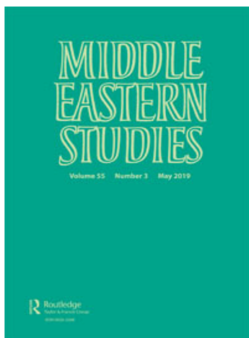

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Turning ex-combatants into Sadris: explaining the emergence of the Mahdi Army

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On 18 July 2003, Muqtada al-Sadr, the son of the famous Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, stood on the pulpit of the revered Kufa mosque in Iraq. Muqtada announced to an excited audience that he 'will strive and invites us all to strive with me for the creation of a constitution and a council of governors with the aim of forming a state.'[1] More importantly, Muqtada invited all to 'establish the most important constituent of a state and that is the establishment of an Islamic Army' and 'God willing this army will carry the name of The Mahdi Army.'[2] This Mahdi Army (Jaysh al Mahdi or JAM hereafter) became a force to be reckoned with, as they challenged the giants of the world such as the US occupational force, Islamic institutions such as the *Hawza* of Najaf, or the powerful militias such as the *Badr* brigades and al-Qaeda. Even the Iraqi government had to face the Mahdi Army. Furthermore, the name of the Mahdi Army became associated with the infamous 'Shia death squads' during the height of the sectarian tensions in 2005–2006. Nonetheless, its ability to organise and regulate government services such as security, health care and education gave the Mahdi Army a lasting presence, especially after trustees of the Sadrist movement (JAM's social representatives) obtained the ministries of health and transport through the 2005 elections. The electoral victory only enhanced the presence of the Mahdi Army in Iraq, and affirmed their paramilitary status.[3] Finally, the Mahdi Army, contrary to all the other militias in Iraq at the time (i.e. the *Badr* brigade*)* was gradually connected to an emerging *Sadri* identity that was distinct from the wider Shia identity.[4]

A paramilitary organisation is a group of armed actors that commit illegal violence against civilians in service of state interests. A feature unique to the Mahdi Army was that they were a militia that also provided public services such as security, infrastructural regulation and charity. An insurgency group could perform similar public services, however, intended against the interest of the state and with the intention to replace or displace the state.[5] Certainly, the Mahdi Army often clashed with Iraqi and US civilian and military representatives and was critical of both.[6] However, the Mahdi Army's leadership gave little indication of a planned attempt to overthrow the ruling order. Moreover, contrary to what is assumed, the US occupational force and the Iraqi government were rather tolerant and cooperative with JAM if JAM did not cross boundaries of violence. In a sense, the state did delegate part of its monopoly on violence to JAM within certain areas in southern Iraq.[7] The Iraqi state eventually co-opted JAM more explicitly as an armed force when the Sadrist movement joined the political process in 2005. Therefore, JAM was a paramilitary organisation from early on, and its cooperation with the state, whether American or Iraqi, fluctuated in intensity but was always present.

However, the ambiguity of JAM's relation with the state raises questions about the usefulness of depending on an understanding of paramilitaries only within the pro-state and anti-state

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dichotomy.[8] Ariel Ahram rightfully argued that paramilitaries 'share characteristics of both state and counter state actors.'[9] I would like to propose that the Mahdi Army emerged through a bottom-up process outside the perimeters of the state rather than through a top-down process. This development provided a certain level of autonomy to JAM, which defined its ambiguous relationship with the state and with the Sadrist movement itself. John Markoff has argued that the organisational structures and symbols of the foundational stage are often definitive for the trajectory of an organisation.[10] The importance of an organisation's foundational stage for an organisation's trajectory justifies the analysis of the formative stages of the Mahdi Army for a better understanding of it.

While there have been a large number of studies on the emergence of paramilitary organisations through state initiatives, research on bottom-up paramilitary formation has been understudied. The unanticipated and ostensibly ex-nihilo emergence of the Mahdi Army provides a unique opportunity to understand paramilitary formation from a bottom-up perspective.

Theoretical background

Julie Mazzei has emphasised that models which explain the emergence of paramilitaries as products of mostly state interests fail to account 'for the grassroots-level of activity required in the mobilisation of paramilitary groups.'[11] Mazzei has therefore proposed that paramilitaries tend to emerge, when there is a closed off political system, a developing opposition movement, internal dissent within the political elite and a history of providing arms to civilians. When political, military and economic elites feel internally and externally pressured, they are likely to tap into existing networks to form a paramilitary organisation that can repress external and internal resistance to their aims.[12] In short, a social conflict creates political opportunities for elites with vested interests to mobilise existing networks for their own benefits. Yet Mazzei has not explained what kind of networks vested elites rely on, or what kind of networks are more vulnerable to paramiltiarisation. Furthermore, Mazzei has described the existence of social conflict but does not clarify the type of social conflict or where the conflict originates. Ahram, who has identified a similar process, names various networks that can be paramilitarised but does not stipulate what specific characteristics these networks have.[13]

In the case of Iraq and the Mahdi Army, I will argue that an important but unaddressed factor regarding the formation of paramilitaries is the state's inability to effectively demobilise its armed civilians after a formal war, which effectively fosters 'ex-combatant communities' that provoke a particular social conflict prone to paramilitary emergence. Alec Campbell has suggested that scholars of state-formation focus on the state's ability to increase its coercive powers by monopolising violence and employing it during war, which stimulates tighter state centralisation and power.[14] According to Campbell, the state's growing monopoly on violence contains a neglected paradox, namely that state formation means monopolising coercive means and depriving civilian populations access to those means by criminalising it. Yet you need to arm subjects to create those coercive means, and simultaneously maintain enough of a balance to prevent some of those same subjects to taking up arms against yourself.[15]

However, persuading a populace (ex-combatants) to demobilise once a war is over and removing from the population its power to resist the state apparatus has a price often paid by the state in citizen rights, land, employment or ideological acknowledgement for veterans.[16] The larger the population the state armed, the costlier it will be to demobilise the population after the war.

In addition, members of 'ex-combatant communities' have unproductive skills during peacetime, which complicates demobilisation further since ex-combatants risk being a bottomless pit of costs that the state needs to justify vis-à-vis non-combatant civilians.[17] The burden of demobilisation is heavier if there is dissension among elites, economic crisis and state-disorder; in post-conflict societies such as post-2003 Iraq, these circumstances are the rule rather than the

exception.[18] Because ex-combatants are neither part of the workforce nor the business class, they become particularly vulnerable to mobilisation by any actor able to organise their specific war experiences into political action if the state cannot effectively demobilise its veterans.[19] Post-conflict societies can therefore pose a major threat to the monopoly of violence by the state. I hypothesise that if a social conflict's origins lie in a demobilisation crisis, then the formation of a paramilitary group such as JAM becomes more likely.

However, Anders Themnér has rightfully argued that the mere presence of social conflict, economic crisis, unemployment or political opportunities is not enough to cause or explain the emergence of (para)militias from 'ex-combatant' communities.[20] Contrary to what is assumed, ex-combatants are risk averse, and have a disinterest in picking up arms on their own.[21] Moreover, most ex-combatants lack the competency, ideology and organisation to mobilise themselves into an armed group. Ex-combatants, therefore, must be mobilised by external actors. Themnér refers to these external actors as entrepreneurs of violence.[22] Yet, due to the isolated nature of ex-combatants and a sense of insecurity, certain 'military affinities' that resonate with the habits, ideas and repertoires learned during army service need to be communicated by the entrepreneur of violence so that the ex-combatants can recognise their objective political opportunities.[23]

Therefore, to understand the role of the entrepreneur of violence during a demobilisation crisis, the way in which the Sadrist movement, through their communication strategy, specifically targeted Iraqi ex-combatants to mobilise them for the Mahdi Army will be discussed. We will first review the pre-2003 origins of the Mahdi Army to understand why the personal history of ex-combatants was crucial to the formation of JAM. In the second part, we will analyse how Muqtada al-Sadr appealed to ex-combatants in his Friday sermons between 2003 and 2004. In the final part, Sadrist music will be discussed to understand how a Sadrist identity was mutated to become agreeable for Iraqi ex-combatants. Due to the impossibility of doing fieldwork in Iraq, songs remain one of the few sources that can offer an insight on how Sadr gained popularity and acceptance amongst ex-combatants.

The limited amount of source material and the inherent danger in researching militias in Iraq that are currently armed places some limits on researching JAM. Therefore, aspects like JAM's inner organisational structure or its on-the-ground recruitment and training procedures are left unaddressed and are beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the general events of post-2003 Iraq have been widely documented in witness accounts, journalism, non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports and secondary literature and can provide abundant contextual information for identifying the structural factors regarding the emergence of JAM. Furthermore, the Sadrist movement itself produced a fair amount of source material, which includes Muqtada's sermons, music videos known as *Sadriyat*, documentaries and several Sadrist publications. These materials offer an insight into the Sadrist movement's elite and into the ideas that the elite tried to impose on the soldiers of JAM. Finally, several unstructured interviews on the events of pre and post-2003 with Iraqi witnesses were quite valuable in verifying information. All these sources should be sufficient to explore the different factors related to the paramilitary emergence of JAM.

Origins of the Mahdi Army

Muqtada al-Sadr is the son of the famous Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (Sadr II). Sadr II had a large network of charities in the 1990s, mosques and junior clerics to enable him to gain a wide appeal amongst the Shia of Iraq.[24] The sermons and ideological convictions of Sadr II offered a shared identity to the supposedly estranged Shia of Iraq and were based on nationalism, Islam and anti-imperialism.[25] Eventually, the Ba^{c}thist regime began to see a growing threat in the appeal of Sadr II and assassinated him in 1999. After four years of silence, Muqtada emerged in 2003 and started giving Friday speeches that were reminiscent of his father's. As

tensions were rising in post-2003 Iraq, Muqtada's fiery sermons that rejected the Americans and asserted Iraqi nationalism, and Islamic morals gained the attention of a large swathe of Iraqis who decided to take arms under this new leader. It is remarkable that after the former government was toppled by the United States, JAM came into existence almost ex-nihilo within four months.[26] The militia also had a political wing named *Tayar al-Sadr* (The Sadr Movement), which emerged simultaneously within JAM, and had intimate ties with JAM.[27] In addition to the military and political wings, there was an affiliated charity organisation called *Maktab Shaheed al-Sadr* (Office of the Martyr Sadr), which provided health care and educational and financial services to the lower classes of Baghdad and Najaf.[28] These three 'Sadrist' organisations operated as a veritable state within a state.

While much of the relevant literature either concentrates on the Sadrist movement instead of JAM or treats the two as the same entity, there are several conflicting interpretations, especially regarding the origins, emergence and motivations for membership of JAM. Much of the literature claims that after 2003, Muqtada merely re-activated the organisational apparatus of his father, which supposedly operated clandestinely between 1999 and 2003. This same apparatus under the leadership of Muqtada produced the Sadrist movement, which then mobilised JAM. There is therefore an emphasis on the continuity of the Sadrist movement since the 1990s. For example, anthropologist Nicholas Krohley has claimed that the Sadrist movement's 'immediate roots (go back) to the 1990s.'[29] Then, in 2003, this pre-existing Sadrist movement was utilised directly because Muqtada was automatically 'the head of one of the country's only broadly-based popular movements', which implies he had instant legitimacy amongst JAM as well.[30] Patrick Cockburn has also pointed to an explicit continuity between Sadr II and the post-2003 Sadrist movement under Muqtada, saying 'Sadrists picked up where they had left off at the last high point in Shia political activism before state repression intensified following the assassination of Sadr II.'[31] Leslie Bayless goes further and claims that there was a persistent 'Sadrist movement' since the early 1960s that started with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (Sadr I) and that 'each time the Sadrist movement appeared to mature into an expansive entity, its core was eradicated and its followers left with no choice but to temporarily recoil – although, remarkably, this cluster of Sadrists never completely disintegrated.'[32]

The authors who argue for placing the origins of the Sadrist movement and JAM in a pre-2003 underground clandestine movement have pointed to the Sadrist clerics working with Muqtada to provide governmental and charity services once the state imploded in 2003. It has indeed been confirmed that shortly after the implosion of the Iraqi state, agents associated with Sadr II started taking over basic government services such as security, health and education and provided some form of self-rule.[33] However, confirming that clerics provided state services after 2003 is not sufficient to prove the continuity of a distinct network of a pre-existing Sadrist movement. Within the early months of the American occupation, many local elites of differing backgrounds decided to provide basic services and impose some form of local self-rule; this was quite common all over Iraq and not exclusive to Shia-populated towns and districts.[34] The wide-scale phenomenon of local elites providing state services raises questions about the uniqueness of a supposed pre-existing Sadrist network performing these activities in post-2003 Iraq.

Many of the authors claim that there is/was a practical and ideological continuity between Sadr II's movement and the current Sadrist movement and not JAM specifically. However, their assertions regarding an enduring Sadrist continuity has had implications for the interpretations that authors provided on who joined JAM. The constituency of Muqtada's adherents is often reduced to their lower-class status and their Shia background as the main motivator to join JAM or the Sadrist movement.[35] While the image of 'Sadrist devotees' being 'channelled into the militia' is an attractive explanation, it muddles the different reasons why individuals joined JAM, which cannot be explained through ideological commitment to Muqtada's father or by class solely.[36] Asef Bayat has written that in analysing social movements in the Middle East, authors tend to rely on the discourse of those movements' elites (i.e. the pre-2003 Sadrist continuity) to

understand the motivations of the constituency of Middle-Eastern movements.[37] Yet, as extensive research on social movements has shown, various actors with interests that are not always aligned with the same convictions belonging to the elites join organisations.[38]

We have little evidence on the impact Sadr II had on average Iraqis during the 1990s. Most information regarding Sadr II's impact emerged after 2003 and was formulated through a specific post-2003 lens.[39] Furthermore, the movement under Sadr II was a fundamentally different organisation than its post-2003 successor. Contrary to the post-2003 Sadrist movement, Sadr II's movement did not get involved in committing violence in any form, not even defensively, throughout the whole of the 1990s.[40] The non-violent nature of Sadr II's movement had partly to do with the repressive capabilities of the Iraqi government that structurally limited the possibility for Sadr II's adherents to commit violence. The lack of violent operations by Sadr II's movement also indicates a lack of internal organisation or subjective will, which some argue is a condition within an organisation before it resorts to violence. [41] However, JAM clearly had the expertise and will to use violence; yet this expertise and will cannot be retraced to Sadr II and thus needs to be located elsewhere.

While the events of 1993–1999 surrounding Sadr II are relevant to understand the historical background, ideological ideas and symbolism of JAM, the pre-2003 events surrounding Sadr II, are insufficient to explain the emergence of JAM. Peter Harling has argued that the Sadrist movement is better understood as a post-2003 construct, which encompasses a dynamic plethora of factors that influenced the emergence of the Sadrist movement and JAM.[42] In short, because there might be continuity between Sadr I and Sadr II, it still needs to be explained how this organisation attained an armed wing. This article proposes to focus on Iraqi ex-combatants to comprehend how the Sadrist movement attained an armed wing like JAM.

Most literature on JAM has largely neglected the specific role ex-combatants played in the formation of JAM. Patrick Cockburn's account of Muqtada, which is often considered to be the most detailed book on the Sadrist movement, does not once classify JAM's constituency as that of ex-combatants and instead, mainly characterises them as young, poor and religious.[43] The crisis report group recounts the JAM constituency mainly as a 'a mob-like following that joined in the wake of the Baᶜthist demise and reportedly includes some Baᶜthist elements' but it is not specified what is meant by Baᶜthist elements nor what the added analytical value is of identifying Baᶜthist elements.[44] In his book, *Insurgency and counter insurgency*, Ahmad Hashim has also confirmed that JAM has 'several members of the former army' but generally gives little analytical value to trying to understand how JAM functioned the way it functioned or emerged.[45]

Before providing an analysis on the role of ex-combatants in the emergence of JAM, two points need to be made: first, in discussing JAM in relation to post-2003 Iraq, it is often forgotten that the impact of Saddam's state apparatus was much more significant for most Iraqis than Sadr II's fiery speeches.[46] Second, it would be fruitful to trace JAM's repertoires of violence to those durable repertoires ingrained into Iraq's armed forces during the reign of Saddam Hussain rather than to Sadr II's movement.

When writing about paramilitaries, Ahram has emphasised the role of a state in fostering repertoires that define patterns of coordinated and collective violence. Once a group of individuals has been trained and habituated by the state, 'they can be deployed to a variety of contexts and circumstances, becoming part of a durable repertoire.'[47] Based on Ahram's understanding of repertoires a new perspective will be provided to the discussion about the origins of JAM in relation to the Sadrist movement.

The repertoires of the Mahdi Army after a long-lasting demobilisation crisis

Post-2003 Iraq experienced a demobilisation crisis that was not effectively resolved and facilitated the emergence of JAM. By 2003 Iraq had 1,054,000 men formerly employed in the regular

army, republican guards, the Jerusalem brigade, or Fedayeen Saddam or the reserve army, and they were not effectively demobilised after the USA toppled the regime in 2003.[48] This crisis facilitated the creation of several militias whose constituencies must have contained a significant ex-combatant community. Iraq's demobilisation crisis had been a persistent problem after the Iran-Iraq war (1988). Saddam Hussain, the incumbent president of Iraq, had to endure coup attempts and growing criticism from his one million person army, which consisted of members who were difficult to re-employ because of their unproductive skills – especially because of a growing economic crisis.[49] Saddam's temporary solution to the demobilisation crisis was to invade Kuwait for economic gain but also to provide a conflict to occupy the large and threatening group of armed Iraqis.[50] The Kuwait war was a disaster that led to a mass uprising against the state by deserting soldiers in the 1991 uprising or the *intifada al sha'abaniyya*. The conflict was a textbook example of when a state's monopoly on violence was temporarily undermined by a failed demobilisation. Despite effective repression by the regime with the help of the United States, the problem of a large group of armed citizens who could threaten the regime remained unsolved, as was proven by the enduring coup attempts within the Ba^cth regime.[51]

Iraq's demobilisation crisis was rekindled when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. Saddam Hussain was able to contain the demobilisation crisis by exploiting the sanctions and expanding the functions of the army in the 1990s.[52] The United States, however, ignored this crisis in 2003. The United States disbanded the Iraqi Army and its associated security organisations such as the Jerusalem Brigade and the Fedayeen without paying the price of demobilisation: that is to say the state has to use its resources to provide, privilege, capital or at the very least, ideological acknowledgement for ex-combatants.[53]

It is no coincidence that when the Mahdi Army revolted against the occupational forces in April 2004, the analyst Michael Knights likened the fighting scenes to the 1991 uprising.[54] The 2004 uprising was disorganised and easily repressed like the 1991 uprising, but more importantly, both uprisings were products of a demobilisation crisis in Iraq. Each was also led by ex-combatants, whose repertoires of violence must have endured until 2004.[55] Monica Ingber has touched upon Iraq's repertoires of violence during Saddam's reign: 'secret police and intelligence agency, the army and the party militia are representative of the institutions used to survey the population and ensure compliance'. [56] Ingber's description refers to a repertoire whose main function was local security, repression of defiance, arrest, torture and the general assertion of dominance over one's own citizens through violence. Many of these feats coincided with the repertoires associated with the Mahdi Army, who were known for their internal regulating abilities such as security and infrastructural coordination but also in repressing deviancy from their order.[57]

However, these repertoires excluded, disciplined and coordinated combat against an external enemy and the ability for ex-combatants to self-organise themselves as a unit. The failure of Iraqi soldiers to effectively fight an external enemy or organise themselves as a unit was demonstrated during the US interventions of 1991 and 2003 but also during the 1991 uprising when Iraqi ex-combatants failed to sustainably resist the Ba^cth regime.[58] Yet, importantly, the persistence of these repertoires was also demonstrated by the inability of JAM, to effectively fight an external enemy like the US army in 2004 and the newly trained Iraqi Army in 2007–2008 and the enduring disorganisation within JAM. The continuity of the specific Iraqi repertoires of violence within JAM is clearly clues that there was a presence of a significant group of Iraqi ex-combatants in JAM. These ex-combatants in JAM were familiar with the repertoires of violence of the former Iraqi armed forces and their expertise mainly rested in internal coercion but lacked the ability to organise themselves and conduct conventional combat.

Ex-combatants in JAM

While it is difficult to trace the exact numbers of ex-combatants who entered JAM, it is only self-evident that they must have been significant given the large number of Iraqis who served in the

military before 2003. There have been several reports that point to the truthfulness of this deduction. For example, an Iraqi who participated in the Mahdi Army's confrontation with the United States in 2004 stated, 'Most of us had been in the military, so we know how to move in battle. We didn't need orders or a commander.'[59] Author Ali Abdul Ameer also recalls the story of Qassem Khalaf, a former Iraqi soldier who used his barbershop as an operational base for the Mahdi Army.[60] In an article that Al-Jazeera published in 2004 on the Sadrist uprising, Abu Abdullah, a veteran of the former Iraqi Army, commented that the members of the Mahdi Army had not undertaken any training because 'the majority of Iraqis are trained to fight and deal with weapons through their compulsory military service as well as the wars fought by Iraq over the past two decades.'[61] In addition, there have been multiple reports on the presence of former Fedayeen in JAM.[62]

Aside from ex-combatants, three other groups can be identified as part of JAM, including student militias, whose presence was mainly in the university and on the street imposing their convictions onto fellow students and joining in larger battles when necessary.[63] A remarkable example of this student segment of JAM was found in Philip Robertson's interview with a young man named Hayder: '"I was a history student, but now I have this," he said, holding up a Kalashnikov.'[64] The second group consisted of criminals, who just continued their practice of illegal activities such as smuggling, thievery and extortion under the auspices of JAM and were most likely part of the large number of prisoners Saddam released in 2002.[65] There doubtless was an unidentifiable third group that did not fit within either of the other groups, and for now, we can only conclude that they were youngsters who grew up in the harsh realities of sanctions-Iraq.[66] However, I want to argue that the most important group is that of ex-combatants in JAM.

The presence of ex-combatants within JAM is the most significant factor in trying to understand JAM. An ex-combatant, in the case of an Iraqi ex-combatant, is connected to a larger family network that often depended on his work as a combatant.[67] The central importance of the role of the combatant in Iraqi society made non-combatant elements such as students and the unidentifiable third group mentioned earlier, vulnerable to mobilisation. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in an early combat video of the Mahdi Army in Sadr City, which is not clearly dated but most likely filmed during the skirmishes in the spring of 2004. In the video, we can see boys, who were most likely between the ages of 18 and 22 wielding bazookas and machine guns. They were standing behind walls and looking for opportunities to hit an unidentified enemy, either the Iraqi police or the American army. More importantly, throughout this scene, viewers can hear several older voices instructing the boys how to stand, how to shoot and whether to hide, run or attack. These older men, who were most likely ex-combatants and were facilitating the mobilisation of these young boys, clearly demonstrated that ex-combatants played a vital role in mobilising non-combatants.[68] Furthermore, many combat videos of JAM dated around 2003 and 2004 featured older experienced males instead of adolescents.[69]

Therefore, in trying to understand the formation of JAM, it would serve our analysis to understand ex-combatants as an autonomous group, with certain abilities and potentialities functioning, as Paul Collier calls it, 'social capital'. [70] Social capital can be exploited by entrepreneurs of violence such as the Sadrist leadership but also the United States and Iraqi government. This article thus wants to emphasise the autonomy and agency of the ex-combatants in JAM, rather than the Sadrist movement, because as most authors writing on the Sadrist movement have stated, there is no clear indication that Muqtada gained any serious control over members of JAM until 2008.[71] In 2004, Muqtada himself explained that he could not disband JAM because the group had been established by the Iraqi people, which was subtly admitting Muqtada's limited control on them.[72] Moreover, in most combat videos on the Internet, there is rarely a clerical representative of the Sadrist movement visible, making JAM operations often seem independent and distinct from the Sadrist movement itself. The Sadrist movement had to resort to an extensive mobilisation offensive through sermons, music and videos to maintain legitimacy amongst

ex-combatants and to consolidate a Sadrist identity.[73] The rest of this article will demonstrate how the Sadrist movement specifically targeted ex-combatant communities in their communication strategy and its impact.

Entrepreneurs of violence and military affinities

Yvan Guichaoua has noted three techniques that entrepreneurs of violence use to mobilise a militia to achieve their goals. The use of well-crafted narratives, horizontal network coalitions and the creation of a vertical bond to gather agents to do their work.[74] However, Guichaoua warns us that violent entrepreneurship is a 'two-sided phenomenon, the mobilising methods implemented by leaders have no guarantee of success'. [75]

For Muqtada, the main function of his appointed 'network coalition', namely *Tayar al-Sadr* was that of an enabler of violence.[76] The Sadrist movement, through coordinated sermons and grassroots media throughout the country, provided ideas, symbols, 'well-crafted narratives' and objects of legitimacy such as membership cards and a formal organisational name.[77] These discursive instruments of the Sadrist movement were utilised by violent actors within JAM and *enabled* them to justify their illegal acts of violence without always having to serve the agenda and interests of the Sadrist movement. For the Sadrist movement, in hindsight it could be understood that in 2003 and 2004, the movement was in need of financial resources to fund their network of various services and to become an influential political agent in post-2003 Iraq.[78] However, while that might have been the agenda of the Sadrist movement, between 2003 and 2008, there remained a tension between what the Sadrist movement wanted and what elements of JAM wanted.[79] An illustrative indication of this tension was when Muqtada called his audience 'Stupid, stupid, stupid' during a sermon after they kept shouting slogans that praised Sadr.[80]

According to Themnér, a post-conflict society such as Iraq is ruled by distrust and insecurity since perpetrators have to live next to their victims and elites have to manoeuvre themselves within a new and unfamiliar *status quo*.[81] Muqtada himself was honest about this in his thirty-third sermon, stating that most negative traits of the Iraqi people were because they 'still suffer from the consequences of that difficult time during the era under the former regime.'[82] Themnér has, therefore, explained that if someone wants to resonate with ex-combatants and gain their trust during times of distrust, he has to communicate military affinities that resonate with ex-combatants. Themnér, however, asserted that military affinities must be expressed by elite military individuals (i.e. former generals) who have a common history and vocabulary of combat and war with the ex-combatants.[83] However, Tayar *al-Sadr* gave off a clerical identity and not a military identity. They seem to have nonetheless attempted to compensate for this absence of military elites in their cadre by using specific rhetoric and narratives that resonated with ex-combatants. To understand how the Sadrist movement was targeting ex-combatants through military affinities, we must carefully reread the foundational sermon of the Mahdi Army.

'We are an Army, not a Militia'

Cockburn quotes a scene in his book between himself and three members of JAM: 'There was one point they kept on repeating, as if it mattered a lot to them, "It is wrong," they asserted "for people to call us a militia we are an army."'[84] While sociologically speaking the Mahdi Army was a militia, for the Sadrist movement and JAM was established as a formal army institution and part of an official government that represented Iraq and had its own ministries and even an embassy.[85] Much of the literature has often approached Muqtada's intention to set up a parallel government and the creation of JAM as two separate events and only grants attention to the creation of JAM.[86] I argue that Muqtada's idea of a 'shadow government' was fundamental because it helped him address the aggrieved ex-combatants more effectively. It is therefore

worth quoting the sermon at length here, which set the tone and the context wherein he imagined JAM in its formal state.

> I will strive (…)to establish a constitution and a council of governors which will declare an Islamic state that aims to implement Islamic law and will pave the way for the Mahdi (May he hasten his return) so that he can be the leader and its head (…) you will strive with me for establishing the most important constituent of a state and that is the establishment of an Islamic Army obedient to the Marjaieh and its leaders, and therefore the door for registration to volunteer for this great army is open. (…) this Army will carry the name of the Mahdi Army (…) For this is our country, for this is our Iraq, its leadership is one and its heads of state are one and its army is one under all circumstances. (…) And we will strive, very soon, to open offices in several Islamic countries with the help of God, and this office will represent an embassy in these countries.[87]

Muqtada frequently returned to this idea of a state by referring to the administrative councils and town halls he wanted to establish.[88] Muqtada also explained the importance of having an Iraqi Army that knew what was important for Iraqis so that it knew what it had to defend.[89] Muqtada often referred to people who called the Mahdi Army a 'militia' and not an army in a sarcastic way.[90] In another sermon, he implored his newly formed army to take responsibility regarding the creation and establishment of this new state, which would entail a ministry of interior, foreign affairs, justice, finance and all the other ministries every government should have.[91] In an interesting turn, Muqtada even sent his compliments 'to some of members of the council of rulers who do not criticise this government (of mine).'[92]

When Muqtada claimed that he saw a vacuum and filled it, he was not only referring to the absence of state services, but also most likely to the army as an institution, which was older than the Ba^c^thist regime.[93] When the Coalition provisional authority disbanded the Iraqi Army, it not only sent its soldiers home but disbanded the army as an institution as well and conflated it with the rule of Saddam Hussain.[94] According to Ibrahim Marashi, the erasure of the institutional presence of the Iraqi Army was experienced as a humiliation by a large majority of Iraqis.[95] Marashi quotes Ayad Alawi, Iraq's interim president between 2004 and 2005, who captured the importance of Iraq's Army for Iraqi identity quite well: 'Despite Saddam's attempts to put out the candle of the army and suppress its spirit, he has failed to destroy and alter the history of the establishment of our army, the army of Iraq.'[96]

Muqtada played into the humiliation people experienced because of the disbandment of the Iraqi Army. Muqtada and his followers emphasised that they were an army and part of a larger state structure reminiscent of the past and not a 'private militia'. While this may have been merely rhetoric, it was the right rhetoric at the right time to resonate with ex-combatants in the middle of a serious demobilisation crisis.

Sadrist identity and ex-combatants in music

While the Mahdi Army busied itself closing the compact disk shops that they deemed to be selling inappropriate videos and music,[97] it is often left unmentioned that the Sadrist movement also produced their own video and music materials.[98] One type of content the Sadrists produced were *Sadriyat*, a form of music that contained appraisals of Muqtada and his father, nationalism, religiosity and anti-Americanism and was often accompanied by visual material that contained scenes of battles the Mahdi Army commenced.[99] The quantity of *Sadriyat* that was produced and distributed before the rise of social media could be considered impressive and demonstrates that *Sadriyat* were an important segment of Iraq's cultural space. While it is not clear to what extent the Sadrist movement was officially orchestrating the production and distribution of *Sadriyat*, they were created by serious poets, film editors and singers and were all part of official studios that gave out their own phone numbers for contact. Furthermore, most of these studios operated from Sadr City, which was under the supervision of JAM and Sadrist clerics. Although it cannot be proved that the production of *Sadriyat* was orchestrated by the Sadrist movement, it

had its active approval and escaped the repression that distributors of non-Sadrist content endured, suggesting that taking control of popular culture was relatively important for the Sadrist movement.

I have surveyed and categorised fifty *Sadriyat*, which were most likely produced between 2003 and 2008, and documented several recurring themes and genres. Many *Sadriyat* mainly emphasised the legitimacy of Muqtada's leadership by stressing he was the son of Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. I call these 'Sadr-centric' songs. Sadr-centric songs reflected two points, namely a conscious realisation that Muqtada and the Sadrist movement lacked legitimacy amongst their target audience and that the lack of legitimacy had to be assertively addressed through propaganda in the form of Sadr-centric songs.[100] Second, these *Sadriyat* aimed to consolidate a specific Sadrist identity that was distinct from a general Shia or Iraqi identity and could bind adherents to the Sadrist movement. After 2003, the concept of calling oneself a Sadrist started to take root for the first time. Proof of this is in the recurring question posed to Muqtada 'When is one a Sadrist?', which demonstrated a general unfamiliarity with the concept of a Sadrist identity.[101] While it should not be denied that *Sadriyat* also alluded to a Shia identity, the relation between Shia identity and *Sadriyat* has already been extensively dealt with elsewhere and therefore this article will focus more on unaddressed themes within *Sadriyat*.[102]

However, the large number of Sadr-centric songs seems to have provoked the emergence of *Sadriyat* that de-emphasised Muqtada and his father. Some *Sadriyat* were therefore about highlighting the Mahdi Army's emphasis on combat, military leadership, weapons and anything else associated with a military enterprise. These songs contained minimal references to Sadr or the movement and were categorised as JAM-centric songs. The number of JAM-centric songs was small but demonstrated a sense of subverting autonomy vis-à-vis the Sadr movement and showed an emphasis on military combat that reflected the plight of ex-combatants rather than that of 'Sadrists'.

JAM-centric songs seem to have provoked a third genre of *Sadriyat*, which is best characterised as a balanced attempt to marry the Sadrist identity of the movement to the military identity of ex-combatants. I categorised these songs as balanced. Balanced songs reflected a possible equilibrium in the division of power between ex-combatants and the Sadrist movement.

Sadr-centric, JAM-centric and balanced songs

Muqtada was often referred to as the 'son of Sadr' or only Sadr in general, leaving it unclear which Sadr was being referred to or perhaps implying that Muqtada and his father are the same. This conceptualisation fits the continuity myth of the Sadrist movement and justifies Muqtada's leadership based on lineage. I have categorised as Sadr-centric *Sadriyat* with extensive emphasis on the Sadr lineage and Muqtada. A good example of a Sadr-centric song is in a video, *Hyeel ya ibn al-Sadr hyeel rawi idwanak al weel*, which translates as 'That's right, son of Sadr, that's right, show your enemies the rage'. In the title and in the song, it is Muqtada who fights the enemies and not JAM who are only marginalised here. For example, 'That is right make them even more afraid O Muqtada and push back the army of infidelity'. Therefore, Muqtada was the one doing the actual work and the fighters were only followers and had no real agency.[103]

In a song titled *Ibn al-Sadr harar baladne* (The son of Sadr freed our country), which was most likely produced after 2004, 'the son of Sadr' was not only responsible for fighting the enemy but freeing the whole of Iraq as well. The following passage illustrates the imagined power relationship between Muqtada, his father and JAM very well:

> This country is freed in name of the Sadr.
>
> It is worth it to die for the Son of Sadr.
>
> All those who died and in the grave are with you, O Sadr.

How many Sadris sacrificed their hands in the soil of Kufa.

War is our enjoyment.

A human shield for the son of Sadr, we will build it.[104]

Here, 'Sadr' transcends his position as the leader of the Sadrist movement and becomes conflated with Iraq itself. JAM or its fighters merely existed as a supplement to the will and life of Muqtada, sacrificing themselves during the battle of Kufa in 2003 and functioning as a human shield. In another song titled *al layth al abyath* (The white lion), Muqtada, his father and JAM all merge into one unified Sadr body, acting and operating as one, erasing alternative identities and the agency of independent groups within the Sadr movement such as JAM. In this song, Sadr overtakes all forms of existence for the true Sadr follower.

The love for Sadr relieved my Sadr.[105]

And I said my soul is pure for all my acts are Sadri

The Sadr showed us a country and till death I am a Sadri (…)

And you are the son of Sadr and everyone knows you

O Cub of the white Lion, we are a sacrifice for your eyes.

Your name, all over the world, we have spread it.[106]

It shall remain high without being extinguished oh our Sadr.

Our Sadr who else other than our Sadr?[107]

However, this excessive attempt to legitimise the Sadrist movement and the erasure of agency of JAM also provoked some resistance that expressed itself in JAM-centric songs.

The JAM-centric songs only attribute a few sentences to Muqtada or his father and stress combat against Americans and terrorists.[108] In one unique *Sadriya*, we get a look through the eyes of an average JAM fighter, where he explains his own convictions and motivations to subvert the narrative of Sadr-centric songs. *Hatha ana min Jaysh al Mahdi* (This is me from the Mahdi Army) is a song that departs from the tendency to emphasise the importance of Sadr for JAM by pledging first and foremost his loyalty to God. The song states, 'This is me from the Mahdi Army, Other than God we don't want anyone else with us'. The JAM member then explains he only has himself, his weapons and his life.

Tell me where our enemy is, and we will go

This is me and I will not return to my home

My life and end are in the hands of God

This is me, living with my IEDs

I am ready for war.

Afterwards, the JAM member pledges his loyalty to his country, stating 'My sad soul has given its loyalty (to my country), I cannot give excuses.' Muqtada gets no reference at all. This is clearly a different hierarchy of loyalty than Sadr-centric songs, which is better illustrated at the end of the song when the JAM member explains *why* he fights:

If I stop, my children will die

I will never allow humiliation, enough. (…)

O my soul, what do I have to lose?

This is me.[109]

In this last passage, he expresses his desperate attempt to defend his children. This is interesting since it departs from the idea that he fights because he is a Sadrist or because Muqtada is

worth fighting for. In addition, this song is about a JAM member who has children and is therefore a father. This questions the dominant narrative that claims that JAM mainly attracted and recruited childless and careless young men.[110] It can be concluded that within *Sadriyat* there was a struggle for agency; on one extreme, all agency was bestowed upon Muqtada and none was given to JAM, and on the other extreme, agency was within the hands of the members of JAM.

The balanced songs reflect cooperation between JAM and the Sadrist movement. In these songs, Muqtada was foremost the highest military commander and not a metaphysical force as in the Sadr-centric songs. In a distinct song titled *Nahnu jaysh al Mahdi* (We are the Mahdi Army), cooperation between the Sadrist movement and JAM is perfectly expressed. In *Nahnu jaysh al Mahdi*, it is stated that 'We are soldiers, under the command of Muqtada, we are mobilized'. The JAM members assert their agency by stating that they '*volunteered* for an Army that rejects bitter humiliation' and are therefore not merely a tool for Muqtada's ambitions. Third, they are not 'Sadrists' but are 'the students of the Martyr', which is a soberer claim of adherence to Sadr II than the expectations of the Sadr-centric songs.[111]

Another song titled *Kadive tashed alena* (The rocket launcher is our witness) expresses a similar sentiment, saying, 'O our beloved Muqtada, we came to pledge our loyalty. We are your soldiers and you are our commander.' This song also imagines a horizontal bond with Muqtada rather than a vertical one, saying 'O our beloved Muqtada, together with you we will do Jihad'. In this song, JAM members seemed to have simultaneously internalised some themes of the Sadr-centric songs, saying, 'O our beloved, we came to pledge our loyalty to you for the blood of your father.' At the end of this song, the song claims that 'the pen', which represents the Sadrist scholars, and the 'rocket launcher', which represents JAM, are next to each other. Therefore, 'our position is clear' and expresses the perfect marriage between both ex-combatants and the scholars of the Sadr-movement.[112]

While it is difficult to date these songs and document a trend, it can be concluded that excessive Sadr-centric songs had to be supplemented or compromised by JAM-centric or balanced songs possibly so as not to estrange those whose commitment to Muqtada or Sadr remained ambiguous or defied the interests of the Sadrist movement. The appearance of balanced songs indicates a slow consolidation of an acceptable Sadrist identity for JAM's large ex-combatant community, fostering stronger ties between JAM and the Sadrist movement.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Mahdi Army has been largely facilitated by Iraq's post-2003 demobilisation crisis, which created large segments of ex-combatant communities who were vulnerable to mobilisation by a range of political forces. Through the effective mobilisation strategy of the Sadrist movement, it was able to resonate with ex-combatants' sense of humiliation after they were dismissed in 2003. The Sadrist movement stressed that JAM was an army part of a state, and not a militia. By emphasising that JAM is a formal army, the Sadrist movement effectively appealed to Iraqi ex-combatants. Nonetheless, because the Sadrist movement mainly gave off a clerical identity, they were not able to fully resonate with ex-combatants. Consequently, ex-combatants, maintained their autonomy regarding the Sadrist movement and did not fully merge with the Sadrist movement. Another reason why JAM maintained its autonomy is because of the Sadrists' movement's lack of resources and organisational capability to maintain control.

Contrary to what most literature on JAM described, ex-combatants can be considered the most significant actors in the formation of JAM. The military expertise of ex-combatants was crucial in transforming a non-violent social movement under Sadr II into a movement with a military wing after 2003. More importantly ex-combatants were central in mobilising the diverse constituency of JAM that existed out of students, criminals and youngsters.

The Sadrist movement put great effort into creating a Sadrist identity that ties ex-combatants to the Sadrist movement. By analysing Sadrist music we can observe the importance that was placed on appealing to ex-combatants through an acceptable Sadrist identity. The effort to appeal to ex-combatants in music is indicated through the fluctuating meaning of the Sadrist identity in the different Sadrist songs. Eventually this fluctuating Sadrist identity accumulated in a balanced symbolism where the role of combatants vis-à-vis the Sadrist movement is fairly represented.

In this article, a preliminary step was taken to explain bottom-up paramilitary formation by non-state actors. It was demonstrated that certain networks are more prone to paramilitarisation. The mobilisation of specific networks for a paramilitary, according to the literature, is facilitated by a social conflict. This article specified that a social conflict in the form of a demobilisation crisis facilitates specifically the mobilisation of ex-combatants into a paramilitary organisation. However, ex-combatants, according to the literature, do not mobilise themselves into militias but only through an external entrepreneur of violence. The research on JAM done for this article, demonstrated that an entrepreneur of violence was crucial for mobilising ex-combatants. Muqtada al Sadr and his movement mainly played the role of enablers of violence, rather than direct commanders of violence. This indicates the limits of a movement that does not emanate a military identity for mobilising ex-combatants. However, the effective mobilisation of JAM suggests that ex-combatants are mobilisable despite the absence of an ex-elite military individual like an ex-general, contrary to what Themnér argued for.

While much of the literature on paramilitary organisations emphasised the role of states in paramilitarising existing networks in moments of internal and external pressure on the state, the paramilitarisation of JAM demonstrates a different mechanism. JAM was not formed by state actors but by non-state actors and the state actively tolerated the infringement on its monopoly of violence by allowing the emergence of JAM. While the Sadrist movement represented non-state actors, Iraqi ex-combatants were themselves actors who were deeply impacted by the structures of the Iraqi state under ex-president Saddam Hussain. The repertoires and habits of violence that ex-combatants internalised during the reign of Saddam defined ex-combatant communities quite extensively in post-2003 Iraq. Ex-combatant communities were therefore unique beneficiaries of former state power and had important skills and assets necessary to assist in the formation of militias.

Even if states collapse (as in 2003 Iraq), the lasting impact of a state remains vital for the emergence of paramilitary organisations. The depth of the impact of states on groups is possibly definitive in identifying the networks that are vulnerable for paramilitarisation. In the case of JAM, the army as a state institution had enough important value for the ex-combatants and partly explains why they did not join the insurgency instead. However, a large segment of ex-combatants did join the Iraqi insurgency, indicating that the legacy of the former state and army had divergent effects on different ex-combatant communities and influenced how they understood the state (possibly as a set of specific personal networks rather than an institution) whose vulnerability to paramilitarisation must have differed as well. This suggests a further study in clarifying how and why certain networks under which conditions are more prone to paramilitarisation or insurgency would be useful.

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Notes

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69. Min al-arsheef al mubarak mu arak jaysh al imam al Mahdi zud al muhtal al amreeki al intifadah al Mahdia (From the honorable archive of the battles of the Mahdi Army against the American occupier the Mahdi uprising), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR_joX-57g4 (accessed 4 December 2017); Wiladat hatha al nasheed ma a wiladat jaysh al-Imam al Mahdi (This song was born with the Mahdi Army), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWqikxp9ccw (accessed 4 December 2017); Jaysh Al Mahdi fi Al-Amara – muqawama sareesa zud al jaysh al amereeki (The Mahdi Army in Amara fierce resistance against the American Army), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IAki7iouY4 (accessed 4 December 2017); Jaysh al Imam al Mahdi Al Tayar al Sadri Zud Quwat alhtilal al Amreeki (The Imam Mahdi Army the Sadrist movement against the American occupier), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cle7pPUQ3F4 (accessed 4 December 2017).
70. Paul Collier, 'Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective', in David Malone and Mats R. Berdal (eds), *Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp.99–100.
71. Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr, and the fall of Iraq*, p.183, and Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*.
72. Al Khateeba 56 lisimaha al-Sayid al-Qaid Muqtada al-Sadr Audh Billah (Sermon 58 Sayid leader Muqatada al Sadr Glory to God https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQ6lW4dvGKQ (27 November 2017).
73. Ali al Zeidi, *Shaheed bila Hijab: Majmu'at maqalat hol Al Seyed Muqtada Al Sadr* (Beirut: Dar al Hikma al Arabia, 2010), pp.82-114, devotes a complete analysis to a situation where Muqtada replied to a letter that asked 'what is a Sadrist?' The event is left undated in the book, but it shows that in 2010 the necessity of explaining the Sadrist Identity still existed and was unclear.
74. Yvan Guichaoua, 'Group Formation, Identities, and Violent Mobilization: Evidence from Nigeria and Niger' in Justino, Patricia, Tilman Brück, and Philip Verwimp (eds), *A Micro-Level Perspective on the Dynamics of Conflict, Violence, and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.73.
75. Ibid., p.73.
76. See, for example, Muqtada's sermons 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23 and in particular 28 which can be found in this playlist: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMgkrSEzd4o&list=PLBR5Uk1NDhVlfKg_GoHBrzSui3vuWocvA (accessed 27 November 2018).
77. A good example of this coordination is shown in the documentary *Inside Sadr City*, where Muqtada's representative speaks in the same tone as Muqtada: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Emi7FQqRJX8 (accessed 27 November 2017).
78. Muqtada was quite explicit about this already in his first two sermons on 11 April 2003 and 18 April 2003 both of which can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMgkrSEzd4o&list=PLBR5Uk1NDhVlfKg_GoHBrzSui3vuWocvA (accessed 4 December 2017).
79. Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Fall of Iraq*, pp.183, 229.
80. Friday Sermon 68 on 30 July 2004: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=181w3nT4dJs (accessed 27 November 2017).
81. Themnér, 'A Leap of Faith', pp.307–8.
82. Friday Sermon 33 on 28 November 2003: https://youtu.be/ffIE2EfWm5A (accessed 4 December 2017).
83. Themnér, 'A Leap of Faith', pp.307–8.
84. Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Fall of Iraq*, p.6.
85. Corinna Jentzsch, Stathis N. Kalyvas, and Livia Isabella Schubiger, 'Militias in Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol.59, No.5 (2015), pp.755–69.
86. Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr, and the fall of Iraq*, p.170; Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*, p.65; Marisa Cochrane, *Iraq Report 12: The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement* (Washington: Institute for the Study of War, 2009), p.13 and International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr*.
87. Friday Sermon 14 (18 June 2003): https://youtu.be/iLZwUHrspY4 (accessed 30 November 2017).
88. Friday Sermon 18 (15 August 2003): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-VWXdcj8QY (accessed 27 November 2017).

89. Friday Sermon 22 (9 December 2003): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBT_LPBG9h4 (accessed 4 December 2017).
90. Friday Sermon 22.
91. Friday Sermon 26 (10 October 2003): https://youtu.be/NUM6vX8F4ds (accessed 4 December 2017).
92. Friday Sermon 29 (31 October 2003): https://youtu.be/65xd4RQLDNo (accessed 4 December 2017).
93. Naomi Klein, 'An Iraqi intifada' (21 April 2004) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/apr/12/iraq.comment (accessed 11 November 2017).
94. Suzanne Goldenberg, 'Bremer Refutes Bush's Accusations over Iraqi Army' (4 September 2007) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/04/iraq.usa1 (accessed 27 November 2017).
95. Al-Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History*, pp.205–10.
96. Ibid., p.207.
97. Rayburn, *Iraq after America*, p.190.
98. Ivan Watson, 'Songs of Sadr Provide Soundtrack for Shiite Militia' (16 May 2008) https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90465454 (accessed 27 November 2017).
99. This is based on a survey I did on 50 *Sadriyat*, produced between 2003 and 2007. All can be found on YouTube.
100. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the impact music has on mobilising individuals for movements, but it has been documented elsewhere. See Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), John Street, *Music and Politics* (NJ: John Wiley, 2013) and Carin Berg's unpublished dissertation, *The Soundtrack of Politics. A Case Study of Anashid in Hamas and Hezbollah* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg 2017).
101. Zeidi, *Shaheed bila Hijab: Majmu'at maqalat hol Al Seyed Muqtada Al Sadr*, pp.82–114. I also interviewed several Iraqis who were followers of Muhammad Baqir al Sadr in the 1970s and 1980s and they never called themselves Sadrists either back then.
102. Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic visions of unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.153–63.
103. Aqdam Qaseeda Sadriya Himasiya (Oldest Sadr enthusing song), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCnc2TFdd44 (accessed 4 December 2017).
104. Qaseeda Sadriya himasiyya harar watana ibn al-Sadr (Enthusing song free our country son of Sadr), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11AK9lVKg4E (accessed 4 December 2017).
105. Sadr means chest in Arabic and is used as a pun in the song.
106. The root of 'to release' in Arabic is Sadr and is used as a pun in the song.
107. Hossein Al-Hijami al lays al abyaz (Hossein Al-Hijami the white lion), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfGWQ9CFt3I (accessed 4 December 2017).
108. Qaseeda himasiyya Jays al Mahdi nalab jola lo sar taq (Enthusing song Mahdi Army we are only playing games), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMCo08UQZVQ (accessed 4 December 2017);
    Dhal Yunzaf min soaba (A shadow is bleeding), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xK1wd_9_MFI (accessed 4 December 2017); Murtada albdhani Ma yuhimna amreeki la arhabi qaseeda sadriya qadima (Murtada we do not care about Americans nor terrorists' old Sadrist songs), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI7vm8UqY1I (accessed 4 December 2017); Nasheed al sowar Jaysh al Imam al Mahdi. Mahdi al Ubaidi (Song of the Imam Mahdi Army revolutionaries Mahdi al-Ubaidi), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wTvGtR8ohQ (accessed 4 December 2017).
109. Hatha ana min Jaysh al-Mahdi (This is me from the Mahdi Army), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aL5_nSple_U (accessed 4 December 2017).
110. Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Fall of Iraq*, Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army* and Cole, 'The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba'thist Iraq', p.544.
111. Nahnu jaysh al-Mahdi min arsheef anasheed almqowama (We are the Mahdi Army from the resistance song archive), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_axYvmZ8Z8 (accessed 27 November 2017).
112. Al mobdah mola Hossein al-Hijami Alanasheed al Sadriya tashed alena al Qadifa (producer Mola Hossein Al-Hijami Sadrist Song: the rocketlauncher is our witness), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMfgV_KA8t4 (accessed 27 November 2017).