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# Collective *hawza* leadership in a time of crisis: The period of *maraje thalath* (1937-1953)

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## Abstract

The intention behind this article is twofold. Firstly, to review the political settings leading to the second phase (1937-1953) of formation of the *hawza* 'ilmiyya of Qum, - often ignored by scholars but regarded as 'the breathing period'. This period follows the death of its founder Ayatollah Abd al-Karim Haeri in 1937, and precedes the 1953 CIA sponsored coup d'état, and includes the appointment of Ayatollah Boroujerdi as the leader of the modern *hawza* 'ilmiyya. Secondly to assess and evaluate the leadership style of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists known as '*maraje thalath*', Ayatollahs Mohammad Hojjat Kooh Kamari'i (1892-1952) Mohammad Taqi Khonsari (1888-1952) and Ayatollah Sadr al-Din Sadr (1882-1953). The three senior jurist managed to firmly consolidate the modern *hawza* of Qum despite the secularising policies of the Pahlavis, aimed at eliminating the religious sector from the Iranian political scene. In order to understand the course of subsequent developments of the religious establishments and Shi'a scholars in their attainment of power and influence in Iran, it is crucial to investigate the developments during this period. This paper will research the political and social contributions of the triumvirate, in addition to focusing on the impact of Ayatollah Boroujerdi's arrival in Qum to the later part of this period.

## Keywords

*hawza* 'ilmiyya, Qum, Shi'i Islam and political activity, *maraje thalath*

## Introduction

Amongst the Shi'i scholars there are two intellectual camps for and against political involvement. On one side, the school of Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Najafi (d. 1850) referred to as *Shaheb Javahir*, in recognition of his important book *javahir al-kalam* (Kondo, 2017: p. 61) encourages the clergy towards political activism. Contrasting this approach is the school of his immediate successor Sheikh Morteza Ansari (d. 1864), author of major books on Shi'a

jurisprudence such as *al-makaseb* (Mottahedeh, 1985; p. 213), rejects and discourages political activism by the Shi'i clergy. Historically, the position of *ulama* or learned scholars with regards to the question of political involvement in the affairs of the state, has been that of quietism, and as such has been regarded to be essentially in favour of quietism and apolitical (Piscatori and Saikal, 2019: p. 60). Since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, religious scholars became more politically pro-active and their involvement in the modern politics of Iran has been highlighted by the Tobacco Movement of 1891 by Ayatollah Mirza Mohammad Hassan Shirazi (d. 1985) in his opposition to the granting of the Tobacco concessions by Iran's Qajar monarch Naser al-Din Shah (d. 1896) to the colonial British Empire (Keddie, 1966: p. 65). Nevertheless, the emphasis on the Shi'i *ulama* within literature tends to concentrate on the political participation of the religious scholars particularly with regards to the two of the major Iranian revolutions of our time, namely that of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and the Islamic Revolution (1978-79) (Keddie, 1998: p. 4). Material on traditionalist quietist *ulama* is limited and their role has been often ignored despite their crucial role in ensuring the survival of the clerical establishment within Iran and safeguarding the many theological schools throughout Iran including the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum.

Following the founding of the *hawza*, such determination can be seen during the collaborative leadership of a triumvirate of Shi'a jurist known as '*maraje thalath*' (d. 1952-1953), and later their presence alongside Ayatollah Seyed Hossein Borujerdi (d. 1961), who became the absolute source of emulation, shifting the centre of influence of Shi'i authority from Najaf to Qum (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014: p. 263). These senior religious scholars did not only play a decisive role in launching, consolidating, and preserving the *hawza* and its independence from the state as the major centre of spiritual and religious direction, but they achieved this task through quietism in political affairs at a period of time when the Pahlavi regime had 'promulgated a series of measures for reshaping the political, social, and economic life of Iran' (Khomeini, 2002: p.16). The period of the triumvirate of Shi'a Jurists marks one of the most eventful periods of Iranian history and the very occurrence of the triumvirate of jurists indicates 'political quietism' or a 'pragmatic quietism'. Due to unprecedented circumstances spearheaded by the modernization initiatives of the two Pahlavi monarchs, and the unique opportunity provided during the phase of transfer of power, their response involved a mechanism of collective leadership by the three senior Shi'a jurists -an approach that was 'highly adaptable to specific socio-historical contexts', providing withdrawal when circumstances were 'antagonistic' and cooperative pragmatism, when circumstances were 'propitious'.

(Kawtharani, 2019: p. 92). Their aloofness from political involvement was aimed towards preserving and consolidating the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum. For the purposes of this essay, we begin by exploring three key dynamics through which we will evaluate the 'collaborative approach' of the Shi'i jurists. Foremost we will introduce the political setting within Iran from 1937-1941, during the rule of Reza Shah. Thereafter we will detail the structure of the triumvirate, highlighting what the religious scholars aimed to achieve through this innovative approach or their preferences over the outcomes that resulted from the series of events that took place from 1941-1945, which created a quasi-democratic space in Iran. Finally, we will focus on the deliberations within *hawza* and outside, identifying number of different political aspirations that leads to the presence of a sole leader and turning Qum into the centre of influence of Shi'i authority. This leads us to a holistic assessment of the leadership of the *maraje thalath* and why quietism does not always connote to calm acceptance of political realities. The phase of the triumvirate's political non-interference has been critical to the rise of Shi'i clerical activism a couple of decades later, in opposition to the Pahlavi regime.

### **The Formation of the Modern *hawza* in Qum**

The formation of the modern *hawza 'ilmiyya* dates back to 1921 with the arrival of Ayatollah Sheikh Abd al-Karim Haeri Yazdi (d. 1937) in Qum after years of experience with the management of the *hawza* of Arak following his return from Najaf in 1913 (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: p. 42). His move to Qum coincided with the period of expulsion of many religious scholars of Iranian decent from Najaf, after the failed 1920 Iraqi revolt against the British (Moazami, 2008: p. 41). He benefited greatly from the congregation of so many learned Shi'i scholars in his attempt at forming the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum (Siavoshi, 2017: p. 31). At this time two of the most prominent Shi'i scholars Ayatollahs Seyed Abul Hasan Isfahani (d. 1946) and Mirza Mohammad Hussain Na'ini (d. 1936) also visited Qum, prompting the 1921 visit to the newly formed establishment by the King, Ahmad Shah Qajar (d. 1930) and the new commander of the armed forces Reza Khan Pahlavi (d. 1944) (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 85). This visit which is thought to be decisive in his future responses to the religious scholars of Qum was just after the 1921 British assisted coup d'état that had elevated his position from a Colonel in the Cossack Division to soon being the Shah of Iran (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 103). During his visit he discussed with the senior scholars his plan to declaring the country a Republic, possibly imitating the events of Turkey. He sought the religious scholar's support but abandoned the idea following their concerted opposition (Curtis

and Hooglund, 2008: p. 27). Their opposition was essentially because of their fear of providing a platform to the Communist movement as 'republicanism was a step toward Bolshevism' (Faghfoory, 1987: p. 423). This can be seen by the actions of Reza Khan thereafter, announcing that the 'ideology of republicanism had created social confusion' and arresting many Communist campaigners (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 134). In reality, Reza Khan used the events to fortify his own position in a future takeover of the monarchy and build new alliances. Having realised the potentiality of such congregation of religious scholars in Qum, in a matter of months, Reza Khan was instrumental in easing the return of the Shi'i scholars back to Najaf, accompanied by specially assigned army commander to ensure their safe return and settlement back in Iraq (Samiei, 2012: p. 282). The newly reformed *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum which had benefited from the presence and expertise of so many different scholars of various fields, inevitably led to an increase in *hawza* student numbers, although an exact figure is not available, but assumed to have reached as high as a thousand at its peak (Jafariyan 2002: p. 16). One such student was Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) whose arrival in Qum around 1922 begins a series of developments that ultimately leads within decades to the Islamic Revolution (Khomeini, 2015: p. XIX). From 1925 the circumstances for the *hawza* changed, the Qajar dynasty fell following the crumbling of the central political authority, giving rise to the 'era of Colonel Reza Khan' (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 118), a new monarch with a new agenda.

Reza Khan's flirtation with the religious scholars in his rise to power was short-lived (Arjomand, 1993: p. 82), and the Constitutional rights and the privilege granted to the clergy during the *enghelab-e mashruteh* or the Constitutional Revolution of Iran were soon eroded. This included the disappearing of the provision for a five member religious scholar committee to supervise legislations ensuring they did not violate the Shari'a which was enacted by Ayatollah Seyed Hassan Modarres (d. 1937) (Arjomand and Brown, 2013: p. 20). Reza Khan's government envisaged a 'modernisation project with Western connotations', 'secular' with a great deal of 'anti-clergy rhetoric' (Moazami, 2013: p. 171). In an attempt to control the *hawza*, the government introduced new curriculum for the clergy in 1934, added to the implementation of annual examinations (Akhavi, 1980: p. 45). The setting of new standards and the offering of employment with the government itself, alongside proper governmental training, was a major challenge to Ayatollah Haeri's authority (Faghfoory, 1987: p. 427). Ayatollah Haeri's approach was quietist, his views of political involvement were shaped by the events of the Constitutional Revolution, when both sides of the political argument, namely Ayatollahs Akhund Mohammad-Kazem Khorasani (d. 1911) and Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri (d.1909) did not

accomplish their goals (Samiei, 2017: p. 319). As such Ayatollah Haeri did not rebel against the new requirement and requested the new examinations to be managed in Qum, and supervised by the administration of the *hawza* (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 46). Nevertheless, the ranks of the religious scholars reduced in numbers and only those with official government certificates could continue (Samiei, 2012: p. 284). Thus during this difficult period the modern *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum lost many of its talented scholars and students. Another decisive move made against the religious scholars by the government was the creation of an endowments directorate to channel funds away from the *hawza*; by accessing the financial resources of *ulama* and *hawza*, governmental power was extended to the collections of religious taxes (Manzur-Ajdad, 2000: p. 104 & 137).

Reza Khan's 'anti-clericalism policies' had peaked following his visit to Turkey and his meeting with Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (d. 1938) in 1934 (Arjomand, 1988: p. 82). Reza Khan was impressed with the policies introduced in Turkey and attempted to emulate them in Iran. In addition, he invoked the forced wearing of European-style clothing by men *taghyir-e lebas* and later the forced removal of hijab *kashf-e hijab*. This led to the bloody suppression of a clerically organized anti-government gatherings particularly that of Mashhad in 1935 (Arjomand, 1988: p. 82). Ultimately, the events led to the closure of many *hawza 'ilmiyya*'s across Iran (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 114), including the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Mashhad, and the exile to Karbala of its chief educator, Ayatollah Agha Hussain Qumi (d. 1946) (Baghestani, 2012: p. 259). Ayatollah Haeri who had always kept his distance from politics, issued a rare reaction in the form of a letter in 1936 to the monarch, expressing 'extreme concern' at a policy which was deemed to be 'in contradiction to the laws of Islam' (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 51). It is not known whether he would have called for confrontation, because Ayatollah Haeri died in the midst of governmental 'anti-clerical fever'. The vacuum created by Haeri's death was an opportunity for Reza Khan to intensify his attempt to take complete control over the religious sector, as such the settings became more repressive, systematic, and coercive, in a final push to 'curtail the power and authority of the clergy' (Daneshvar, 2016: p. 6). There are reports that fear and insecurity within clerics throughout the country, with rumours of religious scholars being 'submerged and drowned in the sea', or 'placed before firing squads' (Faghfoory, 1987: p. 427). There was an expectation that the Reza Khan policies would lead to the same events that had occurred 'in Turkey with Ataturk', or in the 'Soviet-Russia by the Bolsheviks' to take place in Iran (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 51).

### **The Period of the Maraje Thalath (1937-1953)**

Although historically various *hawza 'ilmiyya* saw the presence of multiple eminent scholars or *maraje*', sources of emulation, these would be series of individual authorities and did not assume a collective approach to leading *hawza* institutions. However, the use of a triad leadership has been synonymous with periods of time involving political action. The term *maraje thalath* or triumvirate of Shi'a jurists has been initially used to refer to three most prominent pro-Constitutionalist scholars of Najaf opposing the Qajar dynasty (Moradi, 2016: p. 1); Ayatollah Akhund Khorasani (d. 1911) in addition to Ayatollahs Mirza Hassan Khalili Tehrani (d. 1908), and Sheikh Abdullah Mazandarani (d. 1912) (Farzaneh, 2015: p. 115). Similarly, the term has been linked for Ayatollahs Sayyid Abul Hasan Isfahani (d. 1946), Mirza Mohammad Hussain Na'ini (d. 1936) as well as Seyed Ali Shahrastani (d. 1964), who were expelled following popular and tribal revolt led by the Shi'i *ulama* against the British occupation of Iraq in 1920 (Anonymous, 2020: para. 21; Litvak, 2002: p. 167). Also reference is made to this term for Ayatollahs Isfahani, Na'ini and Haeri in their negotiations with Reza Khan about the republican proposals (Ladjeverdi, 2001: p. 4). Most recently, the term was used for the leadership of Ayatollahs Seyed Mohammad Reza Golpaygani (d.1993), Seyed Shahab al-Din Mar'ashi Najafi (d. 1990) and Seyed Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari (d. 1986) (Khosroshahi, 2017: p. 3) as the most senior scholars of Qum supporting the position of Ayatollah Khomeini in his opposing the Pahlavi regime, in the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution (Hiro, 2013: p. 43).

Nevertheless, *maraje thalath* or *ayat thalath* is termed predominantly to denote the presence of three prominent Shi'i religious authorities or Ayatollahs, who jointly managed the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum during its second phase of activities following the demise of its founder Haeri (Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2015: para. 1). An era that starts with the death of Ayatollah Haeri in January of 1937, and ends with the death of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists close to each other between 1952 to 1953. Importantly this period is significantly touched and strengthened in the latter part by the presence of Ayatollah Borujerdi (d. 1961). Subsequently, during this period the 'triumvirate' of Ayatollahs assumed leadership of the *hawza* (Fischer, 2003: p. 257 & 111). They are called the triumvirate because of their collective approach to leadership, despite being of different political persuasions, through collaborative decision-making. The triumvirate of Shi'a jurists acting jointly in their control of the *hawza* as leaders until the arrival of Ayatollah Borujerdi in 1945, and as consultative advisors to his leadership in the second half, while at the

same time each of them being a recognized as an independent marja'. The three senior jurists were Ayatollahs Seyed Mohammad Hojjat Kooch Kamari'i (d. 1952), Seyed Mohammad Taqi Khonsari (d. 1952) and Seyed Sadr al-Din Sadr (d. 1953) (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: 44; Walbridge, 2001: p. 216). Their deaths occurred within months from one another, and just prior to the 1953 CIA-led coup d'état that led to the removal of the prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh (d. 1967), and the return of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (d. 1980) as autocratic ruler (Gasiorowski, and Byrne, 2015: p. xiv). Ayatollah Khonsari was the earliest of the triumvirate to settle in Qum, back in 1921 with Ayatollah Haeri, in the early days of forming the modern *hawza* 'ilmiyya (Effati, 2018: para. 4). Ayatollah Hojjat came to Qum in 1930 as an able scholar of Najaf, based on Ayatollah Haeri's personal invitation. His departure from Najaf was essentially because of his asthmatic condition effected by the climate (Aghighi-Bakhshayeshi, 1981: p. 58). Although Ayatollah Sadr had briefly stayed in Qum in 1927, but moved on to teach within the *hawza* of Mashhad within months. His return to Qum was much later in 1935 at Ayatollah Haeri's insistence, either following or just before the tense anti-government protests of Mashhad (Kamalian, 2012, p. 187)

Within the scarce material available on the triumvirate in English, there is an assumption that the triumvirate was shaped because, Ayatollah Haeri's death left the *hawza* without an effective leader (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014: p. 262), or that it was a temporary administration (Algar, 1998: para. 4). There is ample evidence, however, that Ayatollah Haeri had already delegated his authority to Ayatollahs Hojjat and Sadr for educational as well as financial matters whilst severally ill in 1936 (Basirat-Manesh, 1997: p. 268; Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 201). To support this position, official records show the head of police in Qum who was responsible for stopping commemorative programs for Ayatollah Haeri is recoded as reporting back 'people are now referring to Ayatollahs Hojjat and Sadr' (Basirat-Manesh, 1997: p. 268). He is also quoted as saying 'now that I am severely ill, it's best for you to lead prayers in my place', thereafter Ayatollah Hojjat led the congregational prayers in his place (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 89). The extreme sensitivities by the government to *hawza* activities required the senior scholars to work together, and the triumvirate was formed based on a conscious decision for 'crisis management' and 'consolidation of hawza' to guarantee its continued existence. There is unanimous account by students of the *hawza* and historians that although there were many eminent scholars in Qum at the time of Ayatollah Haeri's death, the formation of the triumvirate was a decision by his three confidants, for joint leadership based on a shared recognition to have a collective response to difficult circumstances (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 90; Davani, 2007: p. 91). However



the continuation of such format after the abdication of Reza Khan in 1941 is confirmation that the arrangements were viewed as working well and regarded not to be temporary. The assumption that the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists was formed because there was a 'lack of consensus on one scholarly figure' (Moazami, 2013: p. 110), is not warranted either. Amongst the three, Ayatollah Hojjat is regarded as Ayatollah Haeri's favourite (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: 44). This is supported by detailed account Ayatollah Haeri life given by Sheikh Mohammad Sharif-Razi (d.2000), whose book was published in 1953, just after the death of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists, 'people were aware who was praying and lecturing' in places dedicated to Ayatollah Haeri', 'there was no ambiguity' (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 89). Nevertheless, Ayatollah Hojjat did not seek to become Ayatollah Haeri's sole successor but decided to stand back and adopt a more collective leadership approach. He called out to the others to work together for action to prevent the closure of the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum (Meshkat, 1983: para.14; Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 72 & 371). Particular credit goes to Ayatollah Hojjat for this pronouncement, despite leading in position (Karbashi, 2001: p. 104), but Ayatollahs Sadr and Khonsari helped him in without any reservations (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: 44). Although according to Ayatollah Hojjat's son-in-law Allameh Abbas Mesbahzadeh, Ayatollah Hojjat gave tribute for the collaborative approach to Ayatollah Haeri, 'before his death, he called the three of us together and warned us against individualistic or political approach', he said 'work together if you want to overcome Reza Khan' (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 394 & 70). Thus the collective leadership approach ensured that the attitude of political quietism continued after Ayatollah Haeri to be carried on later by Ayatollah Borujerdi, through the synergy of the triumvirate with regards the issue. Consequently, the three senior jurists preferred the pre-eminence of the *hawza* of Najaf over Qum (Ash'ari, 2009: para.10). Such arrangement not only recognized Ayatollah Isfahani's status, and avoided rivalry with Najaf, it would also shift Reza Khan's attention from Qum, subsequently they would not be seen as a threat and thus avoid confrontation. This decision was in line for the period which marks a time when the religious scholars were more or less split based on the borders between nation-states, and subsequently formed local networks (Feirahi, 2012: p. 410). Thus, the *hawza's* continued existence 'is owed to the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists and in particular to Ayatollah Hojjat' (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 114; Modarres-Tabrizi, 1948: p. 24).

An interesting point is that even though the term *maraje thalath* has been initially synonymous with political activity of the religious scholars during the Constitutional Revolution, its use during this era is for exactly the opposite. Irrespective of their personal political background

and opinions, it is essentially representative of their joint so called ‘quietist’ leadership. This is despite the fact that Ayatollah Khonsari was an extremely political figure (Raja’i-Nejad, 2013: para. 7): while in Iraq he fought against the British in his youth, was arrested and sent to Singapore as a prisoner of war as well as being very active against Reza Khan (Effati, 2018: para. 2; Khomeini, 1989: p. 243). Ayatollah Sadr was also politically active, who is noted to have been active against the Russian invasion in 1912 (Ash’ari, 2009: para. 18), as well as being involved in the organized anti-government gatherings against Reza Khan including the 1935 Goharshad Mosque in Mashhad where he led congregational prayers (Ra’in, 2000: p. 75). Amongst the three, Ayatollah Hojjat is marked out for his consistent non-political approach throughout his life, but is known to have moved swiftly to help those caught out by the security forces, and for issuing a ruling against the removal of hijab formally in writing, reminding the government of its Islamic obligation while not specifically addressing Reza Shan (Basirat-Manesh, 1997: p. 503; Aghighi-Bakhshayeshi, 1981: p. 62). Also, his anti-colonial stance can be exemplified by the conversion of the British barracks in Qum to his theological school (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 138 & 392) and the joint triumvirate support for oil nationalisation initiative under the premiership of Mossadegh in 1951 (Hoseinian, 2008: para 11). The three jurists worked together in collegial manner, even when their followers did not always comply (Montazeri, 2001: p. 42; Araghchi, 2010: p. 94). Despite having different political opinions they are shown to be aware of each other’s public stance. Ayatollah Hojjat managed to convince the others of his quietist approach, even though they were more inclined towards political activism. This approach proved to be critical to the *hawza*’s survival (Seraj, 2014: p. 128).

### **Consolidation of Position**

Following the death of Ayatollah Haeri, the senior scholars of the modern *hawza ‘ilmiyya* of Qum were greatly concerned about the survival of the religious institutions and the socio-cultural influence of religion in society in the light of the secularising policies of Reza Khan (Faghfoory, 1987: p. 427). However, even Ayatollah Haeri is noted as anticipating the possibility of *hawza*’s closure, with many senior scholars leaving Qum altogether (Shobeiri-Zanjani, 2018: p. 418). As such the number of students studying in *hawza* declined sharply to fewer than 400 by 1941 (Khomeini, 1999b: p. 407), the challenge faced was how to contain an authoritarian monarchy enforcing stricter anti-clerical policies. Nevertheless, Reza Khan in his replications of Ataturk actions had encountered a far greater task than that of Turkey, because ‘the Sunni *ulama* were at state’s service’ under the Ottoman Empire: but the ‘Shi’a *ulama* had

traditionally practiced as an autonomous power' (Hazır, 2015: p. 11; Akhavi, 1980: p. 45). The Shi'i religious scholar's historical autonomy from the state is due their insistence upon *ijtihad* or a process of jurisprudential reasoning the senior scholar's exercise; and also by being the recipients of *khums* or a religious tax, they are economically independent of financial support from the state (Akhavi, 1980: p. 11). As such, despite the hurdles created by Reza Khan, the religious scholars had already entered the evolving national arena and were making judgements on issues, seen as counterproductive to Reza Khan's agenda. Additionally, the creation of the modern *hawza* under Ayatollah Haeri had provided for the religious scholars to evolve, giving them a platform to operate. Subsequently, Reza Khan's policies introduced against the scholars are indicative of his intention to erase this ability (Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2012: p. 5). Many had thought that it was thought as inevitable that the modern *hawza* would close down and 'nothing would remain of the Islamic identity of the people' (Samiei, 2012: p. 284). Ayatollah Haeri's trustees Ayatollahs Hojjat and Sadr, and joined later by Ayatollah Khonsari, had to rethink their strategy altogether, as such the formation of the triumvirate was a conscious political move. At a critical time such as that of 1937, the triumvirate realized that in order to succeed, individuals needed to cooperate and liaise with each other. Their collective decisions were relayed to the public in the form of joint statements signed by each of the three Shi'a jurists. By agreeing to synchronise as never before, the spiritual, administrative and scholarly functions of the *hawza* were divided among them. Ayatollah Khonsari was mainly responsible for cultivating its social dimension, Ayatollah Sadr was charged with all the administration including its representative to the government, and Ayatollah Hojjat was responsible for its scholarly and pedagogical aspect, advancing the educational orientation (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 39). By accepting the primacy of Najaf over Qum, the triumvirate evaded the political encounters but burdened the *hawza* in Qum with financial consequences because the bulk of religious taxes was directed to Najaf. To alleviate this they concentrated the overall management of the *hawza* in one single office under the supervision of all three jurists. This ensured the continued support of financial requirement of the *hawza* (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: p. 45), but later informally agreed for Ayatollah Hojjat to be the sole authority regarding all financial aspects of the *hawza* 'ilmiyya (Basirat-Manesh, 1997: p. 271; Akhavi, 1980: p. 68). The call by the triumvirate was to focus on an expanded educational agenda (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: p. 44), a subtle but crucial move that was championed by Ayatollah Hojjat. During the final years of Reza Khan's regime there was reduced *tablighi* or dissemination and propagational activities and no involvement in the political arena. As such there was a shift from external activities directed towards society and politics to internal

consolidation, concentrating solely on religious student's pedagogic abilities. Dynamic quietism had replaced active opposition, the focus on education demonstrated to be timely, and the approach had made Qum relatively immune from Reza Khan's policies and reforms. This approach permitted the possibility of the *hawza* becoming the de facto centre of underground religious opposition (Bulliet et al, 2013: p. 57). This would in time allow the easing of the pressures, and consolidate the *hawza* 'ilmiyya of Qum and provide what is referred to as 'the breathing period' of the *hawza* (Karimi, 2010: para. 3; Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2015: para. 2). It was the dynamic quietism of the triumvirate of the Shi'a jurist that proved to be fundamental component because the consolidation of *hawza* ensured the survival of the *hawza* and its autonomy from the state, which Reza Khan had intended to erase. Thereby they laid the groundwork for the *hawza* later becoming the central site of resistance to the Pahlavi regime in the 1960s. Additionally this period marks the time when the status of the religious scholars changed altogether, their public standing of the *ulama* was raised enormously. They benefitted from the window of opportunity created by the 1941 succession of Mohammad Reza Shah who was initially weak and had to rely on religious support among other social and political forces to remain in power (Samiei, 2017: p. 386), a breathing period that 'favoured the religious currents which were on the rise' (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014: p. 262)

The cooperative approach proved to be essential for the demanding years that followed. The three scholars were facing the Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran that took place in 1941, witnessing the 'occupation of Qum by the British armed forces' (Majd, 2012: p. 306), with a battalion of troops stationed within the city. Despite Reza Khan's view of his government as one that sought 'development' and 'modernisation', the religious scholars had viewed that it as a regime that 'dictated Westernisation'. For the public it had developed to be state governed by 'oppression', 'persecution', security governed 'police states'. The Allied invasion 'shattered the image that Reza Khan had portrayed' of himself and of Iran, as a secular, modernised, and strong state (Samiei, 2012: p. 285). The American officials who had come to assist Iran in 1942, termed it as 'a government of the corrupt, by the corrupt, and for the corrupt' (Abrahamian, 2018: 91). The weakness of the new monarch Mohammad Reza was the key to events in the decade that followed. The parliament proved to be the most important player at this time, and begun to exert 'control over bureaucracy' and by allowing 'freedom of press and of expression' (Hazir, 2017: p. 44). The political and social movement seeking change led to the advancement of other actors, repressed previously, primarily the nationalists in the form of the National Front and the communists in the form of the Tudeh Party. All parties shared the

common goal of 'limiting the authority of the Pahlavi monarch which relied on the military for support' (Poulson, 2005: p. 143). Subsequently, even before Reza Khan's departure from Iran, the parliament had set to 'abolish many of his practices' (Majd, 2012: p. 371) that were hated by the public and opposed profoundly by the religious authorities in Qum. These included removing restrictive legislation on political participation and press laws and abolishing the requirement for the clergy to have government authorisation for wearing of religious clothing (Majlis, 2016).

In 1941, the same year as Reza Khan's abdication, Ayatollah Hojjat established the Hojjatiyeh madrasa indicative of the increased demand (Yazdi, 2001: p. 128; Tehrani, 2011: p. 361). The school was designed by Ayatollah Hojjat's chosen student and friend from his time in Najaf, Allameh Mohammad Hussain Tabatabaei (d. 1981) and was fully completed in 1947 and encompassed the former British barracks in Qum as part of the newly built school (Jafariyan 2002: p. 31; Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 138). Second only to the Faiziyeh school all *maraj'e* of today have resided and/or studied with this school, including the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei (Akbarian 2001; para. 4). Despite the success of the quietist leadership of the triumvirate in consolidating the *hawza*, a policy that had kept the *hawza* open and active through its difficult years, their continued non-interference approach to politics turned out to be problematic in this period. By 1943, the political situation had changed and there appeared to be a greater opportunity for the religious scholars to be involved in the political environment (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 356). The triumvirate Ayatollahs Hojjat, Sadr, and Khonsari helped in providing the *hawza* the ability to continue its dissemination and propagational activities, the essential capacity for its trained religious scholars to be 'scattered all over the country', 'in cities, districts and villages', guiding and leading the people and active in much needed publicity (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 397; Hazir, 2017: p. 51). When they had taken over the convening of religious programs were banned but by 1943 even the radio was broadcasting religious programs with speakers from the *hawza* (Jafariyan, 2013: p. 30 & 73). Their common stance had guaranteed the existence of the *hawza* provision, meaning the religious scholars could do far more than they were capable of doing during the reign of Reza Shah. At this time a religious scholar was officially appointed to the Justice Ministry, and the police no longer enforced than ban on hijab (Burrell and Jarman, 1997: p. 443; Abrahamian, 1982: p. 184). However, the approach of political non-interference of the triumvirate was questioned, even if their position was still seen by other scholars as politically astute and conducive to the democratic advancement (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 393). Despite Ayatollah Khonsari and

Sadr's closeness to the *hawza* activists and even the radicals, they had come to a common understanding that by allowing the different agencies to function without *hawza* interference, democratisation of Iran would flourish. The period of the triumvirate, from the fall of Reza Khan's 'military monarchy in August 1941' until the rise of the rise of Mohammad Reza 'military monarchy in August 1953', marks the quasi-democratic phase of Iranian history, when 'power was to shift back and forth' (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 327) between different components of the Iranian political fabric. Irrespective of calls from within the *hawza*, the triumvirate concentrated on social issues such as food shortages that needed addressing rather than entangling themselves in politics. Senior scholar and activists such as Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammad Taqi Bafqi (d.1946) involved with Ayatollah Haeri's arrival in Qum, who had been arrested and evicted from Qum by Reza Khan (Akhavi, 1980: p. 45; Davani, 1981: p. 156) had returned to the *hawza* and vocally questioned the non-political approach of the triumvirate. He asked Ayatollah Hojjat 'Are you not the grandson of Hussain, why are you not revolting', to which he smiled and replied 'No, I am the grandson of Hassan, who resisted and made the necessary peace' for the good of the people (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 114).

### **Unified Leadership**

At this time, political activism was on the rise within the *hawza* 'ilmiyya and religious scholars were seeking greater involvement in politics, with some becoming increasingly active and some revolutionary. Ayatollah Seyed Abul Qasem Kashani (d. 1962) who had campaigned against the British and sentenced to death in absentia in Iraq (Keddie and Guni, 1972: p. 241), was arrested in 1943, while the British accused him of being involved in pro-German activities (Mo'tadel, 2014: p. 109). Ayatollah Qumi, who had been exiled to Karbala following the bloody uprising in Mashhad but had disagreements with Ayatollah Isfahani while there, returned to Iran in 1943 (Manzur-Ajdad, 2000: p. 265; Samiei, 2017: p. 386). Upon arrival, he issued a five point demand of stopping the harassment of those wearing the hijab, returning to religious institutions funds that were channeled the endowments directorate, teaching of religious education within the new curriculum including the segregation of boys and girls schools, negotiating with the Saudi authorities about the reconstruction of shrines at the cemetery of *Jannat al-Baqi* in Medina<sup>1</sup>, providing the provision of goods across the country so

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<sup>1</sup> *Jannat al-Baqi* is the first Islamic cemetery in the city of Madina and contains the graves of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Imams of the Shi'a, as well as many other Islamic personalities. It was demolished by the Saudi authorities in 1925, and both the Sunni and the Shi'a protested against the demolition..

that people can live at ease (Manzur-Ajdad, 2000: p. 269). The government responded that these had been discussed in the cabinet meeting and concluded that points had already taken place or were being discussed in parliament or actioned by the government to take place accordingly (Manzur-Ajdad, 2000: p. 272). What is of importance is that the religious scholars had gained the upper hand and were in a position to require the new monarch to disown the secularisation actions of his father Reza Khan through a formal announcements (Samiei, 2017: p. 386). Also the revolutionary cleric Seyed Mojtaba Navvab-Safavi (d.1956) stepped up his activities and in 1945 founded the Islamic revivalist movement *Fada'ian-e Islam* or Self-Sacrificers of Islam, aimed at replicating the Muslim Brotherhood and their Islamist ideas (Behdad, 1997: p. 52). The triumvirate of Shi'a jurists stood firm primarily concerned about the country's misery during the Anglo-Soviet occupation. The three senior jurists recalled the Iranian WWI famine years when disease and hunger had overtaken the country, and 'nearly one half of the population' died while Iran was under the British occupation (Majd, 2003: p. 3), and did not want to see history repeated once again. During the WWII years, Iran felt the 'economic effects of occupation', and during 1942 people had died of hunger by the thousands (Taheri, 1991: p. 78). The Allied occupation had 'degraded the Iranian state's capacity to feed its people and protect them from lawlessness'. Additionally, the 'monopolies over imports and internal transportation' that had been imposed on the powerless state of Iran, for the creation of the 'Persian corridor' for aiding the Soviet forces, had badly effected 'the economic life of the country' (Jackson, 2018: p. 245).

During the years of food shortage, the triumvirate made sure that each are involved jointly and individually in a range of social welfare initiatives to lessen the pressures on all concerned. Ayatollah Hojjat continued to cater for financial aspects, he paid the religious scholars of Qum their sustenance throughout this period, when there was no funds coming into Qum (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 90), he also had bought essential food in bulk and donated these to those in need (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 401). Ayatollah Sadr was involved in the setup of a number of charitable organizations, to help the needy (Ash'ari, 2009: para. 17), and Ayatollah Khonsari's is renowned for leading a communal prayer for rain during the drought of 1944 (Effati, 2018: para. 7). Other than the issue of famine, the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists were also concerned of other dangers, these included two major forms of conflict which had been repressed under Reza Khan but were unleashed with his downfall. 'Class antagonisms' and 'ethnic rivalries' had made the possibility of ethnic conflict and social tensions across Iran, more real than ever before. The 'disparity between the haves and the have-nots' had endangered the country and

created a volatile situation with ‘intense distress’ amongst the people (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 172). However, this was not helped by the ‘dual sovereignty’, between the parliament and the young monarch (Azimi, 1989: p. 37), and the ‘strong incentive to participate in elections’ had not materialized into ‘stable peace’ (Fernee, 2014, p. 315). Additionally, triumvirate were also concerned that the volatile situation had also helped to increase Communist tendencies gaining momentum across the country (Amini, 2002: p. 86). This was particularly the case amongst the modern educated middle class, the new generation of *rosanfekr* or intelligentsia or, and to a lesser degree the working class (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 327; Zabih, 1966: p. 63). Also of concern was attempts by secular writers such as Ahmad Kasravi (d. 1946) to challenge the religious scholars altogether, questioning the basis of faith and the context of their authority, accusing them of ‘encouraging superstitious practice’ (Martin, 1993: p. 34). Moreover, unlike the Qajars the Pahlavis were more relaxed about Bahaism in Iran, and although their numbers were limited, the religious scholars were worried of their infiltration into governmental bodies (Samiei, 2017: p.388). The scholars were of the opinion that Communism was instigated by the Soviets, and Bahaism by the British and their response to these issues, needed to be strategic and long term (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 233 & 398), but their immediate response was to encourage the young religious clerics to disseminate their acquired knowledge across the country in propagation trips (*safar-e tablighi*). It was in one such visit that two of active students of the triumvirate, Ayatollahs Sheikh Hossein-Ali Montazeri (d. 2009) and Sheikh Morteza Mottahari (d. 1979) attended the lectures of Ayatollah Borujerdi in the city of Borujerd within the Lorestan province, and were charmed by the pedagogic abilities of this remotely located educator (Montazeri, 2001: p. 50).

To alleviate the many difficulties encountered, the triumvirate thought it crucial to remove the British and Soviet forces out of Iran, and in their resistance to the Allied forces they accused them of aggravating the economic and political crisis. The Allied were blamed for the deliberate inciting of one tribe against another, dividing the people on ideological, social and political issues, whilst benefitting from Iran’s resources (Salehi, 2011: p. 6). The British ambassador in Tehran is noted as writing 2 ‘It is quite true that a policy of inciting one tribe against another will never lead to a permanent peace. But the preservation of a balance of power in certain areas may be the only way open to the government at the present moment of keeping a temporary peace’ (Abrahamian, 1982: p. 174). Although the triumvirate of Shi’a jurists

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2 British Minister to Provincial Consuls, “Note on Tribal Policy,” F.O. 3711 Persia 1944/34-40178.



wanted the Allied forces out of Iran, they did not seek to exacerbate the political situation by active protest, but preferred the exertion of pressure on the government to find a political solution for the withdrawal of foreign forces. Of particular concern was the situation within the Azerbaijan province, from which both Ayatollah Hojjat and most of his followers originated and which was under Soviet occupation with a pro-Soviet local leadership and was heading towards separation from Iran to form a pro-Soviet republic (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 349; Samiei, 2017: p. 411; US, 1980: p.161). They sought the smooth exit of the Soviets and the British forces through the timely implementation of the treaty already signed by the new monarch, which had secured their exit from Iran six month following the end of the war (Mowla, 2008: p. 167),. Nevertheless the prolonged duration of the war had expatiated the situation, the economy had declined and unemployment had risen, and the religious scholars were also facing hardship as a consequence. Whilst the three jurists were concerned by the lack of commodities such as food, clothing and medicine, they were evasive of getting directly involved with the political affairs. There were other scholars in Qum who thought political participation was necessary during the ‘transitional interval’ opened before them, they urged the triumvirate of Shi’a jurists to revolt and take action against the government (Basirat-Manesh, 1997; p. 290).

At the same venture of time the young monarch Mohammad Reza, who was in reality, a weakly installed head of state barely exercising any authority (Dabashi, 2017: 412), was also seeking to cooperate with the *hawza* in Qum to provide a joint stance in opposition to the growing Communist movement in Iran (Ardalan, 2013: p. 118). The young king sought the implementation of a single religious leader in Qum, the presence of whom would benefit his cause in confronting Communism. In an approach through the premier’s intermediary, he expressed his intent to recognise Ayatollah Hojjat as the most senior scholar of Qum, given complete control of the *hawza*, but Ayatollah Hojjat’s apolitical stance and independence was resolute. This is represented by ‘his refusal’ to meet Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in his attempt to visit Qum to convene a meeting in 1943. Ayatollah Hojjat viewed the monarch, as one who had been appointed, and had agreed to cooperate fully with the Allied forces; subsequently he avoided any association with him whatsoever (Karbashi, 2001: p. 52; Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2012: p. 65). In fact Ayatollah Hojjat is the only marja’ of that time whom neither of the two Shahs, Reza Khan or Mohammad Reza, ever met (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 104; Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 396). This clear stance of political non-interference is also iterated further by his scholarly opposition to *vilayat-e faqih* or the concept of absolute guardianship of a jurist (Jam’ei, 2003:

p. 295; Anonymous, 1987: p. 16). Since different sides in the political arena were seeking a single leader to deal with their political endeavors, the triumvirate of Shia jurists were left with no option but to give way. The non-existence of a single leader for the hawza of Qum was becoming an issue of concern to those seeking a unified leadership in Qum, whereby power would be in the hands of one person, a single authoritative figure, as 'a kind of Pope for the Shi'i' (Thiessen, 2009: p. 30). Since every Shi'a is required to follow the rulings of a specific marja', if these could be directed towards one authority, its impact would be huge (Walbridge, 2001: p. 4). Rather than coordinating the decisions of the three *maraj'e* into one single voice, such a move would concentrate the political power of the hawza in one figure unprecedented previously, seeking the re-organisation the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum altogether (Ghaderi, 1999, p. 411). Ayatollah Khomeini was of this opinion, but when Ayatollahs Montazeri and Mottahari attempted to discuss the inclusion of Ayatollah Borujerdi, his initial reaction was the danger of increasing the three existing authorities to four (Montazeri, 2001: p. 52).

A single leader could not have come out of any of the three jurists, because the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists would not challenge each other nor did they think it was necessary, as they deemed arrangements to be functioning by allowing the hawza to evade the difficulties beyond what was envisaged. Moreover, although all three jurists were regarded highly at this time and had lectured for many years with their own circle of students, Ayatollah Hojjat was the most academically minded, noted for his structured lessons, detail content, and pedagogical knowledge, referred to as *ustad* or master (Modarres-Tabrizi, 1948: p. 23; Shobeiri-Zanjani, 2018: p. 472). He was the most senior of the three in terms of scholarly standing, despite being the youngest in age (Karbashi, 2001: p. 104; Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 70), and the reason why the new monarch had initially nominated and approached him for this position (Ardalan, 2013: p. 67). However, Ayatollah Hojjat who disliked involvement in political matters, would distance himself from the monarchy, ministers, politicians and ambassadors alike (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 103), and at the same time would also not support radical clerics such as Navvab-Safavi to whom the other two members of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists were more inclined (Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2015: para. 5). The two opposing political sides were both seeking a single religious authority in Qum, however they became aware of each other's positions in a meeting between an active student of the triumvirate, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani (d. 1979) and a *hawza* intermediary politician Mohsen Sadr known as Sadrul-Ashraf (d. 1962), who later took over the premiership position for a brief period in 1945 (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 38). Thereafter the approach was made to Ayatollah Sadr by the politically active elements of the *hawza* and

the move for the unified leader was formally undertaken by the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists, Ayatollah Sadr who always chaired the triumvirate meetings nominated Ayatollah Borujerdi at end of 1943, pointing out his qualities and the necessity to act swiftly (Shobeiri-Zanjani, 2018: p. 647), although the arrival of Ayatollah Borojerdi finally materialised at the beginning of 1945. Ayatollah Khonsari knew Ayatollah Borujerdi well from his youth while studying at the *hawza* of Isfahan, and Ayatollah Hojjat had shared many instructors with Ayatollah Borujerdi from his days within the *hawza* of Najaf. However, The initiative owes initial credit to Ayatollah Khomeini and his close circle of companions, the politically minded cleric Ruhollah Kamalvand (d. 1964) has also played a critical role in this initiative and known Ayatollah Borujerdi since childhood (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014: p. 262), Davani, 1981: p. 129). Ayatollah Khomeini has played a considerable role in convincing Ayatollah Sadr and other senior scholars in strengthening Ayatollah Borujerdi's position (Khomeini, 1999a: p. 24; Raja'i-Nejad, 2013: para. 25). He and the others made their request to the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists to prepare the grounds for the unified leadership to be implemented (Jam'ei, 2003: p. 604). At this time, the activist and radical components of the *hawza*, who were both looking for greater *hawza* involvement in politics, agreed for a decisive change in the administration of the *hawza* (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 114; Basirat-Manesh, 1997: p. 2900. Irrespective of how things progressed thereafter, throughout the challenging nine years that the triumvirate of Shia jurists were in charge and managed the *hawza*, despite with myriad of problem in the latter days directly linked to the WWII circumstances, the three jurists continued with their regular meetings and issued joint statements, taking a dynamic quietist approach to the political circumstances before them (Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2012: p. 2). This ensured consensus of opinion irrespective of differences of opinions that occurred at times without any noticeable friction, continuing with the education aspect of the *hawza*, leading to a steady increase in student numbers (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 90; Samiei, 2017: p. 384).

### **The Consultative Position**

The final part of this period is of great significance to the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum as it denotes the leadership of Ayatollah Borojerdi, considered as 'the most influential and powerful *marja'* since the Constitutional Revolution' (Farsoun and Mashayekhi, 2005: p. 40). His leadership was the culmination of a series of different 'social, political, religious and scholarly factors' (Ardalan, 2013: p. 50), but the choice of him is predominately because of his scholastic status (Vaezzadeh-Khorasani, 2000: p. 9). The need of a strong scholar with high erudition who could

parallel Ayatollah Hojjat, who was recognised for such abilities stemmed from the intention to set a strong scholar as head of the *hawza* in Qom. The person chosen was a recognized scholar of the highest standing with a long seminary career in Najaf till 1910, with renowned pedagogic abilities, with followers as a *marja'* but resided in Borujerd (Alavi-Borujerdi, 1962: p. 35; Algar, 1998: para. 4; Fischer, 2003: p. 89). His choice was further supported by his political background, he had opposed and been arrested and held by Reza Khan in 1927, subsequently meeting with Reza Khan and expressed his concerns of the government's policies (Manzur-Ajdad, 2000: p. 408). Upon his arrival in Qum in the final days of 1944, many senior scholars visited Ayatollah Borujerdi 'not just as a matter of courtesy but in order to request his stay' (Vaezzadeh-Khorasani, 2000: p. 53; Rouhani, 1982: p. 98). Referral to Ayatollah Borujerdi had long been advocated by those seeking activism within the *hawza*, he was particularly admired for his position in support of the political activism by Ayatollah Qumi (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 36; Montazeri, 2001: p. 42), (Karbashi, 2001: p. 50), although the political outcome did not turn out to be as had been initially envisaged (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 37). The young monarch Mohammad Reza was also quick to visit Ayatollah Borujerdi in hospital accompanied by Sadrul-Ashraf, and is noted for 'kissing his hand' as a sign of reverence while Ayatollah Borujerdi had attempted to rise up to stand as a sign of respect (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 8; Ardalan, 2013: p. 65 & 68).

By 1945 in effect, the triumvirate voluntarily withdrew their complete leadership role in favour of Ayatollah Borojerdi (Ardalan, 2013: p. 61). What is also unique is that once they had collectively agreed to invite Ayatollah Borujerdi, they went out to provide him the platform necessary for to take full control (Shobeiri-Zanjani, 2018: p. 644). Upon his arrival, the three jurists went out to greet and welcome him to Qum, with each contributing their share, by giving him their position of prayer leader in the holy shrine or giving him their prestigious teaching position inherited from Ayatollah Haeri, or by joining the many other senior scholars of Qum in attending his lectures to honour Ayatollah Borujerdi (Alavi-Borujerdi, 1962: p. 119; Aliabadi, 2010: p. 44; Algar, 1998: para. 4). This orderly and organized transfer of power from the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists to Ayatollah Borujerdi refutes the recent allegations that the callout for a unified leadership was due to the 'chaotic' state of the *hawza* (Shirkhani and Zare', 2005: p. 34). Shortly after Ayatollah Borojerdi's arrival in Qum, a number of senior scholars including Ayatollah Khomeini suggested to have a committee take responsibility for administering the *hawza* (Karbashi, 2001: p. 203), but when Ayatollah Borujerdi appointed members and asked for the full proposal, he rejected presented scheme in 1948 and terminated

the committee altogether (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 45; Ardalan, 2013: p. 80). The proposed arrangement was to have up to twelve scholars, coming together ‘like a cabinet’, dealing not just with the administrative and financial cases but also to take a political stance on behalf of the *hawza* to the government to oversee and supervise the approval of parliamentary legislations (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 42; Rouhani, 1982: p. 99). In essence the envisaged changes were similar to what had been pursued by Ayatollah Modarres (Halm, 1991: p. 118), but soon came to realize that Ayatollah Borujerdi did not envisage such a position for the senior scholars, and some left Qum after being disheartened (Alvansaz-Khoei, 2015: p. 409). The approach taken by Ayatollahs Borujerdi’s was of non-political involvement (Manzur-Ajdad, 2000: p. 417), he was clear on who was in charge, and subsequently would not let political issues ‘take priority’ over his religious position (Halm, 2007: p. 122; Moshtarak, 1986: p. 42). This position of Ayatollah Borujerdi was subsequently openly questioned by the radical cleric Navvab-Safavi who wanted to make Qum an arena of combat against the monarchy (Montazeri, 2001: p. 74; Modarresi, 2016: para. 23).

The arrival of Ayatollah Borojerdi to Qum was ideal timing because it was just before the immediate vacuum created by the death of Ayatollah Isfahani in Najaf in 1946. As such it provided an added platform for Ayatollah Borojerdi’s to emerge with universal consensus as the sole authority of the Shi’a community (Esposito, 1995: p. 47; Mottahedeh, 1985: p. 231). In less than a decade of the triumvirate of Shi’a jurist’s leadership, the status of *hawza*, and the public perception towards the religious scholars had changed immensely. Ayatollah Borojerdi attained the position of supreme *marja’* or the ultimate source of emulation in the Shia world, shifting the centre of influence of Shi’i authority to Qum (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014: p. 263; Algar, 1998: para. 4). The arrival of Ayatollah Borujerdi led to further ‘thriving and scholarly vigour’ (Baghestani, Dhakiri and Radawi, 2012: p. 46) and the reinforcing the *hawza ‘ilmiyya* of Qum. The steady increase in the number of students jumped up, with up to 600 taking part in his sessions alone (Jafariyan 2002: p. 76). Jurisprudential teachings is noted to have been in early days delivered by Ayatollah Borujerdi in addition to the triumvirate of Shi’a jurists, Ayatollahs Hojjat, Sadr and Khonsari, and one or two other senior scholars (Jafariyan 2002: p. 38). But these sessions increased to be delivered by over twenty senior scholars in later days (Sharif-Razi, 1953: p. 172), with student numbers increasing from 2000 to 5000 by 1956 (Jafariyan, 2013: p. 202), reaching 8700 by the final days of his leadership (Arabzadeh, 2004: p. 218). With *marja’iyya* of the Shi’a world based in Qum, the flow of funds to the *hawza* increased helping to alleviate the financial problems the religious scholars felt, although did

not eliminate them immediately (Montazeri, 2001: p. 72). With his leadership in place, Ayatollah Borujerdi kept his relations with the young monarch in place. This was done in order to safeguard 'religious interest of society', and by stopping the secularist agenda. The young monarch also kept his relations with Ayatollah Borujerdi 'cordial' to safeguard their mutual interests (Ladjevardi, 2001: p. 67). Of importance is the unsuccessful assassination attempt on the life of the young monarch in 1948 by the radical elements of the *hawza*, providing the opportunity to the monarchy to crackdown on political opponents, and send Ayatollah Kashani the founder of *Mujahedin-e Islam* (Combatants of Islam) into exile due to his alliance with the militant *Fada'ian* (Dhowqi, 2011: p. 69; Thiessen, 2009; p. 31). The group was suspected of 'employing terrorism' in their campaign for political activism (Kazemi, 2012: p.470; Behdad 1997, p. 40). In dealing with the tense situation Ayatollah Borujerdi begun consulting with the triumvirate. Ayatollah Khonsari tried to present a case for political activism and in support Ayatollah Kashani, but all arguments were rebuffed by Ayatollah Borujerdi (Modarresi, 2016: para. 12). He also begun consulting with many other senior scholars of Qum, and held a gathering in 1949 at Faiziyeh school to review the issue of political activism. Thereafter, Ayatollah Borujerdi openly adopted a non-interventionist position for the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum (Akhavi, 1980: p. 63; Farsoun and Mashayekhi, 2005: p. 41). The 'disapproval of direct involvement of Shi'ite jurists in political affairs' limited the ability of the clerical activists to openly criticise the government (Walbridge, 2001: p. 218). Additionally the move forbid the religious scholars from joining political parties, and as such made it impossible for political forces to take root in the *hawza* (Modarresi, 2016: para. 17). During the events of the early 1950s Ayatollah Borujerdi took the stance of a very similar quietist approach as the triumvirate, he is noted as having said 'I do not want to involve myself in political affairs that I do not know its origin or outcome' (Shagerdan, 2009, p. 423; Salikfar and Rezaei, 2019: p. 2). This was in contradiction of the expectations of political activists among the religious scholars who hoped for Ayatollah Borujerdi's ascendancy to lead the *hawza* in Qum would strengthen their political power and that of the *ulama* in Iran. Subsequently Ayatollah Borujedi rejected Navvab Safavi's activities in public (Qulizadeh-Alyar, 2015: para. 7; Davani, 1993: p. 376) and kept his distance from Ayatollah Kashani even after his return in 1951 (Farsoun, and 2005: p. 41; Davani, 1993: p. 376). There also developed significant differences with Ayatollah Khomeini (Moshtarak, 1986: p. 45; Martin, 2003: p. 60), who had aimed to 'utilize the potentialities of the position of supreme religious authority' for political activism (Khomeini, 2002: p.14). The deterioration reached a point when the latter said: 'I would never visit Ayatollah Borujerdi again' (Montazeri, 2001: p. 88; Moshtarak, 1986: p. 40).

## Conclusion

Following the 1979 Islamic revolution of Iran, there has been a significant amount of research on the politically quietist and activist approaches of Shi'i scholars. By considering the case of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists the complex relationship between quietism and activism and the contextual factors determining it is further discussed. The assessment of circumstances during the second period of the *hawza* (1937 – 1953) which coincided with the highest point of Pahlavi power, when Reza Khan dictatorship had reached its totalitarian phase, and aimed to eliminate the religious scholars capacity as a political, social, educational and cultural force through his policies of secularization and Westernization. Their period ends at the lowest point of Pahlavi power, when Mohammad Reza Shah was only able to hang on to power through foreign intervention, and the religious scholars influence was further entrenched in every aspect of Iranian life and used as a counterweight to Communism. The three jurists of this defining period show that political change does not necessarily need to come through activism but at times political awareness dictates an approach of non-interference.

The triumvirate of Shi's jurists provided an alternative approach to leadership, identifying a collective leadership approach, not just as an exceptional measure to avoid potential rivalries between different leadership contenders in a time of an unprecedented crisis, but also to show that religious leaders can work together to manage the *hawza*. The coherent actions of the triumvirate during their phase of their leadership provides a clear alternative to the norm of the authority of a single Shi'a jurist, by presenting the possibilities of collaborative decision-making. This example of collective leadership arrangement, has become a proven legacy for other collective leadership proposals as referred to by the likes of *Shura al fughaha* of Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad al-Shirazi (d. 2001) or Hojjat ul-Islam Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (d. 2017). The presentation of the 1948 proposal by the activist for a committee to take responsibility for administrative, financial and managerial responsibility of the *hawza*, is further proof that the arrangements under the triumvirate was a successfully working arrangement. The triumvirate of Shi'a jurists actively perused the cooperative approach, discussing and scrutinizing decisions by regular consultation meetings. An evaluation of the triumvirate approach proves that it not only provided the much needed consolidation of the religious scholars position within the country when there was a concerted effort to eradicate the *hawza* institution during 1937-1941 during the final years of the Reza Khan era. The same

approach proved to be conducive for democratic involvement of events following the succession of Mohammad Reza Shah in 1941, when there was an opportunity presented within the political arena for change. In less than a decade of leadership by the triumvirate, the political circumstances had changed altogether, and to a large extent this was based on their collaborative approach of the triumvirate. By listening to people's concerns, rather than perusing political interests, they worked collectively for the good of the *hawza 'ilmiyy*. Within the quasi-democratic space available, the *hawza* flourished and subsequently the public perception towards the religious scholars transformed altogether as well. Their concerns for people's misery during the difficult years of WWII and the tactical approach to the Communist threat as well as their resistance to the presence of foreign Allied forces in Iran with concerted pressure on the government for their removal, are further examples of their coordinated consultative approach during a very challenging era.

However, what antagonized both activist and radical components of the *hawza* was the triumvirate's approach non-interference in politics, when they were seeking greater political involvement in the affairs of the country by the clergy. This consequently led to activists pursuing the appointment of Ayatollah Borujerdi's as a single leader. Nevertheless, the synchronised voluntary withdrawal of their leadership by the triumvirate in favour of Ayatollah Borojerdi indicates further their managerial skills as well as their alertness to the political climate of the *hawza*. Their vigilant consideration of factors before presenting their invitation to Ayatollah Borujerdi, is indicative of their concerted efforts to avoid rivalry at all costs. Such relentless effort is regarded as the basis for the universal consensus that came about for the sole authority of the Shi'a community by Ayatollah Borujerdi. This Borujerdis' arrival led to the shifting the centre of influence of Shi'i authority from Najaf to Qum, further reinforcing the status of modern *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum. Their trust in the system proved to be the final success of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurist, when their quietist approach prevailed and the new leadership continued to follow their style of political non-interference and distancing the *hawza* from the political activists which had asked for a change in leadership. Ironically, Ayatollah Hojja, the man at the centre of this critical approach, and the central figure to the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists, is a forgotten figure in today's Iran. This is possibly due to his ideological and political differences with Ayatollah Khomeini, although following the 1945 events Ayatollah Khomeini is noted to have changed his opinion of Ayatollah Hojjat altogether (Shobeiri-Zanjani, 2018: p. 644 & 650). Irrespective of their political stance and the interpretative lens of distinguishing quietism and activism, it has been the Shi's scholar's ability to assess and apply the most



appropriate mechanism in preserving their religious entity and independence from the state, which has proven to be the key to their success.

The success the activist Shi'i scholars within Iranian history should not essentially be attributed to their 'revolutionary Shi'a history and ideology', but rather to the more 'ingrained hierarchical structure of the Shi'a *ulama*' (Golkar, 2017: p. 216), for which the many quietist religious scholars are responsible. Their ability of exercising *ijtihad*, and practice religious authority as a source of guidance *marj'a al-taqlid* or as a model to be imitated, and their crucial independence from the state (Clarke, 2009: p. 65), are all factors that would not be possible without the quietist *ulama*. These key religious scholars include the likes of Ayatollah Haeri Yazdi and his successors the *maraje thalath*. They are regarded as profoundly quietist in establishing and consolidating the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum, but profoundly dynamic in orientation. In recognition of their achievement, Ayatollah Seyed Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989) founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran has commented 'the formation of the *hawza* by Ayatollah Haeri during those difficult days should be viewed 'as political' as my founding of the Islamic republic of Iran (Raja'i, 2013: p.2).

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