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Chapter 8

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Religion and Regional Planning: The Case of the Emerging 'Shi'a Region'

Fathali M. Moghaddam

Introduction

> The Brain is deeper than the sea -
> For – hold them – Blue to Blue
> The one the other will absorb -
> As Sponges – Buckets – do –
>
> <div align="right">Emily Dickinson</div>

Religion is fluid; it can take on different shapes as it moves from container to container, situation to situation. But religion is also like a gas, in that it can drift in the air across geographical borders, lines on maps, and move in different, sometimes unexpected directions. The borders of a country or a region can not limit religion, which is far deeper and more expansive than such containers. Religious identity can serve as a powerful cement, binding people together, sometimes working against national borders and against 'official' regional boundaries, even bringing about regional ties that go against the grand plans of world powers.

The role of religion in regional identities and regional development can be conceptualized along a continuum with the 'planned region' at one extreme and the 'accidental region' at the other extreme (see Figure 8.1).

Planned Region_____Accidental Region

Figure 8.1   The 'planned–accidental' continuum

The traditional literature on regions is overwhelmingly concerned with the 'planned region' extreme of this continuum. Multidisciplinary planning teams, often led by economists, have invested heavily in keeping the focus on the formal planning of regions. However, this chapter focuses on the other end of the

continuum, exploring how the fluidity and 'border-less' nature of religion can bring about an accidental region, by which I mean a region that was not planned for by the most powerful groups: in this case, the United States and its allies - although, as we shall see, the region in question, a Shi'a region in the Near East, does serve the interests of some local actors. My focus is on attempts by competing powers to strengthen rival identities based on two clashing story-lines: the first story-line presents an identity of a 'modern, democratic, secular Muslim state' supported by the United States and its allies; the second story-line presents an identity based on Shi'a religious ties, supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies. Any planning that took place on the part of the United States and other major powers moved forward with the intention of thwarting the second story-line, and thus preventing the emergence of a Shi'a region. This is because the United States and its allies have tried to diminish the influence of Iran, and Iran's influence is enhanced by the emergence of a Shi'a region.

The case to be considered is an illustrative example, demonstrating that the outcome of regional planning reflects the influence of multiple competing factors, with religion being a historically important factor that can render impotent 'official' planning efforts by world powers. Of course, this is a difficult lesson to learn, because most governments, particularly superpowers, are likely to exaggerate their abilities to re-shape the present, even against the direction of deep cultural and historical trends. We will now further explore this tendency toward 'illusions of control'.

Illusions of Control in Planning: A Psychological Assessment

Any consideration of the construction and use of identities as a formal part of regional planning should begin with a consideration of the tendency of planners to exaggerate their level of influence. The human propensity to assume control over both the course of our own lives and our environmental conditions is prodigious, and often associated with 'illusions of control' (Moghaddam and Studer 1997). This is partly a result of our desire to see the world as less threatening (Lerner 1980). Through positioning ourselves as 'in control' even when we are in the midst of chaotic conflict (Moghaddam et al. 2008), we can presumably 'prevent' bad things from happening to ourselves and our loved ones. Thus, we tend to exaggerate our ability to shape the course of events and have a tendency to interpret outcomes as being a result of our intentional planning.

'Illusions of control' are particularly rampant in the contemporary world because of increasing specialization (Moghaddam 1997), with planning studies being a prime domain of 'specialized experts', and the pervasive assumption that 'experts' can predict and control events and people. We tend to exaggerate the value of 'expert' judgments (for examples, see Tetlock 2005), and wrongly assume that 'expert' predictions are better than those made by lay persons. For example, consider the following report discovered in declassified US government materials: 'A team of government and outside experts convened by the Central Intelligence Agency concluded in 1997 that North Korea's economy was deteriorating so

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rapidly that the government of Kim Jong-il was likely to collapse within five years' (Mazzetti 2006).

In my own experience of participating in planning of various kinds, including for United Nations third world development plans, 'illusions of control' are often maintained through collective participation in the kind of memory reconstruction highlighted by Loftus and others (Loftus 1997). For example, a five-year plan is made with specific predicted outcomes. But at the end of each year the plan is revised to be more in line with the actual course of events, so that by the fifth year the plan looks rather different from its original shape, as it was at the start of the project. However, by the fifth year the plan has been radically revised to fit the actual outcomes and, on paper and in retrospect, it appears that 'planning' worked: after all, the end result is now in line with 'the plan'.

These 'illusions of control' are reflected in discussions about regional planning, 'regionalism', 'regional studies', and by the increased emphasis placed on the 'planning of regions' in international development meetings (see the discussion of the rapid proliferation of 'planned regions' in the second half of the twenty-first century, by Francesco Duina in this volume). A critical reading of the contemporary literature on regional studies, set in contexts such as Australia (Eversole and Martin 2005), China (Okamoto and Ihara 2005) and Europe (Paraskevopoulos et al. 2006), reveals underlying assumptions that need to be questioned. First, there is a general assumption that regions have an objective existence outside our minds: we bring into being 'a region' by calling it 'a region' (Slocum and Van Langenhove 2003; see Moghaddam 2005, ch. 20, for a broader discussion of social constructionism); although of course there are examples of areas that have the characteristics of 'regions' through historical-cultural accidents, but were never labeled as 'regions'. A second assumption is that 'regions' come into existence as a result of planning by the most powerful authorities working in the 'here and now', such as the United States in the Near East. In this discussion, I am concerned particularly with this last assumption.

Top-Down' Regional Planning and Causal Models of Behavior

The assumption that regions can be brought into existence, controlled, and even dissolved and ended, through 'top-down' planning by the most powerful authorities is associated with the causal model of behavior that emerged in the West and has been exported to non-Western societies (Moghaddam et al. 2007).[1] The causal model underlying regional planning assumes that external stimuli will determine responses (this is true of even the more creative contemporary approaches to planning, that is, Calthorpe and Fulton 2001). Moreover, this model is materialist and rationalist, in that it assumes the material conditions (serving

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1 According to the traditional paradigm, the goal of research is to find cause-effect associations. For the first half of the twentieth century when the behaviorists were the dominant school the causes were termed 'stimuli' and the effects 'responses'; since the 1950s, with the rise of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, the causes come under terms such as 'cognitive mechanisms', 'memory systems', 'neurotransmitters' and 'genes'.

as positive and negative reinforcements) can be manipulated with predictable results, because people will react to such changes in a rational manner. For example, the behavior of a population can be shaped by economic incentives (as positive reinforcement), because individuals will adopt behaviors that maximize their profits. On a practical level, the situation in Iraq after the US-led invasion of 2003 shows the fallacy of such top-down, rationalist, materialist models. If the goal was the maximization of profits, and if people were rational beings, surely a solution could be found that would lead to less killing and destruction – and more profits – in contexts such as post-invasion Iraq.

On a conceptual level also, there are strong reasons to reject the causal, materialist, rational model. Although some human behavior, what I have termed *performance capacity* (how well a task is carried out), can be explained according to this model, other behavior, *performance style* (which has to do with meaning), is better explained according to a normative model (Moghaddam 2002). An example of performance capacity is how well a person can hear a particular sound. The answer to the question, 'Did you hear that sound?' is in terms of capacity, 'Yes, I heard it' or 'No, I did not hear anything'. The answer to the question 'What was that sound?' has to do with meaning, 'It was just the sound of fire works, not gunfire'.

Human[2] behavior involves both performance capacity and performance style. One has to be able to first hear a noise, before interpreting it (for example, as fire works or gunfire). But it is only performance capacity that can be explained in terms of what Aristotle called *efficient cause*, the cause directly and inevitably precedes the effect it produces.[3] Performance style requires normative explanations based on cultural meaning systems. The 'causation' involved here is not efficient causation, but what Aristotle termed *formal causation*, which has to do with the structure of a process. Performance style also involves goals, in Aristotle's terms *final causation*.

The distinction between performance capacity and performance style, and the knowledge that only performance capacity can be explained through causal accounts, whereas performance style requires normative explanations, enables us to better assess the planning of regions. A fundamentally important point is that regional planning necessarily involves social behavior and shared culture, rather than the behavior of isolated individuals. Social behavior is regulated by

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2   This is also true in the case of animal behavior. Pribram (2002), a pioneering neuroscience researcher, has written that 'One of my experimental observations supports the view that brain processes need to be considered in terms of performance style, not just performance capacity. I removed the amygdala on both sides of the brains of monkeys and showed that, as a rule, the monkeys were dramatically tamed. However, taming depended on the form or structure of the social colony from which and into which the monkeys were returned immediately after surgery. If the amygdalectomized monkey was not challenged by an aggressive cage mate, the amygdalectomized monkey became even more aggressive' (p. xii).

3   This is the stimulus-response (cause-effect) association the behaviorists were seeking.

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normative systems, which provide guides as to 'what to do' and 'how to do' things in different contexts.

An important source for the normative system in many contexts is religion. For example, in Iran, gender relations are regulated by norms and rules that derive from Shi'a Islam. Whereas in a Western context, planners preparing for an event involving a large crowd would consider the size of the crowd and the size of the entrance needed to the event, in Iran planners would consider the need for two different sets of entrances, one for men and a second for women. At the individual level, if and when a man and a woman are introduced in Iran, it would not be correct for them to shake hands (unless they were already related by birth or marriage).

Note that the local normative system makes behavior predictable. In the Iranian context, we would be able to predict that women going to the event would use a different set of entrances from men. But this predictability would not be because of efficient causation: individuals can intentionally decide to break the rules and use the entrance that is forbidden to them (there are cases of men dressing as women and women dressing as men, so as to 'pass' through the wrong entrance). Most people most of the time 'do the right thing' according to the local normative system, but some people behave incorrectly, sometimes intentionally.

In summary, although a variety of factors are incorporated in formal regional planning (see Wong 2006, for a review), the underlying orientation is materialist and rational (this is related to points discussed by others under the title of 'new regionalism', for example see Boas et al. 2003). But in practice there are many different ways in which regions can come about in different parts of the world, with variations in the priorities that different economic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other factors have in the emergence of a region. Whereas economic factors take priority in shaping some regions, religious identity can become the dominant factor shaping other regions. The religious and collective identity factors that can influence a region might not be easily influenced by five-year or even 50-year plans.

Case Study: The Construction and Use of the Shi'a Identity

The specific focus of this chapter, then, is the factors that are leading to the potential emergence of a 'Shi'a crescent' (Nasre 2006). The rise of Shi'a identity comes in the context of rising Islamic consciousness, and a pervasive identity crisis sweeping across Islamic communities around both non-Western and Western world (Moghaddam 2006). To appreciate the contemporary experiences of Islamic communities, we need to first consider the historical context. I begin by assessing the construction and use of a Shi'a identity.

My methodological orientation is guided by three principles. The first is that mixed methods yield superior results (Moghaddam et al. 2002). I was trained both as an experimental social psychologist, conducting controlled laboratory studies, and as an environmental psychologist, with a focus on qualitative field research. Over the last few decades, I have learned to appreciate that multiple

methods have an additive outcome, leading to more accurate results. A second principle is that researchers do best when they break out of narrow specializations and refuse to conform to the assumptions set up by experts in each discipline (Moghaddam 1997). Third, I give highest priority to theory and concepts, and treat the 'nuts and bolts' of data gathering as completely dependent on theory. After all, the nature of our theories determines what we recognize to be data. This methodological orientation is reflected in my critical review of the idea of 'formal planning'.

Historical Contexts

Two major reasons for the failure of United States policy in Iraq after the 2003 invasion of that country are the lack of appreciation for the importance of cultural continuity and tradition, and the enormous weight of history in the Near and Middle East region. Identity construction among Muslims is ongoing, but it is also directly and strongly tied to events 1,400 years ago. Thus, the consideration of the historical past is not an 'addition' that can be omitted, but is essential.

The modern Shi'a identity, and the re-emergence of a 'Shi'a region' since the last decades of the twentieth century, has to be understood in the historical context of the evolution of Islam as a cultural, political, and religious movement in the seventh century (see Rogerson 2007). The most important splintering that took place in this Islamic movement came soon after the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632AD, and the struggle for succession that followed (Ramadan 2006).

No potential successor to the Prophet Mohammed enjoyed full support among all Muslims. One group of Muslims rallied behind the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali, and after Ali's assassination behind his sons Hassan and Hossein, also assassinated by opponents. This minority group is the source of Shi'a Islam. The majority of Muslims supported a different succession line, rallying behind Omar, and form the source of Sunni Islam. The vast majority of the approximately 1.3 thousand million Muslims in the world are Sunni, including in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and other important Near and Middle Eastern Arab and North African nations.

The Shi'a-Sunni split parallels another important split: the Persian-Arab split. Almost all Persians are Shi'a Muslim, and almost all Arabs are Sunnis. The main exception to this is found in Iraq, an Arab country with a predominantly Shi'a population. Today over 96 per cent of the approximately 75 million population of Iran, and about 60 per cent of the 20 million population of Iraq, is Shi'a Muslim. As we shall see, this pattern of religious affiliation limits the extent to which 'revolutionary Iran' can influence the identity of most Muslims in the world, who are neither Persian nor Shi'a, and even Shi'a Muslims in the Near East, many of whom are not Persian.

Historically the most important centers of the Shi'a religion are Najaf and Karbala, both in Iraq. Prior to the 1978 Iranian revolution, the most important Shi'a Muslim religious leaders were established in these two centers. Shi'a Muslims are obliged to select a religious leader as a *marja-i-taqlid* (source of

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inspiration), a person who serves as a 'model' for how to live one's life, and whose interpretation of the Koran is taken as guide. The most important *marja-i-taqlid* has traditionally lived in Najaf or Karbala, away from direct political control of Tehran and Baghdad. Since the Iranian revolution, and particularly since the eight year Iran-Iraq war, Najaf and Karbala have become less important Shi'a centers, and religious centers in Iran have become more important, with Ghom taking the lead and becoming the new power center of Shi'a Islam.

The Iranian Context

The twentieth century storyline of Iran might have been 'country moves from monarchy to secular democracy', but intervention by the United States and other powers resulted in Iran becoming an Islamic republic. Iran entered the modern era under the Qajar dynasty (1796–1921), but a democratic movement finally led to an end to this dynasty and a new constitution that restricted the power of the monarchy through a *majlis* (parliament). However, hopes for a genuine democracy were dashed when Reza Khan, a military officer initially supported by the British, seized power and established the Pahlavi dynasty (1926–78). Reza Shah attempted to follow the same modernization policies as Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, but his attempts to use the influence of Nazi Germany to counter the influence of Britain and Russia in Iran led to his removal by allied forces in 1941, to be replaced by his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–78).

In the post World War II period, the United States took over as the most important foreign influence in Iran. When a pro-democracy uprising, in support of the popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, forced the Shah into exile in 1953, a CIA directed coup almost immediately brought the Shah back to power. Through continued American backing, the Shah used booming oil revenues to establish his position as absolute dictator. Because the Shah was seen as an 'American puppet', the 1978 revolution turned out to be as much anti-American as it was anti-Shah.

Soon after the 1978 revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini managed to out manoeuver other potential leaders and there took place what one writer insightfully termed an exchange of 'the turban for the crown' (Arjomand 1988). Iran was declared an 'Islamic Republic', and power became concentrated in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists. Revolutionary fervor also led the fundamentalists to spread their influence outside Iran's borders. Khomeini spearheaded an ambitious movement intended to export 'the revolution' to other Islamic nations. The espoused goal was to unite all Muslims under an 'authentic Islamic' identity, and to recover the glorious early era of Islam. There were two key themes in the 'revolutionary' strategy of Khomeini and his followers, both of which involved the construction of a religious identity.

The first theme involved identifying and attacking an 'external enemy', which was avowedly anti-Islamic. This enemy included the United States ('the Great Satan') and Israel ('Little Satan'), as well as the 'puppet' regimes, such as those in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, condemned for doing the bidding of the United States. Through a variety of tactics, such as hostage taking (of American embassy staff

in Tehran in 1979 at the beginning of the Khomeini revolution and British sailors in the Persian Gulf in 2007, during the leadership of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad), Khomeini (who died in 1989) and his followers created conflicts with 'the external enemy', so as to increase internal cohesion and have an excuse to stamp out internal dissent. Again and again, critics of the fundamentalist government in Tehran were accused of 'aiding the enemy' (just as critics of President George W. Bush and his administration have been accused of 'helping the enemy' in the era of the so-called 'war on terror').

The second key theme involved an appeal to the 'bare foot' Islamic masses to rise up and revolt against the 'despotic powers' that avowedly prevented Muslims from reaching their positive potential. Instead of 'workers of the world unite', Khomeini's slogan was 'Muslims of the world unite'. The annual Haj pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a gathering of millions of Muslims from around the world, was one of the most important venues where Iranian fundamentalists attempted to influence Muslims outside Iran. But Khomeini's 'revolutionary' message never caught the imagination of large numbers of Sunni Muslims. Those Sunni Muslims who do lean toward a pan-Islamic vision are more influenced by Wahabism, sponsored by the Saudi regime.

The greatest potential for exporting the Khomeini-led fundamentalist Islamic revolution was to areas with large Shi'a populations, such as Southern Lebanon and Southern Iraq. Among Palestinians, the influence of Khomeini's message is evident among Hamas (rather that Fatah) supporters. However, because of the historical importance of Shi'a religious centers in Iraq, the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the historically close cultural ties between Iran and Southern Iraq, among a number of other factors, it is Iraq that has become the main external 'beneficiary' of the fundamentalist movement in Iran. We will now examine the Iraqi historical context to further illuminate why this is the case.

The Iraqi Context

Western powers have attempted to establish 'multi-ethnic Muslim country progresses from dictatorship to democracy' as the story-line of modern Iraq. However, various historical events in the region have resulted in identities based on religion and ethnicity. The following sections will show how the way in which these identities have been constructed has led to long and violent conflict.

The land occupied by modern Iraq was formerly named Mesopotamia and formed part of the Ottoman Empire. The discovery of oil reserves in the region in the early twentieth century heightened rivalries between Turkish, German, and British interests. World War I brought on the demise of Germany and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, with a corresponding rise in British influence. Between 1921 and 1958, a succession of 'puppet monarchs' were put into place by Britain to rule the new state of Iraq, composed of Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shi'a Arabs, but the monarchy ended when a military coup established Iraq as a republic under General Qasim in 1958. There followed a succession of power struggles, eventually resulting in the Ba'th Party of Iraq coming to power in 1968, and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein being established in 1978.

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In recent history, Sunni Arabs have constituted the power majority in Iraq, and Saddam Hussein further concentrated power in the hands of this group. Although the Kurds, situated mostly in the north of Iraq, are also Sunni Muslims, they have not enjoyed the wealth and status of Sunni Arabs. Iraqi Kurds have long had separatist aspirations, associated with the goal of a united Kurdistan, possibly bringing together tens of millions of Kurds from neighboring Iran and Turkey. But Kurds were brutally repressed in Iraq prior to 2003, when oil revenues helped to create an extensive, centralized government administration and expand higher education opportunities, particularly to the benefit of Sunni Arabs. The Shi'a are concentrated in the poorer districts in Baghdad (particularly in Sadre City) and in the south of Iraq (Basra being the largest city). However, the 'revenge of the Shi'a' has come in the shape of their higher birth rates (as in most parts of the world, education and birth rate have been negatively correlated: the higher educated Sunni Arabs have had lower birth rates, compared to the lower educated Shi'a).

Saddam Hussein had come to power the same year as the Iranian revolution, and he no doubt felt threatened by the possibility of Khomeini's influence on the Shi'a majority in Iraq. I was researching in Tehran in 1979, and there were clear signs of Iranian ambitions to export the 'Islamic revolution' to Iraq. This exportation was facilitated by the traditional to-and-fro of large numbers of people between the holy Shi'a cities of Iraq and Iran. Although the turmoil of the revolution, and the collapse of the Shah's military, had weakened Iran militarily, the cultural and ideological influence of Iran on the Shi'a population in Iraq was overwhelming. Indeed, all Sunni Arab regimes in the Near and Middle East had become targets in Khomeini's attacks on 'the Great Satan and its puppets'. This further built up the Shi'a identity and constructed it in opposition to Sunnis. In response, when Saddam Hussein's army invaded Iran in 1980, he positioned himself as fighting on behalf of all Sunni Arab regimes.

As a manifestation of this Shi'a – Sunni opposition, from 1980 to 1988 Iran and Iraq were gripped in a bloody war that crippled the economies of both countries. Iraq received considerable financial support (much of it in the shape of loans) from other Arab nations, including Kuwait, and some military assistance from the United States. Clearly, the United States did not want the war to end with an Iranian victory and the possible establishment of two radical Islamic republics side by side, the first in Iran and the second in Iraq.

Islamic Identity and Borders: The Crisis of Identity in Islamic Communities around The World

Although there is rapid growth in Muslim populations around the world, Islamic communities feel threatened by globalization. This threat is experienced as being against the physical borders of Islamic countries or groups (as in the cases of Iraq and Palestine, for example), as well as against the life-style of Muslims. In essence, Islam, as it is represented by the cognitive maps of Muslims, is perceived to be under threat. The emergence of a Shi'a region in the Near East is best understood in the context of this wider issue of threatened Muslim identity.

Globalization does not, of course, mean only Westernization. Anyone who travels internationally can witness the influence of non-Western societies on one another, and on the West. As emphasized in Anne Brown's (Chapter 9) study of interactions between Melanesia and 'the West', influence is mutual, even if not equal. A further example is the exportation of Indian films and music, and an enormous variety of products 'made in China', to many different countries. However, globalization has involved secularization, and a perception among many Muslims, particularly fundamentalists, that their way of life is under attack from Western secularism. The weakness of governments in Islamic societies (for example, the reliance of the Kuwaiti and Saudi regimes on the US military to keep power) has intensified this feeling of vulnerability and given rise to a search for better ways forward.

This perceived vulnerability to Western power and secularism has contributed to a profound and pervasive identity crisis, experienced by Islamic communities around the world (Moghaddam 2006). This is first and foremost a crisis of *collective identity*, concerned with the question, 'What kind of group do I belong to?', but it is also influencing *individual identity*, concerned with the question, 'What kind of person am I?' How can Muslims both practice their faith and join in the historic changes associated with globalization in the twenty-first century?

As they face the challenges of the twenty-first century, Muslims are confronted by two competing 'ideal' identities; each of these identities has different implications for the kind of border that Muslims attempt to maintain. The first is represented by Salafists and other Islamic extremists who are pushing to get Muslim societies back to 'pure' Islam, to the ideal they imagine Islam achieved 'in the beginning'. This path is associated with a return to traditional gender roles, the use of the full veil by women, and the implementation of *Shari'ah* law. The second is represented by those who would abandon traditional ways, copy the West, and adopt Western ideals of what Muslims should become.

This blind copying of the West is leading to what has been termed the *good copy problem* (Moghaddam 2006): adopting an ideal model that you can only be a good copy of, but can never be as good as or better than. The good copy problem resulted in Muslims perceiving themselves to be second-class citizens in their own lands. The Shah's message to the Iranian nation was 'copy the West, and you could become the Switzerland of the East'. But this meant that even if Iranians succeeded along these lines, the best they could do was to become a good copy of Switzerland. They would always lack authenticity, and never become as good as the original model. In contrast, Khomeini exhorted Iranians to return to pure Islam, and he told them that they *are* the best; they *are* in the lead and ahead of everyone else, because they have Islam.

A third, secular, 'authentic' identity alternative is so far not available because of policies followed by Western-backed dictatorships in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region (Moghaddam 2006). These dictatorships have harshly cracked down on all forms of free expression, preventing the growth of grass-roots, potentially pro-democracy movements. But even the harshest dictatorships have not dared to close down mosques, which can still serve as a gathering place for dissident voices. Unfortunately, these dissident voices are becoming radicalized.

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The repression of secular opposition and the prevention of an alternative secular identity has resulted in the rise of fundamentalists of various kinds – as well as increased Sunni-Shi'a conflicts.

Narratives and Borders: Unexpected Consequences on Identity

Various factors have facilitated the construction of a 'Shi'a Crescent', a region based upon religious identity. To better understand how this came about, recall that historically the national border between Iran and Iraq was ignored by Shi'a Muslims traveling between religious centers in Iran and Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of people have family ties 'across the border'.[4] Although in the short term the Iran-Iraq war ruptured relations between the regimes of Tehran and Baghdad, the 'official' border failed to cut ties between Shi'a Muslims in Iran and Iraq.

In the longer term, ties between the two countries were strengthened. Hundreds of thousands of Shi'a Iraqis (including many of the elite) who fled or were expelled to Iran during the Iran-Iraq war have now returned to Iraq, and some of them are in key decision making posts. This includes many of the current leadership in Iraq (that is, members of the powerful Hakim and Sadre families, including Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, and Moqtada al-Sadre, the leader of radical Shi'a militias in Iraq), who spent a number of years in exile in Iran as guests of the Iranian government. This is because after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein, there was a sharp rise in the power and influence of Shi'a factions, and a decline in Sunni power and influence in political, economic, and religious spheres. Shi'a clergy had been persecuted during the rule of Saddam Hussein, but after 2003 they became the dominant force in southern Iraq and a major force in national Iraqi politics. Ayatollah Sistani, who was born in Mashad, Iran, gained considerable influence as the leading Shi'a clergy in Iraq.

Another factor that served to strengthen ties between Shi'a Muslims in Iran and Iraq is the construction of a Sunni – Shi'a rivalry. Before the 2003 invasion, Saddam Hussein's predominantly Sunni Arab regime repressed Iraqi Shi'a Muslims, who received at least moral support from Iran. After the 2003 invasion, Shi'a Muslims are the target of attacks from Sunni fundamentalists, apparently funded by Saudi Arabian and other Sunni Arab sources. Once again, Iraqi Shi'a Muslims under attack find that the Shi'a in Iran are their main supporters. Both professional Iraqi Shi'a politicians and ordinary Iraqi Shi'a citizens are pulled by historic, cultural, and religious commonalities to ally themselves with Iran.

This identity rivalry has had a domino effect in generating a Shi'a region by influencing the voting patterns in Iraqi elections. In voting for a new Iraqi constitution, and then an Iraqi parliament, voters in Iraq have voted along ethnic and religious lines (see the controversial account by Allawi 2007, a former minister in post-invasion Iraq). That is, Shi'a Muslims voted for Shi'a Muslims; Kurds

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4   The author's mother was born in Najaf, Iraq, and returned to live in Tehran, Iran, when she was in her teens.

voted for Kurds; and the few Sunni Arabs who participated in elections voted for Sunni Arabs. The result is that southern Iraq has become a *de facto* Shi'a Islamic Republic, in some respects highly similar to the Islamic Republic of Iran.[5]

From the perspective of those who are less familiar with the cultural and religious history illuminated here, perhaps the most unexpected and unpredictable factors influencing the strengthening of a Shi'a identity and Shi'a region has been the narratives introduced by the Bush administration after the tragedy of 9/11. The main theme of this narrative is captured by the phrase, 'you are either with us or against us', which positions everyone as being on one side or another in the so-called 'war on terror'. This categorical narrative placed all critics in the 'against us' camp, at the pinnacle of which was an 'axis of evil' comprising of three so-called 'rogue states', Iran, Syria, and North Korea.

Within the context of pre-existing historical ties between Shi'a in Iran and Iraq, multiple factors have resulted in Shi'a Iraq being pushed closer to becoming a *de facto* Islamic Republic in the style of Iran, including the construction of rival Shi'a and Sunni identities and resulting voting patterns, the categorical 'you are either with us or against us' narrative (combined with the invasion of Iraq by US-led forces in 2003, the toppling of Saddam Hussein, and the utter mismanagement of post-invasion Iraq) and the general increase of Shi'a influence in Iran. These events have led to the rise of a Shi'a region, combining Shi'a Muslims in Iran and Iraq. Prior to the invasion, it was predicted by some analysts that the presence of US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, with Iran wedged in between, would put unbearable pressure on the ruling clerics in Tehran. It was imagined that a thriving pro-Western 'democracy' in Iraq and another in Afghanistan would lead to the collapse of the regime in Iran. But events have proved this prediction to be incorrect, because developments in Iraq and Afghanistan have not gone 'according to plan'.

Identity Constructions and Conflict

The strengthening of Shi'a identity and the emergence of a Shi'a region in the Near East has increased intergroup tensions locally, regionally, and internationally. A useful way to conceptualize this trend is through the metaphor of an onion, starting at the core inner ring, representing the most local intergroup rivalries, and working out to the surface layers, representing the wider international intergroup rivalries.

The Core of the Onion: Local Rivalries

At the core of the onion is the local conflict between Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi'a groups in Iraq. The Shi'a are determined to maintain and extend their dominance

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5 This is not necessarily because there was an attempt by Iraqi Shi'a to copy Iran, but in large part because the implementation of *Shari'ah* law has certain inevitable consequences.

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in Iraq, and possibly become an independent republic. The Sunni Arabs, the former dominant group, feel threatened by the emerging Shi'a identity and Shi'a region in southern Iraq, as well as by an emerging Kurdish identity and region in northern Iraq. The Shi'a within Iraq feel less threatened by the emerging Kurdish identity (but, as we shall see, the Kurds are seen as a threat by the Shi'a within the larger regional picture).

The Kurds are less threatened by the emerging Shi'a region and identity, but seriously threatened by a possible re-emergence of Sunni power in Iraq. This is because there is direct rivalry between Kurds and Sunnis for oil producing areas, particularly Kirkuk, that both claim as part of their ethnic heritage. Kurds in Iraq are determined to maintain their independence (gradually gained in the 1990s when the US implemented 'no fly zones' in Iraq, after the first Gulf War), and also to work toward a greater Kurdistan in the Near and Middle East.

The Middle Ring of the Onion: Rivalries in the Near and Middle East

The strengthened Shi'a identity and emerging Shi'a region are perceived as major threats by Sunni regimes in the Near and Middle East. This is because a Shi'a region would strengthen Iran, a Shi'a state that is associated with revolution and anti-Americanism. The Sunni regimes in the Near and Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt, owe their continued survival to American support, and Iran is seen as trying to destroy that support.

At the same time, Shi'a Iran and Sunni Turkey both feel threatened by the rise of Kurdish identity and the possibility of a 'Kurdish nation state'. The Kurds in northern Iraq are receiving support from the United States and Israel, as well as various Western powers, and are attempting to build an independent state. Kurds in Turkey and Iran (and to a lesser extent, Syria) also have aspirations to join a 'greater Kurdistan'. The concern of Iran over Kurdish independence is increased by the perception among Iranian rulers that the United States is attempting to ferment rebellion among Kurds in Iran, and in this way weaken Tehran.

The Outer Ring: International Rivalries

The emergence of a Shi'a region in the Near East is also increasing international tensions. First, the United States and its allies are concerned that a Shi'a region could strengthen anti-American forces. American policy continues to support a united Iraq (although some US analysts now suggest that a three-way breakup is more realistic, see Galbraith 2006). Second, a Shi'a region would be a threat to the conservative Sunni regimes of the Near and Middle East, and create further instability to oil supplies.

In an effort to diminish the influence of Iran and limit the impact of a 'Shi'a revival', the United States policy is to isolate Iran politically and economically. However, this effort is not being supported, and in some ways is even being resisted, by China and Russia, as well as by some European states. This resistance arises because China, Russia and some other states are doing lucrative trade with Iran: buying Iranian oil and gas, and selling Iran various goods and services.

This lucrative trade would decrease if the United States once again became the dominant foreign influence in Iran.

Thus, it is clear that the increased prominence of Shi'a identity and the emergence of a Shi'a region is having an impact on intergroup tensions at local, regional, and international levels. This impact was not predicted by, and goes against the plans of, the United States and its allies, reminding us of pitfalls in formal planning. The case of the emerging Shi'a region can help us reflect on planning more broadly, and on planning in the EU and the US in particular.

The Role of Religious Identity in Regional Formation: Implications for Other Regions

An important lesson to be learned from the accidental Shi'a region emerging in the Near East is that, in some situations, shared religious culture and religious identity can take priority in shaping a region, giving actors who are less powerful on the world stage (that is, Iran) opportunities to seriously challenge a 'sole superpower' (the US). This does not fit in easily with the materialist, rational assumption underlying traditional regional planning. Of course, such uncomfortable realities will not lead us to abandon traditional models. Rather, 'illusions of control' will tend to mislead us to assume that we can predictably plan for and shape the role of religion in regional development.

But religious identities are not easily contained by 'official' boundaries and formal laws. Southern Iraq is developing into a Shi'a Islamic republic, with enormously important oil resources, and the probable ability to negotiate independently with foreign oil companies for the exploitation of what will become de-nationalized Iraqi oilfields. In many important respects, this new Shi'a Islamic republic is integral to a rising Shi'a region, which includes Iran. The emergence of this accidental region has implications for how future developments might take place in other regions around the globe.

A major assumption of regional planning, including in the most important cases such as the European Union (EU) as demonstrated by Duina (Chapter 7) is that the central elements of collective identity, the kind of people a group believe themselves to be, can be re-shaped in a predictable manner through the political, economic, social and other levers at the disposal of official planners. The avowed goal of European planners is 'unity in diversity', intended to promote the diversity of European cultures, but at the same time nurture the assumed 'common cultural heritage of Europe'.

This assumed 'common cultural heritage' becomes problematic when we ask, 'What is a European identity?' The so-called *Copenhagen Criteria* (stable democratic institutions, a market economy, and effective administrative structures), is more a bureaucratic than it is a cultural basis for identity, and it does not make clear how far east the European Union could extend in the future. For some, the only strong basis for European identity is a 'common Christian heritage' (a view initially supported by Pope Benedict XVI, but somewhat revised during his visit to Turkey in 2006). On this basis, Turkey, an Islamic nation, would be excluded from joining the European Union.

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But the issue of using religious identity as a basis for developing a 'region' is problematic for reasons far more important and broad than the specific question of Turkish entry into the European Union. We do not need to go far to provide Europeans with examples of how religious identities are 'messy', tend to 'spill across' neat categories and borders, and are not easily predicted or controlled through regional plans. Consider the following conclusion that comes at the dawn of the twenty-first century in a report on the transformation of empty churches into mosques in the heart of 'Old England': 'Britain may continue to regard itself as a Christian nation. But practicing Muslims are likely to outnumber church-attending Christians in several decades' (Perlez 2007: A1). The over twenty million Muslims in the European Union are tending to maintain their religious identity and have a higher birth rate than the local populations (that is, 'In Blackburn, the constituency of Jack Straw, the leader of the House of Commons, there are 30,000 Muslims among a population of 80,000. But in a telltale sign for the future, the number of children 10 years and younger is evenly divided between Christian and Muslim' (Perlez 2007: A6). This has led to Islam being a factor in European life, a trend that the planners of half a century ago, at the start of the road toward a unified Europe, did not expect or prepare for.

Nor have the outcomes of religious diversity been predicted or planned for from decade to decade. For example, since the (unpredicted) major attacks by Muslim terrorists on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, DC, on 11 March 2004 in Madrid and on 7 July 2005 in London, Muslim-Christian relations have become more problematic in Europe and North America. By 2006, the percentages of people who believe that relations between Muslims and Westerners is 'generally bad' (rather than 'generally good') is 55 (vs 32) in the United States, 61 (vs 28) in Great Britain, 70 (vs 23) in Germany, 66 (vs 33) in France, and 61 (vs 14) in Spain (Pew Research Center 2006).

The general assumption has been that the millions of South Asian Muslims in the United Kingdom, North African Muslims in France, Turkish Muslims in Germany, as well as Muslims of many other nationalities spread across the European Union, would assimilate, melt into the mainstream and become 'European'. Moreover, it is assumed that the borders of Europe can be terminated at the borders of Turkey. Both of these assumptions are being severely tested, and may well prove incorrect. First, Muslims in Europe are not abandoning their identities or traditional lifestyles and 'melting away' to become 'European'. Second, there is a vibrant and active bridge between the Muslims in Europe and the hundreds of millions of Muslims living in Turkey and other Islamic countries. Traffic on this bridge is only partly controlled by regional plans, because much of it is informal and influenced by 'underground' rules (and illegal immigration) rather than black-letter law.

Like religion, other cultural affinities, such as a common language, are difficult to control using national boundaries and formal regional plans. As evidenced in Slocum-Bradley's study (Chapter 6) the official trade region created by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) does not control a Hispanic region being created across the Mexico-United States border, and even the wall being built along parts of the Mexico-United States border will not effectively end illegal

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immigration. Millions of people are making their way up from South to North America, to join the estimated 12–20 million illegal immigrants already in the United States. Hispanics may well be the long-term majority in important areas of the United States, creating a linguistic bridge with Mexico and confronting mainstream American society with historic political and cultural challenges in the next few decades (Moghaddam, 2008).

The *English Only* movement is one kind of backlash against the increasing numbers of Hispanics in America. However, this movement represents another type of formal, organized 'plan', and will not necessarily be able to control the North American 'Hispanic region' in the process of becoming a reality. The rapid rise in the number of Hispanics, already more numerous than African Americans and hovering around 50 million at the time of the publication of this book, indicate developments unforeseen by official planners. Telltale signs of future developments are found in Miami, Los Angles, and other areas where Spanish is commonly used in public discourse and official business.

In conclusion, just as the strong bonds between Shi'a Muslims in Iran and Iraq are breaking the mold of 'official plans' for the Near East region, so too the resistance to assimilation of rapidly increasing numbers of Muslims in Europe and Hispanics in the United States, are side-tracking official regional plans for Europe and North America. Identities based upon religion are not easily controlled by planners, be they regional, national, or international. Religious identities can, and often do, spill over 'official' national and regional boundaries, and the rise and fall of identities based upon religion cannot predictably be controlled by official intra- or inter-governmental treaties. This important point has not received the attention it deserves, because regional planning tends to work on the assumption that religious identities (like identities based upon other cultural aspects) are not major factors in shaping economic development. This is an assumption that fits with the political and religious leanings of academics and professional planners, who tend to be more educated and less religious than the general public in their societies.

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