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Amal and Harakat Al-Mahrumun: The Rise of Shi'a Social Movements in Lebanon

The study of social movements and the communal identities they espouse continues to be a precarious enterprise ridden with several challenges. Scholars who address the interrelated phenomena of political mobilization, identity-construction, and the evolution of social movements tend to analyze such entities as separate static schemata, rather than as relational entities that constitute dynamic processes of social change. Most studies which apply social movement theories to a Middle Eastern context tend to categorize movements by their communal identities; such approaches, however, neglect to explain how movements evolve in relation to structural change, cultural transformation, or even processes of identity-construction.

The pitfalls of using this 'mosaic' model, or what some scholars have termed 'structuralist/functionalist' theories, is illustrated by the case study of Lebanese Shi'a social movements. Layne (1994) observes that the 'mosaic' model possesses several shortcomings concerning its explanations of communal identities in a Middle Eastern context. According to Layne, this model posits that, "...discrete, static, clearly bounded groups keep their identities and their unique cultures while contributing to a larger structure. There is no room for overlap, for gradation, for change" (Layne 1994: 4). When analyzing why social movements like Harakat al Mahrumun (The Movement of the Deprived) and its successor, Amal, rose to influence in Lebanon, using a 'mosaic' model to categorize such movements is indeed problematic. Both movements demonstrate that they are neither 'nationalist' nor 'Islamist,' but formed through dynamic processes of political identity formation.

Through reviewing scholarly literature that has addressed Shi'a social movements in Lebanon—namely the Mahrumun movement and Amal—this paper will explain why using 'mosaic' models are inadequate for understanding two processes: how social movements emerge in the first place due to structural and cultural changes, and secondly, how such movements gain support in relation to their leaders' social constructions of communal identities over time. The rise in popular Shi'a support for the Harakat and Amal from the 1960s to the early 1970s is the focus of this study.

In addition, this paper adopts a ‘process-oriented’ approach to explain which conditions facilitated the political mobilization of the Shi’a in Lebanon during this time period, and how such mobilization related to the rise of both social movements. Lastly, a constructivist theoretical approach will be used to analyze how Amal leaders like Imam Musa al Sadr socially constructed a distinct Lebanese Shi’a national identity in order to increase his movement’s influence in Lebanese society. Through using textual and discursive analysis, this paper concludes that theories which explain social movement evolution should address this phenomenon in relation to identity construction as a process, rather than as a series of static categorical schemata.

Approaches to Social Movement Theory: The Case of the Lebanese Shi’a

In their studies of Lebanese Shi’a social movements, scholars within a variety of disciplines—especially history, sociology, and political science—have attempted to answer the following questions: how did the Lebanese Shi’a become politically mobilized in Lebanon during the 1960s and 1970s, and how did this mobilization lead to the emergence of social movements like Amal? Several studies have used structuralist/functionalist theories (the ‘mosaic’ model) to answer the above questions. Existing literature usually explains the emergence of Amal through two approaches: (1) a modernist explanation, which emphasizes analysis of structural changes that produce social change due to urbanization and economic development, and 2) approaches which focus on political mobilization as a phenomenon. In regards to the second approach, this group of scholars usually argues that the Shi’a were political mobilized due to the agency of leaders like Amal’s founder, Imam Musa al Sadr. This emphasis on leadership patterns has led to the production of studies which explain Shi’a communal mobilization through biographical profiles of leaders like Sadr and Sayyid Fadlallah (Ajami 1986; Halawi 1992; Ghorayeb 2003; Sankari 2005).

If there is one commonality in the literature which uses the above approaches, it concerns the theories scholars use to explain communal identities. In this respect, even if scholars like Ajami (1986), Halawi (1992), and Sankari (2005) attempt to address culture and agency as variables which affect political mobilization, these scholars still categorize communal identities as if they are static schemata. Most of the literature which addresses the history of Amal as a social movement does not explain identity-formation as a dynamic process. Instead, scholars usually label Amal as a ‘nationalist’ movement, and contrast it with ‘Islamist’ movements like Hizbullah (Ajami 1986;

Norton 1987; Halawi 1992; Ranstorp 1997; Binder 1999; Ghorayeb 2002; Ghorayeb 2003; Harik 2004; Sankari 2005).

As Layne (1994) observed, the inherent problem with this approach is that communal identities are thus conceived to be mutually exclusive (Layne 1994: 4-5). ‘National’ identities are analyzed as phenomena that do not overlap with ‘religious’ (Islamic) or confessional (Shi’a) communal identities. Within a Lebanese context, this exclusive, static, and particularistic explanation of identity-formation is especially problematic, since it does not account for overlap or dynamic changes in identity-construction (the full implications of this are discussed below in the context of historical analysis of this subject).

In addition, this attempt to categorize social movements according to their communal identities not only inhibits researchers from understanding how social movements change their expressed identities over time, but it also prevents them from explaining how such movements are able to mobilize support (and potentially lose it) due to changing constructions of communal identities. Most of the aforementioned authors simply label the Amal movement without explaining why communal identities are significant within the context of political mobilization patterns. Identities are thus commonly associated with social movements, yet the dialectic relationship between these entities is usually not explored.

Finally, this categorical approach to social movement theory does not effectively explain how processes of identity-construction relate to continuous structural change and cultural transformation in societies. The negative implications of analyzing the Harakat al-Mahrumun and Amal through static schemata are illustrated by the gaps which exist in the literature. Since most of the literature on this subject is historical in nature, this study will present the various historical perspectives scholars have of Lebanese Shi’a social movements, and will also supplement this evaluation with a critique of existing approaches in the following pages. After providing a brief historical background of this subject through reviewing available literature, this paper will explain why constructivist theories, namely those proposed by Tilly (2002), best explain the emergence of Lebanese Shi’a social movements.

Historical Perspectives of Shi’a Political Mobilization in Lebanon

The formation of national identities in Middle Eastern states like Lebanon is partially rooted in the historical legacy of colonialism. Before 1918, the area of coastal Syria that later became

Lebanon was previously governed by Ottoman administrative units. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the victors of World War I, Britain and France, distributed territory (with overt American approval) to be governed. With French support, the Lebanese state was officially formed in 1920, and was governed by France during the mandate period until 1943 (Cleveland 2004: 217-218). A few watershed events occurred in Lebanon in 1943: the state acquired formal independence from colonial rule, and secondly, the leaders of the Maronite and Sunni communities signed the National Pact (*Al Mithaq Al Watani*) (Cleveland 2004: 229). The utter significance of the National Pact can not be understated: it was the key cornerstone which defined the form Lebanese state development would take. As most scholars of Lebanese politics know, the Pact also became a key source of conflict in the country due to its institutionalization of sectarianism (Winslow 1996: 78-79).

To appreciate the significance of this last statement, it is important to evaluate the terms of the Pact and the historical context in which it was developed. Winslow (1996) observes that a key reason the Shi'a were historically disillusioned with Lebanese state institutions derives from the nature in which such institutions were established in the first place. The foundations of the Lebanese state were products of French mandate governance during the interwar period (Winslow 1996: 78-80). France historically offered support to Lebanon's Christian Maronite community, and thus, assisted with the development of state institutions that secured the Maronites' political dominance in the new state of Lebanon (Salibi 1988: 26-27).

A few examples illustrate the implications of this imposed form of state development. The Lebanese Constitution was adopted from documents French mandatory authorities created in 1926. It was thus structured in a way that effectively checked the power of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. The former group strongly opposed French influence in 'Greater Syria' and historically identified with Arab nationalist movements that emerged from the Syrian interior (Salibi 1988: 27-29). Interestingly enough, the majority of the Lebanese Shi'a actually did support the creation of Lebanon since they viewed themselves as a religious minority in a Sunni-dominated Middle East (Norton 1987: 6-7). At a communal level, however, they remained critical of Lebanon's distinct pattern of state development, which institutionally granted power based upon confessional or sectarian affiliation (Nisan 1991: 186-187).

The actual substance of the Lebanese Constitution merits further analysis since it was historically a key issue of contention between Lebanon's three largest religious communities: the

Maronites, the Sunnis, and the Shi'a. The controversial nature of the Constitution mainly relates to its perceived 'confessionalization' of Lebanese politics. The document elaborates how the country's electoral system, legislative and executive structures, and the organization of its courts and bureaucracy are to be structured. Specifically, the French aim of giving all of Lebanon's religious communities "fair and equitable representation in the legislature" translated into granting Lebanese Christians six representatives in the Chamber for every five Muslims. Before the Taif Accord (1989) was created to end Lebanon's fifteen year civil war, the number of members in the legislative branch was divisible by eleven (houses were convened in numbers of 55, 77, 44, 66, and 99 members for example). Winslow (1996) concurs that this was one form of Lebanese state development which reinforced institutionalized sectarianism due to its sect-based power allocation (Winslow 1996: 80-81).

Winslow also argues that the second aspect of Lebanese state development which exacerbated sectarianism (or communal identification according to religious sect) in the long term was, as mentioned previously, the National Pact. The agreement was actually an informal understanding that was achieved between Sunni politician, Riyad al-Sulh, and Maronite leaders like Bishara al-Khuri. The terms of the agreement included the following: Lebanon would be an independent state, but would support Arab regional orientations in foreign policy. In this respect, the idea was that Sunni Muslims who initially opposed separation from Syria would support Lebanese statehood if Christians allowed the government to cooperate with other Arab states in their regional endeavors (Winslow 1996: 80).

Additionally, an unwritten portion of the Pact proved to be particularly controversial and contentious: members of the six major sects (Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Druze) were given representation at the top levels of government—this proportional representation was based upon the 1932 census. The fact that there has been no census taken in Lebanon since this date illustrates how utterly contentious and sensitive this issue is (Maktabi 1999: 219). The Presidency to this day is considered a Maronite institution, while the offices of Prime Minister and Speaker of the Chamber have been restricted to Sunni and Shi'a office holders respectively. Historically, the army's chief officer was almost always a Maronite; the Minister of Justice was usually a Greek Orthodox community member; finally, the Druze headed the Defense Ministry (Khalaf 1987: 92-93).

This complex tapestry of distributed power based upon sectarian affiliation produced

social consequences that continue to affect Lebanon until the present day: sectarianism became deeply institutionalized within the Lebanese state and society; secondly, Lebanese national identity was consequently associated with communal sectarian identities by each of the above communities; finally, the Shi'a experienced asymmetric power relations compared to Lebanon's other confessional communities as a result of this institutionalized sectarianism. This ultimately became a key source of social discontent for the Lebanese Shi'a, a community which increasingly felt disadvantaged in a system which seemed to be structurally built against them (Winslow 1996: 80-82).

Given that the Shi'a became politically mobilized at an unprecedented level during the late 1960s, this seems to be a curious historical development. The literature which explains this phenomenon usually addresses the following questions: why this period? If the Maronites and Sunnis had both developed nationalist movements decades before the National Pact agreement, why did it take the Lebanese Shi'a so long to express a cohesive and distinctive national identity of their own? Why did social movements like the Harakat and its successor, Amal, which gained popular support through using religious nationalist discourse, emerge decades after the National Pact was concluded?

To answer the above questions, most studies have specifically focused on the period of the late 1960s and the early 1970s for a few reasons: this period marked the first time the Shi'a were mobilized at a mass level under the leadership of Amal's founder, Imam Musa al Sadr. Ghorayeb (2003) observes that although the Shi'a had actively participated politically in leftist movements (which included communist movements and even Arab nationalist movements) during the 1950s, the movements which emerged in the 1960s garnered an unprecedented level of unified communal support from the Shi'a. She claims this was the first time in the history of Lebanon's Shi'a community that they successfully formed a grassroots movement—Harakat al-Mahrumun—which specifically focused on their community's interests, needs, and most importantly, their communal sense of national consciousness and identity (Ghorayeb 2003: 296-297). She claims this is the key reason why the 1960s heralded in a new era for the Lebanese Shi'a.

Under the advent of Musa al Sadr, the Harakat al Mahrumun movement successfully mobilized the Lebanese Shi'a in a manner that was unprecedented in the country's history. Before Hizbullah arrived on the scene, Musa al Sadr and his Harakat supporters effectively carved out a space in Lebanese politics for their community. The emergence of this movement and its military

wing, Amal, has occupied the focus of scholars who are interested in explaining Shi'a political mobilization from a historical perspective (Ajami 1986; Norton 1987; Halawi 1992; Ranstorp 1997; Binder 1999; Khazen 2000; Ghorayeb 2002; Ghorayeb 2003; Harik 2004; Sankari 2005). All of the above scholars analyze different factors pertaining to the Harakat's emergence and its subsequent evolution as a movement, which later produced Amal. Their explanations of the Harakat's rise in Lebanese politics will be shortly explored below and critiqued.

In her study (2003), Ghorayeb does categorize Amal as a 'nationalist' and a 'sectarian' movement (she argues it encompasses both forms of communal identification) (Ghorayeb 2003: 290). She argues that Amal's success was largely due to the Shi'ites' historical experience with two movements: Libanism and Arab nationalism. Before the 1960s, the Maronites tended to view the Lebanese Muslim community through a prism of Arab nationalism due to the Sunni's historic support for 'Greater Syria' schemes. This view led to the development of popular associations between social movements and communal identification: the Maronites were often viewed as supporters of Libanism (Lebanese national identity and sovereignty), whereas the Sunnis and Shi'a were both perceived to be supporters of regional Arab nationalism (Ghorayeb 2003: 290-294).

Ghorayeb observes that the inherent flaw with this assumption is that the Shi'a, as mentioned previously, actually supported Lebanese statehood from the start. Their disillusionment with the system not only derived from their lack of power institutionally, it was also rooted in an inherent lack of public recognition for their Lebanese national identity. One of the strengths of Ghorayeb's study is that she challenges the artificial dichotomies historians set up regarding communal support for either Libanism or Arab nationalism (Ghorayeb 2003: 287-289).

Ajami (1986), Norton (1987), Halawi (1992), and Ghorayeb (2003) all provide thorough explanations regarding how the Shi'a became initially mobilized before the rise of Amal. All four scholars attribute the Shi'ites' political mobilization to the effects of modernization, political marginalization, and social alienation. However, Halawi tends to emphasize the role of uneven communal development, whereas the other three explain mobilization mainly through the agency of individuals like Musa al Sadr. Norton arguably presents the most thorough study which bridges the gap between structural and cultural analysis. A key critique of structuralists like Halawi (1992) and even Hudson (1968) is that they overemphasize the role of structures at the expense of understanding the influence of culture and agency on political behavior. On the other hand, scholars like Ajami seem to attribute too much agency to figures like Sadr, and conveniently ignore the

influence of structural conditions on a given individual's agency (Ajami 1986; Norton 1987; Halawi 1992; Ghorayeb 2003).

In his oft-cited study of Amal, Norton explains how the movement emerged in response to Shi'ite political mobilization in Lebanon during the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to Ghorayeb's approach, Norton does use historical analysis to explain how Amal's rise and fall in popularity is inherently related to the later emergence of Hizbullah. He also concurs with her and other scholars like Ajami (1986), Halawi (1992), and Sankari (2005) concerning the significance of historical contextualization for the study of Lebanese social movements. He argues that researchers can not explain the emergence of Shi'a social movements without analyzing the societal conditions their community experienced between the 1967 war and the beginning of Lebanon's civil war in 1975. This period, according to Norton, was pivotal since the political mobilization of the Shi'a was interconnected with the rapidly deteriorating security environment in Southern Lebanon due to the expansion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Norton 1987: 32-33).

It thus seems to be the case that scholars do not adequately discuss transitions in identity-construction in their approaches to social movement theory. If they address this factor, they tend to overemphasize the role of individual agency, or focus exclusively on structural analysis at the expense of acknowledging the role of culture and agency in the emergence of social movements. None of the aforementioned studies effectively explain how changes in Shi'a communal identity relate to the increase in support for social movements. Although it may be analytically helpful to label social movements, this does not leave much room for exploring how such social actors change their constructions of communal identities over time. If this factor is ignored, this usually leads to scholars attributing changes in the movement's political behaviors to variables other than identity or culture. This paper suggests that an alternative theoretical approach—a constructivist one—can be used to effectively explain how the emergence of social movements is related to processes of structural change and identity-construction.

Shi'a Political Mobilization and Amal's Emergence: A Constructivist Explanation

In his work *Stories, Identities, and Political Change*, Tilly (2002) explains how social movement leaders construct political identities in order to obtain desired social change. Through using a constructivist approach to social movement theory, Tilly observes that a dialectic

relationship exists between forms of storytelling, identity-construction (namely national identity), and dynamic social processes. He claims that we can understand how storytelling is used by individuals to explain social change at three different points: (1) in the stories (historical narratives) people tell to explain the social changes a particular community has experienced; (2) the social behavior to be explained, which “often features storytelling and responses to it;” and (3) the prevalent explanations observers, analysts, and participants (outside a given community or society) use to explain processes of social change (within that community or society) (Tilly 2002: x-xiii).

As a social constructivist, Tilly explains how political identities form and are reflected through storytelling (namely in the area of communal historical narratives). He subsequently analyzes how this dynamic process facilitates social and political change. “Nationalist leaders, union organizers, and social movement activists fashion widely accepted stories about who they are, where they came from, and what are they doing” (Tilly 2002: xiii). Tilly thus explains how three processes of social change are interrelated: first, how collective social and political identities form; secondly, how social movements (namely leaders and activists of such movements) socially construct identities through communal narratives; finally, he explores how these narratives are received by the communities in question, which leads to the development of certain behaviors and actions that produce social change.

Tilly responds to critics of constructivism by claiming that analyzing the stories themselves is not sufficient without understanding first, the social context in which such stories are generated, and secondly, how such stories or narratives are received as they are produced over time (Tilly 2002: ix). He also contends that storytelling serves a wide-range of purposes socially, which include but are not limited to: the formation of national historical narratives, self-justification, social movement mobilization, moral condemnation, and documentation of nationalist claims to name a few examples (Tilly 2002: 8). Tilly thus adopts a position which calls for understanding how political identities are socially constructed within communal discourse; he also argues it is necessary to understand how such narratives are affected by “causal mechanisms and sequences that do not correspond to standard stories” (Tilly 2002: 10).

In regards to the role of political activists, Tilly argues that they construct identities in two ways to mobilize populations: first, they can either detach previously embedded identities through creating connections among fragmented populations (as when residents of urban neighborhoods come to identify themselves as victims of the same corrupt city administration), or, they can embed

detached identities through expressing them in ‘routine social relations’ (an example would be ethnic nationalist leaders promoting their identity through the creation of specific ethnic institutions, exclusionary practices, and privileges) (Tilly 2002: 12).

Tilly describes this dialectic relationship between communal identity-construction and the emergence of social movements as being an area of ‘contentious politics.’ Within contentious politics, identity can and usually is a source of contention within social relationships. This relationship is usually expressed in actions by social actors who make claims against or in conjunction with powerholders (including governments) concerning communal identity. Tilly provides an example of this dynamic process: “Whether embedded or detached, a wide range of contentious politics includes crucial performances in which people not only demand, request, attack, petition, or otherwise make specific claims on powerholders, but also act out statements of the type We are Alpha, We speak for Beta, or We insist on being recognized as Gamma” (Tilly 2002: 12).

In regards to the Shi’a in Lebanon, Tilly’s arguments concerning the contextualization of stories apply significantly. He contends that it is important for social scientists to recognize what standard stories (historical narratives) actually are, but to also contextualize them within social processes that may or may not conform to the content within such communal narratives. He mentions that contextualizing standard stories requires identification of the conditions which lead a connected but previously unmobilized population to develop narratives regarding its national identity and history (or origins), articulate calls for communal and political recognition through such narratives, and lastly, produce action which results from the usage of that specific story or narrative in contrast to alternative options for identity-construction (Tilly 2002: 41).

Tilly’s theoretical arguments are quite significant since constructivist approaches to social movement theory have arguably been neglected in studies of Middle Eastern social movements. By using constructivist theories to explain processes of mobilization, identity-formation, and social movement evolution, scholars can provide a more nuanced explanation of the political mobilization of the Lebanese Shi’a and the subsequent emergence of movements like Amal. Ironically, even though identity is arguably a key variable in the above social processes, structuralist/functionalists either reduce it to static categorical schematic terms, or neglect to analyze its role altogether within the context of social change.

In this respect, Tilly’s approach to studying social movements fills in this gap by reintroducing identity as a variable that both shapes and is a product of social behavior, structural

change, and cultural conditions. He does not attempt to categorize social movements according to their communal identity, be it 'nationalist' or 'Islamist.' He is instead more concerned with explaining how social movements emerge and evolve in relation to continuous processes of identity-construction. Tilly's arguments thus illustrate how a constructivist approach to social movement theory is more effective than structuralist/functionalist explanations, which continue to categorically label movements like Amal. In the case study of Amal in particular, Tilly's approach more effectively explains how Amal leaders like Musa al Sadr were able to construct a distinct Lebanese Shi'ite national identity, which encompasses layers of identification that can not be separated or compartmentalized.

Furthermore, Tilly's approach is also quite relevant to Lebanon as a case study for additional reasons: to understand how the Harakat al-Mahrumun and Amal emerged on the Lebanese scene, we can not explain this phenomenon without understanding the process of Shi'a political mobilization during the late 1960s and how this relates to both structural and cultural changes. Although several studies address such changes, they usually do not relate them to processes of identity-construction. This study attempts to fill in those gaps through analyzing the relationships between communal mobilization, the development of political identities through identity-construction (by Amal's founder Imam Musa al Sadr), the emergence of social movements, and finally, social changes these interrelated processes produced for both the Lebanese Shi'a and Lebanon as a whole.

This study also uses Tilly's conceptual definition of 'identity' to describe this concept in its various forms (national, religious, sectarian, etc.). Identity can be defined as "social arrangements reinforced by socially constructed and continuously renegotiated stories (narratives)" (Tilly 2002: xiii). He clarifies how political identity relates to general processes of identity-construction:

Standard stories locate identities within individual bodies as some combination of attributes, experiences, and consciousness, then derive collective identities from the attributes, experiences, and consciousness shared by many individuals. In political life, however, collective identities always form as combinations of relations with others, representations of those relations, and shared understandings of those relations. Social identities at all scales, from individual to international, combines three elements: relations, boundaries (boundary construction for identity), and stories. Such stories include all the major actors that a valid causal account of the events in question would identify and relate; they would accurately represent cause-effect relations among actions of participants, even if they neglect indirect, incremental, and other effects that are not visible in the participants' interactions; they provide effective means of connecting the story with times, places, actors, and actions outside its purview; and they offer means of relating causes explicitly invoked by the story with other causes that are indirect, incremental, unintended, collective, and/or mediated by the nonhuman environment" (Tilly 2002: xiii).

Through employing a methodology of textual and discursive analysis, the remainder of this paper will use Tilly's approach to explain how the Shi'a became politically mobilized in the first place, and secondly, how did this process relate to the rise of Sadr's Mahrumun movement. These points are addressed in subsequent pages.

A History of Uneven Communal Development

The historic political mobilization of the Shi'a and the subsequent emergence of the Amal movement were not spontaneous or sudden phenomena. Both events were products of long-term social circumstances which came to a head in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The Shi'a community's experience with decades of state neglect economically and socially in Southern Lebanon and the Biqa' regions eventually produced a political atmosphere that was ripe for reformist movements (Norton 1985: 111). What distinguished this decade, however, from previous periods were a few causal mechanisms that completely changed the political status and identity of the Shi'a in Lebanon. The rise of the first distinct Lebanese Shi'a nationalist movement, Harakat al-Mahrumun (later Amal), under the charismatic leadership of Imam Musa al Sadr was one such trigger; the other was the expansion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into Southern Lebanon. The above issues will each be explored in this section.

As mentioned, a key factor which fueled the Shi'ites' political mobilization was their lack of an effective outlet to politically communicate their frustration with the status quo. This inability to exert political influence in their favor derived from the disproportionate power their community held relative to their population size. Since Lebanon's last official census was taken in 1932, the Lebanese Shi'a increased demographically to become the largest confessional community in the country. Given the lack of significant political reform, or a 'deconfessional-ization' of Lebanese state institutions, the Shi'a did not have the power politically to change state policies toward development in Shi'ite dominated areas, namely the Jabal 'Amil area in Southern Lebanon and the Biqa' region in the North (Maktabi 1999: 220).

Hudson (1968) argues that Lebanese state structures were not built to absorb such rapid demographic changes; thus, communities like Lebanon's Shi'a were in a position where their power in numbers was not adequately represented at the highest levels of government, and their needs and interests were consequently ignored. Hudson also claims that political conditions were not the only

source of Shi'a social discontent historically. He also observes that their historic underdevelopment socially and economically also fueled their eventual political mobilization (Hudson 1968: 87-89). State policies in this area seemed to worsen rather than alleviate the Shi'ites' plight, as will be explained below.

Historically, the Lebanese state focused its efforts on 'modernization' in urban centers like Beirut, where Sunni and Maronite urban dwellers were the prime beneficiaries of state-sponsored urban development programs (Halawi 1992: 61-65). This focused economic development of Lebanon's urban areas ultimately contributed to greater economic inequality between Lebanon's confessional communities. In contrast to the Sunnis and Maronites who mainly inhabited cities like Beirut, the Shi'a mainly resided in rural areas before the 1960s. The Lebanese state's urban-driven efforts to pursue modernization thus negatively impacted the Shi'a in two areas: first, the agricultural sector—where a majority of the Shi'a obtained their employment—declined gradually, and secondly, larger numbers of Shi'ite workers migrated to urban centers like Beirut in pursuit of better employment opportunities (Norton 1985: 111-112). This decline in agricultural production merits further analysis due to the implications it had on Shi'ite urban migration patterns prior to and during the civil war period.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanon experienced an extraordinary services-centered economic boom. One consequence of this development was an increase in tertiary services compared to the agricultural sector as shares of Lebanon's overall GDP. The share of the tertiary sector—financial and banking activities, commerce, tourism, medical and educational services, etc.—in the GDP increased from 62 percent in 1960 to approximately 72 percent in 1970. The community that especially felt the negative repercussions of such structural changes was the Lebanese Shi'a. As mentioned previously, the primary beneficiaries of this growth in the tertiary sector were the Sunni and Maronite urban dwellers who were primarily employed in the aforementioned areas. By contrast, the Shi'a mainly worked in the agricultural sector, which was one of the key areas of production that declined rapidly during this time. Between 1948 and 1974, the share of the agricultural sector in Lebanon's GDP decreased from 20 percent to less than 9 percent (Halawi 1992: 51, 64-65).

Aside from this factor, the Shi'a were also the poorest and most uneducated population in the country. Compared to Lebanese Christians who had an average family income of LL 7,173 in 1971, the Sunni families usually obtained incomes of LL 5,571, and the Shi'a placed last among

Lebanese confessional communities with a national average of LL 4,532. In addition to this, the Shi'a possessed the lowest literacy rates and education levels in the country. By 1970, illiteracy among the Shi'a residents in North Lebanon was at approximately 45 percent, which was followed by South Lebanon and the Biqa' regions where it stood at 42.5 percent and 40.6 percent respectively. In Beirut's Shi'a neighborhoods, nearly 36 percent of the men and 50 percent of the women were illiterate, compared to 30.2 percent and 41.2 percent for the city's other residents. The proportion of Shi'a men who had received no education was 31 percent, compared to a national average of 21 percent (Halawi 1992: 64-65). Due to the lack of economic development in the South, many Shi'a workers immigrated to Beirut to find better employment and educational opportunities. Many realized, however, that living conditions in Beirut's Shi'a neighborhoods were also quite poor and underdeveloped compared to its other municipal areas (Hudson 1968: 64-65).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, approximately 40 percent of the Shi'a lived in the Jabal 'Amil region in Southern Lebanon. The remainder mainly resided in the Biqa' Valley. An increasing number did, however, migrate to urban areas during the 1960s where they formed the 'Belt of Misery' in the outskirts of Beirut's suburbs alongside Palestinian refugees and other dispossessed populations (Khazen 2000: 44-45). It is important to mention that Shi'ite urban migration to Beirut not only occurred due to the lack of economic opportunity in the South; a key factor which intensified this movement was the human cost the Lebanese Shi'a suffered due to the Israeli-Palestinian military confrontations in the early 1970s.

One significant consequence of increased urban migration is that it effectively united Shi'a workers from Northern and Southern Lebanon in Beirut, and contributed to the gradual development of a distinct urban Shi'ite identity. The development of an urban Shi'ite base in Beirut later enabled Amal leaders to bridge the gap between urban and rural support bases for their movement (Norton 1987: xv-xvii). Although structural changes concomitant with modernization affected the Lebanese Shi'a profoundly, analyzing variables like family income levels, literacy rates, or even urban migration patterns does not provide a sufficient explanatory basis for understanding why the Shi'a became politically mobilized. Other factors played a key role, and each will be evaluated in the remainder of this paper. These included the rapidly deteriorating security environment in the South due to the expansion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into Lebanon, and the newfound communal leadership of Imam Musa al Sadr, who founded the Mahrumun movement in response to the above changes. Sadr's agency and his ability to socially

construct a distinct Lebanese Shi'a national identity ultimately garnered popular Shi'ite support for his movement. Both issues will be explored in subsequent pages.

A Struggle for National Identity and Communal Security

In the aftermath of the 1970 Black September events in Jordan, the PLO shifted its base of operations to Southern Lebanon due to its previous violent confrontations with the Jordanian government. Khazen (2000) observes that historically, Lebanon's weak state structure has largely contributed to its domestic politics being highly influenced by external actors, be it Israel, Palestine, Syria, or Iran to name a few examples (Khazen 2000: 99). The Lebanese political scene completely changed due to the newly developed PLO position of creating a 'state within a state' in the South. The Lebanese Shi'a during the late 1960s and afterwards increasingly found themselves in an unfortunate middle position: they would be the key Lebanese confessional community that would bear the human cost of conflict, which intensified as Israel retaliated against PLO-led incursions from Southern Lebanon (Khazen 2000: 132-133).

Although addressing the complex dynamics of the Lebanese Civil War is beyond the scope of this paper, a few points should be mentioned to clarify the context in which the Mahrumun movement and Amal emerged on the scene. Beginning in the mid 1960s, Palestinian guerrillas began launching attacks into Northern Israel from Southern Lebanon. Aside from Black September, two key events led to the intensification of Palestinian militant activity in Lebanon: the losses incurred by Arab regimes in the 1967 War and the conclusion of the 1969 Cairo Agreement between Arafat and Lebanese officials (Khazen 2000: 162). A well-known consequence of the 1967 War was the increase in non-state affiliated Palestinian militant activity, which usually attempted to attack Israel through bases in other Arab states. In the case of Lebanon, its weak state structure enabled the PLO to continue its activities largely unabated until the mid 1970s, when the civil war's formative years led to complete state breakdown in Lebanon and changed the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict completely (Cleveland 2004: 274).

Since the use of force against the PLO was not a practical option for the weak Lebanese government, its leaders developed the 1969 Cairo Agreement as a diplomatic way of mediating potential Lebanese-Palestinian conflicts. The Agreement was highly relevant to the Lebanese Shi'a community in one key respect: the Lebanese government officially granted the PLO open access to the 'Arqub region in the South and in other areas along the Lebanese-Israeli border. Although the

Agreement technically included terms which called for upholding the “sovereignty and security of Lebanon,” the Lebanese government did not possess the means to effectively enforce the Agreement’s terms (Khazen 2000: 162). The consequences of the Agreement bore out in the intensification of armed hostilities in Southern Lebanon between the PLO and IDF forces. By 1975, over 25 percent of the rural Shi’ite population in the Biqa’ and 40 percent of Shi’ite inhabitants in the South had migrated to Beirut and other areas in Lebanon to escape an increasingly worse security situation (Norton 1987: 23).

As mentioned previously, one key consequence of Shi’ite urban migration to Beirut was the gradual development of a cohesive and shared national consciousness, which derived from their communal experiences with political disenfranchisement, economic inequality, and social and cultural alienation. One caveat to mention is, as Ilya Harik notes, religious (and sectarian identity in particular) has served as the primary source of social organization in Lebanon and often overlaps with perceived class identities (Harik 1981: 62-64). In this case, it can be argued that the Lebanese Shi’a were well aware of their shared identification as a religious community; however, they had not associated this identity at a macro-level with perceptions of relative deprivation. It was arguably their mass migration to Beirut which solidified this collective association between being a Lebanese Shi’a and the whole notion of being ‘deprived,’ ‘disinherited,’ or ‘oppressed’—terms which Imam Musa al Sadr would effectively draw upon later to politically mobilize his community (Ghorayeb 2003: 289-290).

Before urbanization occurred in Lebanon, the Lebanese Shi’a were scattered throughout al-Janub (the South) and the Biqa’ regions. After partaking in increasing migration patterns, their communal identity shifted and arguably intensified as they encountered other confessional communities in Beirut who enjoyed higher living standards. Ghorayeb (2003) argues this contributed to developed perceptions of ‘relative deprivation’. She maintains that even if the Lebanese Shi’a were increasing their economic and social standards in ‘absolute’ terms, their ‘relative’ comparisons between the status of their community and others deepened existing sentiments of ‘deprivation’ (Ghorayeb 2003: 296). Hudson (1968) supports this hypothesis and also argues that as scattered populations participate in increased urbanization processes, “Urbanization appears to fortify, rather than diminish Lebanese parochialism...the crucible of Beirut does not appear to be molding less particularistic Lebanese citizens” (Hudson 1968: 61).

In the case of Lebanon's Shia, it can be concluded that an increase in urbanization and modernization did not lead to assimilation, but fostered a collective sentiment of sectarian differentiation along class lines. Deutsch's arguments concerning political mobilization especially explain this phenomenon: "The same process (urbanization) may tend to strain or destroy the unity of states whose population is already divided into several groups with different languages or cultures or basic ways of life" (Deutsch 1966: 501). Norton (1987) concurred with Deutsch in this respect and argued, "That the Shi'a might act as Shi'i-Lebanese and not as Lebanese was not wholly unanticipated in the social science literature. The most obvious explanation for the relative solidarity of the Shi'a is the commonplace that it is nearly impossible to escape from one's confessional identity in Lebanon" (Norton 1987: 25).

Although urbanization and modernization greatly contributed to the development of a stronger sense of Shi'a communal identity, they were not sufficient conditions for producing political mobilization. A key reason for this is that prior to the emergence of Sadr's Mahrumun movement, the Shi'a community lacked leadership that was genuinely interested in changing the status quo. Their political representation mainly existed through patronage networks they maintained with the Shi'ite *zu'ama*. The *zu'ama* was comprised mainly of six elite Shi'ite families who clearly had a vested interest in protecting the status quo in terms of state-society relations. Their elite economic and political status depended upon their feudal-like relations they maintained with the poor Shi'ite work force, which they purported to represent within state institutions (Norton 1987: 34). The *zu'ama* thus had little desire or incentive to pursue real change in the interests of their community.

Interestingly enough, an additional by-product of urbanization in the late 1960s was the loosening of ties between the Shi'ite *zu'ama* and their constituency base. In his work on the Shi'ite *zu'ama*, Arnold Hottinger observes that the *zu'ama*'s power was dwindling as early as the late 1950s due to the growth of the state bureaucracy, which began to provide public services that replaced the historic favors the *zu'ama* dispensed among their clients (Hottinger 1966: 85-105). Due to the Shi'a uprooting from the South which derived from poor living conditions and a deteriorating security environment, the *zu'ama* found it increasingly difficult to respond to the changing demands of their community. Ultimately, it was the failure of the *zu'ama* to change their ways which paved the path for the success of future reformist movements.

The Shi'ites' lack of attentive leadership was not restricted to the political sphere; they also were increasingly dissatisfied with their religious leadership. The Shi'a *ulama* were renowned for their political passivity and overt support of *za'ama* politics. A key reason for this was the fact that the *ulama* did not possess an independent financial base and depended upon the *zu'ama* for financial support (Norton 1985: 112). Thus, the two potential groups of leaders who could have called for political reform did the exact opposite to secure their social position: the Shi'ite *zu'ama* accepted the system due to the economic advantages they reaped from it, and the Shi'ite *ulama* supported the *zu'ama* since this allowed them to maintain their position of religious authority through institutional stability (Ajami 1986: 73-75). The two groups reinforced each other in order to protect their position and the status quo. Fouad Ajami (1986) describes how this relationship worked between the Shi'ite *zu'ama* and *ulama*:

“If men in this Shi'a society thought of political salvation in the late 1950s and 1960s, they didn't look in the direction of the Shi'a mujtahids. Shi'a Lebanon sustained a clerical community that was on the whole economically depressed and politically quiescent. The clerics accepted the preeminence of the beys. The latter were the ones with the money, with the men with guns, and the land...The clerics were bearers of a stilted religious and educational tradition...The tradition they transmitted had no bearing on the reality that men knew and lived. (Ajami 1986: 73-75)

The stage was thus set for the political mobilization of Lebanon's Shi'a. They had experienced decades of social and political inequality, uneven economic development and neglect by the state, and bore the brunt of military hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians in their homeland. Their community did not have any effective political or religious leadership it could turn to in such turbulent times (Ghorayeb 2003: 287-290). The final step which led to the emergence of the Mahrumun and Amal movements arrived in the form of Imam Musa al Sadr, a charismatic Iranian-born cleric who articulated, for the first time, a national narrative the Shi'a could call their own (Norton 1987: 39-40). Ultimately, it was Sadr's unique ability to socially construct a communal identity the Shi'a could identify with which led to their support for his movement, Amal.

The Advent of Imam Musa al Sadr

Musa al Sadr (who later gained the conferred title of 'Imam' from his followers) came to Lebanon from Iran in the late 1950s at the behest of Tyre's former Grand Mufti. He first and foremost considered himself to be a 'man of religion,' yet he publicly questioned the seemingly passive role Shi'ite mujtahids adopted in Lebanese political life. He believed religion was meant to be an affair of both *al-dunya wal-akhira* (this world and the next), and conveyed this view in the

following statement, “I took the man of religion, *rajul al din*, into the social realm...I removed from him the dust of the ages” (Ajami 1986: 85). When Sadr arrived in Lebanon in the late 1950s, he discovered a community that, in his view, had not attained its full potential socially, politically, or economically. Sadr thus viewed his role as a cleric to be both spiritual and political: he vehemently disagreed with the notion of religious passivity in the face of what he perceived to be blatant social injustice and inequality (Norton 1985: 111-112).

Although the role of structural change was addressed in previous sections, it is also important to analyze culture and agency as variables concerning the rise of Amal as a movement. In explaining the rise of Imam Musa al Sadr, the key mistake scholars like Ajami (1986) and Halawi (1992) make is overemphasizing his agency in their analyses of the Shi’ites’ political mobilization. Ajami in particular tends to depict the Lebanese Shi’a as a quiescent and politically passive community that was not mobilized before the entry of Sadr into Lebanese politics (Ajami 1986: 96-97). Ajami’s point may be applicable to the Shi’ite *ulama*, but does not match the political experience of the masses.

As Ghorayeb (2003) correctly points out, the Shi’a community was politically engaged before the 1960s in a variety of social movements, including leftist movements and even Arab nationalist organizations (Ghorayeb 2003: 289-291). The significance of Sadr’s agency does not derive from his ability to mobilize the Shi’a (other movements had succeeded in this endeavor); rather, his success should be attributed to the type of political mobilization that took place and the unique social movement he produced. If there is one key hallmark achievement that should be associated with Sadr’s leadership, it is the fact that he was able to create a social movement that truly represented a Shi’ite communal sense of identity for the first time. In this respect, the other leftist movements failed to do this, and were thus unable to unify the Shi’a as cohesively as Sadr did through his Harakat Al Mahrumun (The Movement of the Deprived) which later formed the core of Amal.

While Ajami’s overemphasis on Sadr’s agency merits great critique, it is important to note that Sadr’s role in the successful formation of Amal should not be understated. It was arguably his charismatic leadership, his sensitivity to the plight of Lebanon’s Shi’a, and his ability to appeal to their sense of national consciousness and their deep embedded sense of communal identity which contributed largely to his acquired influence. Amal’s success in politically mobilizing the Shi’a was largely due to Sadr’s effective leadership (or his agency), and his ability to socially construct a

distinct Shi'a identity discursively in a way that was positively received by his community. This specific form of discursive identity-construction, which expressed a distinct form of Lebanese Shi'a nationalism, was absent in the other leftist movements' discourses and programs.

As Tilly (2002) argued, the potential success of a given social movement's mobilization is inherently connected to its effective use of preexisting symbols and historical narratives to create specific forms of identity-construction. He claimed that, "It is becoming increasingly clear that activation of previously existing solidarities sustained by ties and social networks plays a fundamental role as a mechanism of mobilization in political action and social movements" (Tilly 2002: 50). In this respect, Musa al Sadr's successful rise as a charismatic leader is not only attributable to structural changes and the political context, but also derives from his exercised agency.

The reasons for this lie in the fact that unlike the *zu'ama*, Sadr called for political and social changes to the status quo. Furthermore, his leadership contrasted with that of the Shi'a *ulama* since he dismissed the notion of political passivity. His critique of both groups greatly contributed to his popularity and that of Amal's during the early 1970s (Norton 1987: 73-75). All of the above factors will be explored in this final section to explain how Amal emerged as the first distinctly Lebanese Shi'ite social movement. Amal's rise in influence enabled the Lebanese Shi'a to express their sense of nationalism for the first time in their country's history, a factor which completely changed the political face of Lebanon.

As mentioned previously, what distinguished Amal from other leftist movements concerns the notion of communal identity. Before the rise of Amal, no prior social movement had articulated a distinct sense of Lebanese Shi'ite nationalism. Other leftist movements had not appealed specifically to the needs and interests of the Shi'a, but expressed their ideological agenda either from a classicist perspective (the communists), or addressed Arab nationalism as a 'secular' phenomenon that transcended confessional lines (Owen 2004: 150-151). Historically, the Lebanese Shi'a were divided in their support for regional Arab nationalist schemes since they were usually led by Sunni Arab Muslim leaders and activists (Sankari 2005: 131-135).

Musa al Sadr wanted to offer something different to the Shi'a of Lebanon. What distinguished him from other leftist movement leaders is that he recognized one core aspect of Lebanese society they attempted to ignore: confessional or sectarian loyalties still served as the main source of social organization in the country, and could not be overlooked in the hopes of

forming an 'Arab nation' or transcending 'class differences' (Maktabi 1999: 220-225). As Halawi (1992) notes, "The bonds of kinship and religious identity in Lebanon permeated daily life and cut across discrepant levels of wealth, education, and social status. The importance of these bonds was then exaggerated by the country's electoral laws and confessional system." (Halawi 1992: 76). Confessional religious identities thus permeated Lebanese life to such an extent that they were typically associated with other communal forms of identification, including but not limited to class status, political movements, and even national identity (Owen 2004: 151).

Imam al Sadr's agency matters here in that he recognized this essential facet of Lebanese society. He understood that the success of any social movement in Lebanon was inherently tied to its expressed identification with the specific religious and national sentiments of its prospective constituent base. In Lebanon, the conception of national identity was (and arguably still is) framed in terms of confessional identities. To be 'Lebanese' then is to be Lebanese Shi'a, Lebanese Sunni, or Lebanese Maronite instead of simply 'Lebanese' (Khalaf 1987: 33). In a country that had constructed its national identity mainly according to Sunni and Maronite historical narratives, the Shi'a discovered their communal identity was absent from the dominant discourses on Lebanese 'nationhood' (Khalaf 1987: 33-34).

The Amal movement then should not be merely described as a Shi'ite militia which formed as the Lebanese state broke down in the years preceding Lebanon's civil war. Although Amal's activities as a militia have arguably generated the most attention, the dimension that is the focus of this paper concerns Amal's predecessor movement, Harakat Al Mahrumun, which eventually formed the core base of Amal. The occurrence of two key events enabled Musa al Sadr to effectively construct a Shi'ite identity that resonated with future Amal supporters: the 1967 creation of the SISC (the Supreme Islamic Shi'a Council), and the formation of the Mahrumun movement. To understand why a significant portion of the Lebanese Shi'a supported Amal when it was created in 1974, it is important to analyze the movement's precursor, the Mahrumun movement. For scholars who are interested in explaining the process of identity-construction within the context of social movement theory, Sadr's Mahrumun movement was mainly responsible for this process of identity-construction, whereas Amal became the overarching umbrella label for the principles Sadr's Harakat stood for.

By the 1960s, several leftist parties were competing for support among the newly politicized Shi'a community (Norton 1985: 113). Musa al-Sadr was a still a relative newcomer to the scene of

Lebanese politics at this point. Born and educated in Qum, Iran, in 1928, Sadr developed his social and political worldviews there. He attended college at the Tehran Faculty of Law and Political Economy. Initially, Sadr had no intentions to become a cleric, but decided to pursue this path at the behest of his father who was concerned with the fate of Iran's Shi'i institutions. In 1953, he moved to Najaf, Iraq and studied *fiqh* with the Marja' al-Kabir Muhsin al-Hakim. He finally moved to Lebanon in 1957 at the request of Tyre's religious leader, Sayyid 'Abd al-Husain Sharaf al-Din (Norton 1987: 39).

Sadr was known to be an ambitious character who was deeply concerned with the plight of Lebanon's Shia. Upon arrival in Lebanon, he began to build his support base in the South through engaging in community development work, which included his supported construction of a vocational institute in the town of Burj al-Shimali, the establishment of *al-Mu'assasa al-Ijtima'iyya* (The Social Institute) for Tyre's orphans, and the creation of *Ma'had al-Dirasat al-Islamiyya* (The Institute of Islamic Studies) in Tyre, the town which held the largest Shi'a population in the South (Halawi 1992: 136). These moves enabled Sadr to exercise his leadership in ways that expanded his support among future Amal supporters.

Sadr also developed an ingenious strategy which solidified his support among the Shi'a. Until the late 1960s, the Shi'a in Lebanon did not have any form of communal religious representation that could effectively communicate their needs or pursue political reform. A few attempts were made to create an independent Shi'a Council which could be more responsive than the *ulama* were in the area of community-development projects. Historically, the prior attempts by groups of Shi'a professionals like the *Hay'at al-Nidal al-Ijtima'i* (The Committee for Social Struggle) failed due to the absence of charismatic leadership. The *Hay'at* especially faced opposition to its programs from the Shi'ite *ulama* who wanted to maintain their dominance over the community's religious affairs. Furthermore, the *Hay'at* and the Shi'a in general also faced opposition from the Sunni religious establishment, which desired a united religious authority. This factor obviously tilted in their favor given the Sunnis' existing power compared to the Shi'a (Khazen 2000: 43). Despite such opposition, the *Hay'at* did achieve limited successes which included obtaining Shi'a appointments to governmental administrative posts for the first time (al-Shira 1984: 53-54).

One of Musa al Sadr's aims was to redress the hegemonic positions the Sunnis maintained religiously and the Maronites possessed politically. He pursued the goal of creating an independent

Shi'a religious council for this reason. Unlike his predecessors, Sadr possessed two advantages that worked in his favor: he first maintained relatively good relations with President Shihab and later, President Charles Helou who were aware of his successful development projects in the South; secondly, he possessed a unique level of charisma and cunning other Shi'a leaders lacked. He was also renowned for his spirit of tolerance and interfaith understanding, a characteristic which earned him support from the government (Ajami 1986: 178). Sadr's ability to gain state support for his initiative was crucial for the creation of the first independent religious council for the Shi'ites' affairs.

The Supreme Islamic Shi'a Council (SISC) was created by Act 72/67 of the Lebanese Parliament in May 1967. Upon its signing, the Bill stated, "The Islamic Shi'a community henceforth became independent in its religious affairs, endowments, and institutions with representatives" (Halawi 1992: 160). This move proved to be widely popular among the Shi'a since it marked the first time their confessional community was able to exercise independent authority over communal affairs. Of the eighteen officially recognized religious sects in Lebanon, the Shi'a were the second to last to establish an independent religious council. By contrast, the Sunnis were given a council titled, The Supreme Official Islamic Council, which was created by law in 1955. As Halawi notes, "The Shi'a community needed a central mechanism to coordinate its affairs, to defend its rights, and to oversee its interests. Such was the inevitable consequence of Lebanon's political configuration with its emphasis on communal particularism" (Halawi 1992: 141).

Sadr's second strategy to obtain further political mobilization was connected to the leadership he exercised at the newly created Council. On May 23rd, 1969, Musa al Sadr was elected the first chairman of the SISC for a renewable term of six years (Halawi 1992: 142). It was at that moment that his increasing group of followers bestowed the title of "Imam" to him, which indicated their support for his political agenda. The conferred title of "Imam" encompasses tremendous symbolism in the Shi'a Islamic tradition. In the history of Shi'a Islam, the title "Imam" was historically associated with the 'just and righteous' descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who could lead the *umma* to fight oppression and social injustice (Zaman 1990: 200-211). The fact that Sadr is still referred to by his conferred title "Imam" to this day illustrates the iconic status he acquired among the Lebanese Shi'a.

Sadr decided to use his newfound leadership at the SISC to develop a movement that would historically transform the Shi'a community and pave the path for Amal's entry. In contrast to his

leftist competitors, Sadr decided to combine the use of Shi'ite historical narratives and religious symbols with political associations in order to gain support for his new movement. Sadr's movement, Harakat al-Mahrumun, seemed to capture the plight of the Shi'a in its very name of 'deprivation.' Khazen explains the significance of the term: "Sadr had captured the social and political realities of his community and brandished a new and powerful political weapon: that of the deprived, al-mahrumun. The symbolism of al-mahrumun was an unprecedented 'unifying factor' for all the 'Shi'a,' drawn from all social backgrounds" (Khazen 2000: 43).

Sharara (1996) also adds that the main reason Sadr's allusion to 'deprivation' proved to be a potent force of social organization was not solely due to his charismatic leadership. It was the historical context, the implications of the Shi'ites' demographic expansion, and the regional disparities between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' which brought the sentiment of 'deprivation' to the forefront. Sadr's ability as a leader to translate these experiences into political and even religious language was where his political genius lay (Sharara 1996: 23-24). Ajami (1986) also concurs with this analysis and argues that Sadr's ability to gain support for his Mahrumun movement and later, Amal, was largely due to his specific interpretation of Islam, which contrasted with that of the Shi'a *ulama*:

His political agenda emerged out of the way he interpreted faith. Faith was not about ritual, but social concerns, about the needs of men. Religion was not something that had to be quarantined and kept pure by stern guardians; it could be made to address modern needs...political ambition—something that the traditional men of religion frowned upon, a defiled realm of greed and naked desire—Sayyid Musa neither openly asserted nor forswore...He was the harbinger of a religion-political movement that blurred the line between worldliness, *al dunya*, and religion, *al din*. (Ajami 1986: 96-97)

What seems to be missing in the above analysis concerns the notion of nationalism. Sadr's approach to politics was unique in the sense that he attempted to demonstrate before the Lebanese public that Lebanon belonged to the Shi'a as much as it did to the Maronites and the Sunnis. If there was one key goal Sadr developed for his movement, it was to carve out a public space for his community where it could claim its version of a Lebanese national identity. Through giving hundreds of speeches during a tumultuous decade which resulted in civil war, Sadr staked his claim that his community was experiencing two forms of deprivation: deprivation due to long-term neglect from the state, and deprivation of their homeland in the South due to the extension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Khazen 2000: 49).

Since this paper advocates using critical social theories to explain the rise of social movements, the last part of this section will utilize discursive analysis to illustrate the specific forms

of identity-construction Sadr employed to gain support for the Harakat and its successor, Amal. Granted, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address this process in relation to the full scale of events which occurred between 1970 and 1978, the year Musa al Sadr disappeared on a trip to Libya. The following analysis presented below is meant to merely be a selection that complements the structural and cultural analysis that was addressed above.

Through using discursive methods of identity-construction, Sadr associated being a Lebanese Shi'ite with a state of 'dispossession,' 'disenfranchisement,' and 'deprivation.' His usage of such vocabulary enabled him to publicly redefine what it meant to be both Lebanese and Shi'a. However, this process of identity-construction was not developed merely for descriptive purposes; Sadr was also calling for immediate action and change. He wanted to improve the plight of his community (Ajami 1986: 23-25). A few excerpts from his speeches illustrate this dynamic example of communal identity-construction through public discursive methods:

The Lebanese Shi'a are as old as Lebanon itself. They have participated with the other communities in cultivating its plains and mountains, developing its land, and protecting its frontiers. The Shi'a have survived in Lebanon in prosperity and adversity. They have soaked its soil with the blood of their children, and have raised its banners of glory in its sky, for they have led most of its revolts. (Halawi 1992: 19)

The above statement illustrates how Sadr associated the notion of being Shi'a with Lebanese nationalist credentials. At the time, this was as significant development given that the Shi'a had previously not had a leader who could appeal to their communal values in a way that was relevant to their daily political lives. In regards to the above statement, there are a few interesting notes to mention here. He declares that the Lebanese Shi'a are as "old as Lebanon itself." It is possible to interpret that statement as being one where Sadr associates Shi'a history with Lebanese history. In this respect, he fuses the two identities together in an attempt to bolster the Shi'ites' nationalist credentials as members of a Lebanese 'nation.' He supports this view with explaining that the Shi'a have "participated with other communities in cultivating its plains and mountains, developing its land, and protecting its frontiers." Sadr thus connects being a Shi'a with public service and loyalty to the Lebanese state. In other speeches, he juxtaposes the Shi'ites' public contributions with the 'deprivation' they have experienced at the hands of the state:

We who built the palaces of Beirut, we shall occupy them and live in them. The palaces should be the actual homes of the children of the South, and not Red Cross tents...We are demanding that the state bear responsibility for protecting the South, and that we cooperate with the Arab armies....

We have given the state the opportunity to exercise such responsibility, but it has not done so.
(*Al Hayat*, 27 May 1970)

He also defines Lebanese ‘nationalism’ in relation to promoting “human dignity” and “justice.” This social construction of a Lebanese national identity is illustrated in Sadr’s following statement:

Because of our faith in the dignity of man, and our refusal to tolerate oppression, ignorance, negligence, and all that contradicts that dignity; because of our loyalty to our fatherland, Lebanon, the land open to all men, land of love where all can live in harmony and with respect for the dignity of all; because of our belief that justice is the foundation on which nations rise and by which they endure, especially nations like Lebanon whose greatest asset is its human resources; the Supreme Islamic Shi’a Council feels that the present situation in Lebanon in which people live, as they do, in a world of anxiety facing a threatening future, is an obstacle to the aspirations of its citizens and to their hopes for a proper life and for dignity. (*Al Hayat*, 2 December 1974)

Sadr’s conception of a Lebanese Shi’a national identity, which he consistently associated with concern for social justice and equality, is conveyed in his statement regarding the objectives of Harakat al Mahrumun:

Harakat al-Mahrumun in Lebanon is...an expression of the human ambition for a better life which drives him to resist all that undermines his life, dulls his talents, and threatens his future. Harakat al-Mahrumun is...a movement of all the disinherited...of those who feel deprived...and fearful about their future, as well as those who bear responsibility to the disinherited and the fearful with honor and dedication. It is the movement of the Lebanese toward the betterment of their lives. (Norton 1987: 144-145)

Although Norton (1987), Halawi (1992), and Ajami (1986) all argue that the Harakat’s members repeatedly claimed it was not a sectarian movement *persay*, all three believe that it was a *de facto* Shi’a nationalist movement since Sadr was identifying the notion of ‘deprivation’ with the plight of Shi’a southerners in particular. If there is one key commonality between all of the above statements and others, it is the fact that Sadr prioritized a Lebanese national identity and Lebanese aspirations for human betterment in their society. He did not argue that the Shi’a should transcend their national identity to identify with a universal umma, nor did he mention that being Lebanese was less important than being Shi’a. Through discursive analysis of Sadr’s statements, we can conclude that he attempted to socially construct a distinct Lebanese Shi’a national identity in order to create a space for his religious community in Lebanon’s public life. The implications of this analysis is that Sadr’s statements also illustrate that scholars need to rethink their constructed dichotomies between movements that are ‘nationalist’ versus those that are ‘Islamist.’

To assess a movement’s relative success is quite difficult, and some would say impossible. In the case study of Amal, it is plausible to present a few conclusions regarding how Sadr’s

movement was received. Amal was finally formed in 1974 and became the ‘military wing’ of the Harakat al Mahrumun. The two movements were synonymous to the point that Amal’s Charter was the same as the Harakat’s (Norton 1987: 144-146). Observers usually explain that Sadr’s move was more practical than it was religious or cultural. As the Lebanese state gradually broke down in the decade prior to the civil war, Sadr increasingly found his once moderate position of peaceful activism to be untenable. His initial form of activism was one of active civil disobedience; as time progressed, Sadr realized he would lose Shi’ite support to leftist movements that increasingly became more radical as Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Lebanese, and Palestinian-Lebanese conflicts dissolved into worse forms of intergroup violence.

Despite Amal’s newly adopted militant activities in the mid 1970s, its core communal identity continued to be socially constructed by its leaders in a manner that valued both confessional identity and nationalist endeavors. Their Charter conveys this form of identity-construction:

Our movement is completely devoted to national sovereignty and to independence in defining its own political course...The sovereignty of the motherland cannot be achieved without according sovereignty to its citizens and protecting them from both political convulsions and capers and from restrictions on their free will and thought. Such sovereignty must be accompanied by a fusing together of the people in the tolerant melting pot of patriotism to produce a strong and healthy Lebanon embracing all her different cultures. (Norton 1987: 73)

Conclusions

The legacy of Musa al-Sadr is that he successfully created the first distinctly Shi’ite social movement in Lebanon, a historical development which completely changed the political face of the Shi’a through specific forms of communal identity-construction. Before the advent of Sadr, the Shi’a had lagged behind Lebanon’s other confessional communities in terms of their political involvement. The 1960s thus ushered in a new era for Lebanon’s Shi’a community: the emergence of Amal only marked a beginning of a new era in Shi’a history where their community joined others as a major political actor. Although scholars have either focused on structural change or have overemphasized individual agency, this study has attempted to illustrate that analysis of both variables is necessary for explaining the emergence of social movements. This study also concludes that a constructivist theoretical approach effectively explains how social movements evolve in response to processes of structural change, cultural transformation, and specific forms of identity-construction. The case study of Lebanon’s Shi’a indicates that we can no longer address communal identities that are ‘national’ or ‘religious’ as being mutually exclusive entities. In the future,

scholars could benefit from integrating the use of constructivist theories into their study of social movements.

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