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Religionization of politics in Iran: Shi'i seminaries as the bastion of resistance

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Over the past two decades, the restraint of Iran's religious reformists by the country's conservative theocrats has attracted increasing attention. Somewhat curiously, another important underlying issue in the country's politico-religious context – the tension between the ruling clergy and Shi'i traditional orthodoxy – has attracted scant interest.¹ Examples of this tension include two controversial incidents that occurred in 2018 in Qom, the religious capital of Iran. The first was the controversy that arose following a speech delivered by Hassan Rahimpour-Azghadi, a leading theorist of governmental-Shi'ism.² In his speech, delivered at Faydiyya, Qom's most famous seminary school, he accused some of the country's most high-ranking clerics (hereafter *Maraja'*)³ of being advocates of secularism. Emphasising that, in Iran, secularism is grounded in the religious seminaries and not in the universities, he stated that forty years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, *Maraja'* continue to support the separation of religion and politics. Voicing his discontent with *Maraja'*, he claimed that, rather than theorising about various aspects of governmental jurisprudence (or *fiqh*), they had limited their teaching and writing to aspects of worship and non-political jurisprudence. He further stated that while approximately 700 jurists in Qom claim to be *Marja'* (singular form of *Maraja'*), few among them spoke about 'administrative *fiqh*', 'governmental *fiqh*', '*fiqh* of international relations', 'economic *fiqh*' and 'banking *fiqh*'.⁴ Rahimpour-Azghadi considered this an omission because *Maraja'* either do not believe in the Islamic state system or consider it dysfunctional.⁵ His speech triggered an internal quarrel in the seminary and different groups of clerics were set against each other.⁶

The second incident was an intimidating open letter sent by Mohammad Yazdi, the chairman of the Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom (JMHEQ),⁷ to a highly-respected *Marja'* named Mousa Shubairi-Zanjani, an advocate of traditional orthodoxy. In his letter, Yazdi expressed his anger with Shubairi-Zanjani regarding the latter's meeting with former president Mohammad Khatami who is denounced by the ruling clergy. Yazdi wrote:

Your high position and status relies on having respect for the Islamic establishment, its leader, and the dignity of the position of the [Shi'ites] source of emulation; ... therefore, you should necessarily respect the position and the requirements of a source of emulation and take relevant measures to avoid such incidents (receiving 'troublesome' political figures [such as Khatami]).⁸

The letter provoked widespread outrage among those who viewed its contents as an insult to the sanctity of the *Marja'iyat*. Many supporters of Shubairi-Zanjani published open letters emphasising his lofty religious credentials and the importance of respecting not only his position, but also the centuries-old independence of *Marja'iyat*. In the traditional clergy manner, many went to Shubairi-Zanjani's office to express their support for him and their rejection of Yazdi, whose letter was generally perceived as yet another step taken by the government to demolish the independence of the *Marja'iyat* institution.⁹

These two incidents are not unique in their nature but are reflective of recent confrontation between the ruling clergy and the Shi'i traditional orthodoxy in Iran. Since seizing the state apparatus in 1979, members of the ruling clergy have systematically targeted seminaries and the clerical establishment. Throughout subsequent decades, their aim has been to transform the seminary into an ineffectual entity that would offer unwavering support for the Islamic state and its theological linchpin, governmental-Shi'ism. During the 1979 Revolution and in its aftermath, Ayatollah Khomeini and his companions successfully converted believers into political subjects who played a decisive role in the clergy's rise to power. Thus, a strong connection was established between religious and political allegiances, one that worked to benefit the clerical Islamists. In order to maintain this prerogative, the ruling clergy skilfully crafted an image of themselves as the exclusive source of religious authority. As part of their quest to reify this image, they invested heavily in the seminary to subvert Shi'i traditional orthodoxy, for which maintaining a principled distance from the state apparatus has been a firm conceptual bedrock and centuries-old political *modus operandi*.

Against this backdrop, this paper explicates the degree to which the ruling clergy have systematically manipulated the seminary and religious establishment in order to eliminate – or at least undermine – traditional orthodoxy. We start by making a case for the generally overlooked fact that Ayatollah Khomeini and his companions were dealing with a formidable foe, i.e., traditional orthodoxy within the Shi'i seminary. We then detail the suppressive measures that the ruling clergy took against advocates of traditional orthodoxy who openly and actively objected to the incorporation of religion into the state apparatus. This is followed by an investigation of the ruling clergy's systematic intervention in the internal dynamics of the Shi'i traditional orthodoxy. As part of this process, we examine their intervention in three important areas: (a) the education system; (b) the financial configuration; and, (c) the institution of *Marja'iyyat*. We conclude by arguing that the ruling clergy have waged a calculated campaign to transform the flexible, pluralistic and independent nature of the traditional orthodoxy into a system that is dependent upon the state and submissive to its state-centric reading of Shi'ism.

Emergence of governmental-Shi'ism

Only a marginal segment within the clerical establishment seized the opportunity created by the revolutionary conditions of the 1970s to undertake jurisprudential re-conceptualisation. Despite governmental-Shi'ism being a young and marginal discourse at the time, its advocates successfully managed to hijack most of the Shi'i orthodoxy's resources for their own political ends. In the political sphere, governmental-Shi'ism's religious capital played a decisive role in engaging a wide sector of the populace as well as in intensifying political opposition towards the regime. The discourse of governmental-Shi'ism soon became a leading force in the country's polity. Synchronously, and largely as a result of its achievements in the political arena, governmental-Shi'ism also made gains in the orthodox religious establishment, evolving from a peripheral discourse into one of the leading discourses of mainstream Shi'i orthodoxy.

After the revolution was won, the ruling clergy's newfound access to political power provided them with a mighty instrument with which to actively disrupt and undermine the traditional orthodoxy that had defined the mainstream Shi'i orthodox establishment for centuries. Unsurprisingly, the meteoric and clamorous rise of governmental-Shi'ism monopolised the attention of not only the media, but also of academic researchers. Indeed, A.J. Newman accurately characterises the aftermath of the 1979 revolution as 'the years of the expansion of studies on Shiism'.¹⁰ A more precise observation would be that there has been an explosion of studies on governmental-Shi'ism, a phenomenon that has occurred at the expense of analyses of the mainstream Shi'i orthodoxy, which has continued to remain loyal to traditional orthodoxy. The passivity of the traditional orthodox establishment juxtaposed against the insatiable appetite of

governmental-Shi'ism for power, particularly insofar as its proponents seek to present their views as the sole representative discourse of Islam, has further reinforced the prevailing tendency to overlook the mainstream Shi'i orthodox establishment.

To reiterate, it was not only the doctrinal shift initiated by Ayatollah Khomeini that was unprecedented; his establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 through the complete seizure of state apparatus marked an extremely rare occurrence in the history of Shi'a. Over the course of fourteen centuries, the only Shi'i religious leaders to assume state power were the first and second of the twelve infallible Imams,¹¹ Imam 'Ali, who ruled Muslims for five years (from 656 CE until 661 CE) and Imam Hasan b. 'Ali who ruled for seven months in 661 CE. None of the subsequent infallible Imams in Shi'a or any other jurist ever led a state. Yet, despite little precedence, soon after assuming power, the ruling clergy of Iran made clear that they would not be satisfied with anything less than total control of both the political and religious arenas. Just as they had in the pre-revolutionary era, the ruling clergy tasked themselves with fighting two wars simultaneously. On the political front, they competed with other ideologies including Marxism, liberalism, and nationalism, all of which had made significant in-roads in Iran over the previous decades. Through the use of brute force, the ruling clergy managed to suppress alternative political ideologies.

At the same time, Iran's new rulers insisted that their politics stemmed from their religious duties (*taklif-i dini*), a dictum based upon a state-centred interpretation of the Shi'i scriptures. Unrelenting in their quest to establish themselves as the sole representatives of the Shi'i denomination, the ruling clergy orchestrated a campaign to rout out the traditional approach within the Shi'i establishment for which keeping a distance from state apparatus has always been a guiding principle. Ayatollah Khomeini at times depicted this second clash as even more important than grappling with non-religious political isms. On every occasion that he addressed the clerics – whether verbally or in writing – he mounted a bitter attack against those clergy who did not subscribe to the idea of governmental-Shi'ism, even designating new terms for this express purpose. These included 'sanctimonious' (*moghadas-ma'ab*), 'retrogressive' (*motahajér*), 'propagators of American Islam' (*muravvej-e islam-e amricaei*), and 'foolish reactionaries' (*tahajjurgarayan-e ahmagh*). In a widely celebrated text titled 'The Charter of the Clergy', Ayatollah Khomeini wrote:

At the religious seminaries, there are individuals who are engaged in activities against the revolution and the pure Muhammadan Islam. Today, they are simply sanctimonious posers, some are undermining religion, revolution and system as if they have no other obligation. The menace of the foolish reactionaries and sanctimonious clerics at religious seminaries is not insignificant. ... The first and most significant move [by the West] is the induction of the slogan of the separation of religion from politics. Unfortunately, this weapon has been effective in the seminary and amongst the clergy, so much so that involvement in politics was considered unbecoming of a jurist.¹²

The inflammatory and insulting language that Ayatollah Khomeini used against the members of the clergy who did not subscribe to his vision, particularly after he seized the state apparatus, was without parallel.¹³ Prior to that point, no-one – neither from within nor outside the Shi'i orthodoxy – would have dared to attack the clergy in such a vituperative way. Yet, the campaign against traditional orthodoxy was not confined to aggressive words. In effect, the ruling clergy launched a two-pronged assault on the orthodox establishment, using a variety of methods and resources to suppress traditional orthodoxy and permanently alter the mainstream Shi'i orthodoxy. On the one hand, they sought to crush the active resistance mounted by some clerics, and, on the other, they systematically targeted the internal structure and dynamic of the orthodox establishment with the intention of forcing it to succumb to Ayatollah Khomeini and his vision.

The new regime did not hesitate to eliminate any foes in the seminaries who publicly challenged the governmental version of Shi'ism. The case of Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari (1905–1986) is an especially striking example. Shariatmadari was a *Marja'* and the

harassment and persecution of a jurist of his rank would have previously been unfathomable. Yet, when he openly opposed the implementation of the doctrine of *wilayat-i faqih*, he was accused of plotting to overthrow the Islamic state. In 1982, Ayatollah Shariatmadari was forced to publicly confess to this charge on national television, after which he was put under house arrest until his death in 1986. Other *Maraja'* were similarly persecuted, including Ayatollah Hassan Tabatabaei Qomi (1912–2007), Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Hussaini Rohani (b. 1926) and Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani (1920–1997), to name but a few.¹⁴

The ruling clergy expected all members of the clergy to either fully endorse their very specific version of governmental-Shi'ism or to remain silent. Other clerics such as Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri (1922–2009), Ayatollah Ahmad Azari-Qomi (1925–1999), and Ayatollah Sadiq Hussaini Shirazi agreed with the governmental aspect of the ruling clergy's discourse, but they did not comply with the authoritarian orientation of the ruling clergy. They suffered the consequences of their beliefs, as would a still growing number of dissenting clerics following in their footsteps. Indeed, clerics of all ranks who diverge from the ruling clergy continue to be seen as oppositional figures. In June 1980, soon after seizing state apparatus, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the establishment of the Special Clerical Court (*dadgah-i vizhe-ye ruhaniyat*) to institutionalise the prosecution of dissident clerics. This court functions outside of the judicial system and is therefore not beholden to the juridical procedures that apply to the rest of the country. It has the authority to defrock and imprison dissident clerics. Among the well-known clerics who have been defrocked by this court are Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, Hadi Qabel, Arash Honarvar-e Shojaei, Ahamad-Reza Ahmadpour, and Seyed Hassan Agha-Miri. Other well-known clerics, including Mohsen Kadivar, Abdulah Noori, and Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi were imprisoned by order of the court.

Transforming the internal dynamics of Shi'i orthodoxy

Further to these eliminative measures, the ruling clergy systematically intervened in the orthodox establishment to transform it into a docile and obedient apparatus. The ruling clergy's religious credentials played a profound role in their ascent to power and continue to be their most treasured political asset. Indeed, maintaining their religious authority has been a means of survival for the ruling clergy because in addition to guaranteeing the support of the masses, it has been the underpinning pillar of their political system. To ensure their unrivalled influence in the religious realm, it was not enough for the ruling clergy to simply suppress active resistance within the Shi'i orthodoxy. For centuries, the internal structure and dynamics of the Shi'i orthodox establishment had taken the form of a pluralistic environment within which clerics had shared power, financial resources, and religious authority.¹⁵ The ruling clergy could no longer afford to share these treasured assets due to their authoritarian inclinations and their pragmatic political rationale.

As previously noted, the political clergy capitalised on the many resources and capacities that the Shi'i orthodoxy had built up over centuries.¹⁶ For example, the traditional alliance between the Ulama and the Bazaar played a decisive role in the 1979 revolution. The Bazaar was not only a major financial source for the clergy¹⁷ but also the place many protests originated.¹⁸ The alliance is evident in the example of the Society of Islamic Coalition (*Jam'iyyat-e Mutalefeh-ye Eslami*), which was formed in 1941 by religious merchants who had a long-standing relationship with the clergy.¹⁹ The political clergy also turned pre-existing religious networks (e.g. mosques, seminaries, *Husseiniyahas*,²⁰ and Islamic associations throughout the country and beyond) into an effective mobilization mechanism.²¹ While in opposition, the political clergy were able to take advantage of these networks, causing only minimal friction with the mainstream Shi'i orthodoxy. Yet, after consolidating their power in post-revolutionary Iran, the ruling clergy knew that there could be no guarantee of unfettered access to these networks if they remained governed by a

traditional Shi'i orthodoxy. If left alone, the orthodox establishment's self-governing system, in which senior clerics (*Maraja'*) enjoyed considerable religious authority and financial independence, could eventually pose a formidable challenge to the ruling clergy's legitimacy. As a result, the ruling clergy deemed it necessary to overpower the orthodox establishment in order to obviate a potential challenge from within. Hence, they became heavily involved in the scholastic pursuits and mundane affairs of the seminaries with the aim of transforming the orthodox establishment into a docile, tractable and subservient institution. The specific areas in which the ruling clergy sought to exert their dominance were the education system, the financial system and the centuries-old independent and pluralistic nature of the *Marja'iyyat* institution.

Bureaucratizing the seminary education system

Since the ascendancy of Khomeini's vision of governmental-Shi'ism, Shi'i orthodoxy has witnessed not only the state's increasing involvement in teaching and curriculum planning, but also the mushrooming of state-sponsored universities and teaching/research institutes, particularly in Qom. The state clearly aims to transform the intellectual and scholarly parameters of Shi'i orthodoxy. Generating theological/jurisprudential scholarship to sanction the fusion of state and religion was an especially shrewd political strategy. Yet, the ruling clergy's intrusion into the scholastic life of the seminaries has gone far beyond simply mandating the adoption of governmental-Shi'ism in the seminary curricula. In effect, state intervention has been directed towards producing generations of clerics who will promote the exclusionary version of Shi'ism propagated by the country's ruling clergy.

Traditionally, the Shi'i seminary's education system operates within a fluid structure and elastic dynamics based upon the fully voluntary participation of students. The three levels of seminary education include: introductory (*muqadamat*); intermediate (*sath*); and advanced (*dars-i kharij*). Within the traditional context there is no enrolment process or attendance checking. Each student is completely free to choose his topic, class and teacher. There is no assessment system at the end of an education cycle; and, more importantly, no certificates are awarded at any level of study.²² There is no bureaucratic or formalised procedure governing admission to or graduation from a seminary.²³ Only after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran did the ruling clergy create institutions and introduce procedures to manage the scholastic life of the seminary. The first institution, established in 1981, became known as the 'Council for the Management of the Qom Seminaries' (*shurayyi mudiriyyat-e hawzayyi 'ilmiyya-yi Qom*).

After Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989 Ayatollah Khamenei came to power, marking the beginning of a new era in the Islamic Republic. Unlike the late Ayatollah Khomeini, a *Marja'* who possessed the highest religious credentials, his successor Ali Khamenei was little more than a middle-ranking cleric at the time of his appointment to Supreme Leader. In Kadivar's view, this was a source of insecurity for Khamenei; many of the clerics in the seminary could claim higher religious credentials.²⁴ Khamenei had been appointed *wali-yi faqih*, the country's highest religious position, and assumed leadership of a country in which religion was a crucial component of politics. His elevation to leadership required him to cement his authority in the religious sphere in general and the seminary in particular. This may explain why Khamenei invested heavily in transforming the seminary's internal dynamic and scholastic life.²⁵ During a visit to Qom in 1992, widely seen as a turning point in the seminary's recent history,²⁶ Khamenei stated that the seminary had failed to meet his expectations because it lacked 'a specific and unified management apparatus'.²⁷ He deemed it vital to specify what kind of management he was alluding to:

There should be 12 or 15 first ranking members of the seminary at the head of the Supreme Policy-Making Council of Seminary Affairs. They should choose a learned [jurist], who is approved by other learned jurists as the manager. This nominee must suspend his academic activities for a few years in the interests of serving God. He should be afforded an appropriate level of authority, provided with the necessary budget, and have several deputies to manage different sections... The seminary needs a centralized management

system, supported by the ulama, *Maraja'*, the Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom, and seminary students.²⁸

Khamenei's call for a centralised management apparatus marked a milestone in the seminary. Immediately following his visit, the Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom took the lead and created a taskforce to respond to Khamenei's summons. A few months later, in May 1992, the taskforce convened a seminar at which they announced the establishment of the Supreme Council of the Seminary (*shurayya 'Aliyya hawza*).²⁹ According to its charter, the Council would enlist a minimum of seven members suggested by the Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom and approved by the Supreme Leader and *Maraja'*.³⁰ One of the members would be appointed manager of the seminary. This may seem a relatively normal expectation espoused by an organisation or institution. But when one considers the centuries-old fluid structure and elastic dynamics of the Shi'i seminary, it becomes clear that establishing an organisation with officially appointed members and a manager at the head signalled a radical shift in the history of the Shi'i seminary.

With minimal delay, this hierarchical institution, clearly established in response to political circumstances, introduced a comprehensive plan of action that would drastically alter the character of the seminary. The scope and scale of the changes that this state sponsored-institution aimed to implement is manifested in its charter. Further to transforming the seminary's education system, the charter commissions the council to: a) create a disciplinary and punitive system; b) bureaucratised preaching and propaganda mechanisms; c) systematise the performance of religious rituals; and d) modify the financial configuration of the seminary through the allocation of state funding. The charter requires more a formal and structured curriculum, including directives to 'formulate appropriate programs' and 'determine the methods for recruitment' of seminary students.³¹

Many of the verbs used in the 48 articles of the charter (e.g. formulate, design, plan, determine, prepare) are indicative of the fact that the seminary had previously lacked any form of institutional regulation. For the first time in Shi'i history, the ruling clergy had approached the setting of education levels and the introduction of an academic calendar in a systematic way. They established universal regulations for the admission and enrolment of students and for conducting exams. This does not suggest a total absence of these settings in the traditional seminary. Previously textbooks had been used, a form of an academic calendar existed, and classes were held. However, these processes were practiced more in the form of customs rather than in an institutionalised and universally regulated way. Furthermore, the system had neither a management nor monitoring body to ensure that all schools, teachers and students adhered to a common or fixed set of rules and regulations.

Today, it is obligatory for students seeking admission to seminaries in Qom and other cities in Iran to pass the requisite universal entrance exam. The Center for the Management of the Seminary has prepared a list of textbooks, organises the exams, and requires students to pass exams before they can proceed to classes at a higher level. Iran's seminaries can no longer claim to be autonomous and self-managed schools. All of Iran's seminary schools and classes are institutionally linked to the state-sponsored management system. In effect, the ruling clergy have succeeded in establishing an institutionalised and universal seminary educational system. Clearly, the political and financial resources possessed by the ruling clergy placed them in a unique position to implement their desired systems.

The ruling clergy have not been ignorant of the importance of the content of the teachings offered in the seminary. One of their crucial aspirations has been to include political theology/jurisprudence as a key topic in seminary education. They have achieved this not only by establishing different teaching and research institutes,³² but also by specifically adding political jurisprudence to the teaching curriculum in the seminary. In 2010, the Manager of the Seminary announced that the teaching of the doctrine of *wilayat-i faqih* would be obligatory.³³ Traditional seminary education is completely jurisprudence centric; thus, most of the courses are

jurisprudence oriented. This does not synchronise with the basic principles of governmental-Shi'ism, according to which clergy should be sufficiently equipped to lead a country in modern times. Successful leadership of a country requires management, economic, political and social skills. As the founding and legitimising source of the Islamic Republic, the seminary is expected to engage in all areas of social and political life. Ayatollah Khamenei, when stressing the importance of the seminary's support of the Islamic state stated:

Due to the religious character and nature of the Islamic Republic, formulating theories for all areas, e.g., politics, economy, management, discipline issues, and other areas pertinent to the management of the country is the responsibility of religious scholars, those who know Islam and are expert in religious matters.³⁴

Similarly, Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi, a leading advocate of governmental-Shi'ism states:

[The] requirements of the society and, consequently, the responsibilities and obligations of the seminary have changed in comparison with the past. In order to avoid lagging behind the times, and to fulfil our responsibility towards Islam, we should take steps to gain new knowledge and proficiencies.³⁵

To ensure that the seminary breeds a new generation of clerics with the skills required to lead a country, the ruling clergy have heavily invested in exposing seminary students to a wide range of courses not traditionally included in the seminary's curriculum. To this end, an institution was established in 2003 called Management of the Centres for Professional Subjects in the Seminary. These management apparatuses are commissioned to establish, expand and monitor institutions for higher education in the seminary. The Centre's website reports that to date, 21 institutions in the Qom seminary – and 29 associated with seminaries in other cities – have been established. Furthermore, over the last three decades, a remarkable number of universities and research institutes have been established in Qom, all of which admit seminary students, offering them various kinds of concessions. Many of the universities and research institutes offer programs in almost all fields of social science, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (including PhD programs). Arrangements enable seminary students to simultaneously study in one of these universities and in the seminary.

In the early days of their administration, the ruling clergy launched two initiatives: 'unity between seminary and university' (*vahdat-e hawza va daneshgah*) and 'Islamisation of the universities' (*islami kardan-e daneshgahha*). As authorities have stipulated on many occasions, the aims of these programmes are to instil religious conviction in modern teaching institutions. However, after four decades, these programmes have yet to prove successful, evident in the fact that the ruling clergy have repeatedly expressed their disaffection with the extant situation of the universities.³⁶ In contrast, the Islamic state has transformed the seminary by bureaucratising the system. Thus, rather than Islamising the universities, the authorities have to some degree modernized the seminary. The format and structure that have been imposed on seminary education are reflective of a modern education system.

In sum, the ruling clergy's intervention in seminary education has been pervasive to the extent that there is currently a significant difference between the Qom seminary in Iran and the Najaf seminary in Iraq. Whereas in the latter, the traditional education system remains intact,³⁷ the Qom seminary has undergone a major transformation. Such transformation notwithstanding, the ruling clergy continue to push for further change. Recently, they targeted the advanced level of teaching. In his controversial address, governmental-Shi'ism theorist and member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Hassan Rahimpour-Azghadi stated:

Instead of theorising Islamic government and civilization, advanced teachings (*dars-i kharijs*) have become secular and [focused on] individual jurisprudence [which is about] worship, purity and impurity. They have nothing to say about economics, banking and international relations. This is the meaning of secularism. Everybody talks about secularism in the universities. Let me tell you that the roots of secularism are in the seminary ... Do you have any – not five but just one – advanced class in Qom, Mahshad, Najaf or Isfahan [seminaries] which is ... engaged in issues related to governance?³⁸

In Qom today, one finds a considerable number of *Maraja'*, who were mid-ranking clerics during the 1979 revolution. Currently they are the seminary's main advocates of governmental-Shi'ism. However, being trained in the traditional seminary system, it seems they are not sufficiently equipped to meet the expectations of the ruling clergy. Yet, with the transformations in the seminary, it seems that the ruling clergy have proven successful in exposing a new generation of seminary students to a wide range of disciplines that will equip them with the requisite knowledge to rule a modern state. A majority of them will opt for administrative jobs, positions in universities, or posts in other organisations. However, an important question to explore is: what of the small number of them who opt to remain in the seminary and become *Marja'*? In the decades to come, there will be a new generation of *Maraja'* trained in a seminary manipulated by governmental-Shi'ism. Only the forthcoming decades will reveal what kind of seminary education they will offer.

Financial independence of the seminary

The financial independence of the Shi'i clergy from the state has long been one of its most significant assets.³⁹ During the formation of Shi'i identity in the middle of the third/ninth century financial support of Shi'i leaders was introduced as part of believers' religious obligations.⁴⁰ Believers pay their *Marja'* the *Sāhm-i Imam* (Imam's share), which is a part of *Khums* (one-fifth of each believer's net income). *Maraja'* are entitled to spend these funds in any way they deem fit, including allocating them towards their own living expenses.⁴¹

For centuries, the monthly stipends that the *Maraja'* distributed to their pupils were the main source of income for the clergy. However, the ruling clergy of the Islamic state intended to nurture a new generation of clerics as well as to construct a patronage and clientele system within the orthodox establishment. The government made sizeable financial investments in the seminaries and created multiple sources of income for the clergy, which overshadowed their traditional income stream,⁴² making the clergy reliant on the ruling clergy. Iran has also undermined the autonomous capacity of *Maraja'* to distribute stipends to their disciples. Given the *wali-yi faqih's* (Supreme Leader's) unmatched financial resources, he is able to offer a considerably greater stipend, and even if a *Marja'* has the resources and desire to provide more financial support, this action would cause trouble for the pertinent *Marja'* because it would be seen as undermining the *wali-yi faqih*.

In 2017, President Rouhani's budget bill detailed the government's financial support for seminaries and religious institutions for the first time. This disclosure prompted heated debate, in particular due to widespread economic hardship. Due to the reintroduction of US sanctions, the government saw no option but to reduce its spending on subsidies and infrastructure projects. However, at the same time, its financial investment in seminaries and religious institutions doubled. In addition to the government's annual budget, many state institutions, in particular the office of the Supreme Leader, spend millions of dollars on religious entities outside the government's budget process, though no official figures detail this expenditure. It is generally considered confidential information, not shared with the public. However, statements by government and religious authorities reveal that the state's financial contribution to these religious organisations is extensive. Clergy who benefit from these financial bonanzas receive a wide array of benefits unprecedented in the Shi'i seminary. For example, in 1991 the Supreme Leader ordered the establishment of a welfare organisation called The Service Centre for Seminaries (*markaz-i khadmat-i hawzayehayy-i 'ilmiyya-yi*). This Centre offers a wide range of support to seminary students and clerics, including housing and loan services, social security insurance, wedding gifts, free shopping vouchers, and even cash allowances.⁴³ Making a case for this financial support, Sayyid Abulhasan Navab, the chairman of the Service Centre, stated during an interview in 2010:

The seminaries have produced hundreds of trained personnel without receiving compensation for their educational expenses from the state. A seminary does not detail in writing its relations with the [Islamic] system. That notwithstanding, one should not only speak of state aid to the seminaries. For example, the seminaries have trained hundreds of judges. Had universities trained these judges, they [universities] would have claimed high expenses from the state.⁴⁴

Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi, a leading advocate of governmental-Shi'ism, offered a similar rationale in response to critiques of the state's budget for seminaries and religious institutions. Highlighting the fact that the seminary had fulfilled the needs of the Islamic state by training Friday Imams, judges and human resources for the ideological and political guidance of the country, he stated: 'No matter how much attention the authorities and politicians lavish on the city of Qom, they will never be able to repay this level of service. In truth, Qom is a creditor of rather than being indebted to the state.'⁴⁵ However, claims of this type overlook the fact that the use of state money to fund religious activities risks putting the centuries-old independence of the Shi'i clergy into jeopardy.

In addition to providing the religious establishment with cash injections, the ruling clergy have encouraged clerics to leave their traditional religious positions and to actively engage in running the country in a variety of capacities at all levels of government. A significant number of clerics are now working outside of the orthodox establishment, occupying positions far removed from religious affairs, which were once considered the sole responsibility of the clergy. In fact, clerics now have an omnipotent presence in the country's political sphere, not only in terms of sheer numbers, but also in terms of their assumption of leading roles. For nearly four decades, they have occupied many of the country's managerial and administrative positions. When taken together, these factors have seen the clergy become accustomed to a new lifestyle, one in sharp contrast to the abstemious way of life they once led. New sources of income have become integral to the continuation of this lifestyle, and with them come expectations on the part of the state.

Marja'iyyat and state apparatus

Another important feature of the Shi'i orthodoxy targeted by the ruling clergy is the authority and influence of the *Maraja'*, particularly those who have refused to align themselves with governmental-Shi'ism. For the ruling clergy this was a significant challenge at the inception of the Islamic Republic, when established *Maraja'* refused to endorse Ayatollah Khomeini's vision. This situation forced Ayatollah Khomeini to recruit followers from the ranks of junior clerics. Not a single senior Ayatollah (*Marja'*) responded favourably to Ayatollah Khomeini's call for the governmentalisation of Shi'ism, neither on the eve nor in the wake of the 1979 revolution. At the time, five *Maraja'* were the leading figures of the Shi'i orthodoxy: Shahab al-Din Mar'ashi Najafi, Mohammad-Reza Golpaygani, Sayyid Ahmad Khwansari, Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, and Abu al-Qasim Khoei. While none among them openly endorsed the clergy's political leadership, Shariatmadari was the only one to explicitly object to Khomeini's political leadership. The others retained their principled distance from the state apparatus, opting not to publicly disclose their disagreement with the governmentalisation of Shi'ism. Their passive resistance denied the ruling clergy an ostensible reason to eliminate them, and this group of senior clerics continued to exercise great influence and authority within the orthodox establishment as well as among the masses countrywide.

Historically, the Shi'i clergy have enjoyed autonomy, most notably in religious affairs and in their relations with their followers. In addition to preserving their independence from the state, the clergy also maintained their independence from each other insofar as they continued to build their fame and influence through an unstructured, decentralised, and self-governing network of religious actors. There has always been a firm correlation between the income of a given *Marja'* and the expansion of his authority and influence. This stems from the fact that all

seminary students receive a monthly stipend from their *Marja'*, and if a *Marja'* manages to collect extra religious tax, he can recruit more pupils who in turn, act as his emissaries, introducing him to the wider community, which can generate more religious tax to the *Marja'*, increasing his capacity to take on more pupils, and the cycle continues. Thus, the extent of a given *Marja'*'s influence and authority depends upon a triangular web comprised of: a) his ability to attract more pupils; b) his ability to collect religious tax; and c) the growth of his popularity. This triangular web endured for centuries and no single person or institution, within the orthodox establishment or without, had the power to elevate a jurist to the level of *Marja'iiyyat*. Similarly, there has never been a person or agency authorised to remove a jurist from the position of *Marja'iiyyat*. Hence, elevation to the *Marja'iiyyat* position has always been a matter of building up a reputation not a matter of appointment. This decentralised system fostered a multipolar community free of a managing body.

But this system was untenable under the Islamic Republic. The ruling clergy saw pluralist sources of authority engrained in Shi'i orthodoxy as a threat. They needed to substantiate their claims that they alone stood for Shi'ism. Perhaps more important than their political rationale, the expectation that orthodox Shi'ism would give way to governmental-Shi'ism was rooted in a jurisprudential claim embedded in the notion of *wilayat-i faqih*, a doctrine in stark opposition to the pluralistic tradition of the Shi'i orthodoxy. According to this politico-religious doctrine, a *wali-yi faqih* possesses the right to assume hierarchical authority over both the political and religious spheres. Thus, all clerics—including *Maraja'*—are required to follow the commands of the *wali-yi faqih*. Due to this ambition of governmental-Shi'ism, the *Maraja'* and the institution of *Marja'iiyyat* became a primary target of the ruling clergy's campaign to transform the traditional operations of the orthodox establishment. As Saskia Gieling argues, one of the ruling clergy's primary goals was to ensure that the institution of *Marja'iiyyat* came under state control in order to permanently eliminate the potential for *Maraja'* intervening in state affairs.⁴⁶ When Ayatollah Shariatmadari – an established *Marja'* – opposed the implementation of the doctrine of *wilayat-i faqih*, the JMHEQ stepped in. The Society made the following announcement, effectively revoking his sanctity:

Given our religious duty we must announce that he [Ayatollah Shariatmadari] has lost his qualifications to be a *Marja'-i taqlid*. This [announcement] addresses those believers who are uncertain and hesitant. This [announcement] informs them of their duty so that they will not blemish Islam and the revolution through their emulation.⁴⁷

The JMHEQ had no religious authority or credibility, in particular because its members were young and/or mid-ranking clergy. However, its members were close to Ayatollah Khomeini and as a result they signalled Khomeini's wishes, understood by some believers as imperative to follow. Furthermore, its engagement in these matters provided religious justification for state institutions, Basij militia and allied groups to disregard the sanctity associated with the position of *Marja'iiyyat* in the case of dissidents. In a similar vein, the JMHEQ interrupted the organic process of the preferment of a dissident cleric to the level of *Marja'iiyyat*. When Ayatollah Montazeri died in December 2009, it was expected that Montazeri's followers would choose Ayatollah Sanei as their *Marja'* in view of the intellectual affinity he had shared with Montazeri.⁴⁸ In an apparent attempt to prevent this outcome, the JMHEQ issued an announcement in January 2010 claiming that Ayatollah Sanei did not qualify as a *Marja'*: 'In response to frequent questions by believers, after various meetings and investigations over the last year, the JMHEQ came to the conclusion that he [Ayatollah Sanei] lacked the necessary qualifications to act as a *Marja'*.⁴⁹ Later, Basij militia attacked Sanei's office, and some in the Qom seminary sought to defrock him. Of course, the relationship between a *Marja'* and his followers is formed based upon a totally voluntary and non-institutionalised mechanism. Although no-one has the religious authority or practical capability to prevent a believer from pledging her/his allegiance to a *Marja'*, *Marja'iiyyat* is a socio-political institution that engages in a great number of activities and functions in the public

sphere. The JMHEQ's denunciation of a *Marja'* provides the excuse and justification for state institutions and clerical Basij militia to obstruct a given *Marja'*'s activities in the public arena. This obstruction could take the form of physically attacking a *Marja'*'s office – a tactic that has been used repeatedly – disseminating fake news about him, making it highly costly for students to attend his classes, or prohibiting the publication of his manual of fatwas (*tawdih al-masa'il*), a compulsory step in his personal trajectory towards attaining the level of *Marja'iyat*.⁵⁰

The JMHEQ has also been adamant in its desire to establish dominance and superiority of the *wali-yi faqih* within the orthodox establishment.⁵¹ Perhaps the most controversial course of action taken by the JMHEQ in this regard was the introduction of Ayatollah Khamenei, the current *wali-yi faqih*, as a *Marja'*. The death of the last eminent *Marja'*, Mohammad Ali Araki, in 1994 had left a vacuum within the orthodox establishment that needed to be filled. In an announcement in December 1994, the JMHEQ introduced seven clerics as *Marja'-i-taqlids*, upending the traditionally organic and meritocratic procedure underlying the *Marja'iyat*. The list, of course, included Khamenei, while more eminent clerics such as Montazeri, Tabatabai-Qomi, and Sistani were excluded.

Despite the ruling clergy's comprehensive financial and political investment in the seminary over the last four decades, it would be difficult to argue that they have fully succeeded in eroding the independence and plurality of the *Marja'iyat*. Shi'i leaders' independence from the state apparatus has been a fundamental feature of the Shi'i community for centuries. The entire seminary and clergy system is structured around this tradition. Thus, it is no easy task to completely alter this centuries-old system in the course of a few decades. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic's failures have disillusioned many believers, eroding their trust in the ruling clergy. For this reason, they have turned to *Maraja'* who have remained loyal to the traditional orthodoxy. Hossein Vahid Khorasani, Mousa Shubairi Zanjani and the late Mohammad-Taqi Bahjat are among the highly respected *Maraja'* who opted not to associate themselves with governmental-Shi'ism. And, one must not overlook those believers who deliberately and contentiously seek religious sources to question bluntly the religious legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. This segment of the population pledges their politico-religious allegiance to *Maraja'* who take an active stance against the ruling clergy. Yousef Saanei, Ali-Muhammad Dastgheib Shirazi, Asadullah Bayat-Zanjani, Abdulkarim Mousavi-Ardabili, and Hussein-Ali Montazeri are *Maraja'* who are (and were) promoted and supported by religious reformists. Following the fall of Saddam Hussain in Iraq in 2003, the Najaf seminary has also emerged as an alternative source of authority, as it pits traditional orthodoxy against governmental-Shi'ism.⁵² The significance and power of this alternative is evident in the fact that Ayatollah Ali Hussein Sistani, who heads the Najaf seminary, is the most popular *Marja'* in the Shi'i world – including Iran – today.⁵³ Thus, despite the ruling clergy's efforts to transform the institution of *Marja'iyat* into a docile, dependent and non-plural institution, its significant levels of independence and plurality have survived.

Conclusion

The absorption of Shi'ism into the government after the 1979 revolution signalled a break with Shi'i orthodoxy's long tradition of independence and separation from the state. However, the imperative of running an Islamic Republic under the banner of *wilayat-i faqih* necessitated the merger of the two. Furthermore, the consolidation of political power in the hands of the *wali-yi faqih* has had the unavoidable consequence of exclusivist claims to Shi'i scholarship being made by the state. The unitary nature of *wilayat-i faqih* has meant that alternative interpretations and sources of authority continue to be undermined, challenged and ultimately silenced by the state, which allows for no interpretation of Shi'ism other than their own. This is at variance with the pluralistic nature of the *Marja'iyat* institution whereby each *Marja'* is independent from both the state and from other *Maraja'*. The relationships between *Maraja'* and their followers take shape

according to a voluntary and non-institutionalised mechanism. Each Shi'i believer is religiously charged with the personal responsibility to investigate the living *Maraja'* and opt for the one he/she considers the most knowledgeable and pious. No one has the religious authority or practical capability to prevent a believer from pledging her/his allegiance to a particular *Marja'*.

Maraja' also have a history of internal disagreement, which serves as an articulation of their points of difference on a level playing field. This particular quality has been seriously under threat since the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The subjection of the autonomy and religious authority of the *Maraja'* to the *wali-yi faqih's* imperatives has caused disquiet in the country's traditional seminaries. In reaction to the suppressive measures imposed by the ruling clergy, a few *Maraja'* openly resisted the governmentalisation of Shi'ism but many of this group were either put under house arrest or severely restricted. Active resistance from a section of the Shi'i traditional orthodoxy can be considered at best exceptional. The mainstream traditional orthodoxy adopted a somewhat subtler approach, continuing to exercise their traditional *modus operandi*. Steadfastly maintaining their distance from the state, the majority of *Maraja'* have preserved their traditional pattern of relations with their followers and students.

Over the last four decades, members of the ruling clergy have systematically intervened in the seminary, their aim being to transform its internal dynamic. They have successfully established a new orthodoxy in which state-sponsored and imposed institutions claim prominence. However, the traditional orthodoxy has survived despite the efforts of the ruling clergy to demolish it. There is evidence that competing religious discourses persist in the Shi'i seminary. The ruling clergy's blatant exploitation of religion has also persuaded a considerable number of believers to reorient their religious allegiance; that is, to once again opt for the traditional orthodoxy. In addition, some internal opposition groups, in particular the reformists, promote the traditional orthodoxy in order to undermine the religious credibility of the ruling clergy. Furthermore, following the fall of Saddam Hussain in 2003, the Najaf seminary refused to follow the prescribed model of governmental-Shi'ism. Today, the Najaf seminary has emerged as a powerful hub for the traditional orthodoxy. In line with the transnational nature of Shi'ism, it expropriates increasing numbers of those who once pledged their religious allegiance to governmental-Shi'ism. Traditional Shi'i orthodoxy offers an alternative discourse for those among the Iranian populace who are disappointed in governmental-Shi'ism.

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Notes

1. 'Traditional orthodoxy' refers to those members of the clergy loyal to the centuries-old Shi'i tradition of keeping its distance from the state apparatus. This segment of the clergy is depicted as 'quietist' in the relevant literature; R. Brunner, 'Shiism in the Modern Context: From Religious Quietism to Political Activism', *Religion Compass*, vol.3, no.1, (2009), pp.136–153; J.-P. Filiu, 'The Return of Political Mahdism', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol.8, (2009), pp.26–38; D. Hermann, 'Political Quietism in Contemporary Shi'ism: A Study of the Styasat-i Mudun of the Shaykhi Kirmani Master 'Abd Al-Riqa Khan Ibrahimi', *Studia Islamica*, vol.109, no.2, (2014), pp.274–302, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43577570>; N.R. Keddie, *Religion and politics in Iran: Shi'ism from quietism to revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1983); P. Smyth, 'The battle for the soul of Shi'ism', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol.16, no.3, (2012), pp.1–20. However, we maintain that while they

are – and have always been – engaged in politics, their political *modus operandi* has been subtle. In other words, it has not aimed to take over the state apparatus.

2. We use the terms 'ruling clergy' and 'governmental-Shi'ism' to respectively refer to the adherents and discourse that emerged in the 1970s and claim dominance in Iran today.
3. *Marja'-i taqlid* is the highest-ranking authority in Twelver Shi'i community, and the words and deeds of those who have reached this level serve as a guide for believers who are unable to exert independent reasoning (*ijtihad*).
4. These are all newly developed notions. Since Shi'i jurisprudence has never been in charge, state apparatus, topics related to the governance has never included in the Shi'i jurisprudence. But his expectation is that *maraja'* should have conceptualised and added these new dimensions to Shi'i jurisprudence.
5. H. Rahimpour-Azghadi, *Full text of speech by Rahimpour-Azghadi in Faydiyya school [Matn-e khamele-sokhanan-e rahimpour-Azghadi dar madraseh faizyiyah]* (2018), <https://bit.ly/2CoD0tQ>.
6. B. Gholipoor, *Insurgence of 'revolutionary' seminary against 'Purity' seminary [Toghyan-e howzeyeh elmiyyah enghelabi moghabel-e howzeyeh elmiyyah taharat]* (2019), <https://bit.ly/2MDUoJM>; Y. Mirdamadi, *Qom experiences strife between 'secular jurisprudence' and 'revolutionary jurisprudence' [Qom dar keshakesh-e figh-i secular va figh-i enghelabi]* (2018), <http://www.bbc.com/persian/blog-viewpoints-45314046>.
7. A number of Khomeini's pupils secretly founded this first and only structured clerical organisation in Qom in 1961. Today, it is the most powerful organized group of clerics in Iran's seminaries whose members often assume powerful positions in the state. JMHEQ is also the leading patron of the state in the seminary, and plays a decisive role in how state resources are distributed in the seminary.
8. M. Yazdi, *A Grand Ayatollah Is Chastised For Meeting With Reform-Minded Politicians*, 28 October 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Wg8bdJ>.
9. J. Faroughi, *Yazdi's letter to Shubairi-Zanjani: Leader's message and trivialisation of Shi'i Marja'iyat* [nameh Yazdi be Shubairi-Zanjani: Payyam-e rahbar va ibtizal-e marja'iyat-e shi'a] (2018), <https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/iran/a-46074114>.
10. A.J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism: unity and diversity in the life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p.4.
11. The main branch of Shi'ism (*Ithna 'ashari*, or the twelve Imams) purports that the right to govern was directly given by God to the twelve Imams, Imam Ali and eleven of his descendants, and are believed to be infallible. As a messianic figure, the twelfth Imam, *Mahdi*, is believed to be living and is expected to return to form a just government.
12. R. Khomeini, *Book of Leader V.21 [sahifeh Imam: Jeldeh 21]*, (Tehran: Moasseh Tanzim va Nashre Asare Imam, 2006) p.279.
13. M. Khalaji, 'Islamic Republic of Iran and the new order of clerical establishment' *Iran Nameh [Journal of Iranian Studies]*, vol.24, nos. 2 and 3, (2008), pp.1–36.
14. H. E. Chehabi, 'Religion and Politics in Iran: How Theocratic Is the Islamic Republic?', *Daedalus*, vol.120, no.3 (1991), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20025388>; M. Kadivar, *Testing the Revolution and the Regime with Ethical Criticisms: Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani, Slander and Marja'iyat [Enghelab va nezam dar buteh naghd akhlaghi: Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani, mobaheteh va marja'iyat]* (Durham: Self-published e-book, 2015).
15. N. Ghobadadeh and L.Z. Rahim, 'Electoral theocracy and hybrid sovereignty in Iran', *Contemporary Politics*, vol.22, no. 4 (2016), p.455; A. Kazemi Moussavi, *Religious authority in Shi'ite Islam: from the office of mufti to the institution of marja'* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 2007); A. Mehregan, 'Multivocality in Shia Seminary', *Sociology of Islam*, vol.5, no.1, (2017); A. Shirkhani and A. Zareh, *Transformations in the Qom Seminary after the victory of the Islamic Revolution [Tahavollat-e howzeyeh elmiyyah Qom pas az pirouzi enghelab-e islami]* (Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2005).
16. M.H. Semati, 'Theory of resource mobilization and the Islamic revolution of Iran' [Nazariyeh basij-e manabe va enghelab-e islami], *Law & Political Science*, vol.35, no.0, (1996).
17. A. Ashraf, 'Bazaar-Mosque Alliance: The Social Basis of Revolts and Revolutions', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol.1, no.4, (1988); 'Union system, civil society and democracy in Iran' [Nezam-e senfi, jamei madani va democracy dar Iran], *Goftogu*, vol.4, no.14 (2006); J. Foran, *Fragile resistance: social transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).
18. M. Mozaffari, 'Why the Bazar Rebels', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.28, no.4, (1991).
19. M. H. Pourghanbar, 'Formation of Islamic Motalefeh' [Shekl-giri moutalef-e eslami], *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol.6, no.1 (2014), pp.45–71; R. Roohbakhsh, *The role of Bazar in the 15 Khordad uprising [Naghsh-e bazar dar ghiyam-e 15 khordad]* (Tehran: Islamic Revolution Documents Center, 2002).
20. A *Husseiniyaha* is a congregation hall for Shi'i commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husay ibn Ali, the third of the Twelve Imams who was killed by Sunni Umayyad Caliph Yazid I on 10 October 680 CE.
21. A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, 'Small media for a big revolution: Iran', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol.3, no.3 (1990).

22. One informal certificate is issued at the advanced level by seminaries, an *ijtihad* permission statement, indicating a person is capable of independent reasoning and would be primarily used to assist jurists to build their reputations. For further discussion see A.A. Velayati, *Shi'a's role in Islamic and Iranian culture and civilization* (Tehran: Amirkabir, 2010), pp.84–90.
23. A. Furati, *Clergy and politics: issues and outcomes [Rouhaniyyat va siyosat: masail va payamadha]* (Tehran: Research Institute for Islamic Culture and Thinking, 2011), p.40.
24. M. A. Kadivar, 'The Ayatollahs and the Republic: The religious establishment in Iran and its interaction with the Islamic Republic', *New Analysis of Shia Politics*, vol.6, no. 28 (2017), pp.6–9. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Rfej6q>
25. M. Khalaji, *Balancing Authority and Autonomy: The Shiite Clergy Post-Khomeini* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016).
26. R. Isaniya, *Independence of the Islamic seminary and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Estighlal-e howzeyeh ilmiyyah va doulat-e jomhouri islami Iran]* (Qom: Academy of Islamic Sciences and Culture, 2016), p.158.
27. A. Shirkhani, 'The process of the development of the Supreme Council and Management of the Seminary', *Payame Hawza*, vol.1 no.1, (1992) p.8.
28. A. Khamenei, Speech delivered during a meeting with the learned jurists of Qom seminary [*Dar didar be jamie az fuzalayah howzeyeh immiyyah Qom*] (1992), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2587>.
29. With the establishment of this Supreme Council, the previous management body, the Council for the Management of the Qom Seminaries, automatically ceased to exist.
30. The reference to *maraja'* is made in a loose way so as to facilitate the claim that plans benefit from their overall contribution and support, while in practice engaging only a small number of acquiescing *maraja'*.
31. For the complete charter see Iran Data Portal, *Charter for the Supreme Council of the Seminary* (1995), <http://irandataportal.syr.edu/charter-for-the-supreme-council-of-the-seminary>.
32. For detailed discussion about these institutions and their activities see Furati, *Clergy and politics [Rouhaniyyat va siyosat: masail va payamadha]*; Furati, 'The nature and features of seminary political knowledge', *Siyasat-e muta'aliyya [Danesh siyasi howzavi, seresht va mokhtasat-e un]*, vol.1, no.1 (2013), pp.97–126.
33. M. Moghtadai, Imam Khomeini's wilayat-i faqih course will be taught in the seminary [dars-e wilayat-i faqihe Imam Khomeini dar howza tadrish mishavad] (2010), <https://bit.ly/2VdtjkG>.
34. A. Khamenei, *The Leader's meeting with clerics, teachers, school managers and students of the Qom seminary [Didar be jamie az ulama va asatid-e va mudiran-e madares va tollab-e howziyyah ilmiyah Qom by rahbar-e enghelab]* (2010), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=10345>.
35. N. Makarem-Shirazi, 'Grand Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi's view on the seminary and response to the new demands' [Hawza: pasukh be niyazha az negaheh Ayatollah al-uzma Makarem-Shirazi], *Pegah-e Hawza*, vol.7, no.38 (2003).
36. A. Javadi-Amoli, 'Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli's view on the only way to Islamise the universities' [Tanha rah-e islami kardan-e daneshgahha az didghaeh Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli] (2010), <https://bit.ly/2VqqOeT>; A. Khamenei, *Speech in meeting with university professors [Didar be jamie az ulama va asatid-e va mudiran-e madares va tollab-e howziyyah ilmiyah Qom by rahbar-e enghelab]* (2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7959>; A. Khamenei, *The Leader's meeting with clerics* (2010), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=10345>; M.-T. Mesbah-Yazdi, *Mesbah-Yazdi's critique of university textbooks* (2012), <https://bit.ly/2QhCjI2>.
37. Discussion about these differences falls beyond the scope of this article. For further discussion see S.A. Hairi, 'There has been scientific growth in Najaf and scientific decline in Qom' [Najaf rushd va Qom uft-e elmi dashte ast] (2017), <https://fa.shafaqna.com/news/357251/>; M.B. Irvani, *Differences between Najaf and Qom seminary [Tafavothay-e howziyyah Qom va Najaf]* (2014), <https://bit.ly/2QdBxFr>; S. Mervin, 'Introduction' in S. Mervin (ed.), *The Shi'a worlds and Iran*, (London: Saqi, 2010), pp.9–26; Smyth, 'The battle for the soul of Shi'ism'.
38. H. Rahimpour-Azghadi, full text.
39. M. Motahhari, F. Arshad and H. Dabashi, 'The fundamental problem in the clerical establishment' in L.S. Walbridge (ed.), *The most learned of the Shi'a: the institution of the Marja'i Taqlid*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.161–182.
40. H. Modarressi Tabataba'i, *Crisis and consolidation in the formative period of Shi'ite Islam: Abu Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Razi and his contribution to imamite Shi'ite thought* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993), pp.10–15.
41. N. Calder, 'Khum in Imami Shii jurisprudence, from the tenth to the sixteenth century A.D.', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol.45, no.1 (1982), pp.39–47.
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43. R. Isaniya, *Independence of the Islamic seminary and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Esteghlal-e mali howzehayyeh ilmiyyah]* (Qom: Academy of Islamic Sciences and Culture, 2016) pp.194–197.
44. Navvab quoted in M. Shafiei, 'Financial independence of the seminaries' [Esteghlal-e mali howzihayyeh ilmiyyah] in A. Furati (ed.), *The Clergy and the Islamic Revolution II [Rouhaniyyat va enghilab-e islami jelde 2]*, (Qom: Research Institute for Islamic Culture and Thinking, 2015) p.139.

45. N. Makarem-Shirazi, 'State is indebted to seminary' [Howza az doulat talabkar ast] (2019), <https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/iran/a-47093071>.
46. S. Gieling, 'The "Marja'iyah" in Iran and the Nomination of Khamanei in December 1994', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.33, no.4 (1997), p.781.
47. Quoted in Mohammadi-Rayshahri, M. *Khatereha: Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri [Memories: Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshari]* (Tehran: Islamic Revolution Documents Center, 2004) p.306.
48. As a jurisprudential principle, the emulation of a dead *marja'* is not permissible. When a *marja'* dies, his emulators must shift their adherence to a new *marja'*.
49. JMHEQ, *What is the Opinion of JMHEQ about Sheikh Sanei's Marjaiat?* (2010), http://www.jameehmodarresin.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1595.
50. S. Golkar, 'Clerical militia and securitization of seminary schools in Iran', *Contemporary Islam*, vol.11, no.3 (2017). DOI:10.1007/s11562-017-0384-8; M. Khalaji, 'Iran's Regime of Religion', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol.65, no.1 (2011), pp.131-147; M. Yazdi, *Establishment of a confidential commission monitor religious treatises [Tashkil-e comisiyon-e mahramaneh nezarat bar resaleha]* (2011), <https://bit.ly/2MjqLxn>.
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