



Article

From Chi-Raq to Iraq: The retreat of the state and the rise of organized violent nonstate actors

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Abstract

Spike Lee's latest film, *Chi-Raq*, draws upon a portmanteau coined by local rappers to describe the violence and chaos of Chicago's South Side, home of some of the most violent neighborhoods in America. City leaders condemned the title as inflammatory and hyperbolic, but this article argues the comparison is not as far afield as they suggest. Drawing from the literatures on state legitimacy, American gang formation, and the emerging scholarship surrounding the Islamic State, it is argued the two locations and their organized violent nonstate actors exhibit a host of important similarities. In both situations, the absence of services and protection delivered through the legitimate government has left a vacuum of both material goods and legitimacy, which fuels the genesis, growth, and stability of these extralegal organizations.

Keywords

Chicago, gangs, Iraq, Islamic State, state legitimacy

Introduction

Spike Lee caused a wave of controversy yet again with the title of his latest film *Chi-Raq*, a portmanteau drawn from local rappers who have employed it to describe the violence and chaos of Chicago's South Side, home of some of the most violent neighborhoods in America (Schnell et al., 2017; Smith, 2015). City leaders condemned the title as inflammatory and hyperbolic, arguing that to compare the two is absurd (Smith, 2015). However, drawing from literatures regarding state legitimacy, American gang formation,

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and the rise of the Islamic State (IS), this article argues the two locations and their respective organized violent nonstate actors exhibit extensive similarities, demonstrating the effects of a power vacuum created by the retreat of the legitimate state, opening the door for other actors to fulfill the state's vital functions.

Indeed, there are a number of similarities between the conditions that produced the gangs of South Chicago and IS and other jihadist organizations in Iraq. The Iraqi state continues to suffer significant problems with establishing legitimate rule or providing basic governmental services (NDI, 2015; Wozniak, 2017b), leaving the nation with one of the highest crime rates in the world (Özerdem, 2010), a situation exploited by IS, who offer a combination of their own form of order and social control and material goods in exchange for the ability to control geographical areas (Camabanis, 2014; Siebert et al., 2015; Wood, 2015; Wozniak et al., 2018). The story is not terribly different on Chicago's segregated South Side, where a lack of social services and meaningful security has created one of the highest crime areas in the United States (Fessenden and Park, 2016). In the little over a month it took to film *Chi-Raq* on location, there were over 300 people seriously injured and 65 killed by violent crime in Chicago (Smith, 2015) and the violent crime situation and general government neglect mean that many residents of the South Side 'qualify as Internally Displaced People and would be entitled to special protection under UN guidelines' (Hagedorn and Rauch, 2007: 451) with residents displaying levels of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) comparable to those living in active war zones (Lowe et al., 2014). This situation is similarly exploited by gangs, who offer a combination of their own form of order and social control, as well as the provision of various social services (Hagedorn and Rauch, 2007).

Despite the differences in specific contexts, both the general milieu from which these organizations sprang as well as how they derive their power from filling the vacuum left by the absence of the legitimate state illustrate the similar role played by these seemingly-disparate organizations. In both cases, these groups represent peoples who are considered indecipherable by the state and resist easy incorporation into bureaucratic order and rationality (Scott 1998). They are responding in large part to a combination of state racism and neoliberal austerity, which finds its expression through the severe curtailing of public and social services in combination with violent state repression. This neoliberalism privileges the civil and political participation of a narrow segment of the population of both nations (Nascimento, 2011), relying heavily on alienating state violence to enact these dictates (Aronowitz, 2002; Silva, 2010). For while neoliberal policies definitely eschew the provision of social services, they have 'regularly marched arm-in-arm ... with militarization or the maintenance of a strong police state' (Glassman, 2005: 1531). As people bear the brunt of these neoliberal policies through declining social services and increasing repression, they begin to turn to other organizations for both support and protection.

As Hagedorn (2008: 22) argues, 'the lines of distinction between different kinds of groups of armed young men are just not so clear anymore.' The multiple distinct similarities between these two organized violent nonstate actors reveal a weakness in the scholarly literature surrounding these organizations; while there is a growing awareness of scholars of both gangs (Collins, 2011; Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018; Sobel and Osoba, 2009) and IS (Siebert et al., 2015; Wozniak et al., 2018) that their respective literatures

are minimizing or outright ignoring the role of the state, there remains a paucity of literature drawing connections between state retreat and the development of organized violent nonstate actors. Instead, most gang studies literature is dominated by a myopic focus on crime and policing (Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018), while the nascent literature surrounding IS tends to view the organization as an exclusively Islamic phenomenon, ignoring its clear parallels to other organized violent nonstate actors.

Strengthening the connections between these two literatures has the potential to not only challenge the existing assumptions and analyses in these works, but also to greatly further our understanding of organized violent nonstate actors in general. Highlighting these connections both improves our understanding of the origins and longevity of organized violent nonstate actors, and helps us to understand how to combat the rise and institutionalization of such organizations. It further challenges both of these literatures to expand their understanding regarding their specific subject of analysis, pushing scholars of IS to better understand the organization as part of a continuum of violent nonstate actors rather than a novel phenomenon exclusive to Islamic societies, and will push gang studies to not only more seriously grapple with questions of the state but to move beyond Eurocentric and urban-centric conceptions dominated by narrow crime-control concerns.

American gangs as proto-states

There is growing recognition amongst scholars that gangs and other organized violent nonstate actors do not arise simply due to social disorganization or racial/ethnic solidarity, but that a key component to explaining the rise of such groups is an absence of state structures providing the traditional material benefits associated with modern governance. As Sobel and Osoba's (2009) historical analysis demonstrates, while gangs are associated with high rates of violence in an area, they have emerged as a *response* to such violence, not as a cause of it, arguing 'the failure of government to protect the rights of individuals from violence *committed by* youths has led to the formation of gangs as protective agencies among those populations who are most victimized by unpunished juvenile offenders' (2009: 996, emphasis in original).

Yet there is much evidence to suggest gangs do not emerge exclusively as a response to violence, but rather are responding to the legitimate government's large-scale neoliberal abandonment of many areas in the contemporary world. Whether they are conceived of as 'primitive states' (Skaperdas and Syropoulos, 1995), 'parallel administrations' (Yousif, 2006), or 'protection firms' (Sobel and Osoba, 2009), such organizations clearly owe some portion of their origins and continued existence to their ability to fulfill basic governmental necessities. As Call (2011) argues, a legitimate state requires two fundamental needs – legitimacy, in the eyes of its citizens and other various actors, and effectiveness, in terms of services rendered to the population. Effectiveness is the more important of the two, as legitimacy is highly dependent upon the effective rendering of government services. Gangs and other organized violent nonstate actors arise in large part to fill the void of effectiveness left by a state either unable or unwilling to provide basic security and welfare for either all or specific subsections of its citizenry.

The rise and longevity of gangs in heavily-segregated American ghettos such as Chicago's South Side stand as an example of this view of gangs as filling the legitimacy

and effectiveness gap left by the retreat of the legitimate government. The area is notorious for its criminally-substandard education and housing (Hagedorn and Rauch, 2007; Hendey et al., 2015) and its residents display little regard for the legitimacy of the elected government nor expect much in the way of government assistance or services (Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018). The only government attention South Side residents can regularly count on is the presence of militarized policing, which is not effective in the prevention of crime and disorder (Hagedorn and Rauch, 2007; Horowitz et al., 2015) but whose heavy-handed tactics are highly damaging to the legitimacy of the state (Fessenden and Park, 2016; Schroedter, 2016). It is important to note that this combination of a lack of state services and repressive policing is not simply a coincidence of class and geography, but rather a concerted effort to exclude Black Americans from the larger political body (Alexander, 2012; Manza and Uggen, 2008; Wacquant, 2002).

Such gangs are not simply a reaction to the vacuum of state power, but often create their own quasi-states, providing material goods to people within their territories, levying their own forms of taxes, and providing a form of justice and peaceable order (Collins, 2011; Yousif, 2006). As Sobel and Osoba (2009: 998) demonstrate, gangs provide 'control and employment opportunities that are not provided by legally-recognized institutions.' Throughout the globe armed nonstate actors are a fairly normal presence, as 'loss of faith in the state has been replaced by faith in more local, tangible bodies' (Hagedorn, 2008: 27). The retreat of the state is felt not only materially in a deprivation of good and securities, but also psychologically, as gangs provide an avenue to the status and respect which remains unavailable through conventional channels for those living in these communities (Fessenden and Park, 2016; Hagedorn, 2006; Sobel and Osoba, 2009). Often gangs become institutionalized as an alternative state (Brotherton, 2007), as in Chicago where such organizations not only came to control the local drug economy, but in many cases evolved into social movements and even political parties (Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018).

Indeed, a number of scholars (Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018; Hagedorn, 2008; Sobel and Osoba, 2009) agree with Sanchez-Jankowski (2003: 200) that existing empirical evidence regarding gangs demonstrates them to be 'formal collectives that view their main purpose as producing social and economic benefits to their members and communities.' Yet much of the existing criminological literature on gangs and other forms of organized violent nonstate actors evinces a narrow view of such organizations, ignoring the role of history, class, and the state, and is instead dominated by 'issues of crime, policing, and risk management' (Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018: 45). In addition to the narrow theoretical focus of much of the literature on gangs and organized violent nonstate actors, these studies are almost exclusively conducted in European and American locations, leaving a Eurocentric literature with little to say on how these organizations operate in the rest of the world. As Fraser and Hagedorn (2018) argue, this greatly harms our ability to understand such organizations elsewhere, as the existing literature is impacted by a 'fundamental problem of the imposition of a categorization of human behavior developed within a particular Anglo-American criminological context to cultural environments wherein these categorizations have little or no meaning' (2018: 44).

As such, the existing literature surrounding gangs and organized violent nonstate actors is hampered by a lack of attention to the role of the state and how these organizations operate in non-Western contexts. As Brotherton (2015) argues, the nature of the

state is rarely questioned in these studies, and as such, it is never problematized or treated as a unit of analysis. This is especially concerning not only as such organizations develop in response to a state vacuum, but also because they operate far beyond simple crime to the point where they ‘can represent a challenge to the existing legal framework and possibly to the state and political system itself’ (Skaperdas and Syropoulos, 1995: 61). At the same time, because of this relation and potential challenge to the legitimate state, it is difficult to draw sharp lines between what are traditionally conceived of as street gangs and other organized violent nonstate actors such as militias, paramilitaries, and what are often conceived of as terrorist organizations (Hagedorn, 2008). Indeed, as Goldstone (2002: 151) argues, organizations such as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State are very much ‘like gangs in U.S. central cities.’ The case of the Islamic State is quite instructive, as it is a prime example of an organized violent nonstate actor which shares much in common with US gangs but is often conceived of as an entirely unique phenomenon. In the following section, I present how the case of IS builds upon the call for bringing the state back in to gang research, and how examining organizations outside of the Eurocentric literature can challenge our understandings of how gangs originate and operate.

The Islamic State as proto-gang

While IS is a unique organization in a number of ways, the nascent literature on the organization suffers from a form of Islamic exceptionalism, incorrectly overstating the group’s rise and institutionalization as uniquely spurred by religious motivation and context. A central argument of this article is that IS’s origins and successes came in much the same way as those of American gangs, specifically through responding to the absence of the legitimate state with a mixture of personally-enriching illegal activity and through assuming quasi-governmental duties. However, before making this argument it is important to highlight the functional weakness of the current Iraqi government and the effect this is having on its ability both to deliver core government functions and to establish legitimacy with the Iraqi people.

That the current Iraqi state enjoys little legitimacy among its citizens is hardly a secret; recent survey research has found that an all-time low number of people feel like the nation is moving in the right direction and there is widespread disillusionment with the government and political leaders (NDI, 2015). The existing Iraqi government currently enjoys extremely little legitimacy among the wider public or even among state agents themselves (Wozniak, 2017b). Yet the context in which this concern and disillusionment are occurring is important for understanding why some Iraqis accept or even favor the despotic brutality of a group such as IS.

Prior to the Iran–Iraq war and the first direct US intervention in the form of the Gulf War of 1991, Iraq had one of the most educated and prosperous populations in the entire region (Byman, 2003), but the wars and subsequent decade-plus of crippling economic sanctions decimated the nation’s economy and infrastructure (Muttitt, 2012). These problems were greatly exacerbated by the neoliberal ‘shock doctrine’ (Klein, 2007) of the invasion, which benefitted a tiny elite at the direct expense of the vast majority of the population and ‘magnified the sense of gain and loss in society at large, and delegitimized the reform process itself’ (Yousif, 2006: 497). At the same time, US-backed politicians

with little-to-no popular support were installed at all levels of government, further eroding whatever faith Iraqis may have had in their governing institutions (Dodge, 2013).

Further contributing to these drastic changes in Iraqi society, the security situation in the nation deteriorated almost overnight. While the Hussein regime employed a large and professionally-trained police force for maintaining despotic order, occupation forces ignored the need for crime control and basic security for a significant period post-invasion (Wozniak, 2017a), causing Iraq to quickly go from having one of the lowest rates of interpersonal crime in the world to suddenly having one of the highest (Özdemir, 2010). Combined with sudden shortages of food, fuel, and other basic necessities, it is 'difficult to overstate how novel and sudden Iraq's descent into chaos was for the average Iraqi long conditioned to expect a rigid, despotic order ensured by a strong police force' (Wozniak, 2017b: 810). Taken together, these conditions have led not only to a drastic drop in the standard of living for the average Iraqi, but also widespread mistrust and even outright contempt toward the government (NDI, 2015; Wozniak, 2017a; Yousif, 2006).

Importantly, the limited reach of the Iraqi state has created large stretches in the nation which are essentially a 'no man's land' (Muttitt, 2012: 233) where there is no government presence in terms of social welfare or even basic security. These areas are similar to those Scott (1998) argues typified modernist governing methods, as places without obvious political or economic benefit are effectively rendered invisible to the state. Similar to their American gang counterparts that arose in response to anarchic violence in a state vacuum (Sobel and Osoba, 2009), many of the militias which eventually became part of IS originally developed to restore some semblance of order in these lawless regions (Schwartz, 2008). Although often dismissed by proponents of the invasion as foreign interlopers or former Hussein regime members (Harris, 2014), the staggering numbers involved and their ties to local populations and institutions demonstrate the organic nature of many of these organizations. As Klein (2007: 359) argues, had the government the ability or desire to provide security and basic services to the people in these regions, groups such as IS 'would have been deprived of both [their] mission and many of [their] newfound followers.'

Although many of these groups were formed to provide some security and order in these lawless regions, most were explicitly opposed to the new Iraqi state being developed by the Coalition and its Iraqi partners. The Coalition attempted to coopt and integrate many of these organizations by offering them funding and organizational support in exchange for loyalty and support of the Coalition mission (Simon, 2008). However, instead of bringing stability and legitimate government to the areas controlled by these militias, this attempt to coopt these groups instead exacerbated sectarian tensions (Al-Tikriti, 2008; Green and Ward, 2009) and increased the indiscriminate use of violence, which in turn further fueled anti-state sentiments and support for violent nonstate organizations such as IS (Goodwin, 2001).

Much like their American counterparts, it is not simply a lack of effective presence of a legitimate government which has spurred the rise of IS. As Cockburn (2014) argues, state racism against Sunni Iraqis fueled their turn to militancy, just as state racism in America pushes young men of color toward gang life. As multiple observers have noted, sectarian religious identity does not have a long and embedded history in Iraq, but rather sectarian tensions have been greatly exacerbated by US and Coalition insistence on

staffing governmental positions and allocating resources along sectarian lines (Mahmood, 2015; Muttitt, 2012; Owen, 2004). These policies have become a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ which has ‘forced a newly sectarian political reality’ (Al-Tikriti, 2008) pitting Sunni against Shia. Despite their brutality and despotism, for many Iraqis IS ‘are preferable to Maliki’s Shia-dominated government forces’ (Cockburn, 2014: 63). Indeed, in many places IS has been welcomed for its ability to restore some semblance of law and order following the looting and banditry unleashed by the Coalition’s destruction of the Iraqi state, similar to how the weakness and corruption of state security forces in Afghanistan are often cited as a central reason for the toleration of Taliban activity by Afghani citizens (Braithwaite and Wardak, 2013; Rubin, 2006; Wiatrowski and Goldstone, 2010).

Yet the lack of an effective state presence in so much of the nation, especially the lack of meaningful security, has been central to the rise of IS, as this state vacuum allows them to ‘deliver locally what would resemble a state’s core functions – security, welfare, and representation’ (Wennmann, 2009: 1133). As opposed to more traditional revolutionary movements which respond to a certain patterns of state actions (Goodwin, 2001), IS is responding to the complete functional absence of the state. As revealed by Wozniak et al.’s (2018) analysis of *Dabiq*, the public-outreach magazine published by IS, the organization explicitly positions itself as a provider of ‘civilization and order to present an appealing front to the people it seeks to attract’ (2018: 18). While Western observers understandably often focus on the violence and despotic orientation of IS, they ‘often overlook the humanitarian objectives’ (Siebert et al., 2015: 40) of the organization.

While the rise of IS is undoubtedly due to many factors, notably anger toward the state racism of Shia-dominated government and establishing roots in sympathetic Sunni-dominated areas (Cockburn, 2014; Mahmood, 2015), the ability to provide what the legitimate government cannot or will not has been central to the organization’s appeal and success. Although some recruits to IS are specifically drawn in by its ideology, many join for the same material, non-ideological reasons many join American gangs, such as the high salaries offered by IS in the midst of widespread unemployment. Similar to the psychological benefits provided by American gangs discussed above, many recruits are drawn to IS by the status conferred by membership in the organization (Camabanis, 2014). IS has based their operations in those portions of the nation in which ‘all authority was predatory and nothing was safe; it offered certainty, sincerity, and the promise of reliability’ (Wood, 2015). This stability and certainty comes not only through offering the crime control and order the Iraqi police cannot provide, but also by providing public services and living stipends to those within the areas it controls (Cockburn, 2014; Mahmood, 2015; Wozniak et al., 2018).

A fair comparison?

Although the nation of Iraq and the South Side of Chicago are both literally and figuratively thousands of miles apart, the number of parallels that can be drawn from the origins and organization of American street gangs and the Islamic State invite the question of whether or not we are witnessing largely the same phenomenon playing out with regard to the retreat of the legitimate state. As Hagedorn (2008) argues, the global proliferation of extreme poverty and inequality coupled with the increasing reluctance of

states to address these issues has led to organized violent nonstate actors stepping into this void, and ‘the lines of distinction between different kinds of groups of armed young men are just not so clear anymore’ (2008: 24).

Of course, there are a few notable differences between the two types of organizations. American gangs tend to be a predominantly urban phenomenon (Hagedorn, 2005), and correspondingly, the vast majority of the literature on Western gangs tends to be centered around the city and urban life (Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2003; Sobel and Osoba, 2009). In contrast, IS began as a largely rural phenomenon, and when they began to enter cities in a serious way it was typically with the goal of seizing the entire city, rather than a few neighborhoods (Cockburn, 2014). Another major difference is in their relationship to media: whereas most Western gangs tend to prefer to operate out of sight, IS has built a sizable media empire and puts great effort into advertising itself and attempting to recruit members and spread ideology through internet, print, radio, and television communications (Cockburn, 2014; Ingram, 2015; Wozniak et al., 2018).

Yet despite these differences, the similarities between American gangs and the Islamic State register in both the narrow sense of how they are organized and operate, as well as in the larger sense of how both represent a response to the retreat of the legitimate state and the violence and anarchy which follows in the wake of such neglect. Both IS and many American gangs can draw their lineage back to lengthy prison stays, which allowed leadership the time to coalesce and plan their organizations (Cockburn, 2014; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2003; Sobel and Osoba, 2009; Wozniak et al., 2018). As Hagedorn (2008: 12) notes regarding the formation of American gangs, ‘in today’s world the prison plays a crucial role in both the origins and continuing activities’ of these organizations. Similarly, IS originated in the Camp Bucca prison in southern Iraq, which housed a number of Al Qaeda operatives. At least one senior IS member traces the organization’s roots to its leaders’ time together in prison, arguing ‘we could have never gotten together like this in Baghdad, or anywhere else ... if there was no American prison in Iraq, there would be no IS now. Bucca was a factory. It made us all. It built our ideology’ (Chulov, 2014).

Similarly, while American gangs are indeed organized and even institutionalized, their organizational structure is not directly comparable to most legitimate organizations, but rather is a more loosely-structured affiliate model. Gangs are better understood as ‘horizontal reciprocity networks,’ comprised of ‘a network of affiliated independent actors rather than a strictly hierarchical organization with a single head figure’ (Hagedorn, 2008: 19). This allows them to maintain some centralized decision-making while at the same time maintaining local integrity. IS operates on an very similar model, as is illustrated by the organization of their highly-active media arm. While there is a central media unit that produces much of the official media of the organization (Ingram, 2015; Price et al., 2014), they have established a large number of provincial media offices that both act as a sounding board for these centralized messages and produce their own output and incorporate local appeals and ideologies into the organization’s broader messages (Wozniak et al., 2018).

Beyond their specific origins and organizational structures, IS and American gangs both serve similar functions against a backdrop of states unable or unwilling to fulfill

their core functions of legitimacy and effectiveness (Call, 2011). A long line of literature demonstrates that gangs find their origins in the retreat of the state, operating in urban areas in which the legitimate government provides little in the way of social services or protection from predatory crime, and that these gangs act as proto-states, providing material benefits and social order, albeit at a steep price (Brotherton, 2007; Collins, 2011; Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018; Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991; Skaperdas and Syropoulos, 1995). IS arose from very similar circumstances, as a growing body of literature suggests the organization has found success through providing the material goods and public order the Iraqi government cannot, albeit at the steep price of conformity to their autocratic view of governance and religion (Cockburn, 2014; Colas, 2017; Ingram, 2015; Siebert et al., 2015; Wozniak, 2017b).

Conclusion

While there are some important differences between a jihadi organization such as the Islamic State and contemporary American gangs, drawing a connection between the violent and anarchic streets of Chi-raq and the violent and anarchic streets of Iraq is not so very far-fetched. Both of these environments have led to the rise of organized violent nonstate actors who represent a response of the socially-excluded to being effectively abandoned by the legitimate state. In America, a history of racism in combination with neoliberal policies and declining state expenditures has left many urban areas predominantly populated with low-income people of color bereft of anything resembling the traditional functions of a legitimate state (Call, 2011), while in Iraq a neoliberal reconstruction program has left an incredibly weak and corrupt state with no functional presence in large swaths of the nation (Klein, 2007; Muttitt, 2012; Wozniak, 2017b). Yet despite their individual contexts, both exemplify the argument of Castells (1998: 185) that ‘when and where there is no regulation and control by legitimate forces of the state, there will be ruthless control by the illegitimate forces of violent, private groups.’

In both cases, these groups represent a response to the material and psychological conditions created by this retreat of the legitimate state. As Hagedorn (2007) argues, gangs in the contemporary American ghetto represent a reaction to not only the loss of services and protection, but also the loss of a faith in the possibility of gaining such things through the state, asking ‘where else but the ghetto has the promise of modernity been more severely broken and is the need for certainty greater?’ (2007: 300). Again Iraq provides a fruitful point of comparison, as a large number of Iraqis express feeling this loss of the ‘promise of modernity,’ with survey data demonstrating all but a tiny fraction of Iraqis feel the nation to be heading in the wrong direction, with the government too weak and corrupt to provide basic services (NDI, 2015).

These important similarities between these two organized violent nonstate actors demonstrate the need to expand our theorizing on both subjects. Scholars of both gangs (Collins, 2011; Fraser and Hagedorn, 2018; Skaperdas and Syropoulos, 1995; Sobel and Osoba, 2009) and the Islamic State (Siebert et al., 2015; Wozniak et al., 2018) have argued that their respective literatures are incorrectly minimizing or ignoring the role of the state; yet despite a growing awareness of state retreat as a catalyst for the development of organized violent nonstate actors, there is a paucity of literature drawing

connections between the two. Making such connections and similarities explicit will allow us not only to improve our understanding of the origins and longevity of organized violent nonstate actors, but also to better understand how we might combat the rise and institutionalization of such organizations.

Furthermore, building up the connections between these two sets of literatures will further challenge both of these literatures to expand their ideas regarding their subject of analysis. In the case of the nascent literature surrounding the Islamic State, it can be argued that existing work on the group suffers from a case of Islamic exceptionalism, conceptualizing IS as a completely novel phenomenon despite its many notable similarities to gangs and other organized violent nonstate actors (Siebert et al., 2015; Wozniak et al., 2018). Similarly, as Fraser and Hagedorn (2018: 56) argue, it may well be time to re-examine ‘the building blocks of criminological theories of gangs,’ as current theorizing not only minimizes or ignores the role of the state, but further suffers from both Western-centric and urban-centric biases. As this article demonstrates, expanding our theorizing regarding what are considered traditional gangs as well as newer organized violent nonstate actors like the Islamic State to examine the many processes these two groups share could be fruitful for researchers of each phenomenon.

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Résumé

Le titre du dernier film de Spike Lee, « Chi-raq », qui est une contraction de « Chicago » et « Iraq » en anglais, est le surnom donné par les rappeurs de Chicago pour décrire la violence et le chaos des quartiers du South Side de la ville, qui figurent parmi les plus violents des États-Unis. Dans cet article, nous montrons que la comparaison n'est pas aussi éloignée de la réalité que le prétendent les élus locaux - qui jugèrent cette appellation provocatrice et exagérée. À partir de la littérature existante sur la légitimité de l'État et la formation des gangs aux États-Unis ainsi que des études récentes sur l'organisation État islamique, nous montrons que les deux espaces géographiques et leurs acteurs non étatiques violents et organisés présentent nombre de similitudes significatives. Dans un contexte comme dans l'autre, l'absence de services et de protection de la part des pouvoirs publics légitimes a laissé un vide à la fois de biens matériels et de légitimité qui favorise la formation, le développement et la stabilité de ces organisations extralégales.

Mots-clés

Chicago, État islamique, gangs, Irak, légitimité de l'État

Resumen

El título de la última película de Spike Lee, "Chi-raq", es una contracción en inglés de "Chicago" e "Iraq", un término que fue acuñado por raperos locales para describir la violencia y el caos del sur de Chicago, donde se encuentran algunos de los barrios más violentos de Estados Unidos. Los líderes de la ciudad condenaron el título como provocador y exagerado, pero en este artículo se argumenta que la comparación no está tan lejos de la realidad como estos líderes sugerían. Partiendo de las literaturas sobre la legitimidad del Estado, la formación de pandillas en Estados Unidos y los estudios recientes sobre el Estado Islámico, se argumenta que las dos ubicaciones y sus actores no estatales violentos organizados exhiben una serie de similitudes importantes. En ambas situaciones, la falta de prestación de servicios y protección por parte del gobierno legítimo ha dejado un vacío tanto de provisión material como de legitimidad, que impulsa el nacimiento, crecimiento y estabilidad de estas organizaciones extralégales.

Palabras clave

Chicago, Estado Islámico, Iraq, legitimidad estatal, pandillas