

Marsh Arab Rebellion:
Grievance, Mafias and Militias in Iraq
Juan Cole

The old “social banditry” thesis of the social historians held that what had looked to many analysts like mere criminality sometimes had a social dimension, and functioned to redistribute wealth to groups disadvantaged by the coming of agricultural capitalism. The notion of social banditry assumed that there was such a thing as sheer, greed-driven criminality, with which it was contrasted (such that social bandits would not prey on other poor peasants). This attempt to configure bandits as in class solidarity with the peasants has widely been admitted to have been a failure. More promisingly, the theory posited that when banditry merged with larger political movements, it could contribute to the transformation of society, and the role of former bandits in events like the Mexican Revolution lends some support to this assertion.¹ Some contemporary economists have turned this argument on its head, arguing that all political rebellion has the characteristics of criminal activity, and is motivated by greed rather than idealism or political

grievances.² A problem with both of these perspectives from a social science point of view is that they are phrased in normative terms rather than analytical ones, and depend on our knowing things about the subjective intentions of persons long dead. I will argue that it is more useful to speak of competition for scarce resources than greed. It also seems to me useful to adopt a more neutral attitude toward state actors. Sometimes state actors themselves distribute resources to their cliques and constituencies, and use coercion to disadvantage other populations, often employing illegal means to do so. Theorists have tended to focus on the material dimension and to ignore issues in culture and ethnicity. Here I ask whether these perspectives, of social banditry and rebellion-as-criminality, help us to understand the unstable security situation of southern Iraq and the role of the Marsh Arab tribes in Basra and other southern cities. I will suggest that grievance and ethnicity cannot be ignored as analytical categories in understanding political banditry and criminally-financed rebellion.

Some basic preconditions that make political rebellion more likely have been suggested in the literature. Low-income societies experience more rebellion than high-income ones. Natural resource exports are highly correlated with increased incidence of political rebellion (where a quarter of the gross national product derives from a high-priced commodity, violence is five times higher than in states lacking such commodity rents). Finally, a discourse of group social grievance (based on ethnicity, religion or class) is important to such rebellions. World Bank economist Paul Collier pointed out that none of these correlations is as strong with simple crime as they are with political rebellion, and that therefore it is only reasonable to see political rebels as distinct from mere Mafiosi, even if rebellious groups often adopt mafia tactics. He observed that

whereas high levels of income inequality in a society are highly correlated with crime, no relationship has been found by researchers between such inequality and political violence.³ As Collier recognized, moreover, political rebellion is often inflected by an ethnic loyalty and sense of grievance.⁴

This study will attempt to explain the post-Baath violence in southern Iraq with regard to these considerations, of dire poverty, natural resource predation, and ethnic grievance and competition for resources. Although southern Iraq is largely populated by Arabic-speakers adhering to Shiite Islam, and so appears on the surface less ethnically heterogeneous than central and northern Iraq, there is a real sense in which clan and tribe generate forms of ethnicity there, as well. The problems of security in the Shiite south of Iraq in the wake of the fall of the Baath government in 2003 have often been blamed on religious militias. What analysts who focus on competition for wealth and power among political parties they usually miss, however, is that the parties often draw for members on specific Iraqi clans, and that some political rivalries are influenced by standing feuds among those tribal groups. In the provinces of Basra and Maysan, some Marsh Arab tribespeople can be an ethnic group, a political network and sometimes a mafia. Some clans have formed tribal militias that often become involved in kidnapping and the smuggling of antiquities, drugs and petroleum. They have also sometimes attached these tribal militias to larger political movements and parties.

These conflicts were exacerbated by the displacement of the Marsh Arab tribes in particular from their swamplands in southern Iraq by a combination of Baathist engineering projects that drained the marshes and a severe drought in the 1990s and early 2000s. Bereft of their ordinary ways of making a living, especially fishing but also some

farming and animal husbandry, the Marsh Arabs were forced into urban bidonvilles. Often they developed feuds with neighboring tribes in their new slums around Basra and Amara, and competed with them and with urban populations for scarce resources. With the fall of the Baath regime in 2003, the tribesmen made a play for greater political influence, reversing their long relegation to second-class citizens and even a sort of lower caste. They also engaged in predatory economic activities, including extortion, ransom-seeking, and petroleum smuggling. What effect did this population of displaced tribespeople have on the security environment in the Shiite south? How did ethnicity, kinship networks, and the new religious politics of the post-Baath period intersect to make the Marsh Arabs a force to reckon with?

Tribes and Ethnogenesis

A “tribe” is a political federation of clans based on local conceptions of kinship, whether real or fictive. Pastoral nomads in the Middle East usually organized themselves by tribe. Some settled villagers organized themselves by tribe, and some did not. Urban populations, even when they had a rural, tribal background, tended quickly to lose the memory of their kinship affiliations and instead to operate on the basis of city quarter or occupational guilds or networks. Although tribes played a central role in much of Middle Eastern history, they have largely lost their former centrality in the course of the twentieth century, as urbanization, industrialization and associated processes shifted political identities toward modern political parties.

Pastoral nomadism as a style of life probably emerged after the invention of agriculture. Concentrating on the raising of livestock, pastoralists take advantage of marginal land unsuited to farming because of low rainfall. Marginal land occasionally

throws up temporary pasturage, and pastoralists specialize in seeking it out for their flocks. Pastoralists, however, usually do not produce much grain, necessary to the human diet, and so must trade livestock goods for it with peasants (or steal it from farmers). In medieval times and before, pastoral nomads could often wander without barrier the length of the Eurasian land mass, though some established long-term patterns of local migration between fall and spring sites. The latter, more constrained, pattern of transhumancy became increasingly common with the rise of powerful early modern and modern states, which used artillery and other heavy weaponry to control the tribes.⁵

Up until the end of the eighteenth century, pastoral nomads that formed tribal confederations could often provide the framework for a ruling dynasty and state. The tribal warriors supplied a natural cavalry used to hunting and fighting from horseback. Especially with the introduction of the flintlock in the early eighteenth century, which has a trigger mechanism that sparks the gunpowder to fire, it became possible for pastoralists to use firearms from horseback. This innovation probably helps explain the great power and success of tribal federations in the eighteenth century. At a time when Great Britain and France were undergoing the industrial revolution, much of the Middle East fell to tribal armies. The eighteenth century was the last gasp of tribal state power in the central Middle East. The Qajar tribe, for instance, took over Iran and subsequently its kings created the modern Iranian state. Increasingly, however, tribes were circumscribed by colonial powers or by local modern bureaucratic states with standing armies. Even tribal dynasties that initially came to power on the backs of nomadic cavalries increasingly turned on them and substituted for them salaried standing armies trained in European drill.

Tribes in the nineteenth century were put at a disadvantage by the tactics such as the infantry square and by increasing power and accuracy of handheld firearms, and by improved, wheeled artillery. At the same time, for reasons that are not completely understood, population growth accelerated among sedentary groups like peasants and urban dwellers through the nineteenth century. Nakash notes, "Whereas in 1867, 50 percent of the population in southern Iraq were nomads and 41 percent were cultivators, by 1905 this changed to 19 and 72 percent, respectively." In central Iraq this ratio changed from 23 and 39 percent to 7 and 78 percent, respectively. Over-all, Iraq was perhaps 35 percent pastoralists in 1850, but that percentage was halved through the nineteenth century. It was not that the absolute number of pastoralists declined; rather the cultivators and city dwellers increased their numbers much faster.⁶

In the course of the twentieth century, pastoral nomadism all but disappeared as a way of life in most of the Middle East. By the 1990s pastoralists were estimated at less than one percent of Middle Easterners, mainly living in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The rise of private property in land and bureaucratic techniques of land registration militated against pastoralist practices of moving about in search of pasturage. The military advantages of tribal cavalries, which were swift and could use guerrilla tactics, largely disappeared with the advent of air power. The British put down tribal revolts in 1920 and thereafter with massive bombing, which, while it could not make the tribes obey, could disperse them and prevent them from mounting attacks.⁷ The British briefly reduced Ottoman policies of sidelining the tribal sheikhs in the 1920s, attempting to create a pliant rural elite through them.⁸ These romantic rural British policies, which

harmed urban life and discriminated against the urban educated, were reversed by the Iraqi constitutional monarchy and the republic from 1932.⁹

Most tribesmen became dirt farmers as they were forced to settle by Middle Eastern states in the course of the twentieth century. Frequently, the territory they used to roam became private property, and ended up registered in the name of the tribal sheikh, who was thereby transformed into a big landlord while his tribesmen were reduced from proud warriors to poorly remunerated peasants.¹⁰ Pastoralists all have at least some property in the form of livestock, but peasants can be reduced to a propertyless state, so that many pastoralists experienced sedentarization as downward mobility and a reduction in status. In some instances Bedouin-heritage groups have become involved in settled capitalist forms of livestock production.¹¹ The analogy for the Marsh Arabs was large-scale fisheries. Although the way of life of pastoral nomadism rapidly declined over the past two centuries, tribal ethnic organization and a sort of Bedouin cultural identity survived among many newly settled villagers and even townspeople. This tribal ethnogenesis has been crucial to the ethnic politics of states such as Jordan and Iraq.

Baath Tribal Policy

The Baath Party came to power in a 1968 coup, and in 1979 Saddam Hussein, long the power behind the president, Brigadier General Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, came to power in an internal party putsch as president for life.¹² Saddam Hussein depended heavily on a clique of high Sunni Arab officials, many of them from the Tikrit area, his own birthplace. From 1980 he launched a campaign against Shiite religious parties, and especially after the Shiite uprising of 1991, he treated the southern Shiites with severity.¹³ He was not, however, uniformly harsh toward Shiite tribes of the south. He attempted to

coopt a Shiite branch of the Jubur tribe of Najaf governorate in the middle Euphrates, for instance, giving some members of the leading clans high offices and perquisites.

Nevertheless, the Shiite Jubur did not necessarily remain loyal to Saddam even in the 1990s. In the spring of 2003, they decisively turned against him and allowed the Americans into Najaf.

Urban Shiites for the most part had nothing but contempt for these rural magnates who had collaborated with the regime, and despite Saddam Hussein's best efforts, he could not reverse the vast social changes that had permanently weakened the political fortunes of the tribal chieftains. Although some press reports have estimated that family and clan remain important as social references for about a third of Iraqis, they had become a clear minority in a country of big industrial cities like Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul and Baghdad by the late 1990s. The tribes as social formations remained significant in the countryside, but the countryside had vastly declined in importance. From 1965 to 1988, the proportion of Iraqis who were rural declined from 50 percent to 27 percent.¹⁴ Rural settlement in some big urban slums, such as what is now Sadr City in east Baghdad or Hayaniya in Basra did bring clan-based kinship networks whole into an urban environment, and with the collapse of the central state after the American invasion, some urban environments were tribalized. This phenomenon appears to have been especially important in Basra.

Tribal chieftains' registration of clan lands in their own names sometimes led to the expropriation of their tribesmen, but in other instances it led to a sense of collective ownership. It is alleged that even after land reform, about half of Iraq's land is owned by sheikhly clans. Journalist Martin Walker told the story of how, in the year 2000,

Saddam's regime tried to transfer land near Basra to some loyalists, and the Beni Hasan tribe rose in outrage. At least 24 Iraqi soldiers were killed, and 14 of the Beni Hasan before Baghdad dropped the plan – largely because other tribal sheikhs warned that they too opposed any tampering with tribal land rights . . . the abortive uprising against Saddam's forces inside Basra [during the British invasion] began when a junior sheikh from the Beni Hasan was shot for being lukewarm in his loyalty.¹⁵

The tribes' religious culture has also changed dramatically in the past two decades, so that they are often much more clerically oriented than before. In the 1990s, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (d. 1999) emerged as the most radical of the major Shiite clergy in organizing Shiites and criticizing Saddam. He lambasted Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the leading cleric or Object of Emulation for the laity, for keeping silent about Saddam's tyranny. He found social spaces where Baath security could not penetrate, like the clans and slums of East Baghdad, to organize and preach. His followers, the Sadriyyun or Sadrists, dreamed of an Islamic state in Iraq similar to the one that existed in Iran. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr reached out to neglected congregations within Shiism, such as the urban poor and the tribes. Thus, he wrote on reconciling formal Shiite canon law with tribal custom, and urged tribal chieftains to prefer Islamic law. The incorporation of Iraqi Shiites with a recent tribal heritage such as the Marsh Arabs into the mass religious and political movement of Sadrism could have the effect of integrating them into larger social structures where, as in Sadr City, it was a multi-ethnic phenomenon. But in a city

such as Basra, where Sadrism was strongly identified with the poor and displaced, it became a further marker of distinctive ethnicity.

The Marsh Arabs

Many tribes converted to Shiite Islam in the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries. Among these were the southern tribes of the Ma`dan, including the powerful Al-Bu Muhammad. The latter lived as fishermen, farmers, raisers of water buffalo, smugglers and pirates in the swamps of southern Iraq. Naming practices and social customs among the swamp dwellers seemed neither Arab nor Muslim to British colonial ethnographers, who posited that they might have immigrated from India. It seems more likely that they simply maintained a range of pre-Arab, pre-Muslim cultural practices going back to the Sumerians. Although their way of life has been romanticized by Western travelers such as Wilfrid Thesiger, settled governments in the region have long viewed them as a problem, rather as eastern European governments often looked on Gypsies.¹⁶ Marsh Arabs in the early twentieth century sometimes held up travelers for loot or ransom, and some ran smuggling rings. But many of them also earned a hard living from the marshes and their irrigable hinterlands. Ma`dan was a term of disrespect in most of twentieth century Iraqi history, and other Iraqis report difficulty in understanding their dialect of Arabic.

Despite their low social status, the Marsh Arabs played an important economic role. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, they were providing nearly two-thirds of the fish consumed by Iraqis in the 1980s. They switched from traditional spears to nets, and among their catch was the barbell (*shabbut*), which could grow to 200 pounds. They dwelled in sturdy reed houses, typically ten feet tall and

twenty feet long, employing a reed screen to define male and female quarters. They could dismantle these dwellings, move and quickly reassemble them if the waters suddenly rose. Chiefs maintained enormous reed structures termed *mudhif* where they hosted feasts for guests.¹⁷

Anthropologist Edward Ochsenschlager described their way of life as he found it in a village in 1968 to journalist Joe Rojas-Burke:

The village Ochsenschlager and colleagues first encountered in 1968 lay sheltered within a broad, shallow marsh with a deep canal closing the circle. To reach the closest outpost of the outside world required a 2-1/2-hour ride by motorized boat followed by a 15-mile walk or car ride. Villagers made the trip only when necessary to sell livestock, hand-woven carpets and reed mats, and to buy certain necessities from outside, including spices, aluminum cookware and guns. Almost everything else, the marshes produced. Sturdy reeds reaching 20 feet became raw material for homes, baskets and boats, while tender reed shoots provided plentiful forage for water buffalo. Muddy stream beds yielded clay for sun-dried bricks. Bitumen, a tarry material from shallow oil deposits, served as a waterproofing agent for rafts and roofs . . . The back side of the house served as workshop or a barn for water buffalo, which lived in an almost symbiotic relationship with their keepers . . . Water buffalo cows produced milk, and a family might sell animals to outsiders for slaughter, for instance, to gain cash for a son to buy his bride or to

settle a dispute with a rival tribe. But the Ma'adan never ate buffalo meat. The most important thing buffalo provided was dung, Ochsenchlager discovered. The marsh Arabs mixed dung with reeds to make fuel for cooking and heating fires. The slightly acrid smoke also repelled flying insects. They also used dung to waterproof roofs and poultice wounds. ¹⁸

Baathist social engineering of the Marsh Arab areas began in the 1980s. Some of the impetus came from the Iran-Iraq war, which spurred the regime to conscript many southern Shiites, and to engage in extensive building of defensive facilities. For instance, the al-Ma`rada tribe inhabited the wetlands around the Majnun oil fields, the target of a major set of Iranian offensives. The Baath regime built enormous earthworks to keep the Iranians at bay. A tribesman later told a Western journalist, "It took about two years. The water just stopped flowing in. Then the soldiers came and we were told to leave." The regime relocated the Ma`rada out to small brick dwellings in the desert.¹⁹ Initial Baath promises of water, electricity and schools in the new location proved empty. Enough tribes had been dislocated by regime projects by the mid-1980s to spark a low-grade guerrilla movement. Sheikh Abdul Karim Mahud al-Muhammadawi of the Al-Bu Muhammad emerged from about 1986 as "Abu Hatem," the "Prince of the Marshes," leading Ma`dan guerrillas on numerous attacks against the Baath. Likewise, the marshes were used by expatriate Iraqi Shiite guerrilla fighters based in Iran, organized as the Badr Corps and trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, to infiltrate into Iraq and hit Baath targets. The sheikh of the al-Ma`rada and his men appeared to have joined the

guerrilla movement or to have been perceived as dangerous by the regime, since they were captured and tortured.

In the great Shiite rebellion of spring, 1991, after the Gulf War, the Marsh Arabs played a significant part. In Amara, the Marsh Arab Bahadili tribe rose up, and suffered many killed. Especially after an assassination attempt on Saddam Hussein's son Uday, the Baath regime became determined to deprive the Shiites of the swamps as a tool of guerrilla war. It sent troops south and committed massacres, and began in earnest engineering projects to drain the marshes. By the late 1990s only 10 percent of the marsh land remained, according to satellite photos. Of the 300,000 to 500,000 Marsh Arabs, almost all were forced off their traditional territory, with only 1,600 or so living on traditional floating grass platforms in 2003. Many became wheat farmers and raisers of livestock on drained land.²⁰ Others crowded into refugee camps or squalid shanty towns around small southern cities such as Kut and Amara or were forced over the border to Iran. They were in effect expropriated of all their property and left bereft of most government services. Some 87 percent of Marsh Arabs were illiterate at the time of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion, and infant mortality rates were high.²¹ The Baath government vigilantly excluded them from the central districts of the large southern port of Basra, Iraq's second-largest city and the primary refining and export center for the country's petroleum.

Saddam Hussein conducted what might well be called genocide against the Marsh Arabs, insofar as he destroyed their way of life and cohesion as a people.²² Some clans migrated on from Kut, Amara and other sites in the South to the Shiite slums of East Baghdad, which had been founded in 1961 as Thawrah Township (Madinat al-Thawrah)

by Col. Abdul Karim Qasim, Iraq's then ruler who had come to power in the 1958 revolution. Under the Baath, which came to power in 1968, this part of Baghdad, largely Shiite and poor, was ultimately renamed Saddam City. On the fall of the Baath government, its residents called it Sadr City in honor of their hero, Shiite ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, who had defied Saddam Hussein. Lebanese journalist Hazem al-Amin spent some time in Sadr City in the summer of 2003, and reported that many neighborhoods were still organized by tribe and place of origin.²³ He said that young people in these poor neighborhoods often went back to visit their tribal sheikhs in the towns and villages of the south, keeping clan networks alive. Some of these Baghdad neighborhoods were settled by Marsh Arabs, though most of the latter settled in southern cities such as Kut, Amara, and Nasiriyah. After the fall of the Baath, they came into Basra proper.

The displaced Marsh Arabs were not only organized by clan and slum neighborhood, but also increasingly by religion. Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr thus gained many followers among rural tribal leaders in the south, either directly or through missionary work among their clansmen in East Baghdad. His devotees were more likely from the Middle Euphrates and tribes like the Muntafiq than the Marsh Arabs, who had their own organization, the Iraqi Hizbullah (which differs entirely from the Lebanese group of the same name). But after the fall of the Baath, the Sadrists, now led by Muhammad Sadiq's son Muqtada al-Sadr and by a disciple, Muhammad Yaqubi, made a concerted and successful effort to spread the Sadrist movement in the Marsh Arab areas. Again, they were probably aided in this by Ma`dan converts living in East Baghdad, who were still linked to the countryside.²⁴ Young Sadrist clerics who form the

cadres for sectarian leader Muqtada al-Sadr often have Marsh Arab last names such as Fartusi and Bahadili.

The Marsh Arabs and Banditry

To speak of the Marsh Arab tribes that turned to criminal activity, smuggling and political clientelage in the post-Saddam period as “greedy,” as the economists who equate rebellion with criminality do, is, to say the least, simplistic. Rather, the massive displacement of the Marsh Arabs tribes left them destitute and forced them into competition with their new neighbors for resources. If any group of people in history ever had a legitimate grievance toward the wider society against which they waged forms of rebellion and brigandage, it is the Marsh Arabs!

With the collapse of state services and policing in the wake of the Anglo-American invasion in March-April, 2003, some Marsh Arab tribes took up kidnapping and robbery as means of claiming resources. In summer of 2003 Marsh Arab tribes were blamed for a crime wave of assassinations and kidnappings in Basra.²⁵ The Karamishah tribe of Marsh Arabs came into central Basra after the fall of the Baath and was widely seen as a kind of mafia. It also engaged in faction-fighting and turf wars with the Basun tribe of Marsh Arabs, in the streets of the city. At one point in the summer of 2003 the two fought a 4-hour gun-battle over a grudge about a killed water buffalo.²⁶ That is, not simple competition for resources drove all their rebellious activities but also a quest for honor and a sense of manhood. Men who had once been bread-winners, but had been driven from their marshes and made homeless and penniless, felt that the assertion of their manliness through violent contest with peers was extremely important.

One major religious sect of Shiites in Basra is the Shaykhis, founded by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i in the early nineteenth century.²⁷ There are perhaps 200,000 Shaykhis in Basra, and because of their sectarianism and mystical devotion to their clerical leader, they are said to act "as a single man." In particular, urban clansmen of the Awlad `Amir are known as committed Shaykhis. In September of 2003, Karamishah tribesmen kidnapped Qusay `Abd al-Khaliq of the Awlad `Amir and demanded a ransom for his release. Awlad `Amir instead replied by gathering a force of armed men in the wilderness south of the Karamishah town of al-Hawtah. The British military observed these movements and interposed themselves between the two groups, deploying Warrior Armored Fighting Vehicles and two companies of the First Battalion of The King's Regiment. They confiscated machine guns from the Awlad `Amir. The British then conducted talks between Shaykh Amir al-Fayiz of the Shaykhi tribe and Shaykh Karim `Abdali of the Karamishah. "After several tense hours the stand-off between the two tribes was called off and the hostage was released."²⁸

In winter of 2003-2004, the Shaykhis banded together and temporarily expelled the Karamishah from Basra. Urban Basrans suffering from lack of security lionized the Shaykhis in the wake of this bold action.²⁹ The Karamishah were not gone for long, and by summer of 2004 they had returned and begun encroaching on the territory of the 30,000-strong Halaf clan, many of whom were Basra urban professionals such as physicians and attorneys. Fighting and feuding ensued. Elements of class warfare, and not just tribal competition for resources, attended this new struggle.

Anti-Colonial Rebellion

In the wake of the fall of Saddam, the continued tribal organization and armed character of the resettled Marsh Arab tribes in southern Iraq resulted in clashes between them and Coalition military forces. The first such incident occurred on Tuesday, June 24 at Majar al-Kabir south of Amara. Townspeople killed six British troops and wounded several more. The violence was provoked in part because US civil administrator Paul Bremer set a deadline of June 16 for Iraqi militiamen to turn over their machine guns and other heavy weapons. (Ordinary Iraqis were to be allowed to keep a pistol or a rifle at home, but not to carry it on the street). When British Prime Minister Tony Blair consulted with the US Civil Administrator of Iraq, Paul Bremer, during his trip to Basra in late May, 2003, Bremer told him that the British in the south were being too permissive and that the Badr Corps of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq was taking advantage of the British to establish its hegemony in the Shiite south.³⁰ As a result of the American pressure, the same policy of confiscating weapons was adopted in the South by British Maj. General Wall, with a June 16 deadline. The Marsh Arabs in Majar al-Kabir deeply resented being disarmed in this way, and it is possible that British troops were overzealous in enforcing the order. Tribesmen who hunted or who feared raids from other clans would need to carry their rifles with them when going out.

Majar al-Kabir is a frontier town bristling with weapons. It is one of the places that the Marsh Arabs settled when Saddam's forces drained their swamps and reduced them to poverty in the 1990s. They had fought him from the nearby reed beds. After the marshes were drained, they continued to maintain spider holes and tunnels from which they could launch attacks on the Baath and then hide from reprisals. The Marsh Arabs were organized politically and paramilitarily by the Iraqi Hizbullah Party for the most

part. The most powerful of the Ma`dan tribes is the Al-Bu Muhammad, and they monopolize leadership positions in Amara and elsewhere in that area. `Abd al-Karim “Abu Hatem” Mahud al-Muhammadawi, who had fought Saddam for years from the marshes, had helped take Amara from the Baath on April 7. As a reward he had been installed by the British as its governor. Patrick Cockburn quoted Al Sayyid Kazim al-Hashimi, a local leader, as saying, "It is the belief of people here, and it is believed by all other Iraqis, that the British want to disarm us so they can stay for a long time."³¹ Another person told him that the Marsh Arabs consider their guns as “sacred things.” One told him, "We are just waiting for our religious leaders to issue a fatwa against the occupation and then we will fight the occupation."³² This rhetoric is remarkable from a Shiite tribesman in a small southern town, because in previous decades rural Shiites had not been oriented toward clerical, scholastic Shiism. Because of the clerical leadership of the anti-Saddam insurgencies, however, loyalty to the *marja`*s or Shiite hierarchy in Najaf had spread to the tribesmen. Among the more important such insurgent groups was the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, led in the 1980s and 1990s by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim from exile in Tehran, and which sent Badr Corps fighters over the Iranian border into Iraq to carry out anti-Baathist operations. They came through Majar al-Kabir and other towns in Maysan and Muthanna provinces, and established a political presence alongside the Iraqi Hizbullah. The latter, however, also sometimes received military training in Iran, so that SCIRI and Hizbullah cannot be easily differentiated as Iran-oriented and indigenous, respectively.

Because of the Bremer/Wall policy of disarming Iraqis, British troops were committed to Majar al-Kabir to do house to house searches. For Middle Eastern clans to

have foreign troops march into the private quarters of their women and to search the domicile for weapons was seen as highly insulting. The British troops in Majar appear occasionally to have been harsh in these incursions. When two guard dogs lunged at British troops invading one home, the soldiers just shot them dead. The heavily persecuted Marsh Arab men would not want foreigners coming and taking their weapons away from them. They had learned that they need to protect themselves. One rumor circulated that a British soldier clowned around with a woman's underwear during one of the searches.

Al-Muhammadawi had to come down from Amara in an attempt to mediate between angry tribal leaders and the British. The British then signed an agreement that local residents understood to suspend house searches for two months but obligated the tribesmen to surrender rocket propelled grenade launchers, mortars, and heavy machine guns, according to Cockburn. The British attempt at mollifying locals was too little, too late. Worse, the British did not agree that they had committed to stop all home invasions, and continued their incursions. Al-Muhammadawi and the other local leaders felt betrayed.

Two British military contingents were in the town on Monday, June 23, one to do another weapons search, another group of six on a hearts and minds mission to train local police. By Monday afternoon the townspeople were fed up, and a crowd gathered to demonstrate near the police station. It got out of hand. The poorly armed British troops on the hearts and minds mission, who were accompanied by some Iraqi police that they were training, initially fired rubber bullets. The Iraqis thought they were being shot at for real, and returned fire. They killed two British soldiers. The other four retreated to the

police station, where one was killed in a hallway. At some point they became so threatened that they switched to live ammunition. The townspeople insist that the British shot down four young men of Majar. The crowd then closed on the remaining three British troops and killed them. They may have captured them first and then executed them.³³ This was a classic anticolonial crowd action, deriving from the occupiers' attempt to disarm the population.

But then there was a separate attack on a British paratroopers convoy in the same area, using rocket propelled grenades. That attack wounded one British soldier and destroyed two vehicles. This attack may be related to the town riot, but it was not the same kind of phenomenon. It was carried out by a trained paramilitary or military force. It seems in retrospect most likely to have been the work of Marsh Arab militiamen from Majar, who had at some point received arms and training from Iran to fight Saddam. It was not possibly the work of locals who had joined the al-Hakims' Badr Corps or the budding militia of the Sadr Movement. Al-Muhammadawi intervened yet again to work out a truce with the British, but the Marsh Arabs of Majar al-Kabir retained a sullen dislike of the British presence.

Attempts at Reconciliation

The struggle for power among the Marsh Arabs continued in the rest of the year. The Sadr movement made increasing inroads. In October of 2003, Sadrists militiamen assassinated Amara's police chief, provoking a feud between the Sadrists and his tribe. His aggrieved fellow tribesmen kidnapped several members of families loyal to al-Sadr, in revenge.³⁴ Although most of Amara's city councilors gave their allegiance to Muqtada al-Sadr over time, they did defy him when he ordered them in March of 2004 to cease

cooperating with the Coalition Provisional Authority. The Marsh Arab tribal leaders, chiefly the Al-Bu Muhammad, wanted things from the Americans and the British, and have often were willing to cooperate. In mid-March of 2004, the Maysan Marsh Arab Council was formed, meeting in Amarah with CPA officials on March 20. (The governor of Maysan province was Riyadh Mahoud al-Muhammadawi, the brother of the “Prince of the Marshes.”) On the agenda was the restoration of the wetlands and the villages that used to nestle in them. Sheikh Al-Muhammadawi, who attended, remarked, “If you are going to talk about the marshes, you must talk about the people, the villages there.” Also discussed were health, education, agricultural and cultural matters affecting the Ma`dan tribes.³⁵ Competition among tribes for council seats was fierce, and the Fartus clan was accused of trying to get more than its fair share. Because of the conviction that the Coalition would put major money into restoration and reconstruction for the Ma`dan, the tribes’ status rose. One British official, Rory Stewart, lamented, “It’s a feeding frenzy . . . Everybody wants to be a Marsh Arab now.”³⁶

The attempts at rapprochement and good relations between the Ma`dan and the Coalition were derailed in the spring. In March of 2004, a Marsh Arab tribal militia clashed with British troops near Amara, leaving seven British wounded and two Iraqis killed. Trouble broke out of a more serious nature in April, 2004, when the US attempted to “kill or capture” Muqtada al-Sadr. Some Ma`dan tribal chieftains had given al-Sadr their religious loyalty. Other Shiites simply sympathized with him as a symbol of Iraqi desires for independence from the Americans. Sheikh al-Muhammadawi resigned from the Interim Governing Council over US actions in Fallujah and against al-Sadr, and given his enormous prestige with the Marsh Arabs, many probably saw this move as permission

to fight the Coalition. Several cities with significant Marsh Arab populations saw fierce fighting in April and May, including Kut, Amara and Nasiriyah.³⁷

As late as May 14, 2004, a major gun battle broke out between the British and fighters near Majar al-Kabir. The Telegraph reported that “28 men from the battalion took part in a rout of Iraqi gunmen who had been terrorising the Route 6 motorway which links Al Amarah to Basra. The troops had been ordered to rescue two vehicles and their occupants from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which was ambushed by a group of 50 Iraqis.”³⁸ In the end, the British soldiers fixed bayonets and stormed the Marsh Arab positions, killing 30 Shiite tribesmen and capturing 12. The second battle of Majar al-Kabir also raised serious charges against Sheikh al-Muhammadawi, who had earlier been accused by critics of using his loyal tribesmen and former guerrillas in unsavory ways at times. Sheikh Al-Muhammadawi was present in the town in the aftermath of the battle with his two brothers, and had an altercation with the local chief of police. “An official close to the investigation said that the situation quickly degenerated: ‘The policeman took offence and an argument started. The witnesses say that his [Mr Mahoud's] two brothers then shot the man dead, although they say it was Karim Mahoud who ordered the hit. It is a very serious matter.’”³⁹ His spokesman claimed self-defense. Zealous Coalition Provisional Authority officials were eager that al-Muhammadawi not receive special treatment, in order to strengthen the rule of law in the new Iraq, and arranged for him to be indicted. He was forced to go underground for a while. The indictment went away when the Americans turned sovereignty over to the appointed government of Iyad Allawi that summer. The story of Sheikh al-Muhammadawi’s up and down relationship with the Coalition demonstrates the difficulties for imperial powers of

making political use of a social structure—the tribes—that is fluid and shifting in its alliances, and that involves feuding and grudge settling as a matter of course.

With the military defeat of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in August of 2004, head-on clashes between Marsh Arabs loyal to that paramilitary and Coalition, principally British, troops, became less common. In the provincial elections of late January, 2005, the Sadr Movement deputies, mainly from Marsh Arab tribes, swept to power in Maysan Province, with its capital at Amara. In addition to Marsh Arab Sadrist politics, tribal and Shiite religious militias continued to operate in cities such as Kut, Nasiriyyah and Amara, however, and increasingly made a bid for control of the streets of Basra. Militia sniping at, or setting of roadside bombs targeting British troops continued to roil security in the south.

The Marsh Arabs and Security in Basra

The Karamishah and other Marsh Arab tribes continued their quest for territory and subsistence in the Basra and Amara areas. The Marsh Arabs often fired rocket propelled grenades at electricity poles, bringing down the wires so that they could strip out the copper and sell it on the black market. Given that the Coalition Provisional Authority and its successor, the Iyad Allawi government, were attempting to increase electricity delivery, this sabotage was a constant irritant.⁴⁰ Feuding between the Karamishah, which had moved into territory earlier controlled by the Halaf tribe, wealthy professionals, disrupted the British supply routes between Basra and Amara in fall of 2004. A British Lieutenant-Colonel, Harry Nickerson, told *The Times* of London that that fall, there had been a "serious gunbattle" every night, wherein the tribes deployed "mortars, heavy guns and anti-tank rockets." He characterized it not as mere brawling

but as “all-out war.” He added, “The tribes sit astride Route 6 from Basra to al-Amarah. They were hijacking or kidnapping everything that was moving on that road and their battles were hitting main voltage lines and blacking out the northern half of Basra.”⁴¹ The Scots Guard first threatened the tribesmen with a tank battle, then attempted to broker a settlement. They offered to pay reparations on both sides if tribesmen would turn in their weapons. The two tribes signed a peace agreement early in 2005. Peace did not last, and the Scots Guard confiscated heavy weapons from the two tribes again in March.

As part of a general pacification effort, attempts were made to reflood the marshes and to convince the Marsh Arabs to return to their swamps. Many of the young people, however, no longer know how to make a living in that environment, having become inexorably urban.⁴² Some of the flooding yet again displaced Marsh Arab villages, which were now below water. Two-decade old feuds among tribes such as the Karamishah and the Shaghanba of al-Madan proved difficult to settle. In 2005, the score in the feud was 35 Shaghanba tribesmen dead, and 40 Karamishah. A member of the Shaghanba told a Western reporter that in exchange for peace, “We offered them 10 million dinars (6,800 dollars) in blood money . . . but they don't want the money. What they want is to kill five of us.”⁴³

In late January, 2005, provincial elections were held in Iraq. The Basra Governorate governing council, consisting of 41 seats, was deeply divided. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq captured twenty seats. SCIRI had been formed by expatriate Shiite Iraqi activists in exile in Tehran in 1982 and was popular among the Shiite middle and upper classes in post-Saddam Iraq. A splinter party from the Sadr

Movement of the late Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, the Islamic Virtue Party (Fadilah), was popular in Basra. It followed Ayatollah Muhammad al-Ya`qubi of Najaf, rejecting the claims to leadership of al-Sadr's young son, Muqtada. Virtue Party politicians put together a coalition that dominated the other twenty-one seats in the province of Basra, allowing them to outvote SCIRI. The Islamic Virtue Party was therefore able to appoint the provincial governor, Muhammad Misbah al-Wa'ili. SCIRI nevertheless had a great deal of influence on the Basra police force and bureaucracy, and was said to infiltrate fighters from its paramilitary, the Badr Corps, into it. The Muqtada al-Sadr group was much smaller in Basra, but it had increasing appeal to the Marsh Arabs, the have-nots in a province dominated by Virtue and SCIRI, middle class parties.

Serious trouble between the Marsh Arabs and the Iraqi government and its British allies was not reported again until spring of 2006, when it became clear that the Marsh Arabs were contributing to a breakdown of security in the province. On May 15, 2006, tribesmen killed 11 policemen in and around Basra. One of their leaders, Hasan al-Jarrah, was said to have been shot down in broad daylight in the center of Basra by persons wearing the uniforms of the Ministry of the Interior Special Police Commandos. The killing provoked these reprisals when the tribesmen came to see his body in the morgue.⁴⁴ The tribesmen blamed the governor, al-Wa'ili, for the assassination.

The Special Police Commandos, an elite national force, had been set up in 2005, and when the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) came to power in the federal parliament in the January, 2005, elections, it gained control of the Ministry of the Interior. This ministry has long had oversight powers over local police forces and was charged with domestic surveillance. SCIRI had in the 1980s developed a

paramilitary, the Badr Corps, trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Badr Corps fighters were infiltrated into the Special Police Commandos, which had fearsome unit names such as the Scorpion Brigade and the Wolf Brigade. The Marsh Arab tribesmen tended to code the Badr Corps and the commandos as “Iranian” because of the latter’s decades in Iran and continued ties to the ayatollahs in Tehran. They themselves, as we have seen, increasingly favored the nativist Sadr Movement within Iraqi Shiism, a rival of SCIRI and the Badr Corps.

Majid al-Sari, adviser to the Iraqi Minister of Defense, said that individuals from the Karamishah tribe came out into the streets of the city heavily armed and killed 11 policemen in the course of an attack on a police station in the Dayr quarter to the south of the city. They also burned down two buildings used as party headquarters in the Intisar district of the Dayr quarter by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Firefights subsequently broke out in several districts of the city at a time of political vacuum in the central government.

Al-Sari said that during the previous month, Basra had been afflicted by a mass of assassinations, equaling one each hour of the day (some 720 for the month). Sources in the city alleged that the police were helpless to intervene, and indeed often refused to go out to the crime scene to attempt to capture the assassins, since they would take fire from tribesmen supporting the assassins, who belong to their tribe. Tribal firefights between the Marsh Arab Al-Bait Sa`idah tribe and the Banu Mansur were said to be common-- as was fighting between Banu Ammar and Al-`Ashur. *Al-Zaman*’s sources said that Basra was without authority save that of the militiamen. The major political parties were unable to dampen down the violence because they were divided against one another. The

newspaper reported that its sources told it that Basra was in chaos and dominated by militias and lawless gangs. Automobiles with darkened windows cruised the streets, armed militiamen within, who impose their law on the city. In the poverty-stricken al-Hayaniyah and Abu al-Khasib districts, strongholds of the Sadr Movement, there were virtually daily demonstrations against the lack of services. The provincial government had cut off relations with the British forces over a videotape that had emerged showing British troops abusing local youths, reducing the ability to coordinate a security response with them.

Dan Murphy of the *Christian Science Monitor* revealed that among the motives for this wave of violence an gangland-style killings was competition among the tribesmen and militias for rights to petroleum smuggling. An official at Iraq's Southern Oil Company told him "that a lot of the city's government contracts are being steered to tribes that backed Waili for the governorship, and that other tribes that haven't been getting the business have been taking up arms."⁴⁵ Likewise, the police were divided in their loyalties among the Virtue Party, SCIRI, and the Sadr Movement's Mahdi Army militia.

In mid-August, the violence flared up again, this time over another assassination of the leader of another tribe, Sheikh Faysal Khuraybat al-Khuyun. In Basra, one policeman was killed and 4 wounded when armed tribesmen staged an attack on the headquarters of the governor of Basra province.⁴⁶ An official source told *al-Zaman* newspaper, "Gunmen in about 15 vehicles surrounded the governor's offices and directed gunfire at it. The guards replied with fire at the source of the attacks." Government reinforcements reached the building after about an hour. The attackers were tribesmen of the Marsh Arab Banu Asad, who had two days before cut the road between Basra and

Baghdad after al-Khuyun was killed in a drive-by shooting in the industrial quarter of Khamsah Mil (Five Mile). A military spokesman said that a partial curfew had been imposed in Basra.

The next day, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* reported that Banu Asad was threatening to take over Basra and imprison the governor, al-Wa'ili. The son of the dead sheikh, Faruq al-Khuyun, complained in an interview that "we live in the midst of murderous and thieving gangs."⁴⁷ Al-Khuyun charged that al-Wa'ili had targeted his father and his tribe. He said that the provincial security forces had killed his brother, Ghazwan al-Khuyun, as well, only three months earlier. He threatened to storm the governor's headquarters and take him prisoner, since "he belongs to us." He complained that gangsters driving cars belonging to the provincial government were terrorizing the city, perpetrating robberies, assassinations and oil smuggling." He characterized his tribe as "nationalist elements" being persecuting by the grasping governor, who had demanded that they join his group. (Al-Wa'ili represented the Islamic Virtue Party, and presumably Banu Asad had like most Marsh Arab groups joined the Muqtada al-Sadr faction). Al-Khuyun did not follow through on his threats, and one suspects the British intervened with him to head off further clashes.

Despite the subsiding of tempers among the Banu Asad, the nexus of Marsh Arab feuding and Sadrist politics continued to bedevil Coalition authorities. A hot spot that fall was the Hartha district of Basra where the Tigris and the Euphrates meet. Marsh Arabs tribes had been displaced there by the draining of the marshes, and had been feuding and clashing in recent decades. Many of them appear to have joined the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr, but then to have hived off, establishing what the British

military considered a “rogue” militia. In early December, a thousand British and Danish troops raided Hartha and captured tribal leaders there, including Kazim `Abid `Ali, the mayor of the township, a follower of Muqtada al-Sadr. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Friday morning, gunmen from the Karamishah and Shaghanba tribes protested the operation, blocking the main road to Baghdad, said Maliki, the Sadr official. By afternoon, they had sent a letter to British regional commanders demanding the release of the five leaders and threatening to overthrow the local government.”⁴⁸ They later withdrew at the urging of their tribal leaders, who were negotiating with the British. At least, the operation had the effect of temporarily causing Karamishah and Shaghanba to set aside their two-decades-old feud.

The Basra violence in 2006 ties the ethnic and political conflict among the caste of Marsh Arabs and other groups in the port to competition over smuggling rights to a high-priced primary commodity, petroleum. Note that the ruling party in the city, the Islamic Virtue Party, was not behaving differently from the Marsh Arab militias. Like them, it had formed a paramilitary, and like them it was seeking to divert federally-owned petroleum profits to itself. Seeing the Marsh Arabs as a mafia requires that we see the “legitimate” government of Basra province as no less a criminal activity. Moreover, its motives were also not reducible to simple “greed.” The Islamic Virtue Party was made up of Iraqis who had been driven into grinding poverty by the sanctions placed on Iraq by the United States and the United Nations in the 1990s and early zeroes. The Anglo-American invasion had disrupted Basra society and contributed to a rapid decline in services. Employment was running by some estimates as high as sixty percent, and

security had declined precipitously. Ordinary Basrans were being reduced to the kind of straits that the Marsh Arabs had suffered for many years.

Conclusion

Iraq in the early twenty-first century was ripe for political brigandage and rebellion, having all the risk indicators for such violence. A pre-existing framework of political violence that derived from the 1991 post-Gulf War uprising and its brutal aftermath deeply influenced the groups in Basra and elsewhere in the Shiite south. Late Baath politics had increasingly taken the form of competition for scarce resources on the basis of ascribed status, whether ethno-religious (e.g. Sunni or Shiite, Arab or Kurd) or tribal, with tribal ethnicity being reinforced both positively and negatively by the Saddam Hussein regime. The Baath rewarded and punished tribes on the basis of their posture toward the regime, so that the Shiite branch of the Jubur at Najaf benefited, the Marsh Arab Karamishah were displaced and impoverished. Although the Marsh Arabs had long engaged in some criminal activities, it should be remembered that in the 1980s they were providing two-thirds of the fish consumed by Iraqis, and were important legitimate economic actors. It was their displacement that turned most of them into penniless refugees and some of them into mafias. The Marsh Arabs and the Sadr Movement had already been mobilized against the regime in the 1990s. The stage was set for an identity war.⁴⁹

The United States/ United Nations economic embargo of the 1990s and early 2000s had reduced Iraq to dire poverty, on an almost fourth-world scale. Just as criminal and political violence is rife in the Congo (formerly Zaire), so it is in Iraq. The country had petroleum, a high-priced primary commodity that is easy to steal and smuggle, and

the Baath regime had already begun winking at such smuggling because it brought extra income into the country above what was allowed by the UN oil for food program. As with Colombia, which has the cocoa leaves that can make cocaine, or Afghanistan, with its poppies that become heroin, so Iraq with its petroleum generates primary-commodity mafias, especially in the absence of a strong central state. The state's monopoly over violence and over the export sector had been destroyed by the Coalition Provisional Authority, which proved unable to replace it with effective new structures of governance.

The vast social engineering projects of the Baath state and its highly invidious policies of favoring Sunni Arabs and some Shiite tribal clients over the masses in the Shiite south and the Kurdish north, along with the punitive draining of the southern marshes, had created large numbers of ethnic and religious groups that felt themselves dispossessed and mistreated. These sought to recover their lost wealth and self-esteem in any way they could, including through brigandage. Many of these groups, including the Marsh Arabs, were not simply criminal enterprises, however. They had a social and a political dimension. They sought power and provided various services, including security, to their clients. The tribal networks and ethos of the Marsh Arabs and the way in which the wider society marked them as a lower caste contributed to their solidarity, which had an ethnic coloration. Tribal loyalties gave them an advantage in criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom, protection rackets, and petroleum smuggling, insofar as their foot soldiers were loyal and if captured yielded little useful information to the British or the new Iraqi government. These rent-seeking activities depended on the tribesmen remaining heavily armed, which explains their violent confrontation with the British soldiers who tried to take away their weapons. The British were threatening the

Marsh Arabs of Majar al-Kabir with a reduction to further poverty, insofar as disarming would have left them unable to compete with other tribal and militia groups for smuggling and extortion profits. In addition, the Marsh Arab men derived self-worth and masculinity from being armed and able to feud with neighboring tribes, feelings made all the more important by their reduction to refugees by the draining of the marshes.

Those same ethnic loyalties served them well when they turned to supporting the Sadr Movement and its paramilitary Mahdi Army. This political role for the Marsh Arabs underlines that they have not functioned merely as criminals, though they have engaged in criminal activities in their quest for the economic security of which their displacement had deprived them. Their turn to puritanical Shiite Islam and new allegiance to the nationalist Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr of Kufa underlines their search for a political and religious framework that would integrate them into Iraqi society. No doubt they are also thereby seeking clientelage from a bigger and wealthier national organization. But they have also embarked on a quest for a political vehicle for conventional political power, which allowed them to capture the provincial government of Maysan. The old “social banditry” thesis was inadequately theorized and presented an overly romantic image of the bandits, but it did open the door to seeing the ways in which banditry could sometimes contribute to political rebellions and revolutions that changed society. The economists who imagine all revolutionary activity as criminality motivated by cupidity have taken a huge step backward. To imagine the Marsh Arabs as simple “criminals” motivated by “greed” is to ignore the entire social history of southern Iraq since 1980. It is also to grant far too much legitimacy to three kleptocracies, that of

Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, that of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and that of the elected provincial governments of the South from January of 2005.

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000 4th rev. edn.); idem., *Primitive rebels; studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971, 3rd rev. edn.); see the useful critical forum around Gilbert M. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3. (1990), pp. 7-53, with replies by Christopher Birkbeck and Richard W. Slatta.

² Reviewed in Paul Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (Dec., 2000), pp. 839-853.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Nicholas Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Nonethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes?: A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry (Part 1)," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 3. (Jun., 2001), pp. 259-282.

⁵ Rudi Paul Lindner, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Oct., 1982), pp. 689-711.

⁶ Yitzhak Nakash, "The Conversion of Iraq's Tribes to Shiism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3. (Aug., 1994), pp. 443-463.

⁷ Amal Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2. (Apr., 1972), pp. 123-139.

⁸ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

⁹ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, "The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, c. 1870-1958," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4. (Nov., 1983), pp. 491-505.

¹¹ Donald P. Cole, "Where Have the Bedouin Gone?" *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2. (Spring, 2003), pp. 235-267.

¹² Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Thabit Abdullah, *Dictatorship, Imperialism and Chaos: Iraq Since 1989* (London: Zed, 2006)

¹³ For Iraqi Shiism, see Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Meir Litvak, *Shi'ite Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture, and History of Shi'ite Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002)

¹⁴ Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1. (Feb., 1997), pp. 1-31.

¹⁵ Martin Walker, "Buying the tribes from Saddam," *United Press International*, April 3, 2003.

¹⁶ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs* (London: Longmans, 1964).

¹⁷ Joe Rojas-Burke, "Iraq's Marsh Arabs," *The Oregonian*, May 14, 2003.

¹⁸ Rojas-Burke, "Iraq's Marsh Arabs;" Michael Spencer, "The Marsh Arabs Revisited," *Aramco Magazine*, March-April 1982.

¹⁹ James Drummond, "A people destroyed by Saddam yearn for 5,000-year-old way of life," *The Financial Times*, April 21, 2003.

²⁰ “One-third of paradise; The marshes of southern Iraq ,” *The Economist*, February 26, 2005.

²¹ Andrew Woodcock, “Marsh Arab Leaders Press their Case in London,” Press Association, April 8, 2004, via Lexis Nexis.

²² Joseph W. Dellapenna , “The Iraqi Campaign against the Marsh Arabs: Ecocide as Genocide,” *Jurist: The Legal Education Network*, January 31, 2003 at <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/forum/forumnew92.php>.

²³ Hazim al-Amin, “Baghdad allati lam taf‘al bi ‘asha’ iriha ma taf‘aluhu al-mudun bi’l-‘asha’ir,” *Al-Hayat*, July 10, 2003.

²⁴ Juan Cole, “The United States and Shi‘ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba‘thist Iraq,” *The Middle East Journal*, Volume 57, Number 4, Autumn 2003, pp. 543-566.

²⁵ Jonathan Steele, “Kidnappers and robbers make most of police shortfall,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2003.

²⁶ Karim el-Gowhary, “Daggers and Roses ,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 17 - 23 July 2003

²⁷ For Shaykhism see Juan Cole, “Individualism and the Spiritual Path in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i,” in Lynda Clarke, ed., *Shi‘ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Publications/SUNY Binghamton, 2001):345-358; idem., “Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i on the Sources of Religious Authority,” in Linda Walbridge, ed., *The Source for Emulation in Shi‘ite Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 82-93; and idem., “Casting Away the Self: The Mysticism of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i,” in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, eds., *The Twelver Shi‘a in Modern Times* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), pp. 25-37, and sources cited in these pieces.

²⁸ “British Soldiers Avert Basrah Confrontation,” The King’s Regiment News Release, 26 September 2003 at

http://www.operations.mod.uk/telic/pn_26sep_kings.pdf [viewed February 22, 2007]

²⁹ Personal communication from David Patel, then resident in Basra, spring, 2004.

Struggles between the Awlad `Amir Shaykhiyyah and the Sadrist Marsh Arabs

continued; see “Ta’ifah Shaykhiyyah tattahim “Jaysh al-Mahdi” bi ightiyal ithnayn bi ibna’iha,” *al-Hayat*, 25 February 2007 at

http://www.daralhayat.com/arab_news/levant_news/02-2007/Item-20070224-f4fff3e0-c0a8-10ed-0090-db32d3ac1010/story.html

³⁰ *The Scotsman*, 26 June, 2003.

³¹ Patrick Cockburn, “Marsh Arabs threaten to resist Army of Occupation,” *The Independent*, June 27, 2003.

³² Patrick Cockburn, “The Killings and Chaos Spread,” *The Independent*, June 29, 2003.

In fact, the Iraqi Shiite religious leadership was attempting to use the occupation to ensure that the Shiites came to power, rather than calling for an uprising against it: See Juan Cole, “The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq.” (ISIM Papers Series) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

³³ Peter Almond, “Analysis: ‘Execution’ of British troops,” United Press International, June 25, 2003.

³⁴ Rory McCarthy, “Iraq: one year on: Marsh Arabs look to our man in the middle,” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2004; Rory Stewart, *The Prince of the Marshes and other Occupational Hazards of a Year in Iraq* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2006), pp. 119-133.

³⁵ “Iraqi Marsh Arabs Discuss Future of Wetlands,” MENA News Service, March 23, 2004.

³⁶ McCarthy, “Iraq: One Year on.”

³⁷ Stewart, *Prince of the Marshes*, pp. 347-377.

³⁸ Sean Rayment, “British battalion ‘attacked every day for six weeks,’” *The Telegraph*, June 12, 2004.

³⁹ Colin Freeman, “Iraqi Lord of the Marshes ‘ordered killing of police chief,” *The Telegraph*, June 6, 2004.

⁴⁰ “Troops Tackle Iraq Turmoil,” *The Cornish Guardian*, March 25, 2004 via Lexis Nexis.

⁴¹ Laura Peek, “Troops sound pipe of peace for Basra Tribes,” *The Times* (London), January 1, 2005; Gethin Chamberlain, “Tribal Leaders Call the Shots but Scots Guards Sort Out the Bother,” *The Scotsman*, January 29, 2005; “Iraqi, U.S., Scotch Troops Nab Terror Suspects, Weapons,” American Forces Press Service, March 3, 2005 at <http://www.domelights.com/forums/lofiversion/index.php/t902-100.html>

⁴² Timothy M. Phelps, “Struggle to Revive Way of Life,” *Newsday*, 1 August, 2005 at <http://www.newsday.com/news/printedition/world/ny-womrsh134367122aug01,0,2281243.story?coll=ny-worldnews-print>

⁴³ “In Iraq's marshes, British learn complex tribal customs,” Agence France Press, September 13, 2005.

⁴⁴ “Ashirat al-Karamishah tuthar li ightiyal za`imiha bi harq maqarrayn li al-majlis al-a`la li al-thawrah al-Islamiyyah: Inhiyar al-wad` al-amni fi al-Basrah,” *al-Zaman*, 15 May

2006: "Eight Iraqi police killed after tribal leader slain," Agence France Presse, May 15, 2006.

⁴⁵ Dan Murphy, "Vying for power, militias roil Basra," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 2, 2006.

⁴⁶ "Ihbat hujum al-milishiyat fi al-Basra," *al-Zaman*, August 17, 2006; Ma`d Fayyad, "Ashirat Bani Asad Tuhajim Mabna Muhafazat al-Basra ihtijajan `ala Ightiyal Ra'isihim," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 17, 2006.

⁴⁷ Ma`d Fayyad, "Asha'ir Bani Asad tuhaddid bi al-Saytarah `ala al-Basrah wa I`tiqal Muhafiziha tha'ran li Maqtal Ra'isiha," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 18, 2006.

⁴⁸ Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Tribal Leaders Held at Basra," *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 2006.

⁴⁹ Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars . . ."