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Uncovering Iraq Trajectories of Disintegration and Transformation

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Peter Sluglett's chapter, "Hanna Batatu and the Historiography of Modern Iraq," is adapted from "Hanna Batatu and Iraqi Politics," *Democratya* 4 (Spring 2006): 7–19 (later incorporated into *Dissent*). Reprinted by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press.

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ISBN: 978-0-615-41701-1

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Washington, DC 20057-1020
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Sectarianism, Historical Memory, and the Discourse of Othering: The Mahdi Army, Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta¹

ERIC DAVIS

How do we explain the rise and development of radical Islamist organizations? What factors shape their collective action? Throughout the Middle East, organizations such as Hizballah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood continue to attract considerable media and scholarly interest. Unfortunately, the study of these movements is often based on a narrow and static political-cultural model that is grounded in a set of unidimensional concepts derived from Western understandings of Islam. These concepts include *al-jihad* (defined exclusively as "holy war," thereby excluding its meaning as greater spiritual closeness to God); *al-takfir* (accusing Muslims of apostasy and expelling them from Islam); *al-istishhad* (martyrdom); and *al-tawhid* (the unity of the Islamic community).

Conspicuously absent from this analytic framework are variables that are regularly used to study collective action in non-Islamic contexts. Such variables include historical crises, social-

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class conflict, the relationship of social movements to the state, changing political opportunity structures, ideological struggle, and the competition among social movements for power and influence. Why are Islamist movements not studied within this larger conceptual framework? Why are the hypotheses that such conceptual frameworks generate in non-Islamic contexts often ignored when analyzing such movements in the Middle East?

A central problem is the failure to situate the study of Islamist movements within a comparative perspective. Comparative studies, whether across regions or cultures, encourage the incorporation of variables that are regularly used in non-Islamic contexts into the study of Islamist movements.² To address this shortcoming, this essay compares a prominent Islamist movement in Iraq, the Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahdi)—also referred to as the Sadrist Trend (al-Tayyar al-Sadri)—with three Italian crime syndicates (ICS) in southern Italy (the Mezzogiorno): the Mafia (Cosa Nostra), the Camorra, and the 'Ndrangheta.³ Although at first glance these organizations might seem to have little in common, all in fact share multiple characteristics.

This essay challenges the notion that Muslim societies are, *ipso facto*, prone to sectarian politics, and, by extension, are best studied within a conceptual framework used to analyze sectarian identities. I argue that the causal mechanisms that result in the rise of sectarianism have more to do with structural conditions, especially socioeconomic and political decay, than with a traditional political culture grounded in Islam. A comparison of the most prominent sectarian organization in post-2003 Iraq, the Mahdi Army (JAM)—also referred to as the Sadrist Trend due to its leadership by the young Shi'i cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr—with the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta demonstrates that sectarian groups can emerge from comparable structural conditions, despite having very different and distinctive cultural heritages and origins.⁴

For democratic politics, sectarian identities are problematic because of their inward focus and the refusal of those who hold

them to acknowledge and valorize a larger and more diverse cultural and political universe. Sectarianism only acquires meaning, however, in the context of sharply drawn social and political cleavages. Furthermore, sectarian identities must be thought of in historical terms, because they invariably draw upon historical narratives in which a group that adheres to such identities is portrayed as having been victimized or is currently threatened with victimization. To sustain democracy in Italy, and to bring about a democratic transition in Iraq, sectarian organizations must be brought under control by the state, and, equally importantly, the socioeconomic factors that provide fertile ground for their development must be addressed.

BUILDING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

What is the analytic rationale for the comparison proposed in this essay? Why construct a comparison of the Mahdi Army and Italian criminal organizations? How can this comparison offer conceptual clarification? First, while the Sadrist Trend is frequently characterized as a sectarian organization, this appellation can likewise be applied to the ICS. All these organizations claim a relationship to a particular religion, culture, and/or region that results in particularistic identities. Their narrow ideological constitution results in an "othering"—a sharp dichotomy between "us" and "them." Second, the extent to which the ICS has become politically institutionalized and economically powerful in Italy warns us that the development of similarly powerful organizations in Iraq, a process that is already well underway, has grave consequences for political stability and the development of democracy. Italian analysts underscore how difficult it is to rid society of these organizations now that they not only control the economy and politics of southern Italy, but also wield great power and influence in the financial and political

institutions of the north. With this expansion into the international realm, the ICS have become even more deeply entrenched.

While the term “sectarian” is not normally used to describe the ICS, these organizations manifest precisely those political and social characteristics that are usually associated with sectarian organizations in the Middle East. Based in a political culture that eschews pluralism and cultural tolerance, the Mafia, Camorra, and ‘Ndrangheta are self-consciously insular, parochial, authoritarian. Their values and behavior are captured by the term “amoral familism,” which was coined in 1958 by Edward Banfield and is often applied, though not without controversy, to the Italian south. According to Banfield, amoral familism resides in “the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family.”⁵ In other words, there is no civic culture in southern Italian villages, whose inhabitants tend to apply moral codes only to their immediate families and not beyond.

This conceptualization of the Mezzogiorno parallels conceptualizations of Islamic societies, imputing to southern Italian society a parochial and unchanging nature. Because social relationships and political identities are highly localized and particularistic, negotiation and cooperation—critical elements of democratic political practices—cannot flourish. Southern Italians are thereby precluded from developing the social trust and the necessary “social capital” to bring about the political and economic development of the region in which they live. Paralleling many analyses of Islamic politics, this view of Italy’s *meridionale* (southern) culture suggests a region that does not possess the human resources necessary to improve its situation.

A systematic comparative analysis of the type I propose demonstrates that the excessive emphasis on what may be termed “primordial Islam” is misplaced. Sectarianism does not inhere in the Iraqi (or Italian) psyche, but rather reflects a particular sociohistorical conjuncture and configuration of events. It is highly significant

that the Mahdi Army today no longer presents a threat as a military organization, having split into at least five different factions after 2007.⁶ Instead, what is now referred to as the Sadrist Trend has been largely confined since 2008 to providing social services—its original attraction to many of its followers.⁷ The Sadrist Trend now acts largely as a political party, though it continues to engage in criminal activity. Such criminal activity, however, is on a scale far below what it had enjoyed before the Iraqi army and police imposed control on areas it commanded prior to 2008, such as Basra, Sadr City (previously known as Revolution City), and ‘Amara. The Iraqi state’s ability to suppress the Mahdi Army in 2008 and confine its political arm, the broader Sadrist Trend, to the realm of electoral politics represents a major step forward toward political stability in Iraq. But the JAM’s military defeat in 2008 did not eliminate the conditions that had enabled it to gain widespread support among poor Shi’a. It still provides social services and generates funds from its criminal activity. The conditions that led to the JAM’s rise and popularity still have not been confronted. Indeed, its winning 40 seats in the March 2010 Iraqi parliament elections indicates that its political power and influence have not been eliminated. Perhaps most ominously at the time of this writing is the fact that offshoots of the JAM, including the League of the People of Righteousness (‘Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq), and the Hizballah Brigades (Kata’ib Hizb Allah), as well as a new armed group with close ties to al-Sadr, the Promised Day Brigades (Alwiyat al-Yawm al-Maw’ud), have appeared in Baghdad and southern Iraq now that U.S. combat forces have withdrawn from Iraq.⁸

Likewise, the Italian state has yet to address in any systematic fashion the Mezzogiorno’s underdevelopment. The political pact or “historic bloc” formed between the industrialists of the Piedmont in the north and the landowning elites of the south at the time of Italy’s unification in 1860–1861 guaranteed that the peasantry of the south would experience little change in their miserable

standard of living.⁹ In pursuing a policy of social neglect, the political elites who controlled the new Italian state received support from a social discourse that developed during the Risorgimento, the period of Italian unification between 1815 and 1871, in which the population of the south was portrayed as inward looking, primitive, anti-civic in social values and behavior, and prone to violence and corruption. Later in the nineteenth century, the state arrived at an accommodation with the crime syndicates of the Mezzogiorno. National elites allowed the Mafia to enforce the interests of the large landowning class in the south. Over time, the state's behavior has not only strengthened the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta's organizational power in the Mezzogiorno, where it has largely tolerated their activities, but also established the conditions that allowed the ICS to penetrate national political institutions, such as the Italian parliament, and ultimately, economic institutions throughout Italy. Thus it is not surprising that the state, in modern times, has been unable (and often unwilling) to suppress the power of the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta, which, if anything, have grown in influence both within Italian society and internationally, especially through control of substantial components of the domestic and international drug trade.¹⁰

Both the Sadrist Trend and the ICS have been studied according to static cultural models that constrain our ability to understand how they experience social and political change. Precisely due to the ahistoricism inherent in traditional approaches to the study of southern Italian society, scholars of the region have come to draw upon the concept of orientalism, which developed as a critique of Western representations of the Middle East. That recent scholarship considers earlier analyses of the Mezzogiorno to share many of the same features that Edward Said and others have claimed characterize Western scholarship on the Middle East¹¹ indicates that the social and political analyses of both Islamic societies and the Mezzogiorno suffer from similar conceptual shortcomings.

The relevance of the concept of orientalism for scholars of the Mezzogiorno registers how understandings of southern Italian culture have been distorted by the disdain with which it is viewed by much of the Italian north. The Mezzogiorno has suffered not only from the colonialism of the foreign monarchies that ruled the region from the seventeenth century until 1861, and then the neglect by the Italian north, which has ruled the south since unification, but also from a cultural imperialism that "blames the victim" for the state's failure to provide services and economic development assistance. The stereotypical manner in which the leadership of the post-Risorgimento Italian state, drawn largely from the Piedmont, viewed the Mezzogiorno is exemplified by its use of the term *mafia* as a blanket label applied to all political opposition to the state, whether local brigands, the Bourbons, or Garibaldian republicans.¹²

All the organizations studied in this essay have drawn upon religion to gain legitimacy. Yet the concept of religion is rarely, if ever, defined in studies of Islamist movements, such as the Mahdi Army, or of the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta in southern Italy.¹³ As we shall see, "religion" assumes multiple meanings in both the Iraqi and Italian cases. In the context of both the Sadrist Trend and the ICS, religion is determined much more by the needs of specific social strata for social and cultural solidarity, and by the need to legitimate specific forms of collective action, than it is by piety, devotion, and orthodox textual meanings of the term.

If the concept of religion is to acquire greater analytic significance in the study of politics, it must be more rigorously defined. Much analysis that purports to explain political identities and behavior by invoking "religion" needs to be reconceptualized and subject to alternative causal explanations. In seeking to expose the stereotypical (some would say "essentialist") manner in which Islam is used to explain politics in Iraq and other Muslim countries, I do not seek to dispense with religion as an analytic category. Quite the opposite is true. Religion, both as discourse and in

institutional terms, is key to understanding the initial constitution of the JAM and the ICS as powerful political and social organizations.

The analysis proffered here is meant to bring the study of sectarian organizations in Iraq more in line with collective action theory, as has already been done in Italy with regard to the ICS, and with recent work in the area of historical institutionalism.¹⁴ Treating sectarianism as a set of abstract norms, values, and interpretations of religion can neither explain how such norms, values, and interpretations become actualized—namely why and when they become politically significant—nor why they endure in some societies but are suppressed in others. A structural and institutional perspective helps remedy this conceptual deficiency.

Both the ICS and the Mahdi Army developed with strong support from large segments of the local populace, only later to devolve into criminal activity, thereby alienating many of their erstwhile supporters. However, by gaining significant economic influence, as well as by infiltrating the political system, gradually the Sadrists and the ICS were able to institutionalize their power. Although their overall popular support may have subsequently declined, these organizations were able to acquire through intimidation what they had formerly achieved through cultural solidarity.

ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

My analysis begins by offering a model for understanding the three crime syndicates in southern Italy and then applies it to the Mahdi Army. This model demonstrates the necessity of addressing a wide variety of structural variables—including an absent state, lack of the rule of law, a weak capitalist impulse, and underdeveloped markets—to understand the ability of the ICS to achieve their current levels of political and economic power. Had these structural conditions not existed, none of these organizations would have been able

to coalesce in a defined institutional manner, let alone acquire significant power.

I also contend that the ICS cannot be understood without integrating the role of culture into the analytic model. The local norms, values, and understandings of social solidarity upon which the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta built their internal structure and social cohesion cannot be grasped without reference to the wide variety of cultural antecedents that existed in the Mezzogiorno well before the rise to power of these organizations. Only through combining structural and cultural approaches can we fully comprehend the rise and strength of the organizations studied here.

HISTORY, MEMORY, AND THE STUDY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF THE ICS

The Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta are known primarily as criminal organizations, concentrated, respectively, in Sicily; Campania, the region in and around Naples; and the southwestern province of Reggio Calabria. However, these organizations did not begin as organized crime syndicates. Their historical roots go back many centuries, providing them with the ability to draw upon a large body of popular lore and tradition. Here the concept of *historical memory* must be introduced as a factor that has structured the parameters of their collective action.¹⁵ In other words, the forms of memory available to what I refer to as *political or sectarian entrepreneurs* facilitate (but sometimes also constrain) the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta's ability to legitimate their power and actions through resorting to symbols, rituals, and myths that form the core components of southern Italian culture.¹⁶

Although this narrative has been challenged, the Sicilian Mafia's origins are said to be found in a loose alliance of roving brigands and bandits that offered a variety of social services not provided by the foreign monarchies (whether the Spanish Hapsburgs

or, later, the French Bourbons) that ruled southern Italy prior to Italian unification in 1861. In Naples, the Camorra's roots are said to have originated in a group of Spanish confraternities that combined religious devotion with illicit activities. These confraternities established branches in southern Italy, although many of their members were incarcerated in Spain.¹⁷ The 'Ndrangheta, the most recently established of the three main crime syndicates, is purportedly an offshoot of the Sicilian Mafia, having been formed in Reggio Calabria by a group of Mafiosi that the Bourbons deported from Sicily. This organization, known also as the Onorata Società (Honored Society) and *fibbia* (buckle), was originally meant to be a mutual aid society designed to protect inhabitants against the arbitrary rule of the Bourbons and to protect the "Calabrian way of life."¹⁸

The notion of the *honored society*, which extends back many centuries, has its roots in the culture of the Mezzogiorno. That the term has been applied to both the Mafia and the 'Ndrangheta indicates the extent to which these organizations share cultural origins. Indeed, a myth developed that all three organizations have a common history. This myth, of unknown origins, asserts that during the medieval period, three Castilian nobles, the brothers Osso, Mastrosso, and Scarcagnosso, who worshiped the Archangel Michael and his saints, were forced to flee Madrid by a powerful lord, whereupon they took refuge on the small island of Favignana, off the west coast of Sicily. From there, Osso went to Palermo, where he founded the Mafia; Mastrosso made his way to Naples, where he became a champion of the Camorra; and Scarcagnosso went to Calabria, where he established the 'Ndrangheta.¹⁹ Because each organization was established at a different time—first the Camorra, then the Mafia, and finally the 'Ndrangheta—we can assume that this myth is of modern origin and reflects the cultural affinity of southern Italy's regions based on a shared set of common historical experiences, especially a strongly held sense of victimization and of subsequent salvation at the hands of local patriots.

For the ordinary Sicilian at the time of Italian unification, the term *mafioso* (or *mafiuso* in the local dialect) had a positive connotation. Well before the Mafia became institutionalized during the mid-nineteenth century, the term reflected core elements of local folklore and popular culture. The notion of the bandits (*briganti*) maintained a very positive connotation among the populace at large, because it signified opposition to foreign control over southern Italy and access to protection and security that the foreign state failed to provide.²⁰ The Mafiosi were men of honor (*homini d'onore*, or, in Sicilian dialect, *uomini d'onore*), who gave of themselves in protecting the people, especially from the outsider. For the Sicilians, the term *mafia* referred to their spirit of independence and the authenticity of their culture and social unity. As much research has shown, the notion of *mafiosi* stretched back into the eighteenth century, when loosely organized and roving groups of bandits and brigands operated throughout the Mezzogiorno, attacking and robbing foreign landowners and exacting revenge for crimes against the local population.²¹

The post-Risorgimento idea of the Mafiosi as "men of respect" (*uomini di rispetto*) conveyed an image of Sicilians who were both courageous and to be feared. Their supposed commitment to the defense of women's honor and the honor of the family further conveyed an image of commitment to the common good of Sicilian society. But these and many other images were a far cry from reality and belied the many activities that promoted the wealth of individual clans. While the notion that the Mafia grew out of the *fratellanze*, or brotherhoods, that sprung up around the banditry of the early nineteenth century contains a grain of truth, this folklore did not capture the manner in which Mafia "families" often exploited the peasantry and preyed on the weak. Far from arising from the lower classes, the Mafiosi were "overwhelmingly men of the middle class, capitalist farmers and contractors, lawyers and the like."²²

Whatever the accuracy of these etymological arguments, they nevertheless point to the Mafia and Mafiosi as deeply embedded in

the historical memory of Sicilian society. For many southern Italians, allegiance to these organizations has been less about their daily criminal activities than about the manner in which they express the Mezzogiorno's resistance to a lengthy period of oppressive rule by foreigners, whether Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Normans, Spaniards, French or, most recently, the Italian north.

I hypothesize that the imposition of foreign rule over a period of 2,000 years in conjunction with a harsh economic climate promoted what may be called the "politics of victimization." The lack of meaningful political authority during this lengthy period of time, when the state failed to demonstrate any form of civic commitment toward the local population and was largely confined to urban areas, created a propitious environment for the formation of extra-legal social organizations.²³

I would argue that the history of the ICS is less important than understanding why, despite often engaging in behavior that harmed the interests of the local populace, the three crime syndicates have continued to enjoy popular support, at least until recently.²⁴ Part of the answer to this question can be found in the "path dependent" quality of the historical narratives mentioned above, which claim that the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta were initially formed not to engage in illicit activities, but to protect and help less fortunate members of society.²⁵ Wrapping themselves in myths, popular culture, and religion, and promoting a culture of fear through their organizational attributes, such as the Sicilian code of silence (*omertà*), the ICS were able to institutionalize themselves relatively rapidly during the first two decades following Italian unification in 1861.²⁶

Although Italy was economically powerful during the Renaissance, political divisions prevented its transformation into a powerful and unified state. Following the Norman conquest of Sicily in 1064, which ended two centuries of Arab rule, a feudal order was imposed on the Italian south. The arrival of the Spanish Inquisition in 1487 already foreshadowed the type of "secret society" that

would later characterize the Mafia.²⁷ The highly personalized form of social relations that the Inquisition forced on Sicilian society, in which notable elites (*i familiari*) were given preferential treatment, including exemption from legal authority, established the historical basis for privileged groups to remain above the law. Between 1500 and the Napoleonic invasion of 1796, the Italian peninsula fell under the control of the Austrian Hapsburgs in the north and Spain and France in the south.

Thus the notion of the *absent state* is essential to explain the rise of the ICS. The state's unwillingness or inability to provide security and social services created the necessary conditions for the translation of sectarian identities into organized and effective collective action. Alternatively, we need to view each of these organizations as forming a *state within a state* that functions parallel to the central government, offering the services that it fails to provide. As we shall see, this same model is critical to explaining the rise of the Mahdi Army.

The Napoleonic invasion of 1796 had a profound impact on Italy, both north and south. Napoleon's short-lived Kingdom of Milan, which lasted until 1814, encouraged northern Italian merchants and financiers to consider the benefits of creating a rationalized state. In the south, the decline of the Ottoman Empire's influence in Europe and the development of nationalism in the Italian north, in Greece, and elsewhere during the first half of the nineteenth century inspired the inhabitants of southern Italy to challenge foreign control, whether in Sicily, Naples, or Calabria. As Bourbon control over southern Italy weakened in the face of these new political challenges, especially after the Napoleonic invasion, social reforms were introduced, including the abolition of feudalism in 1812.²⁸ The deposing of the Bourbons in Naples in 1861 led to an interregnum that is still remembered fondly in Campania.²⁹ Thus a new set of *social relations* called into question many of the traditional hierarchies of power and economic control that had

heretofore dominated the Mezzogiorno. As the peasantry broke away from traditional modes of agrarian organization and new forms of urban production and mercantile activity emerged, would-be crime syndicates filled much of the resulting political and economic void.

At the same time, a new class of Sicilians, the estate managers (*gabelloti*), gained power. The system of *gabella* (a leasehold over a large piece of land) had spread after the Congress of Utrecht removed Spanish control over Sicily in 1713 and awarded it instead to the House of Savoy. Drawn from the peasantry, the *gabelloti* were able to benefit from the desire of estate owners to live near the court in Palermo by becoming their agents. They thus represented an upwardly mobile middle class that derived its wealth and power from service to the large landowning class. The *gabelloti* have been rightfully described as parasitic, because they had little interest in or incentive for improving the lands they administered and, moreover, often resorted to violence and intimidation to control the peasants who worked the land. In the environment of crisis and social disruption that followed Napoleon's defeat, including the spread of banditry, the *gabelloti* were able to achieve upward mobility, often benefiting from loans that they made to large landowners who were subsequently unable to repay them. It is from the ranks of the *gabelloti* that at least some of the Mafia "families" (*cosche* in the Sicilian dialect) came to be formed.³⁰

Thus a political and social *crisis* paved the way for the actualization of the intentions of the would-be leaders of the organizations that came to be known as the Mafia (Cosa Nostra), the Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta. With the decline of Bourbon authority in southern Italy and the elimination of feudalism undermining the large landowners' hold over the agrarian economy, brigandage (*brigandaggio*) increased dramatically during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is within this context of the disruption of social norms and traditional institutions that the Mafia, Camorra,

and 'Ndrangheta were able to initiate their activities on an unprecedented scale.

Against the established narrative that the Mafia was of rural origins and benefited from banditry and the collapse of the Bourbon feudal order, more recent scholarship has challenged the argument that its origins were exclusively linked to the agrarian sector. Research has shown that Mafia organizations were concentrated in specific areas of western Sicily and that its members were often of middle-class and urban origins. In the context of Bourbon collapse and a weak capitalist market, Mafiosi focused on areas of Sicily where economic opportunities were promising, particularly in the rich farmlands surrounding Palermo that were filled with lemon and orange orchards, known as the Conca d'Oro (Shell of Gold). Here organizational relations developed in which Mafia "families" provided protection for prosperous orchard owners. Within Palermo itself, this protection extended to urban cooperative societies such as the mill owners (*Società di Mulino*). The Mafia's protection racket offered merchants the assurance of a stable market, fixed prices, and a monopoly over trade and distribution of products. Under conditions of economic weakness and uncertainty, these arrangements could be seen as highly rational from the perspective of both landowners and merchants, on the one hand, and the Mafiosi, on the other. Thus we need to add to our structural equation the idea of a *weak commercial impulse*. In other words, the Mafia found its most fertile grounds for organizational growth in those areas where economic conditions had dramatically changed and where opportunities to provide protection made sense to both parties.³¹

This analysis suggests that the Mafia reflected diverse economic interests in an economic environment characterized by uneven development and the lack of any significant industrial impulse. Put differently, a coherent capitalist economy failed to emerge following the collapse of feudalism. Unlike other areas of Europe, where peasants who lost access to common lands and were

forced to migrate to urban areas could find employment in a nascent urban industrial sector, few such opportunities existed for peasants in southern Italy. Migration abroad, such as to North America, was available only to the few Sicilians who possessed the requisite financial resources. Thus it is not surprising that the Mafia developed as a loosely associated set of families or clans (*cosche*) that were involved in multiple and variegated illicit economic activities reflecting the disparate quality of the economy not just of Sicily but of the Mezzogiorno generally.

Reflective of a weak commercial impulse and underdeveloped markets, the rise of the Italian crime syndicates was not a highly organized evolution. Nor was the rise the "natural" outcome of some innate quality of southern Italian political culture. Rather, it mirrored the impact of different sectors of the post-feudal Sicilian political economy. The Mafia's diverse economic activities have contributed to the mythology surrounding it. Its very name expresses the historical ambiguity surrounding its development and deflects attention away from its economic activities and organizational structure. The social construction of the Mafia serves its illicit activities, because the notion of the *mafioso* has come to be tied more to myth than to organizational activity.³²

THE MAFIA, CAMORRA, 'NDRANGHETA, AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Despite the ICS's increasing bias, as the nineteenth century progressed, toward upper class interests, these organizations worked to sustain their legitimacy and authority among the local populace and to promote their institutionalization by developing close ties to the Roman Catholic Church. These ties were not new. Indeed, it has been suggested that all three organizations were inspired by earlier social organizations that were closely tied to the Roman Catholic

Church, such as the Knights of Malta and Roman Catholic confraternities. Although the relationship between the ICS and the Roman Catholic Church is still obscure and needs more study, no one denies that it constitutes an essential component of the ICS's power and legitimacy among the inhabitants of the Mezzogiorno.

The relationship between the ICS and the Church began to crystallize in an institutional fashion after Italian unification. In one respect, this relationship was natural, since the Church viewed the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta first and foremost as socially and culturally authentic components and expressions of southern Italian culture. That the Church largely ignored their criminal activity is evident from the absence of any record of its speaking out against the violent acts of the social bandits who preceded the ICS, or, after 1861, of the criminal organizations themselves. It was only following World War I that the Church finally began to criticize the ICS's violence and criminality.

What promoted close ties between the Church and the emerging crime syndicates after unification was less cultural than political—namely the Church's fear of the decidedly liberal ideology of the new Italian state under northern, particularly Piedmont (Piemontese), rule. The liberalism and secular culture that the Piemontese leadership sought to usher into Italian society was anathema to the Church, as was the anticlericalism of the northern political elite, whose members were products of the Enlightenment. Equally disturbing was the new Italian state's expropriation of Church property. These concerns prompted Pope Pius IX to issue, in 1874, the papal bull *Non Expedit*, which denied the state's legitimacy and forbade Roman Catholics from becoming candidates for public office or voting in national elections. Roman Catholics were allowed to participate in local elections, however, paving the way for the ICS to acquire political influence throughout the south.³³

Relations between the Church and the ICS were important at another level. Initiation rituals in each of the three organizations have appropriated Christian symbolism. In the 'Ndrangheta, the

initiation rites were based in the cult of the Madonna di Montevergine, or "Black Virgin," whose figure "mixed Christian religion with pagan ritual." Until the beginning of the 1940s, the 'Ndrangheta also used the end of religious festivals to convene "tribunals" during which its enemies were tried, sentenced to death, and summarily executed.

The Mafia and Camorra also sought to wrap themselves in the cloak of religious legitimacy. The Mafia structured its initiation rituals to parallel baptism into the Roman Catholic Church. As Ciconte notes, the *Mafioso* was the only man able to be baptized both by the Roman Catholic Church and by the Mafia. The Camorra likewise has drawn upon saints of the Church in its initiation rituals. In the mid-nineteenth century, newly initiated Camorristi were forced to find money to buy oil to light the "lamp of the Madonna," which was required to remain burning day and night. The Camorra thus attempted to create a sense of devotion to the Madonna of the Montevergine through keeping her lamp burning and also through participating each spring in the pilgrimage to her sanctuary.³⁴

RITUALS, CLAN, AND CULTURE

The centrality of ritual within the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta points to the fluidity of social structure in the Mezzogiorno, the power of the local community vis-à-vis a weak market economy, and the wide cultural and social gap between foreign elites prior to unification and, after 1861, between the Italian state and the local population. The power of the extended family as a substitute for the state, civil society, and market forces is evident in the organizational structure of the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta, as each is organized along the lines of a set of loosely associated clans that provides social services, economic resources, and political protection. The emphasis on ritual and loyalty in the

clan is another indicator of the lack of a strong public sphere and civil society in the Mezzogiorno. Instead, members of the ICS receive validation through the fetishism of honor, respect, defiance, and a code of silence.

Clearly, the Mafia's rise cannot be understood merely in instrumental and structural terms, nor can its rise be understood in terms of abstract notions of a unitary indigenous culture. The argument that sectarian entrepreneurs seized upon the breakdown of the political and economic structure of southern Italian society to establish the Mafia and its sister organizations, the Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta, provides only part of the story. Such an approach ignores the critical role that culture played in the rise of the Mafia and the other crime syndicates. The local population in southern Italy was largely forced to rely upon itself to meet its daily needs, and it needed protection from a rapacious state, albeit a weak one, that was run by foreign elites who demonstrated little or no concern for local interests. In this context, the cultural setting that Sicilian, Neopolitan, and Calabrian society had established prior to the decline of foreign rule—a set of norms and values that emphasized suspicion of foreigners, hostility toward the state, and a reliance on the extended family to meet material needs—established a crucial social base upon which these organizations could build. That the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta could present themselves as "culturally authentic" and as protectors of the cultural unity and material interests of the local population greatly facilitated their ability to become powerful social, political, and economic actors in southern Italian society.

The fascination with the role of ritual and the ICS's internal structure, both in the media and in academic circles, has promoted a facile cultural model. A narrowly defined concept of culture has prevented the development of analyses that can account for change—critical for any model that seeks to explain collective action. While the Mafia initially focused on providing protection within Sicily, the organization later branched out to the United

States and other areas of Italy. The Camorra remained largely confined to Naples and Campania, whereas the 'Ndrangheta extended its tentacles to Europe, Asia, and Latin America. During the twentieth century, all three organizations became heavily involved in a variety of new criminal activities, especially drug trafficking.

Following World War II, the ICS developed close ties with the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) as each sought to offset the power of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the labor syndicates under its control. As a result, the ICS became more intimately involved with the internal workings of the national state. Determining whether the PDC captured the Mafia or the reverse is less important than comprehending that the intensification of an ideologically based political struggle between right and left propelled the Mafia onto the national political and economic stage. No longer were its activities or those of its sister organizations limited to the Mezzogiorno.³⁵

MODELING THE MAHDI ARMY

How does the model developed thus far to explain the ICS apply to the Mahdi Army (JAM) and radical Islamist organizations in Iraq? We can begin by applying the concept of the *absent state*, since the Mahdi Army, like many sectarian militias in post-2003 Iraq, traces its origins to the interstices of the social, economic, and political decay that characterized Iraq during the 1990s. By drawing upon the cultural currency of the al-Sadr name and the historical memory of the al-Sadr family's support for Iraq's Shi'a, especially through providing material and psychological relief to the beleaguered Shi'i community of Revolution City (known to many residents as "Sadr City" after 2003), the JAM was able to mobilize the poor Shi'a of Baghdad and areas of southern Iraq. To this model we need to add the deeply felt historical sense of victimization that extends back to the martyrdom in 661 of the Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, and of his son

Husayn in 680, that characterizes large segments of Shi'a in Iraq, especially those who are economically disenfranchised and lack political power. Feelings of victimization notwithstanding, the JAM's ability to mobilize large numbers of marginalized Shi'a would not have been possible without the serious contraction of the state during the 1990s.

When developing a model of sectarian politics in Iraq, it is essential to consider the history of British involvement in drawing the boundaries of the modern state and, more importantly, establishing the Hashimite monarchy in 1921, effectively imposing a foreigner as king. Political institutions created by the British, namely the monarchy and the parliament, never possessed much legitimacy among the Iraqi populace. This was evident by the ease with which the monarchy was overthrown in 1958.³⁶ Peasants and workers were treated poorly under the monarchy. The British established a parallel legal system for the tribal regions of Iraq, thereby excluding the central state from administering the large holdings of tribal shaykhs. Despite British efforts to use the traditional colonial strategy of "divide and rule," there was a strong cross-ethnic Iraqi reaction that countered British policies with an explicitly anti-sectarian, democratically inclined political agenda.³⁷

The JAM needs to be understood as an extension of an activist Shi'i politics that developed after the revolution of July 14, 1958. This activism represented a break with an earlier tradition of Shi'i clerical involvement in politics. Although Shi'i clerics had already become involved in politics during World War I as a result of the British invasion of 1914, that involvement had assumed a much more ecumenical dimension. During and after the war, the clerics had used their religious credentials and religious decrees (*fatwa*, plural *fatawa*) to promote policies that would protect all Iraqis, not just Shi'a, from British colonial control.³⁸

By 1958, new political cleavages had emerged that pitted Shi'i clerics against a strong secular trend in Iraqi politics that was

promoted by the powerful nationalist movement and elements within the clergy itself. This cleavage developed after Iraq gained nominal independence in 1921, as ever larger numbers of Shi'i youth and members of the middle class joined secular political parties, particularly the Iraqi Communist Party, which had been formed in 1934. The inroads made by secular civil society organizations, such as professional associations, student organizations, and labor unions, caused a split within the Shi'i clergy. Most clerics wanted to remain within the traditional "quietist" mode, focusing on education, study, and contemplation, but others sought to bring religion into the public sphere, particularly the political arena, to counter secular trends that attracted many Shi'a, especially youth.

During the period between Iraq's invasion of Iran in September 1980 and the imposition of the draconian UN sanctions regime in 1991, Iraq was transformed from one of the world's most centralized states to a state that was largely dysfunctional. After sustaining hundreds of thousands of casualties and extensive damage to its oil industry—its main source of revenue—during the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq was severely bombed by United Nations coalition forces in January 1991. Estimates are that this bombing pushed Iraq back to 1960s levels of industrial development. As a result of two wars, the national uprising (*al-intifada*) of March of 1991 in which hundreds of thousands died (according to the Ba'hist regime's own statistics), and the UN sanctions, Iraq experienced a lengthy period of economic, political, and social decay.³⁹ One of the most serious problems that the Ba'hist regime faced after the *intifada* was the killing of many of the its officials in the countryside. Saddam Hussein needed to replace these cadres, especially in rural areas where his security apparatus no longer possessed a strong presence.

The regime's response to these changed political conditions was to turn to the basic institutions and traditional values of Iraqi society, especially tribe and religion, for legitimation and support. The great irony was that in turning to tribalism and religion, the Ba'hist regime valorized precisely those institutions and values

that it had considered the most threatening when it seized power in 1968 and that it had worked to undermine during the 1970s. Despite having castigated tribes and tribalism as "reactionary" and a remnant of colonial rule, once Saddam Hussein seized power in 1979 from Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, he began to emphasize tribal values as part of his effort to portray himself as the paramount shaykh (*shaykh al-mashayikh*) of the nation.⁴⁰

During the 1990s, Saddam began implementing a "retribalization policy" as a method of reasserting his control in rural areas. He sought to weaken powerful tribes, co-opt others, and resurrect moribund tribes that had disappeared (or were on the verge of doing so) and link them to him via patronage ties. In areas where powerful tribes were seen as threatening his rule, Saddam appointed clan leaders—the leaders below the tribal shaykh—as shaykhs in their own right. This created conflict within the tribe because previously there had always been only one tribal shaykh at the apex of the clan structure. Now the clan leader and the tribal shaykh competed with each other for ultimate control and authority over the tribe.⁴¹

In those areas where tribes were weak, the regime sought out individuals who had been affiliated with former tribes and empowered them by giving them political authority and government contracts. However, this policy only partially served the regime's needs. While "neo-tribal" leaders were able to control significant parts of the countryside, this new policy also allowed traditional tribal forces to gain power at the expense of the central state. It likewise opened new political space for Islamist and other oppositional organizations, like the Sadrists.

These developments in the rural areas were accompanied by reduced social and political control in the urban areas as well. Under the pressure of UN sanctions, the national economy and education systems collapsed. Economic collapse reduced the state's ability to intrude in the daily lives of Iraqis. Indoctrination and surveillance of the young was curtailed, in part, by the lack of schools from which to recruit.

In an effort to sustain its power, the state channeled its limited resources to funding the security services and the military, leaving few revenues for the development of Iraq's infrastructure. The health care system, once the best in the Middle East, experienced serious degradation. As medical education and training deteriorated, many physicians fled the country and were not replaced. Common medicines were available only on the black market, and to those who could afford them. Nutritional levels declined and infant mortality increased.

The dramatic reduction of government salaries relative to inflation and the cost of living curtailed the state's ability to resort to financial co-optation or the lure of government employment as ways to encourage acquiescence to regime policies. Iraqis were increasingly forced to meet their economic needs by finding income beyond what state employment provided. Families were able to sustain themselves for only a portion of the month through the use of state-issued ration cards, which covered about two-thirds of the necessary expenditures for an average family. Families were forced to sell many of their possessions or have members of their family find itinerant employment. Youth were often required to forego education to help families make ends meet.⁴²

The sale of family possessions and alternative forms of economic activity were still not sufficient to bridge the gap between monthly needs and a month's worth of state salaries and rations. Not surprisingly, many families began to encourage their members to resort to crime, which increased significantly as the 1990s progressed. In many instances, the state turned a blind eye to criminal activity, both because it did not have the resources to regulate it, and because such activity reduced some of the pressure to provide social services and economic resources.

The state continued its traditional policy of neglecting the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, the 1990s saw one of the first instances of reverse migration since the founding of the modern state, as Iraqis began to leave urban areas for the countryside. While

such migration made sense for those who could no longer sustain themselves economically, the social decay of urban areas had a negative impact on a sense of Iraqiness, as local social and economic relations competed with and thus undermined a sense of national identity and secular understandings of politics. In short, with the collapse of national economic intercourse, Iraqis were increasingly compelled to turn to local leaders and traditional institutions, such as clerics, tribe, ethnic group, and extended family, to meet their material and social needs.

THE TURN TO RELIGION

During the mid-1990s, Saddam Hussein's regime began emphasizing the role of religion in society. In 1993, Saddam appointed 'Izzat al-Duri, vice-chairman of the Revolution Command Council, as head of a new "return to faith campaign" (*al-hamla al-imaniyya*). Augmenting this cynical campaign, Saddam funded the refurbishing of the gold domes of the revered Shi'i mosques in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala'. After making the pilgrimage to Mecca with great fanfare, he established the Saddam College for Theological Studies.

At the same time, forces outside Iraq attempted to take advantage of its instability and Saddam's efforts to exploit religion to strengthen his legitimacy and power. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the Saudi government offered the newly autonomous Kurds funds for mosque construction. In the Iraqi Arab south, Wahhabi elements in the Gulf, including, it is alleged, the Saudi regime itself, paid Sunni Arabs to pray five times per day and Sunni Arab women to dress in ways that were "Islamically appropriate."⁴³

Women suffered the most of any group in Iraq during the 1990s. As the economy collapsed, they were forced to leave public employment and return to the private sphere. Women were denied education, and female illiteracy rates increased dramatically.

Women were forced to obtain permission from their male relatives if they wanted to travel within Iraq. The rights that Saddam and the Ba'ath had given to women during the 1970s and early 1980s, when it suited the regime's needs, were now withdrawn as the Iraqi president emphasized "tradition" to give his regime greater legitimacy.⁴⁴

In addition to external forces, Islamist groups within Iraq also sought to exploit regime weakness during the UN sanctions regime of the 1990s. Under the guise of providing charity, leaders of these organizations organized politically. Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr's father, mobilized the Shi'i community in Revolution City in opposition to Saddam. While al-Sadr attempted to manipulate Saddam, the Iraqi leader, in turn, tried to use al-Sadr to ingratiate himself with the Shi'a community. The religious leader paid the price in 1999, when Saddam discovered that al-Sadr was using Ba'athist efforts to co-opt him to mobilize opposition to the regime, and he and two of his sons were assassinated.

The state's total contempt for public morality—its purported "faith campaign" notwithstanding—was yet another incentive for citizens to turn to religion as they sought refuge from unpredictable state behavior and a society in which a small rapacious elite prospered while the populace at large suffered. Although the Mahdi Army did not appear as a formal political movement until the summer 2003, when it is said to have been organized by 500 seminary students, it is clear that Muqtada al-Sadr's father, Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, was already deeply involved in Revolution City's social and political affairs in the 1990s. That the most densely populated Shi'i slum area of Baghdad—originally named Revolution City when 'Abd al-Karim Qasim created it while in power (1958–1963) and later renamed Saddam City in the 1980s—gradually assumed the name Sadr City during the 1990s is indicative of the extent to which the Sadrists had come to dominate this district.⁴⁵

THE LACK OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The political and economic conditions of the 1990s set the stage for a turn to more local and religious forms of authority, and the lack of political institutions also contributed to this phenomenon. As was the case in Italy following the Risorgimento, strong and durable political institutions never developed in Iraq, whether under the Hashimite monarchy (1921–1958), the Qasim regime (1958–1963), the Republican regimes that ruled between 1963 and 1968, or Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime (1968–2003). The lack of these institutions reinforced the negative impact of the absent Iraqi state during the 1990s.⁴⁶ While there had been a strong tradition of civil society organizations prior to the first Ba'athist regime, which seized power in 1963, and to a lesser extent during the Republican period between 1963 and 1968, the Ba'ath destroyed them all as part of its strategy of thoroughly demobilizing society. When Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown in 2003, there was no tradition of effective institutions to serve the needs of the populace in the new political environment.

U.S. policy following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 exacerbated the state's inability to provide essential services, thereby undermining political stability and support for building civil society and democratic institutions. The looting in Baghdad that the U.S. military permitted in mid-April 2003 destroyed all Iraqi ministries apart from those that the military had secured, namely the Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of Defense, which was housed in Saddam's Republican Palace. These actions made Iraqis very cynical about the United States' intentions in their country and reluctant to support Bush administration efforts to build what it termed a "new democratic Iraq." Contradicting the stated aim of helping Iraq build a democracy, the U.S. invasion created yet additional obstacles to the development of effective political institutions.

The creation of the Iraqi Governing Council in July of 2003 constituted the first time in modern Iraq's history that a govern-

ment had been created along explicitly sectarian lines. Not only was this policy indicative of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Bush administration's ignorance of the history of cross-ethnic cooperation in Iraq, but it set the tone for the sectarian politics that quickly emerged after the fall of the Ba'athist regime. Seeing the first post-invasion government organized along ethno-confessional lines led many Iraqis to believe that sectarianism was the new political order of the day.

U.S. policy in post-Saddam Iraq set the stage for the emergence of a wide variety of sectarian entrepreneurs who exploited the new ethnically-based politics to reinforce the vertical cleavages that they used to pursue their own narrow political and economic agendas. Inadvertently, the CPA strengthened the sectarianism that had developed during the 1990s. Having expended little effort to understand Iraqi society and history prior to the 2003 invasion, the Bush administration implemented policies that *facilitated* the activities of the very groups that both opposed the U.S. occupation and promoted a sectarian agenda and a weak state. The JAM was one such group.

THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL BASES OF THE MAHDI ARMY

The JAM argues that it can trace its origins to the original Islamic Call Party (Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya) that was formed during the late 1950s by al-Sadr family clerics, especially the highly respected Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr's uncle, known as the "first Sadr" (*al-Sadr al-awal*), in response to the attraction of large numbers of Shi'i youth to the Iraqi Communist Party.⁴⁷ Unlike the Da'wa Party's current head, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who spent most of Saddam Hussein's regime in exile in Syria, the Sadrists did not leave the country. This legacy, in addition to the assassination of Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad

Sadiq al-Sadr, known as the "second Sadr" (*al-Sadr al-thani*), and two of his sons, was likewise invoked to give the Sadrists greater legitimacy over other Shi'i organizations.

The Da'wa Party's efforts at political mobilization were brutally suppressed by the Ba'athist regime in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after in 1977 Iraqi Shi'a insisted on organizing the banned 'Ashura' ritual commemorating the martyrdom of 'Ali's son Husayn. Matters worsened after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in neighboring Iran, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's newly installed regime began castigating Saddam's Ba'athist regime. In 1979 and 1980, the Ba'ath justified its crackdown on the Da'wa Party by claiming that it had tried to assassinate several high-ranking government officials, including the foreign minister, Tariq 'Aziz.

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was executed in April 1980 by the Ba'athist regime along with his sister, Bint al-Huda, an established religious scholar in her own right, wrote two highly influential volumes, *Iqtisaduna* (*Our Economy*) and *Falsafatuna* (*Our Philosophy*), in which he argued that Shi'i Islam could better provide for all the material and spiritual needs of the Shi'a than Marxism.⁴⁸ It was left to Sadiq al-Sadr's youngest and least revered son, Muqtada, to take up the reins of Shi'i activism. Muqtada, however, was not known for his piety or devotion to Shi'i theology and had demonstrated a lack of such interest while a teenager.⁴⁹

Drawing upon the concept of the *absent state*, it was precisely the state's collapse that allowed the so-called Mahdi Army to mobilize supporters during the 1990s and the years leading up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in April 2003. The Sadrists were well placed to fill the security vacuum created by the United States' disbanding of the 400,000-strong Iraqi conscript army in May 2003 and dissolution of the national police force. Despite having much weaker religious credentials than his father, uncle, or two brothers, Muqtada al-Sadr was much more successful in creating a powerful organization.

Shortly after the start of U.S. occupation of Iraq, the Mahdi Army began to offer security and social services to the Shi'a community in Sadr City, other parts of Baghdad, and many areas of the Shi'i south. In effect, it quickly became a *state within a state* in the face of an ineffectual national government. The provision of services gained the JAM considerable legitimacy and support, especially among poor Shi'a. By 2004, the JAM and its various institutional manifestations, such as the Office of the Martyr (Maktab al-Shahid), had become the largest social service providers in Iraq.

The JAM, like the ICS, became involved in criminal activity as a means of consolidating its political and economic power. Crime allowed the JAM to attract a large following of destitute Shi'i youth, many of whom had recently migrated to Baghdad and other Iraqi cities after abandoning a crumbling agrarian sector. These developments—a weak and ineffectual state, rapid social change, and economic opportunity structures—underscore the most important variables that explain the JAM's rise. Using as a subterfuge the provision of charitable deeds to a populace that was experiencing desperate straits, the Sadrists were able to exploit the political and economic vacuum created by the Iraqi state's inability to exert the control over society that it had enjoyed prior to the 1991 Gulf War and subsequent *intifada*.

One reason the Mahdi Army is so poorly understood is that most analysts have not examined the social and political impact of the 1990s on post-2003 Iraqi politics. Instead, analyses are based on the assumption that the Mahdi Army is simply part of a "natural" process in all Muslim societies in which religious-political organizations come to dominate the political landscape. Another core problem of previous conceptualizations of Islamist movements is the failure to account for social stratification. Rarely do we find any effort to explain why these movements invariably recruit from particular social strata. Instead, these conceptualizations are based on the highly problematic assumption of a "communal mind," which posits that culture and religion define, in some homogenous

manner, the thinking of all members of an ethno-confessional group.⁵⁰ Yet neither the ICS nor the Sadrists attract wealthy members of society, and few members of the regularly employed working class or stable peasantry have joined their ranks. Just as the ICS has drawn upon specific social strata in the Mezzogiorno in creating a new class whose work of providing "protection" for specific commercial interests is largely parasitic, so, too, the Mahdi Army largely draws its recruits from certain segments of the Iraqi populace who are likewise parasitic on society.

Specifically, the JAM attracts those clerics who are not among the inner circle of the Shi'i *al-marja'iyah* (scholars whose extensive learning has earned them respect and emulation). These more marginal clerics have been strongly influenced by the teachings and activism of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and especially his brother, Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. The al-Sadr family has been in the forefront of criticizing the traditional *hawza*, the network of religious seminaries in and around the city of Najaf, for its "quietism" and failure to become involved in politics. Indeed, this was a key motivation for its central role in the formation of the Da'wa Party in the late 1950s. As such, the Sadrists and their supporters have emphasized the importance of *al-hawza al-natiqa*—the "verbal" or "speaking *hawza*"—and the concept of martyrdom (*al-istishhad*).⁵¹ The Sadrist Trend has attracted clerics who are less interested in the fine points of Shi'i theology than in finding an organizational expression for their activist inclinations. These clerics are usually not the most learned *mujtahids* (experts in the application of *al-ijtihad*, or religious reasoning) because they have not had the opportunity to pursue studies at a high level and have been more interested in politics than in religious learning.

The Mahdi Army has also attracted a specific social base. JAM units are populated by poor Shi'i men, hailing from both rural and urban areas, who have viewed the movement as a vehicle for upward mobility.⁵² For young males in a society experiencing extensive rural-urban migration and social turmoil, especially in

poorer urban districts such as Sadr City, the JAM provides not only economic sustenance but also a sense of belonging. The experience of solidarity gives members a feeling of empowerment. This empowerment is reinforced by the political and social discipline that the JAM imposes on areas that it controls, such as forbidding the use of alcohol and punishing merchants who sell it.⁵³

For migrant youth, the JAM serves as a vehicle of social integration into a new and often bewildering urban environment. JAM members, who generally have little or no education, are taught that their activities are hastening the return of the Mahdi. Such beliefs help legitimize the extensive criminal activity that characterizes much of the JAM, such as oil smuggling, theft, extortion, and kidnapping. Although members benefit from this criminality, they can justify their actions by viewing them as contributing to the greater good of the Shi'i community by helping the JAM acquire funds to pursue its goals. As its name implies, the Mahdi Army conceives of its activities as hastening the Mahdi's return from occultation, when mankind will have reached the "end of days" and God will make everything right in the world.

In the JAM narrative of politics and society, populist Shi'i ideology becomes a key element in establishing a sharply defined boundary not only between the Shi'a and Iraq's Sunni Arabs, and to a lesser degree Kurdish communities, but even more importantly, within the Shi'i community itself. Because the Sadrists are Arab Shi'a (in contrast to Persian Shi'a, who trace their ethnic origins to Iran), the JAM can invoke the type of "cultural authenticity" (*al-asala*) unavailable to non-Arab clerics. The JAM argues that it is a truly *Iraqi* national organization, and thus more authentically Shi'i than other such political competitors, especially those of non-Arab ethnic origins. This difference in ethnicity becomes essential to differentiating the JAM from the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (formerly the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI), which was established in Iran in 1982 and whose military arm, the Badr Organization, was led during the Iran-Iraq war

by officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. In claiming to represent the true interests of the Shi'i community in Iraq, the JAM parallels the ICS, which likewise claim to represent the regions in the Mezzogiorno where they predominate.

COMPARING THE JAM AND THE ICS

The ICS and the JAM share a number of commonalities. Both sets of organizations have exploited the absence of the state, a political culture based in a historical sense of victimization and neglect, and a suspicion of the outsider to mobilize their respective social bases. Both are situated in a geographically specific region, namely in areas of the country typically ignored by the state, whether the Mezzogiorno or Sadr (Revolution) City and the Shi'i south of Iraq. Although the ICS does not draw upon the poorest elements of society as is often the case with the JAM, both organizations are viewed by their members as vehicles for upward mobility. From a social-class perspective, these organizations' social bases are diffuse, ranging from rural migrants and small entrepreneurs to clerics, government bureaucrats, and police, all of whom are largely parasitic on the economy. Both the JAM and the ICS are extensively involved in criminality.⁵⁴ As noted earlier, the Mafia, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta are subdivided into "families" (*cosche*) and thus exhibit another parallel with the JAM, namely a highly insular character.

The JAM or Sadrist Trend is actually a multiplicity of organizations and is therefore largely decentralized like the ICS. It is first and foremost the Office of the Martyr, which is based on the martyrdom of the "two Sadrs," Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. This office includes those clerics who advise Muqtada al-Sadr, who give Friday sermons in areas controlled by the JAM, and who often represent al-Sadr's views to the media and public in his absence.

Second, there are the JAM units that are nominally under the control of Muqtada al-Sadr. However, many of these units, especially in the areas of southern Iraq beyond Sadr City, often pay little more than lip service to al-Sadr's leadership. In other areas, especially the port city of Basra, the JAM has remained largely independent of al-Sadr.⁵⁵ As in the case of the ICS, there are also groups that appropriate the name Mahdi Army as a cover for criminal activity but that are not actually allied with or part of the Sadrist Trend. Both the JAM and the Mafia have worked at times to eliminate these "rogue" units.

The loose organizational structure of the ICS and the JAM offers benefits but also creates certain weaknesses. The small size and tight-knit nature of their cells or "families" create strong bonds of loyalty. This social cohesion is expressed in the concept of *omertà* (silence) among the ICS. While not as explicitly articulated by the Sadrists, their units likewise keep their structure and activities secret. At the same time, decentralization undermines a hierarchical structure within the ICS and the JAM, making it difficult for leaders at the top to impose their will on the organization. The question of "voice"—the act of speaking publicly about one's platform—serves to differentiate the ICS from the Sadrist Trend. Whereas the ICS are entirely secretive, the Sadrists regularly and publicly announce their views, especially in Friday religious services.

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE ROLE OF RELIGION

What role, then, does religion play in these two groups of organizations? As I have argued, formal understandings of religion are of limited analytic and causal utility in helping us understand the collective action of either the ICS or the Sadrist Trend. Specifically, religious texts do not provide the social and political "roadmap" for

either set of organizations. Instead, religion needs to be viewed conceptually in political-cultural and political-economic terms. For both the ICS and the Sadrist Trend, religion represents a form of folk culture that provides a strong sense of social solidarity and political cohesiveness.⁵⁶ Indeed, ICS and JAM members usually have little formal knowledge of either Christianity or Islam, respectively. Although the Sadrist Trend's leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, comes from a very distinguished family of Shi'i clerics, he is known in Iraq to have had little in the way of formal religious training when he first appeared on the political stage in the summer of 2003.

SYMBOLISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Political culture is a significant factor that can help explain the organization and behavior of the ICS and the JAM. Clearly, the internal structures of the JAM and each member organization of the ICS are shaped by elaborate and historically determined sets of rituals and regulations. These rituals and regulations draw heavily on religious and regional culture. By emphasizing the unique social and cultural characteristics of their respective communities, these organizations seek to create a sharp set of cleavages that differentiate their organizations from "outsiders."

This "othering" reflects the JAM's insular quality. In neighborhoods where it established itself as the dominant force through "ethnic cleansing," namely the expulsion of Sunni Arab families, the JAM subsequently turned on middle-class Shi'a, stealing their automobiles, confiscating their houses and selling their belongings, and extorting money from neighborhood merchants and gasoline stations.⁵⁷ Such behavior caused consternation among many Shi'a who believed that the JAM had been formed to protect their interests, often alienating many from the organization. As in the case of the ICS, economic interests trumped ethno-confessional solidarity.

SUMMARIZING THE CONCEPTUAL AND
METHODOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Because Islamist movements are rarely compared to social movements with similar characteristics beyond the Muslim world, the shortcomings of causal analyses that invoke Islam self-referentially as the core independent variable are often not readily apparent. Many analyses of Islamist collective action fail to historically and socially contextualize such action, and moreover, such analyses are frequently tautological. Islam is purported to prevent the separation of politics from religion and thus to contribute to social decay. Because politics becomes intertwined with religious tenets and absolute beliefs, the argument goes, negotiation and pluralism are excluded from the realm of politics. This resulting social decay, in turn, promotes violence and political instability, leading to still further social decay. In this form of circular reasoning, the downward spiral is continuous and never-ending.

The conceptualization of the Mezzogiorno parallels conceptualizations of Islamic societies. Culture in the Italian south, as in Islamic society, is held to be parochial and unchanging. According to this view, because social relationships and political identities are highly localized, negotiation and cooperation—critical elements of democratic political practices—cannot flourish. Southern Italians are thereby precluded from developing social trust and the necessary “social capital” to bring about the political and economic development of the region in which they live.⁵⁸ Such depictions of Italy’s *meridionale* culture, like analyses of the areas controlled by the Sadrist in Iraq, suggest a similarly insular and hence “defective” region that does not possess the human resources needed to improve its situation.

A systematic comparative analysis of the ICS and the JAM demonstrates that sectarianism does not inhere in the Iraqi (or Italian) psyche, but rather reflects a particular sociohistorical conjuncture of events. I am not arguing that the ICS and the JAM area are

the same. Clearly they differ dramatically in the types of ideology that inform their actions. Indeed, one could argue that the term ideology does not apply to the ICS, which functions according to an internal code that contains little explicit political content. Both sets of organizations have emerged from very different historical experiences. They also differ in their modes of proselytizing. It is much easier for a Shi‘i in Iraq to become a member of the Mahdi Army than for an Italian in the Mezzogiorno to join the Mafia, Camorra, or ‘Ndrangheta. The hierarchy of the Mahdi Army is much less structured than that of the ICS “families.” In terms of “voice,” the ICS strictly ascribes to silence, whereas Muqtada al-Sadr and his clerical supporters deliver weekly sermons that are politically charged and openly advocate Sadrist policies.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the criminality into which both organizations have degenerated provides the social cement that holds them together. A strong process of “othering”—creating a sharp distinction between “us” and “them”—is likewise critical to sustaining the strength of these organizations. Where middle-class Shi‘a have come to realize the true goals of the JAM in their neighborhoods, the movement’s popularity has declined precipitously. A similar process has affected the ICS, as the populace of the Mezzogiorno has realized over time that these organizations do not have the interests of the local populace at heart. Ultimately, religion falls by the wayside, and political and economic motives dominate. It is noteworthy that when the Christian Democratic Party channeled funds into the south to build its electoral base, which facilitated greater education among young Sicilians, it was precisely these youth who were at the forefront of creating a movement to combat the Mafia.⁵⁹

Understanding the future of both movements will require an analysis of the state and whether it is willing and able to offer economic development and social services, especially employment, in the areas where the Italian crime syndicates and the Mahdi Army still enjoy strong levels of support. In the final analysis, religion in

the formal and orthodox meaning of the term can tell us very little about these organizations' long-term viability.

NOTES

1. In an essay written to commemorate and revisit the work of the preeminent scholar of the politics and society of modern Iraq, Hanna Batatu, I feel the need to emphasize from the outset the tremendous debt that my research and writing on Iraq owes to his path breaking study, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

2. For an example of analyzing Islamist movements in a cross-religious context, see my "Religion Against the State: A Political Economy of Religious Radicalism in Egypt and Israel," in *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Case in Islam, Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Richard Antoun and Mary Hegland (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 145–66.

3. A more recently formed criminal organization is the New Holy United Crown of Puglia, which is active in smuggling operations between Albania and Italy's Adriatic Coast. Because this organization is relatively new and there is little information on its activities, I have not included it in the analysis presented here. Charles Richard, *The New Italians* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 212.

4. Very little in the way of the comparative analysis I am suggesting has been done. An exception is Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, "The Mafia and al-Qaeda: Violent and Secretive Organizations in Comparative and Historical Perspective," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 776–82. There is also a brief comparative reference in Pete W. Moore, "Making Big Money on Iraq," *Middle East Report* 252 (Fall 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer252/moore.html>.

5. The term "amoral familism" was first coined by Edward Banfield in his study of a southern Italian village, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958). For a critique of this model, see Carlo Trigilia, ed., *Cultura e Sviluppo: L'Associazionismo nel Mezzogiorno* [Culture and development: associationalism in southern Italy] (Rome:

Meridiana Libri, 1995), especially Trigilia's essay, "Associazionismo e Nuovo Mezzogiorno" [Associationalism and the new Mezzogiorno], 193–227.

6. Anthony Cordesman, *The Changing Situation in Iraq: A Progress Report* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 4, 2009), 19.

7. Sabrina Tavernese, "A Shiite Militia in Baghdad Sees Its Power Wane," *New York Times*, July 27, 2008.

8. "Armed Shi'i groups . . . evidence of Iranian pressure in the negotiations to form a new government," *al-Hayat*, September 26, 2010.

9. Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "historic bloc" denotes the coordination of political and social elites—in this instance those of the Italian north and south—in the development of a hegemonic ideological-cultural "superstructure" or system that institutionalized a national hierarchy of social classes and power that favored these elites. See his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), esp. 104–106.

10. Even Mussolini's vigorous efforts during the late 1920s and 1930s proved incapable of controlling the power of the Mafia. Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1953), 435.

11. See, for example, Jane Schneider, "Introduction: The Dynamics of Neo-orientalism in Italy (1848–1995)," and "Before the Southern Question: 'Native' Ideas on Backwardness and Remedies in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, 1815–1849" in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), 1–26 and 25–50, respectively.

12. Filippo Sabetti, *Village Politics and the Mafia in Sicily* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), xxii.

13. For a discussion of the multiple definitions of religion when used in social and political analysis, see my "Reflections on Religion and Politics in Post-Ba'athist Iraq," *Newsletter of the American Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TAARII)* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 13–15.

14. The more prominent examples of research on the Italian crime syndicates include Letizia Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 191–202; Enzo Ciconte, *Storia criminale: La Resistibile ascesa di Mafia, 'Ndrangheta e Camorra dall'Ottocento ai giorni*

nostris [A history of criminality: the resistible rise of the Mafia, 'Ndrangheta, and Camorra from the nineteenth century until contemporary times] (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Universale Rubbettino, 2006); and Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della Camorra* [Gomorra: a journey into the Camorra's economic empire and dream of domination] (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 2006). For work on historical institutionalism, see Kathleen Thelan, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 369–404; James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

15. Historical memory is defined here as "the collective understandings that a specific group shares about events in the past that it perceives to have shaped its current economic, social, cultural, and political status and identity." Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4.

16. As applied here, the concept of historical memory assumes a structural quality. While it provides narratives that facilitate collective action, it simultaneously works to constrain such action. In drawing upon particular forms of historical memory to mobilize support, political actors likewise place constraints on their behavior by situating it within certain historical-structural confines. In this sense, the dichotomy between structure and culture is a false one. The notion of *political* or *sectarian entrepreneurs* denotes those political actors who exploit ethnoconfessional tensions for their own personal economic and political gain and promote *vertical* identities so as to undermine cross-ethnic and cross-confessional identities and political behavior.

17. Gigi Di Fiore, *La Camorra e le sue storie: La Criminalità organizzata a Napoli dalle origini alle ultime "guerre"* [The history of the Camorra: organized crime in Naples from its origins until the most recent "wars"] (Turin, Italy: UTET Libreria, 2006), 18–21.

18. Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 50–51.

19. Giuseppe L. Messina, *L'Etimologia di "Mafia," "Camorra," e "Ndrangheta"* [The etymology of "Mafia," "Camorra," and "Ndrangheta"] (Catania: Bonnano Editore, 1990), 7.

20. Eric Hobsbawm calls disparate and loosely organized groups that functioned to help protect the interests of the poor and weak from oppressive behavior by political and economic elites "social bandits." See *Primitive Rebels*, 15–29.

21. Paolo Pezzino, *Le Mafie* [The mafias] (Florence, Italy: Giunti-Casterman, 1999), 23; "And Carlo Levi, among others, has reminded us in Carlo Eboli, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, how profound the memory of the bandit-heroes is among the Southern peasants, for whom the 'years of the brigands' are among the few parts of history which are alive and real, because, unlike the kings and wars they belong to them." This quote underscores the power of memory in the Mezzogiorno. See Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 21. What we might refer to as the Robin Hood myth constitutes a very powerful narrative for both the ICS and the Sadrists; for the former, it serves to generate support and for the latter, to offset a sense of historical victimization.

22. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 37.

23. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 35.

24. Nevertheless, a note on the ICS' historical development is necessary. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Mafia was a loose alliance of four main "families" or clans, each with its own activities and areas of control, and there was only minimal coordination among them. As an organization, the Camorra is older than either the Mafia or the 'Ndrangheta, and use of the term was first noted in 1735. However, there is also a tendency to use terms traditionally associated with one organization, the Mafia, to refer to criminal organizations in other parts of southern Italy. To begin the analysis with the structural changes that affected the Mezzogiorno during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries without referencing this political culture, and the powerful historical memory it embodies, loses sight of the power of culture to shape collective action. The strong sense of social solidarity, reinforced by feelings of victimization by outsiders, a hostility to political and legal authority, and a feeling that there were no formal institutions upon which the inhabitants of the Mezzogiorno could rely apart from their own helped shape a distinctly cohesive southern Italian culture, which the ICS exploited for

particularistic gain. The term *'ndrangheta* originates in the Greek *andragathes*, which means an "honorable man." While its origins are not well known, the organization is said to have originated with a group of Sicilians who were expelled from Sicily in the nineteenth century and sent to Calabria, where they established it along the lines of the Mafia. The *'Ndrangheta* shares many characteristics with the Mafia and Camorra, even though each of the three organizations grew out of its own distinctive local social and political structure. For a discussion of the decline of the Mafia, see Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 52-53, and Peter Schneider and Jane Schneider, "Mafia, Antimafia, and the Plural Cultures of Sicily," *Current Anthropology*, 46.4 (Aug-Oct. 2005): 501-520.

25. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 13-29.

26. Ciconte, *Storia criminale*, 6.

27. The first known official reference to the Mafia is in a document written by the General Prosecutor of Girgenti (known today as Agrigento) describing an organization in excess of 100 men that was committed to a code of silence about its activities, had accumulated a sizeable sum of money for communal defense, and was disposed to "typical mafiosi rituals." Ciconte, *Storia criminale*, 37.

28. As Joseph LaPalombara notes, "The Mafia's often violent assault on the state has a long history of more-or-less willing collusion from the Sicilian population. From its origins in the seventeenth century to the present day, the Honored Society has been able to exploit the myth that it stands for the people as against the state, ready to alleviate the latter's arbitrary behavior through violence if necessary. The Mafia is also able to exploit *omertà*, that conspiracy of silence, based on custom and fear, that makes its members relatively immune from violence." In *Democracy Italian Style* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 170.

29. Gaia Servadio, *Mafioso: A History of the Mafia from its Origins to the Present Day* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), 11. Campania is the region that surrounds the city of Naples. A discussion of early nineteenth-century political developments in southern Italy is beyond the scope of this essay. This period is excellently covered in Giuliano Procacci, *History of the Italian People* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), esp. 255-322.

30. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 37-38; Servadio, *Mafioso*, 10; The term *cosche* (singular *cosca*) comes from the leaf of the artichoke, indicat-

ing the manner in which members of the Italian crime syndicates are all part of one "family." Richard, *New Italians*, 212.

31. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 43. This argument still does not fully explain the emergence of the Mafia in specific areas of Sicily and its failure to appear in others. One region where it became powerful was in the sulphur mining area of south central Sicily. Here the Mafia offered mine owners protection, but of a different sort—namely, it suppressed peasant organizations and prevented workers from forming powerful unions (*sindicati*) that could press for better wages and working conditions. This suppression placed the Mafiosi on the side of the local mine owners (foreshadowing the Mafia's role in fighting Communist influence in Sicily after World War II); see Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 104-5. Beyond the Conca d'Oro (Golden Shell) and sulphur mines, the Mafia did gain strength in some of the large *latifundia*. In these large landowning areas, it functioned to control the peasantry, much as it controlled workers in the sulphur mines. However, at least one author has challenged the idea that the *gabelloti* needed the Mafia to keep the impoverished and largely disorganized peasantry in line, when they could accomplish this with their own resources. See Diego Gambetta, *La Mafia siciliana: Un' Industria della protezione privata* [The Sicilian Mafia: A private protection industry] (Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 1992), 107-112. That the Mafia became powerful in certain landowning areas and not in others suggests that it might have built on regional pre-existing brotherhoods (*fratellanze*) that had grown out of the social banditry that had always existed in Sicily but that proliferated during the late eighteenth early nineteenth centuries with the collapse of feudal rule.

32. The term *mafioso* is originally said to have referred to a cocky or "flashy" young man who wore his hat to the side in a rakish manner. Despite limited usage prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the term *mafia* appears as early as the period of Arab control over Sicily, and it is said that the term was derived from the Arabic *mu'afa* (assistance) or from the name of a Berber tribe, the Ma'afir. By the mid-nineteenth century when the term began to appear with some regularity, *mafioso* was a cultural appellation that characterized a certain type of young Sicilian male, probably initially associated with urban areas, especially Palermo. Clearly the term had overtones of cultural solidarity and defiance, particularly against the Italian state, which was not favorably disposed toward local Sicilian

interests. The myth surrounding the development of the Mafia also encompassed the concept of loyalty and keeping in absolute confidence the activity of the "family" (*cosca*) through pledging to uphold *omertà* (silence). Pledging loyalty to the "family" or "clan" was intended to demonstrate that the Mafia was an extension of authentic Sicilian culture and society and its purported cohesiveness. The use of the term *Cosa Nostra* in referring to the Mafia was to accentuate its supposed egalitarian structure, since the term comes from the Italian "it's the same thing" (*è la stessa cosa*) when referring to those associated with it, which is to say, "everyone is the same." James Fentress, *Rebels and Mafiosi: Death in a Sicilian Landscape* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 6; Messina, *L'Etimologia*, 22–23.

33. Smith, *Italy*, 98.

34. Cicone, *Storia criminale*, 203–4.

35. On the relationship between the Mafia and the state, see Paul Ginsborg, *L'Italia del Tempo Presente: Famiglia, Società Civile, Stato* [Contemporary Italy: family, civil society, and state] (Turin, Italy: Einaudi Editore, 1998), 365–368; Patrick McCarthy, *The Crisis of the Italian State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 74–80; Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods*, 191–202; and Saviano, *Gomorra*.

36. For a discussion of the monarchy's declining legitimacy and fall, see Davis, *Memories of State*, 82–108.

37. For a discussion of the Iraqi nationalist movement and its ethnically inclusive composition, see Davis, *Memories of State*, 13 et passim. See also Eric Davis, "The New Iraq: The Use of Memory," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (July 2005): 55–57.

38. That is to say, the clerics who became politically active following the British invasion of 1914 adopted what I have called elsewhere an "ecumenical" politicized religion; see Davis, "Reflections," 3, and *Memories of State*.

39. For an excellent analysis of the impact of the UN sanctions regime, see Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), published in association with the Middle East Research and Information Project. See also Abbas Alnasrawi, "Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990–2000," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): 215; Alnasrawi points out that

"GDP per capita in 1999 was estimated to be \$883 in 1990 dollars compared with the \$6,151 that obtained in 1980."

40. Davis, *Memories of State*, 173.

41. Shaykh Ali Dahham and other shaykhs of the al-'Ubayd tribe, interview with author, November 4–5, 2007, 'Amman, Jordan. See also Faleh A. Jaber, "Sheikhs and Ideologies: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Authoritarianism, 1968–1998," in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 69–109; Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 236–37.

42. Davis, *Memories of State*, 231–32; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 250–54; Dawisha, *Iraq*, 237–38.

43. This information was conveyed to me by a number of Iraqi scholars with intimate knowledge of the period of the 1990s.

44. The 1990s also paved the way for increased patriarchal control in Iraqi society. While Iraqi women had made great strides throughout the twentieth century in the fields of employment, education, civil rights, and even political participation, all this was reversed during the 1990s. The collapse of the economy meant that women were usually the first to lose their employment and be forced back into the home. As part of his efforts to strengthen his regime, Saddam curtailed women's rights, imposing travel restrictions on women who were not accompanied by a male relative and forcing women to get permission from a male family member in order to receive a passport. These new measures played into the hands of the Sadrists and other Islamist organizations by allowing them to manipulate gender as a political issue. Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 186–213; see also Yasmin Husein Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), especially 30–107.

45. For an extensive analysis of the Sadrists and the politicization of Shi'i Islam in Iraq, see 'Adil Ra'uf, *Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr: Marja'iyyat al-Maydan—Mashru'uhu al-Taghriri wa Waqa'i' al-Ightiyal* [Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr: the people's religious authority—his project for change and the facts of his assassination.] (Damascus: The Iraqi Center for Information and Studies, 1999).

46. Davis, *Memories of State*, 227–239.
47. Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 75–76; Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 983.
48. Talib Aziz, "The Political Theory of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologies*, ed. Faleh Abdul-Jabbar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 231–44; Faleh A. Jabar, *Shi'ite Movement*, 296–307.
49. As a teenager in the 1990s, Muqtada al-Sadr's fascination with video games earned him the title, "Sayyid Atari" (Mr. Atari). Davis, "Reflections," 13.
50. On the notion of the "communal mind," see Davis, "Ten Conceptual Sins" in the Analysis of Middle East Politics, <http://new-middle-east.blogspot.com/2009/01/10-conceptual-sins-in-analyzing-middle.html>.
51. For the Sadrists positions on a variety of political issues and on the role of the *hawza*, see al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Nuri al-Musawi, *Al-Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr: Sadr al-Iraq al-Thalith—Ahdafuhu, Mawaqifuhu, Mashru'uhu* [Al-Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr: Iraq's third Sadr—his goals, positions, and project] (Baghdad (?): Markaz Wali Allah li-l-Dirasat, wa-l-Tawzia' wa-l-Irsad, 2004), especially 26–33, 39–44, 52–55, 212–15. On al-Sadr's reproaches, in his Friday sermons and writings, of the quietism of the traditional *hawza* and his call for transforming it into a more activist institution, see Ra'uf, *Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, 112–41, 142–91; for Muqtada al-Sadr's attack on the *hawza*, see al-Musawi, *al-Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr*, 212–16.
52. Clearly, the Sadrists recruit from the poorer sectors of society, particularly among those who are migrants from rural areas seeking employment. International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge," *Middle East Report* 72 (February 7, 2008), 10.
53. The suppression of alcohol sales and the beating and intimidation of alcohol merchants in the southern city of al-Nasiriyya is graphically portrayed in the film *Iraq in Fragments*, directed by James Longley (Typecast Pictures/Daylight Factory, 2006). At the same time, it should be noted that there is only weak centralized control so that many JAM units, or groups claiming to be part of the JAM, often ignore the dictates of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Office of the Martyr (Maktab al-Shahid) in Baghdad.

54. An exception is the report by the International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War," 1 et passim.

55. International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War," 21 (fn. 12).

56. Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's Friday sermon (*khutba*), August 29, 1998 (5 Jamada al-Awal 1419), discusses the centrality of the concept of brotherhood (*al-ikha'*) in religion and its linkage to historical memory; see Ra'uf, *Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, 348–55.

57. Sabrina Tavernese, "Relations Sour Between Shiites and Iraq Militia," *New York Times*, October 12, 2007.

58. On the concept of "social capital," see Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of Community in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), especially 18–24. Putnam differentiates "bridging" social capital, which is inclusive in nature, from "bonding" social capital, which is insular and reinforces exclusionary social solidarity in groups and organizations. Obviously, the JAM and the ICS manifest the "bonding" process, indicating that social capital can also produce negative outcomes for society at large.

59. For an excellent analysis of the rise of anti-Mafia activity in Sicily, see Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Reversible Destiny: Mafia, Antimafia, and the Struggle for Palermo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).