organized and frequently described as a major conglomerate in Jamaican society (*France 24*, 2010). Some even depicted it as a “state within a state, allocating benefits, defending borders and extracting taxes” (Schwartz, 2011). From 2001 onwards the “Jamaican police had not been able to enter the neighbourhood without his permission” (Schwartz, 2013). Like other major drug cartels, Coke also managed mainstream businesses, including his ‘Incomparable Enterprise’ construction firm, allowing him to develop alliances with government officials to help assist the Shower Posse’s illicit commercial ventures (Schwartz, 2012).

Coke’s multi-billion dollar crime organization benefited from the changing socio-economic conditions in Jamaica. The wave of economic deregulation in the early 1990s triggered a dramatic expansion of banking institutions that operated under limited state control. Financialization of the Jamaican economy was essential to cartels seeking to launder massive revenues and diversify their operations. As a result, the line between legitimate and illegitimate businesses activities were considerably blurred. Moreover, the war on drugs, now fought by U.S. president Bill Clinton, continued to escalate prices. Millions of U.S dollars were now being collected by the Shower Posse on a weekly basis.

The alarming decline in living standards that followed the IMF intervention in Jamaica permitted Coke to deepen his organization’s power and legitimacy in the 1990s: “the Don became an even more important figure in the mid-1990s when Jamaica was going through one of its most challenging economic periods” (Campbell, 2011). In the garrison communities, residents now received little or no assistance from the state. Now they relied solely on its leaders for support. Over time the people of Tivoli Gardens viewed the Shower Posse as a central moral authority, an organization they could depend upon for a normal way of life.

Governmental corruption was also part of Coke’s success. In the context of a near bankrupted state, political parties relied on Coke for votes, grass-roots creditability and the

provision of social services. This connection was absolutely instrumental to Coke, not only because it greatly facilitated his drug enterprise, but it also helped him receive lucrative government contracts for his legitimate network of firms (*France 24*, 2010).

After winning the 2007 election, Bruce Golding forged strong bonds with the Coke's organization. It might seem surprising that a state official would do this, but there was a long standing relationship between the JLP and the Coke family. For example, Edward Seaga was so close to Lester Coke that he even marched in his funeral procession after Coke-senior mysteriously died under house arrest (Schwartz, 2011).

This relationship between JLP and Tivoli Gardens would be put to the test in 2009 when the U.S. authorities began to pressure the Golding government to extradite Coke. Golding deliberately protracted the proceedings and employed a U.S. lobbying firm to influence key politicians to oppose the extradition order (Eggen, 2010). When he finally submitted and Coke was finally extradited to the U.S, Golding immediately resigned (*New York Times*, 2011).

### **The Responsibilities of a 'Chief Welfare Officer'**

A major reason for the violent resistance to Coke's extradition was the proactive role his organization had in rebuilding Tivoli Gardens after years of economic neglect. It is here that the Shower Posse organization complicates the stereotypical image of a thuggish drug cartel and can be seen as a bandit organization. In a handwritten letter to the Manhattan court trying him, Coke requested leniency: "I was involved in community development, where I implemented a lot of social programs ... I did a lot of charitable deeds and social services to help members of my community. I also hosted a lot of charity events for the elderly in my community" (Pilkington, 2012). Although conceding that Coke "did good things", Judge

Robert P. Patterson nevertheless insisted, “the conduct charged was of such a bad nature that it offsets the good” (Schwartz, 2012).

Coke’s statements could easily be dismissed as a desperate attempt by a violent criminal to gain clemency. And they probably were in part. However, it has been well documented that his organization was extremely dedicated to the garrison population’s wellbeing. Somewhat ironically, the public service that generated Coke the most loyalty was law and order. The juridical system in Tivoli Gardens was simply known as “the system”, involving magistrates and jails (Schwartz, 2011). The penal code sort to curb crimes that had become rampant in the post-Manley years: robbing, homicide and rape. According to a leaked cable from the U.S. embassy in Kingston, Desmond McKenzie, then Mayor of Kingston, “worked with Coke to reduce crime in the inner cities of Jamaica, particularly in West Kingston”. It was also revealed in the same memo that the ruling party, JLP, heavily relied on Coke to maintain civil calm: “If he now were extradited, this would ‘leave a vacuum,’ and matters would be much worse” (*Guardian*, 2010).

The justice met out by Coke’s organization was ruthless: “teenage thieves had one hand broken, rapists were beaten, and anyone foolish enough to persistently dissent was exiled or killed” (Schwartz, 2011). However, contrary to the state-run legal institutions, which for good reason were considered corrupt (Fahim, 2010), Coke’s “system” was widely effective. News reports are clearly confused by this unexpected poverty/crimelessness couplet when discussing Tivoli Gardens: “rape and burglary were said to be rare ... and police statistics suggest it has one of the lowest crime rates in Kingston and the surrounding area” (Davis, 2012).

The Shower Posse provided other state-like services. Public schools and health clinics were funded by drug money (Annu, 2010; *France 24*, 2010). According to one report,

Christopher Coke was perceived as “a one-man welfare state for the impoverished neighborhoods of West Kingston” (Ronzoni, 2010). Furthermore:

...Christopher ‘Dudus’ Coke was seen by the poor as the head of the shadow parallel government which met their immediate demands for food, shelter and education for their children. He thus became their godfather who provided for them in times of crisis and need and thus creating a situation where they would be willing to confront the forces of the oppressor - the government of Jamaica (*Sierra Herald*, 2011).

The Shower Posse’s welfare system spanned from basic philanthropy to socially responsible commercial activities, like “micro loans” to kick-start small businesses and medicare services (Schwartz, 2011; Fahim, 2010).

A good example of Coke’s social investment programme was the “Presidential Click” organization. The Shower Posse worked closely with numerous reggae artists to rebuild the ailing industry after major Western record labels decamped following Bob Marley’s death. Presidential Click Corp clearly spotted an investment opportunity. Aging (but internationally popular) reggae stars were supported. Untested talent was strongly encouraged. The worldwide popular Rastafarian “slackness” musical genre came to age during this period (Campbell, 2011).

President Click sponsored two annual concerts in Tivoli Gardens. The charity show ‘Champions in Action’ and the free pre-Christmas extravaganza ‘West Kingston Jamboree’. Both featured some of the biggest names in reggae (Meschino, 2010). This is perhaps why one local resident described Coke in the following terms: “He’s the chief welfare officer. It’s the unwritten contract between the don and the Jamaican political system” (Campbell, 2011).

Delivering these social services was motivated by self-interested insofar as it strengthened Coke's control over the district, maintaining favorable relations with the government and cooperation among community members to further his criminal organization. However, the extent to which Coke invested in social programmes repeatedly surpassed these instrumental concerns, often astonishing governmental officials (Ronzoni, 2010; Schwartz, 2011). A genuine commitment to civic wellbeing was important to Coke's business empire, to the point where he even discouraged Tivoli youth from entering his trafficking industry. As one boy reported to the BBC, "He (Coke) made sure I stayed out of trouble and paid for my schooling ... he was even going to pay for me to go to pilot school" (Davis, 2012).

Commentators have also noted how these activities were promoted by a strong commitment to the black power movement, liberation theology and particularly radical Marxism. In other words, Coke had a *political agenda*. During his extensive travel abroad he was exposed to a variety of political ideologies that were hostile to the commercial currents of global capitalism (Gray, 2004). Dons like Coke acquired a renewed urgency about poverty and its causes, which curiously interconnected with their criminal activities and an aggressive view of a customer-base: white upper middle-class Americans (Gray, 2004). This added a strong emancipatory impetus to their activities, an appeal to universal principles of justice. As Gray argues in relation to Kingston's urban poor that idolized Christopher Coke:

World historical ideologies such as liberalism, Black Nationalism, Marxism, and ideas of freedom and individual rights radiated in the ghetto with probably more intensity than in more privileged precincts in the country (Gray, 2004: 289).

After Coke was extradited to the U.S. and sentenced to prison, Tivoli Gardens once again became one of the most violent and impoverished garrison districts in Jamaica, if not the Caribbean (Fahim, 2010). Upon sentencing, a number of reggae artists recorded songs in honor of their “president”. Most famous was Bunny Wailer, a founding member of the Wailers alongside Bob Marley. His song, “Don’t touch the President”, described Coke as a “Robin Hood from the neighborhood”. In Wailer’s words: “Dudus is a man of peace who makes sure people in his Tivoli Gardens community don’t commit crimes”.

### **DISCUSSION: HOW IS BANDIT LEGITIMACY ORGANIZED?**

We propose that Coke and the Shower Posse represents a bandit organization because they functioned *outside* (or against) the law but occupied a position *within* the practical and moral economy of Tivoli Gardens and beyond.

The case tells us that organizational legitimacy was central to this awkward positioning. Unlike most formal organizations, which are legally and socially sanctioned by their political context, bandit organizations derive legitimacy in a *negative* manner, by pointing out deficiencies of the state, the IMF and other putatively legitimate institutions. Credibility is built by demonstrating how the bandit can remedy this perceived deficit. Even though theft and violence are integral to the bandit organization, their legitimacy succeeds (or fails) in relation to a dominant institutional ‘other’ and the ability to be perceived as remedial force. In this respect the bandit is symbolically reliant on the same official order it ostensibly seeks to reject.

However, more detail is required to fully grasp this legitimacy building process. To this end it might be useful to revisit both Suchman’s (1995) theory and the four ‘ways of seeing’ bandits organization discussed earlier (see Figure One). We remind the reader that we do not treat the bandit as a static and fixed ‘type’ since legitimacy is contingent on audience

perceptions. They can shift and change, as the rise and fall of Christopher Coke and the Shower Posse clearly demonstrates.

### *Bandit Organization as Hero*

Recall that the ‘heroic’ bandit organization is considered stationary (rather than roving) and pro-social by their audience. They are, so to speak, ‘for the people’. From this perspective the bandit organization attempts to build legitimacy by fostering the perception that they are rectifying a *public goods deficit* based on community norms. Therefore, Suchman’s (1995) category of *moral legitimacy* is most relevant here. It derives from an audience’s judgement about whether the bandit’s “activities promotes societal welfare, as defined by the audience’s socially constructed value system” (Suchman, 1995: 579). The bandit becomes, to quote one description of Christopher Coke, the ‘chief welfare officer’.

Coke rose to prominence when the IMF-led government imposed harsh austerity measures, creating crippling levels of poverty in garrison communities like Tivoli Gardens. While Christopher Coke was allegedly proficient at taking life (especially in the U.S), the Shower Posse also sought to secure life in the ghetto by supporting schools, health clinics, entertainment events and parks. What the state could not provide, the Shower Posse did by engendering what Suchman (1995) calls ‘consequential legitimacy’ (e.g., improved physical health) and ‘procedural legitimacy’ (e.g., public dialogue and community forums). And given Coke’s charismatic leadership style, ‘personal legitimacy’ (Suchman, 1995) must have also played a significant role.

### *Bandit Organization as Autocrat*

From this perspective, Coke’s bandit organization is viewed as stationary and displaying strong anti-social tendencies. Recall that by anti-social we mean the bandit is perceived to be more aligned with the dominant power structure (the state in this case) than

the local people. Similar to the Italian mafia (see Nuzzi, 2012; Gambetta, 1993; 1995) and gangster capitalists (Woodiwiss, 2005), this way of seeing bandit organizations emphasizes their authoritarian techniques for maintaining order and stability, reducing uncertainty so that its business dealings remain undisturbed. Against the law, but aloof and frequently rumoured to attend official banquets and state ceremonies as they display their under-class credentials. In the case of Christopher Coke, he resided in a very affluent district of Kingston and not Tivoli Gardens. The Shower Posse also enjoyed strong connections with governmental/corporate elites. Strangely, this distance helped fuel Christopher Coke's prophet-like status among the more ordinary citizens of the neighbourhood.

According to this standpoint, the Shower Posse builds legitimacy by fostering the perception that a *governmental deficit* is being rectified. This bandit organization behaved as a state within a state, maintaining law, order and justice in a brutal fashion. But compared to the rampant crime that once prevailed, this safety mandate made everyday life much easier and thus generated loyalty and legitimacy in Tivoli Gardens. This is how the Shower Posse became famous for *reducing* violence and petty crime to levels unseen for generations. These activities were morally and pragmatically important, but Suchman's (1995) concept of *cognitive legitimacy* is perhaps more apt in this respect. The background stability of everyday life in Tivoli Gardens made the Shower Posse's organizational dominance *comprehensible* (e.g., Tivoli would descend into chaos without them) and *taken-for-granted* (e.g., the smooth and safe reproduction of everyday life with Christopher Coke as protector).

#### *Bandit Organization as Marauder*

Recall that the marauding bandit organization is anti-social, exploiting gaps and/or alliances with the dominant system for instrumental gain. The people smuggler, for example, is detached from their audience and in no way seeks to be identified with them. And they are

roving rather than stationary, intermittingly visiting a community to tax or plunder, and then move on. They exhibit no ‘encompassing interest’ (Olson, 2000) in their audience.

We suggest that Christopher Coke and the Shower Posse gang may be viewed from this less romantic perspective too, given that the banditry was only nominally based in and around Tivoli Gardens. As a roving bandit Coke appears to have been skilful at moving in and out of different socio-political spheres, including the state, licit business concerns, the international cartel network and, of course, the Tivoli Garden ghetto. Coke routinely travelled to the US where his enterprise had important business interests, both legal and illegal, and was always on the move to avoid assassination from competing ‘Dons’. Moreover, reports highlight how the law and order meted out by the Shower Posse could be capricious, unpredictable and frequently gratuitous.

However, despite the erratic violence, Coke and his bandit organization did provide instrumental opportunities for an impoverished community that would have been otherwise impossible to access. This is why a visit from the Shower Poses inspired both fear and anticipation. With the Shower Poses’ support, one could get things done in Tivoli Gardens and beyond. From this perspective, Christopher Coke attempted to cultivate *pragmatic legitimacy*. For Suchman (1995: 578) this “rests on the self-interested calculations of an organization’s most immediate audiences”, and is largely transactional, as witnessed by the micro-loans, career support, debt-collection services and other pragmatic accomplishments provided by the often absent ‘Don’. Actively accepting the criminal organization’s supremacy was the price for such opportunity access.

We suggest this kind of legitimacy depended upon fostering the perception that an *opportunity deficit* was being rectified in Tivoli Gardens, casting the state as pragmatically incapable of achieving instrumental and self-interested objectives. Moreover, the state itself

might be an audience in this respect too. Christopher Coke clearly convinced successive governments that he was indispensable for securing votes, maintaining law and order and deterring aggression towards state officials. This accounts for the paradoxical relationship Coke had with the government. He was an anti-state outlaw that sought to be perceived as a remedial force. However, the Shower Posse had no interest in overthrowing or replacing the state, since only through its weaknesses and deficiencies could it leverage transactional power. Ironically, this marauding bandit organization needed the state, albeit in an atrophied and rundown condition.

### *Bandit Organization as Rebel*

From this perspective the bandit organization is roving, prosocial and closely identifies with their audience and vice versa. The rebel is characterized by moving attacks against the dominant power structure and seeks to stay true to an abstract social justice ideal. Seeing Christopher Coke and the Shower Posse from this perspective would highlight how the organization was motivated - in part at least - by political principles associated with anti-globalization and post-colonial justice claims in Jamaica. In this respect, Coke plays the role of the avenger, seeking retribution for the death of his father in US-sponsored custody and the systematic impoverishment of Tivoli Gardens following the neo-liberalization of the Jamaican economy. Bandit legitimacy is organized by the perception that it is *rectifying an ethical deficit* in relation to certain universal ideals; in this case Black Nationalism, liberation theology and Third World Marxism.

This represents the most romantic version of Coke and his bandit organization. Manipulating the hypocritical moral arbitrage in relation to the U.S. (since it represented both a customer and threat in the 'war on drugs' environment), Coke turns the tables on the authorities, becoming a globetrotting freedom fighter, a kind of Bob Marley-inspired noble

robber who has underground connections with other resistance movements (especially in South America). But what kind of legitimacy is being built here? Returning to Suchman (1995), not pragmatic legitimacy because the concerns with Black Nationalism, for example, appear to be non-transactional. And cognitive legitimacy is not sourced here since the Shower Posse are professing to disrupt and subvert the status quo rather than render it taken for granted. Moral legitimacy comes closer. However, the emancipatory objectives espoused by the Coke organization were not in the name of an immediate public good but an abstract ideal. In this light it resembles more a political social movement than a philanthropic organization that merely delivers local welfare.

Perhaps we need to extend Suchman's (1995) model and add *ethical legitimacy* when discussing the bandit organization as rebel. Abstract ideals related to freedom and justice are drawn upon. From an external perspective, including most notably the U.S Justice Department, this type of bandit legitimacy is the most difficult to comprehend. The message of universal freedom and social justice seems to be at such odds with behaviour that sentencing Judge Robert P. Patterson considered befitting of little more than a thuggish drug pusher.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has sought not only to place criminal organizations – some of which are international in scope – under the spotlight for analysis, but initiate a scholarly conversation about how some build legitimacy. This is an important but difficult task given the “yuck factor” (Gilman et al., 2011: 14) involved. By developing the bandit organization concept and a perspectival method for studying them, we have intended to extend knowledge about organizational legitimacy to institutions that are often dismissed as illegitimate by default.

But clearly much remains to be done in terms of fully understanding the complexities that arise from our analysis. In moving forward, we envisage a number of avenues for future research concerning bandit organizations.

First, we now know that different ways of seeing the bandit organization informs their organizational legitimacy. But what determines whether one perspective dominates over the others? The audience and its expectations? Changing socio-political circumstances? Preferences of the bandit organization itself since it may be selective, as Suchman (1995) argues? And can these various ways of seeing bandit organization overlap, complement or contradict each other? Relatedly, it is reasonable to assume more than one bandit organization occupying a single territory. How do they compete for legitimacy and how does a competitor's presence figure into the legitimation process?

Second, how can our theory of bandit organizations be used to study similar outlaw organizations like WikiLeaks or the Animal Liberation Front? Generalizability is always problematic when theorizing from an 'extreme case' like ours. However, we believe that our four ways of seeing the bandit may help in this regard, since audience perceptions are what count rather than the objective deeds of the bandit itself. Any organization that is outside the law yet attracts conspicuously levels of trust and acceptability from an audience can be examined using our framework. This might even hold the key for those investigating organizations that seemingly defy common sense. Rather than depict terrorist groups as "death cults" (as the Islamic State has), for example, our framework might provide a more nuanced understanding of how they persist despite their ghastly nature. Regardless, we encourage fellow researchers to test and explore our argument in other settings to evaluate its reliability.

Third, as mentioned earlier, we have little data regarding the internal processes and structures of the Shower Posse bandit organization. Did it cohere around a holistic set of functions similar to mainstream organizations or was it more fragmented and distributed? Ahrne and Brunsson's (2010) distinction between 'complete' and 'partial' organizations might for future research about the nature of bandit organizations, especially in relation to legitimacy. Partial organizations are missing the completeness (in terms of stable functions, processes and isolatable staff) of formal organizations, and thus represent 'organization outside of organizations'. Ahrne and Brunsson (2010) explore this concept in relation to emergent firms in the global economy. It might also be useful to explore organizational practices in the shadow economy, especially bandit organizations. And if they do exhibit characteristics of structural partiality, does this enable or hinder the legitimacy building processes given the multiple communities or audiences that may be involved?

Fourth, using the idea of the bandit organization to gain a better understanding of legitimacy requires a temporal dimension that is not fully developed in our paper. It is easy to present a rather teleological narrative about the rise (and fall) of bandit organizations such as the Shower Posse. But given their dependence on changeable sources of legitimacy, there are no doubt other cases of false starts (delegitimization), shifting alliances (partial-legitimization) and changing audience perceptions (renewed legitimization) that unfold over time. We would learn much by examining those instances in where legitimacy failed *apropos* the bandit organization, as done in other organizational fields (see Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011; Castello, Etter, & Nielsen, 2016; Ehrstöm-Fuentes, 2016). Moreover, our approach might shed light on those curious examples where bandit organizations have transitioned into mainstream ones. The Mahdi Army in Iraq changed from a murderous outlaw group during the US invasion to an armed community support movement (i.e., providing electricity and sewage facilities). It then developed enough mainstream legitimacy to contemplate

involvement in the 2005 elections. Sinn Féin, the political arm of the Irish Republican Army, was closely allied with anti-British armed militancy in the 1920s. Then the organization moved to the political left in the 1960s and developed an advanced social welfare agenda. Today it is part of the mainstream political establishment. In what ways can the concept of the bandit organization shed light on the processes behind these transitions?

Fifth, the Christopher Coke case indicates that bandit organizations foster a specific perception of the political and economic establishment – as illegitimate – to build their own flows of loyalty. They provide what the establishment cannot. However, we noted how Coke also had concrete connections with the state (e.g., election support) and mainstream business firms (e.g., in relation to his construction enterprise). Similar to the Italian Mafia (see Champeyrache, 2014), this tells us that bandits may also build legitimacy by cultivating close ties with official institutions. For example, in relation to the Iraqi Mahdi Army mentioned above, they became extremely popular with the Iraqi Police Force (trained and sponsored by Western Coalition Forces) before flirting with more mainstream institutions associated with the US-installed government. By 2008 they had lost favour with all stakeholders, even in their local Shia communities, and were disbanded (only to be reborn in 2014 as a ‘Peace Brigade’ to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) alongside the mainstream (and US supported) Iraqi Army. Future research might endeavour to better understand how bandit organizations form field level interdependencies with mainstream organizations. And for obvious reasons, this may be of interest to public sector corruption studies too.

Finally, by attempting to move beyond the biases underlying the social sciences when considering so-called ‘deviant organizations’, we have also learnt a good deal about our own as middle class Western biases. So much research in organization studies – including our own we admit –focus only on mainstream ‘legitimate’ organizational forms, assuming that these are the only ones that really matter in the global economy. Along with a small but growing

number of other researchers in the field (e.g., Parker, 2008, 2011; Crane, 2013; Schoeneborn and Scherer, 2012), we hope our paper will encourage scholars to study organizations that are seldom mentioned in business schools. For sure, while it is important to avoid romanticizing bandit organizations, the same caution must apply to mainstream ones as well.

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**FIGURE ONE**

**WAYS OF SEEING THE BANDIT**

