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ARTICLES

Houses of Wisdom: A Comparative Study of the Najaf and Qom Seminaries

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The politicization of the Shi'a clergy in the 19th and 20th centuries remains one of the most critical developments in Middle East politics. The political developments of the two most notable seminaries for Shi'ite theology and philosophy – the seminaries at Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran – remain central to the development of Shi'ite politics today. Their influence, as well as that of their most notable scholars, continually shape the trajectory of the societies of their home countries and within the Shi'a body politic. Both seminaries followed divergent developmental trajectories, each mirroring and, in many ways, shaping the political developments of the countries in which they are located. Ultimately, both represent divergent yet equally influential positions that shape the broader political role of the Shi'a clergy.

The two seminaries (*hawzat*) of Najaf in south-central Iraq and Qom in central Iran form the most significant centers of theological, social, and political teaching in the Shi'a world. Both seminaries have produced legal and religious scholars (*marja'*, literally "source of emulation") of considerable importance whose influence remains strong among their respective followers. Both seminaries continue to serve as centers of mainstream jurisprudential (*'Usuli*) thought for the global Shi'a community. Moreover, the centrality of the seminaries and their *'marja* within Shi'a society additionally confer a degree of *political* sanctity to their positions. The political and intellectual dynamics of the 19th century effectively encouraged this transformation from the purely theological to the political and were central to the development of the modern *hawza* as a semi-civil institution.

Both seminaries have evolved to represent two different approaches within Shi'a political thought in large part due to the different social and political climates in which they developed. Ultimately, the points of departure between the Qom and Najaf seminaries' sociopolitical positions have inspired salient differences in political organization pursued within the seminaries' countries – Iran and Iraq, respectively – and within the larger Shi'ite world. Shi'ism, a faith of over 200 million adherents, should not be viewed as a monolith.[1] Thus an analysis of the roles played by the two foremost pillars of the Shi'ite religious establishment allows us to consider a central set of questions in the study of the Shi'ite world with greater clarity. We may ask of the two *hawzat*: What is

1 "Sunni and Shia Muslims," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, August 20, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-sunni-and-shia/.

the role of the Shi'ite faith in the public sphere? Should religion be a guiding or a governing principle within the state? What administrative functions can, or should the Shi'ite intelligentsia assume?

In what follows, I will briefly trace the historical, political, and sociological origins of the Qom and Najaf *hawzat* as the foundation for comparing the schools of thought of both institutions according to the above-described questions. An analysis of the role of political neutrality and religious tolerance within both seminaries' doctrines demonstrates the impact of these circumstances. While it is impossible to produce a *definitive* definition of each seminary's roles in their respective countries, considering the philosophical underpinnings and context of each seminaries' respective *marjas'* involvement in civil society will allow a more precise distinction to be formed.

The Politicization of the Shi'a Clergy in the Nineteenth Century

A number of circumstances catalyzed the development of the *hawzat* into sources of scholarly, social, and, eventually, political authority. The advent of an indigenously Shi'ite form of modernism during the nineteenth century initiated a society-wide reckoning "period of awakening" regarding traditional conceptions of authority in Shi'ite thought and set the stage for the seminaries' emergence centers of political authority.[2] Long serving as key institutions for social guidance and theological understanding, the Qom and Najaf seminaries gradually grew in sociopolitical stature, contributing considerably to the solidification and politicization of Shi'ite identity over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This intellectual development drastically changed the seminaries' positions within their respective societies. As borders closed and ideologies were made rigid, the seminaries at Qom and Najaf gradually adapted the mainline of Shi'a thought both were founded to explore.[3]

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Iran and the Shi'a world confronted the social and economic pressures posed by the top-down modernization of the state and society. Traditionally, most Shi'a viewed the prospect of modernization with a degree of skepticism; the *'ulema*, the body of Shi'ite scholars of theology and religious jurisprudence, shared this view.[4] The fruits of Westernization pursued by the Iranian government during this period generally did not benefit the population at large; popular and scholarly opposition to this Westernization was undoubtedly grounded in religiously-

2 Saeid Edalatnejad, "Shiite tradition, rationalism and modernity: the codification of the rights of religious minorities in Iranian law (1906 -2004)." PhD diss., (Free University of Berlin, 2009): 64. See also: Khatchik Derghougassian, "The Social Origins of Shia and Sunni Islamism" (2011): 6, 7.

3 Khalid Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and Its Role in Shaping Modern Shī'ite Identity: The Ḥawzas of Al-Najaf and Qumm as a Case Study." *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (2007): 848.

4 Adel, Gholamali, *et al*. "Hawza-yi 'Ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution," *Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (EWI Press, 2012), 116.

oriented skepticism toward modernization.[5] On the part of the *'ulemas'* response to modernization and gradual politicization, we may chiefly point to three individuals that formed much of the intellectual basis for the politicization of the Shi'a intellectual class through their understandings of, and proposed responses to modernism: Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Ayatollah Mohammad-Kazem Khurasani (d. 1911), and, most central to such developments, Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad-Hassan al-Shirazi (d. 1895).[6] In what is perhaps the most salient, earliest instance in which Shi'ite hierocratic authority was wielded to achieve a political end, the *'Ulema* of Persia played a central role in initiating the Tobacco Protests against the Qajar government's concession to British tobacco interests. *Marja'* Ayatollah Shirazi's 1891 *fatwa* that forbade tobacco consumption and the ensuing countrywide boycott of tobacco served as the first, explicit instance wherein the Shi'a *'Ulema* utilized their socio-religious positions to exact political change from the ruling powers.[7] Within weeks, the population heeded his call, the Shah bowed to social and religious pressure and, following considerable public outcry, cancelled the concession.[8]

The sociopolitical organization formed from the Tobacco Protest movement later served as the organizational axes for the Persian Constitutional Revolution. In this case, the *'Ulema* played a crucial role in guiding Iran's transition to a form of modernity.[9] Although highly informal and driven by a largely unspecific agenda, these movements and the Shah's eventual accession to the *'Ulema's* demands serve as a pivotal moment in the *'Ulemas'* gradual transition from quietism to increased political activity.[10] The protest movements and the intellectual currents they inspired were central to broader developments in politics in the Shi'ite world and, in response to such currents, the later politicization of the *hawzat* in Najaf and Qom.

Najaf Seminary

The Najaf seminary was propelled to a position of extraordinary influence within the Shi'a world. Believed to have been founded by Sheikh Tusi (d. 1067) in the eleventh century upon his expulsion from Baghdad, the seminary has since become one of the largest and most important learning centers in the

5 Adel, Gholamali, *et al*. "Hawza-yi 'Ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution," 116.

6 Bernard Lewis, *et al*, "The Encyclopaedia of Islam," (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), 416; Said Amir Arjomand, *Sociology of Shi'ite Islam: Collected Essays* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2016), 364, 387; Vali Reza, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2006), 103; Edalatnejad, "Shiite tradition, rationalism and modernity," 66.

7 Ann Lambton, *Qajar Persia* (University of Texas Press, 1987), 247-48; Khalid Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and Its Role in Shaping Modern Shī'ite Identity: The Ḥawzas of Al-Najaf and Qumm as a Case Study," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (2007): 849.

8 Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Oneworld, 2000), 218.

9 Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation* (New York: Dutton, 1996), 150-55

10 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, 183-184.

Shi'ite world.[11] Its significance to Shi'ite thought, though unquestionable, is a relatively recent development, generally understood to have begun around the eighteenth century.[12] Since its rise to prominence, however, its' influence has been considerable: Najaf has produced a gamut of Shi'ism's most notable *maraja'*, many of whom are responsible for critical developments in Shi'ite religious thought and political philosophy.[13]

For much of its early history, the Najaf seminary was eclipsed by its counterpart in Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid empire. Crucial to Isfahan's early prominence was an extraordinarily generous patronage network from the Persian state; it was this same network that, in later centuries, allowed the Najaf seminary to rise to intellectual and political prominence in its own right.[14] Beginning in the sixteenth century, Safavid patronage allowed for significant scholarship to be performed in Najaf for the first time since Ibn Tawus (d. 1266), who lived and worked in Najaf near the end of the Abbasid era.[15] Though scholarly developments in Najaf would remain eclipsed by Isfahan and other centers during this period, the Safavid patronage network effectively catalyzed Najaf's later development into a key center of learning.[16]

The consolidation of Najaf as a preeminent center of Shi'ite scholarship was associated with Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-'Ulum (d. 1797), who revitalized the 'Usuli school of thought in Najaf after Wahid Bihbihani's (d. 1791) intellectual "victory" over the Akhbari establishment in Karbala'.[17] Crucial to Najaf's ascent to prominence too was Shaykh Murtada al-Ansari (d. 1864), the most notable Shi'ite figure of the nineteenth century who was the first sole supreme exemplar (*marja' at-taqlid*) accepted by the majority of the Shi'ite world.[18] Ansari eventually settled in Najaf, thus cementing the seminary's position as an undisputed center for Shi'a intellectual activity by the mid-nineteenth century.[19] The establishment of a *marja' at-taqlid* in Najaf provided the financial basis for the *hawza's* future intellectual independence, as religiously-obligated alms paid to the new Najafi *marja'* (known as *khums*) could independently subsidize teaching and scholarly activity at the Najaf

11 Gholamali Adel, *et al*, *Hawza-yi 'Ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (EWI Press, 2012), 118.

12 Augustus Richard Norton, "Al-Najaf: Its Resurgence as a Religious and University Center," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 1 (2011), 132-145.

13 Rasoul Imani Khoshkhu, "Islamic Seminary of Najaf," in *A Glimpse at the Major Shi'a Seminaries, Part 1* (Ahlul Bayt World Assembly, 2013), 8-9.

14 Norton, "Al-Najaf."

15 Norton, "Al-Najaf."

16 Zackery M. Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf: Myth and History of the Shi'i Ḥawza," *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2017): 14.

17 Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf," 14.

18 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, 210.

19 Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf," 15.

hawza. This development effectively cemented Najaf's centuries-long growth in intellectual prominence and eventual transformation into a financially, socially, and politically self-sustaining center of intellectual activity.[20]

Throughout the early- to mid-twentieth century, the *maraja'* of Najaf enjoyed relative noninterference from the state, despite the considerable political changes occurring within Iraq and the region. The emergence of secularist nationalism in the Shi'ite and Islamic world during the first half of the twentieth century appeared poised to weaken the traditional power of the clerical hierocracy. In spite of this ideological challenge, the Najaf seminary, beginning with the tenure of Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim (d. 1970), experienced what has been described as a "golden age" of intellectual activity.[21] The community of scholars and students at Najaf grew to over 3,000 by the late 1970s. However, by the 1980s and with the beginning of Iraq's war with Iran, the number of seminarians and students shrank considerably.[22] This decrease was due in no small part to both the war's effects on the Iraqi populace and the gradual "hardening" of the Iraqi state's policies toward the Shi'ite hierocratic order in Iraq.

Beginning in 1991, following Iraq's expulsion from Kuwait and the beginning of the countrywide revolt against President Saddam Hussein (d. 2006), the Najaf seminary experienced considerable state repression as both a preventative and retributive measure intended to insure state stability from the organized sociopolitical power of the *'ulema*.[23] Seminarians thought to be linked to the insurrection were monitored, with steep penalties for perceived opposition to the Ba'athists' rule. The effects of this crackdown on the Iraqi *'ulema* were severe: the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Iraq calculated that, by 1991, there were only 800 Shia clergy in all of Iraq, as compared to 8,000 in 1971; the remainder had been killed, jailed, or had gone into exile.[24] This period coincided with the tenures of Ayatollahs Khoei (d. 1992) and Sistani as *maraja'* of Najaf, who led the institution into the twenty-first century.[25] Indeed, the turmoil Iraq and the Najaf seminary itself have experienced through the past forty years have imparted a degree of caution upon its *maraja'* and seminarians.

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20 Meir Litvak, "The Finances of the 'Ulemā' Communities of Najaf and Karbalā', 1796-1904." *Die Welt Des Islams, New Series* 40, no. 1 (2000): 41-66; Yasser Tabbaa and Sabrina Mervin. *Najaf, the gate of wisdom: history, heritage & significance of the holy city of the Shi'a* (Paris: Unesco, 2014), 120.

21 Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford University Press, 1989); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam, Religion, Political Order, and Social Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

22 Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown;* Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam.*

23 Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr* (Scribner, 2008), 51-52.

24 Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr*, 51-52.

25 Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 64-65.

Wishing to remain a stabilizing influence *within* society, the Najaf seminary seeks to limit the bounds of its authorities to the traditional, religiously defined constituency; in short, the Najafis may indeed be described as quietist.[26]

Qom Seminary

Persian nationalism drove efforts to develop a seminary of comparable stature to that of Najaf following that institution's rise to prominence in the early 20th century.[27] Roy Mottahedeh identifies the arrival of eminent scholar and *marja' at-taqlid* Abd al-Karim Ha'iri-Yazdi (d. 1937) to Qom in 1921 as the beginning of the Qom seminary's revitalization as a center for Shi'ite intellectual and political activity.[28] Ha'ari-Yazdi, who was considered a "good administrator" and a "respected teacher," was asked by existing notables at Qom to restore the historical Faydiyya seminary – one of the constitutive *madresa* of what was the larger Qom *hawza* – and become the patron of scholarship at the Qom *hawza*.[29] Ha'ari-Yazdi's success in revitalizing that institution facilitated the transfer of seminary scholars and students – and, therefore, of *khums* payments – from Najaf to Qom, solidifying the Qom *hawza*'s revitalization into a key center of Shi'ite learning.[30] This shift in authority from Najaf to Qom became decisive when Qom resident Ayatollah Borujerdi (d. 1962) was singled out as the sole *marja' at-taqlid* of the Shi'ite world in the late 1940s, after the death of Ayatollah Isfahani in 1946.[31]

With Ayatollah Borujerdi's ascendance to the position of *marja' at-taqlid*, the Qom seminary entered a critical period in its development to become a political entity in its own right. We may thus define two periods in the ensuing history of the revived Qom seminary: one in which quietism generally prevailed, marked by the stewardship of Ayatollah Borujerdi;[32] and one of increasing activism, which saw the activities of Muslim Brotherhood-inspired *'ulema* represented initially by Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani (d. 1979), Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari (d. 1986), and, eventually, Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989).[33] Khomeini, in particular, served as the theological-political leader of the Qom seminary that played perhaps the most significant

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26 Norton, "Al-Najaf."

27 Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft: The Politics of Islam in Iran* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 34.

28 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, 228.

29 شبکه علمی و اطلاع‌رسانی اجتهاد (Ijtihad Scientific and Information Network), "Haeri Yazdi ،Ayatollah Abdulkarim," *Ijtihad.ir* (http://www.ijtihad.ir/ScholarDetailsen.aspx?itemid=396); archived at *Wayback Machine* (https://web.archive.org/); citing a capture dated December 19, 2018; Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, 228-9.

30 Keiko Sakurai, "Making Qom a Centre of Shi'i Scholarship: Al-Mustafa International University," in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Al-Azhar, Al-Madinah and Al-Mustafa*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 44.

31 Sakurai, "Making Qom a Centre of Shi'i Scholarship," 44.

32 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft,* 34.

33 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft,* 34-39.

role in transforming the Iranian *'ulema's* sociopolitical role from one of "influence from without" to a maximalist control of the system of government (*wilayah*).[34]

Qom's clerics faced Iran's rapid socioeconomic modernization with considerable skepticism, as it effectively threatened the *'ulema's* traditional positions of influence within Iranian society.[35] The formation of an activist perspective among Qom's seminarians sought primarily to transform the conventional hierocratic apparatus to address the building social pressure within Iran generated by modernization. Given the politicization of individuals affiliated with the Qom seminary, Ayatollah Borujerdi's death in 1961 should effectively be understood as the primary point of departure for the shift toward increased activism and Khomeini's subsequent rise in prominence. With Borujerdi's passing, the Qom seminary lost its most visible figurehead while subsequently freeing Khomeini from direct subordinance to any higher Ayatollah.[36] In short, Borujerdi's death marked the beginning of the end of the seminary's quietist period and provided the ideological space for Khomeini's meteoric rise to prominence. Khomeini began to eclipse other Ayatollahs in terms of influence, enabling him to support seminarians and reap the ideological benefits therewith.[37]

The Khomeinists at Qom subsequently formed a revisionist approach to modernization, which drew heavily from collective memory and identity to produce a religiously based conception of modernization and socially - and religiously conscious theories of justice and political development. In pursuit of these visions, Qom's activist-inclined *'ulema* sought to distinguish themselves as patrons of the public's interests and wellbeing, seizing upon the wave of religiously-driven widespread discontentment with the Shah's authoritarian and western-inclined policies.[38] Moreover, their cause ultimately reaped the ideological benefits of state repression. As the Shah cracked down on dissent, activist *'ulema* turned to the evocative power of history within the Shi'ite tradition to increase their standing among the Shah's opposition. The activist *'ulema* often invoked the memory of Imam Hussein's death at Karbala in 680 CE, as Hussein's status as a martyr for the Shi'ite cause forms a central part of the Shi'ite vision of justice and collective identity.[39] The deaths of revolutionary protesters in clashes with state authorities created an image

34 Najam Haider, *Shi'i Islam: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 212.

35 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft,* 46.

36 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft,* 42.

37 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft,* 44-45.

38 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft*, 43.

39 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft*, 45; Rainer Brunner, "Dropping a Thick Curtain of Forgetting and Disregard. Modern Shi'ite Quietism Beyond Politics," in *Political Quietism in Islam. Sunni and Shi'i Thought and Practice*, ed. Saud al-Sarhan (I.B. Tauris, 2020), 194.

of martyrdom analogous to Imam Hussein's death at Karbala; as such, the activist contingent sought to lend social and ideological significance to their cause by presenting an equivalence between modern developments in Iran and this seminal event in Shi'ite history. These politicized invocations of the Shi'ite experience formed a powerful tool for the activist *'ulema*, galvanizing Iran's populace to the revolutionaries' cause.[40]

With the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Qom seminary would come to serve as the new regime's ideological "crown jewel," with Khomeini as its *marja'*.[41] From this point forward, the seminary was given absolute authority over all other seminaries within Iran and would serve as a method by which the regime would exercise its soft power: in serving as an official point of ideological emulation for Shi'a worldwide, the Qom seminary became the regime's means of "exporting the revolution" throughout the Shi'ite world.[42] Indeed, the Qom seminary continued to function as a center of intellectual pursuit through the tenures of Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei, Qom's current *marja'* and Iran's current Supreme Leader. However, its role as an ideological centerpiece for the revolutionary regime cemented its position as an advocative body; the seminary had, in effect, come to serve as a legitimizing force for the Islamic Republic.[43]

Distinguishing the Sociopolitical Roles of the Najaf and Qom Seminaries

The developmental trajectories of the Qom and Najaf seminaries produced two comparable but ultimately different institutional positions that evolved throughout the twentieth century. Both seminaries' encounters with nationalism, secularism, parliamentarism, and socialism served to define and, eventually, divide the two seminaries from their erstwhile comparable positions of authority and positionality within the Shi'ite world.

On an elemental level, both seminaries represent the same branch of Shi'ite thought and practice. The seminaries are rooted deeply in the *'Usuli* school of thought and instruction, and both have served as important centers of *'Usuli* scholarship since their ascents to prominence. Moreover, as paramount centers of Shi'ite learning, both *hawzat* wield a considerable degree of socio-political influence among each institution's immediate and proximate followers. As scholarly institutions, the *hawzat* both serve as patrons and hosts to countless Shi'ite scholars-in-training. As seats of Shi'ite theological authority, both host *maraja' at-taqlid* that serve to propagate each seminary's respective theological

40 Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft*, 43.

41 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, 246.

42 Sakurai, "Making Qom a Centre of Shi'i Scholarship," 46.

43 Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Regime of Religion," *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 1 (2011): 136-139.

views and form reference points for Shi'ite legal scholars (*faqih*) around the world. In short, at an elemental level, both Najaf and Qom indeed remain comparable.

The seminaries differ in their respective histories and political contexts. The gradual politicization of the Shi'a identity and community during the nineteenth century began to change traditional conceptions of Shi'ite *'ulemas'* duties within and toward society-at-large. According to Rainier Brunner, modern, mainstream Shi'ite approaches to the question of political authority and the *hawza's/'ulema's* place therein form two ends of a quietist-activist spectrum.[44] On this model, however, we must note that Brunner's model cannot describe a particular *hawza* or *marja'* perfectly or completely encapsulate the tendencies of either end of the spectrum – a matter Sajjad Rizvi describes at length in his own work on the question of quietism among the Shi'ite *'ulema*.[45] Despite these flaws, the model manages to succinctly define with considerable accuracy the various institutional and personal philosophies toward civil authority as they relate to one another, according to a central, theoretical axis.

Brunner explains that at one end of the axis, we find the doctrine of quietism. Under this philosophy, an *'ulema* could influence society-at-large on a purely spiritual basis, continuing to uphold the traditional role that the *'ulema* occupied in the Persian/broader Shi'a world from the early-16th century/ Safavid period to the mid-20th/revolutionary period.[46] Under the quietist doctrine, the' ulema would serve as social and theological authorities to their *religiously defined* constituencies, leaving matters of state to civil authorities in the name of social and political unity.[47] Babak Rahimi explains that the Najaf seminary, particularly under the tenure of Ayatollah Sistani, has generally maintained this position despite the turmoil within Iraq.[48] Moreover, Sistani and the Najaf seminarians retain considerable influence *within*, rather than *over* the broader Shi'a world, and generally remain aloof from day-to-day political

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44 Rainer Brunner, "Shiism in the Modern Context: From Religious Quietism to Political Activism." *Religion Compass* 3, no. 1 (2009): 136-153.

45 Sajjad Rizvi, "Political Mobilization and the Shi'i Religious Establishment (marja'iyya)," *International Affairs* 86, no. 6 (2010): 1300.

46 Brunner, "Shiism in the Modern Context," 136-153.

47 Rainer Brunner, "Dropping a Thick Curtain of Forgetting and Disregard. Modern Shi'ite Quietism Beyond Politics", in *Political Quietism in Islam. Sunni and Shi'i Thought and Practice*, ed. Saud al-Sarhan (I.B. Tauris, 2020), 193; Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Ba'athist Iraq," (US Institute of Peace, 2007): 4; Ulrich Haarmann, "'Lieber hundert Jahre Zwangsherrschaft als ein Tag Leiden im Bürgerkrieg'. Ein gemeinsamer Topos im islamischen und frühneuzeitlichen europäischen Staatsdenken ('Better a hundred years of dictatorship than one day of suffering in civil war:' A common topic in Islamic and early modern European state thinking)" in *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident. Festschrift für Abdoljavad Falaturi zum 65. Geburtstag* (*God's is the Orient, God's is the Occident: writings for Abdoljavad Falaturi on his 65th birthday*), ed. Udo Tworuschka Vienna: Böhlau, 1991), 262-69.

48 Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Ba'athist Iraq," (US Institute of Peace, 2007): 3-4.

affairs.[49] In this case, the seminary's "constituency" remains spiritually defined, opting to serve as an example worthy of emulation rather than a totalistic, authoritative source of legitimacy and legality.

On the other end of Brunner's model we find the activist perspective. Under an activist outlook, the *'ulema's* prerogatives are broadened to encompass duties traditionally performed by civil authorities; in short, an activist *'ulema* may seek *wilayah* of their own, as the religious and civil constituencies would be made congruent under the doctrine of the Imamate.[50] The activist *'ulema*, in effect, assume the political and governmental authorities of the state in a manner in line with the doctrine of "guardianship," in which clerical authority forms a meaningful but substitute social, political, and theological source for the Shi'a body politic in the absence of the ultimate authority of the Hidden Imam.

Crucially and distinctively for the Qom seminary, reactionary adaptation to the same sociopolitical forces that propelled Najaf's rise to prominence prompted the Qom seminary's rise. The Qom seminary, generally speaking, has professed a modernistic, if not reactionary sociopolitical point of view influenced very strongly by Iranian nationalism and Islamism since its entry into the modern era of Shi'ite thought.[51] Modernist intellectual developments within Qom eventually solidified the notion of "activist cleric" as a critical element of a uniquely Qom-ist tradition, establishing a distinct sociopolitical role that sought a *particular* political end derived from the very modernist philosophies that propelled the seminary's rise to prominence.

Conclusion

The histories of the Najaf and Qom seminaries are long and storied, and both are, to a certain extent, necessarily intertwined. While sharing comparable elemental characteristics, both seminaries have indeed evolved over their history to represent equivocally different sociopolitical positions and functions. Moreover, this process cannot be divorced from the histories of the countries in which both seminaries operate, as their political contexts have come to impact their function within their respective societies.

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49 Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Ba'athist Iraq," (US Institute of Peace, 2007): 4; Sajjad Rizvi, "Political Mobilization and the Shi'i Religious Establishment (marja'iyya)," *International Affairs* 86, no. 6 (2010): 1306; Bernard Lewis, "On the Quietist and Activist Traditions in Islamic Political Writing," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 49 (1986): 141-47.

50 Brunner, "Shiism in the Modern Context," 136-153; Hamid Mavani, "Khomeini's Concept of Governance of the Jurisconsult '(Wilayat Al-Faqih)' Revisited: The Aftermath of Iran's 2009 Presidential Election," *Middle East Journal* 67, no. 2 (2013): 211.

51 Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Imagining Shi'ite Iran: Transnationalism and Religious Authenticity in the Muslim World," *Iranian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007): 20; Meir Litvak, "'God's Favored Nation:' The New Religious Nationalism in Iran," *Religions* 11, no. 10 (2020): 541.

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