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Dynamic quietism and the consolidation of the *hawza* '*ilmiyya* of Qum during the Pahlavi era

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Reza Shah's attempt in the latter part of his autocracy (1935-1941) to implement formal education for the clergy continues to be one of the most understudied periods of Iran's modern history. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate the *hawza*'s strategic response to Reza Shah's envisaged secularism and to assess the contribution made by Ayatollah Muhammad Hojjat Kuh Kamari, the religious authority leading the *hawza* '*ilmiyya* of Qum during this crucial phase. At a time when the political establishment actively attempted to change the cultural identity of Iran through its promotion of modernisation with Western connotations, he viewed this as a new challenge that endangered the Islamic fabric of Iranian society and placed an emphasis on a socio-cultural response by Shi'i clerics. By drawing on a range of primary sources not consulted before, this study aims at understanding how the institutional and intellectual development of this demanding period led to the breathing period for *hawza* '*ilmiyya* of Qum and the quasi-democratic phase of Iran (1941 to 1953). Additionally, this paper will analyse the approach of dynamic quietism that prioritised the engagement of the '*ulama*' with education and society as the crucial factor in ensuring their socio-cultural influence in Iran.

Keywords

'*ulama*', *hawza*, Education, Culture, Politics

Introduction

The start of Reza Shah Pahlavi's (d. 1944) reign in 1925 is characterized either as 'asr-i farkundeh (an auspicious age)' or alternatively as a controversial period dominated by 'the elimination of the most basic human rights, and the establishment of a brutal dictatorship'.¹ This phase of contemporary Iranian history (1925-1941) was an attempt at transforming the traditional structure of Iranian society, inspired by the events across the border in Turkey following the fall of the Ottoman Empire.² Reza Shah began a 'secular model' of modernisation,³ attempting to free the state from its traditional-religious influence,⁴ and eradicate the customary social role of the 'ulama'.⁵ However unlike Turkey, Reza Shah had initially sought the support of the 'ulama' in his rise to power,⁶ thereby beginning a series of events with ramifications that continued for decades, ultimately leading to the downfall of the Pahlavi dynasty, which was replaced by a religious regime led by the 'ulama' in 1979.⁷ Although there has been significant research on Reza Shah's modernisation drive,⁸ there is renewed interest in the socio-political developments of the Pahlavi era.⁹ Moreover, although there has been research focusing on the educational perspective¹⁰ and the consequences of cultural (*farhangi*) angle,¹¹ the approach of the 'ulama' and the newly formed religious

¹ The review of 'Ali Asghar Hekmat and 'Ahmad Mahrad's conflicting views was made by Rudi Matthee, 'Transforming dangerous nomads into useful artisans, technicians, agriculturists: education in the Reza Shah period', *Iranian Studies*, 26, no. 3-4 (1993), pp. 313-336 (p. 313).

² Said Amir Arjomand, *The turban for the crown: The Islamic revolution in Iran* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 82.

³ Behrooz Moazami, *State, religion, and revolution in Iran, 1796 to the present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 171.

⁴ Mohammad Reza Motamedi and 'Ali Akbar Amini, 'Effect of Reza Shah Modernity on the Political Opposition Development', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 7, no. 5 (2017), pp. 84-88 (p. 84).

⁵ Parvin Qudsizad, 'The period of Pahlavi I' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel, Mohammad J. Elmi (eds.), *Pahlavi dynasty: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 41.

⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between two revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p.103.

⁷ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic World Hizbullah-Ottoman Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p.36.

⁸ Touraj Atabaki, *The state and the subaltern: Modernization, society and the state in Turkey and Iran* (I.B. Tauris, 2007); Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (eds.), *Culture and cultural politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (Routledge, 2013); Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (eds.), *Iran and the surrounding world: Interactions in culture and cultural politics* (University of Washington Press, 2011).

⁹ Ali Mirsepassi, *Iran's Quiet Revolution: The Downfall of the Pahlavi State* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Hamid Karamipour and Matthew Shannon, 'Religious Modernism in Pre-University Schools: The Case of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's Iran', *Iranian Studies* 54.3-4 (2021), pp. 549-572; Shaul Bakhash, *The Fall of Reza Shah: The Abdication, Exile, and Death of Modern Iran's Founder* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

¹⁰ Zahra Seif-Amirhosseini, 'Socio-political change and development in Iran', *Doctoral dissertation* (London School of Economics, 2013); Hossein Godazgar, 'An analysis of social and cultural changes in rural Iran, with special reference to the impact of cultural factors on educational change', *Doctoral dissertation* (University of Warwick, 1999); Ali Massoud Ansari, 'Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi & the Myth of Imperial Authority', *Doctoral dissertation* (SOAS, 1998).

¹¹ The term *farhang* in Persian has a broader meaning than that of culture in English, being a 'complex mixture' that encompasses knowledge, beliefs, education, arts, manners, laws, and habits, linked to being a member of the society; 'Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, *Dehkhoda dictionary* (Tehran University Press, 1993).

establishment of the *hawza 'ilmiyya* in Qum are often neglected. Additionally, what is available on this period is dominated by 'generalizations' and affected by 'black-and-white dichotomies',¹² when the resistance towards Western modernisation by the '*ulama*' was not unanimous.

There were those who believed in opposition, resistance and rebellion as the only way, but their actions led to their quick elimination from the political scene. These included Ayatollah Haj Nurollah Isfahani (d. 1927), who was a member of the clerical panel appointed to supervise legislation and who was arrested accordingly and the panel dissolved.¹³ *Hawza* activists Ayatollah Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Bafqi (d.1946) was also arrested in 1928 and evicted from Qum.¹⁴ Ayatollah Seyyid Hasan Mudarris (d. 1937) was promptly removed from his position as the *majlis* assembly's leader and imprisoned in 1929.¹⁵ On the other hand, there were those religious scholars who believed in the necessity of a strong Shi'a ruler,¹⁶ thinking of influencing Reza Shah in the same manner as they had influenced the Qajar monarchs.¹⁷ However this was not successful as circumstances had changed, and Reza Shah no longer needed the '*ulamā*' as he had previously. These included Ayatollah Na'ini who had expressed preference for working with the new monarch, but was persuaded to return to Najaf alongside Ayatollah Isfahani by Reza Shah.¹⁸ He was of the opinion that opposition to the Shi'a monarch would be counter-productive.¹⁹ Similarly Ayatollah Aqa Husayn Qumi (d. 1946) initially pointed to Reza Shah's rule as beneficial to Iran as a strong ruler²⁰ to counter the rise of Wahhabism on the Arabian

¹² Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner, 'Introduction' in Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (eds.), *Culture and cultural politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

¹³ He opposed the 1925 military conscription policy that required the clergy to attend; Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel, Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 43.

¹⁴ He criticized the entrance of the women of the royal household to the holy shrine of Qum; 'Ali Davani, *Nahzat-i rūhāniyūn-i Īrān* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1981), p. 156

¹⁵ He openly criticized Reza Khan's rule in the national assembly in reaction to the removal of the clerical supervisory role in legislation and was arrested leading to his death; Husayn Makki, *Tārikh-i bīst sāli-yi Īran* (Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī, 1985), Vol. 5, p. 143; Nikki R. Keddie, and Yann Richard, *Roots of revolution: An interpretive history of modern Iran* (Yale University Press, 1981), p. 92

¹⁶ Mohammad Samiei, *Nabard-i qudrat dar Īrān* (Nashr-i Nay, 2017), p. 320.

¹⁷ Mahdi Hā'iri Yazdī and Habib Ladjevardi. *Memoirs of Mehdī Hā'irī Yazdī: theologian and professor of Islamic philosophy*, (Harvard University Iranian Oral History Series, 2001), p. 4.

¹⁸ Mohammad Samiei, 'Najaf and Iranian Politics: Analysing the Way the *hawza* of Najaf Influenced Iranian Politics between Two Revolutions', *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, 5, no. 3 (2012), pp. 277-294 (p. 282).

¹⁹ John L. Esposito, *The oxford dictionary of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 228; 'Abd al-Hadi Ha'iri. *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics* (EJ Brill, 1977), p. 193.

²⁰ Mohammad H. Manzur al-Ajdad, *Marji'iyat dar 'arṣah-'i ijtīmā' va siyāsāt: asnād va guzārish'hāyī az Āyāt-i 'izam Na'ini, Isfahani, Qumi, Ha'iri va Borujerdi* (Pardīs-i Dānish, 2000), p. 104, and p. 228.

Peninsula.²¹ However, when seeking to discuss the enforcement of European-style clothing, he was detained and exiled to Karbala.²² There were also amongst the *'ulamā'* those who envisaged easing of changes through cooperation with the new monarch such as Ayatollah Seyyid Muhammad Behbahani (d. 1963), son to the assassinated Constitutionalist leader Ayatollah Seyyid 'Abdullah Behbahani (d. 1963). He continued to act as the link between the *'ulamā'* and Reza Shah, and 'emerged as an important influential figure' in the years of his rule.²³ There were also cooperative *'ulama'* who were more inclined towards the intelligentsia and openly accepted cultural renewal,²⁴ such as Shari'at Sangilaji (d. 1943) of the Sepahsalar Mosque. He met with several members of the government including the Minister of Justice in an attempt to draw 'closer to official functions'.²⁵ However, he faced hostility in Qum²⁶ and was criticized for being influenced by Wahhabism.²⁷ Nevertheless, his life was protected in the heated climate by the founder of the *hawza* who declared that the suggested reforms by Sangilaji were not of 'the binding principles of faith or religion'.²⁸

Finally, it was the response of the quietist *'ulamā'* of the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum led by Ayatollah 'Abd al-Karim Ha'eri Yazdi (d. 1937),²⁹ that proved to be critical.³⁰ Ayatollah Ha'eri did not oppose the new monarch nor did he support those who did, but at the same time did not openly support him or his policies either.³¹ He is recognized for withstanding Reza shah's concerted pressures³² and stating 'the protection of the *hawza*' to be his principal task.³³ This

²¹ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭhār al-ḥujjah: yā tārikh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 336.

²² Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel, Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 259.

²³ Hamid Algar, Haeri, Mohammād Behbahānī, *Encyclopedia Iranica* 4 (1989), pp. 96-97 (p. 96).

²⁴ Rasul Ja'fariyan, 'Idi'ayi iṣlāh ṭalabi-yi dīnī', *Nāmāh-yi Farhangitān-I 'Ulūm*, 6 (2019), pp 53-62 (p. 57).

²⁵ Richard Yann, 'Shari'at Sangalaji: A Reformist Theologian of the Rida Shah Period' in Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 163.

²⁶ His ideas included the rejection of *raj'at* (corporeal return) of vengeful Imams before the Resurrection. Ayatollah Khomeini has referred to Sangilaji as a 'smuggled clergy'; Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Kashful-asrar* (Intishārāt-i Azadī, 1989), p. 421.

²⁷ Said Amir Arjomand, Traditionalism in Twentieth Century Iran, in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (State University of New York Press, 1984) p. 204.

²⁸ Richard Yann, 'Shari'at Sangalaji: A Reformist Theologian of the Rida Shah Period' in Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 171.

²⁹ His political evasive approach was shaped by the events of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) that prepared the way for Reza Shah's rise to power; Mohammad Samiei, *Nabard-i qudrat dar Īrān* (Nashr-i Nay, 2017), p 319.

³⁰ 'Ali Davani, *Nahẓat-i rūḥāniyūn-i Īrān* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1981), Vol. 2, p. 333.

³¹ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Hujjat al-Islām Mustafā Mohaqiq-Damad', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 21, no. 125 (2004), pp 30-148 (p. 75).

³² 'Abd al-Hadi Ha'iri. *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics* (EJ Brill, 1977), p.179 & p.191.

³³ Sa'eed 'Abbaszadeh, *Sheikh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'eri: negahbān-i bīdār*, (Markaz-i Chāp va Nashr-i Sāzmān-i Tablīghāt-i Islāmī, 1994), p. 67.

approach towards Reza Shah was continued after his death by his successor Ayatollah Seyyid Muhammad Hojrat Kuh Kamari (d. 1952) through dynamic quietism³⁴ and collective leadership.³⁵

This research aims to focus on the interaction between politics and the *hawza* during this critical period by addressing the accompanying activities of the religious scholars and their awareness of a spectrum of modernisation reforms. Even if one seeks to see the ‘historical transformation from the perspective of secularization’ there is a necessity ‘to view reality from the perspective of religion’, as ‘a concept, only makes sense in relation to its counterpart’.³⁶ This study will particularly consider the multifaceted interaction between education, culture and politics and focus on why education became an integral and pivotal part of Reza Shah’s secularisation agenda. The focus of this study will particularly centre on the phase of the implementation of the modernisation initiative towards the clergy from 1935 and following the death of Ayatollah Ha’eri in 1937, until the arrival in Qum of Ayatollah Aqa Seyyid Husayn Borujerdi (d. 1961) in 1945. Particular attention is given to Ayatollah Hojrat Kuh Kamari,³⁷ an important Shi’i scholar whose influence on this phase of modern Iranian history is central to the development of the *hawza ‘ilmiyya* of Qum and yet often overlooked. At the heart of Ayatollah Hojrat’s approach to the circumstances before him has been the emphasis on education as a means for continuous religious socialisation, moving beyond a policy subject to change, to centralising education as a catalyst for change. For him, Western influence was not only in ‘social, political and economic spheres’ but more importantly education had become a way for inducing change in the ‘culture sphere’.³⁸ By reviewing his opinion that the key to overcoming secularisation was educational development, cultural growth and the conservation of values,³⁹ this study will consider the political setting within Iran during Ayatollah Hojrat’s leadership and evaluate perspectives, approaches and methods to understand the ‘*ulamā*’s contribution, while incorporating a historical approach to cultural analysis.⁴⁰ This is particularly important

³⁴ This can be defined as being dynamically involved within the Shi’i public sphere while politically disengaged from the affairs of the state and its government.

³⁵ Mohammad Mesbahi, ‘Collective hawza Leadership in a Time of Crisis: The Period of maraje’ thalath (1937–1953)’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2021), DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2021.1886657.

³⁶ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 20.

³⁷ His name means ‘authority and proof’ and is unique between the ‘*ulamā*’ who are normally identified by a location, thereby an extension is often made to his name such as Kuh Kamari, Tabrizi or Najafi.

³⁸ Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941* (Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 151.

³⁹ Personal conversation in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Muḥammad-Fazil Lankarani on 28th June 2008.

⁴⁰ Substantial use of primary material is made from the public archive in Iran, use of published memoirs, oral history materials, and *taqrīrāt mabāḥiṣ al-fiqh wa uṣūl al-fiqh* (refined and annotated copies of notes taken on teachings of Jurisprudence and Principles of Jurisprudence). Additionally interviews of the senior scholars of the

considering Ayatollah Hojjat's opposition to political interference by the activist clergy,⁴¹ and his scholarly opposition to the concept of absolute guardianship of the jurist (*Wilayat al-faqih*).⁴²

The Modernisation Initiative and Educational Reforms

Reza Shah's 'secular model' of modernisation policies⁴³ were not entirely based on the ideas of the intelligentsia, nor constructed on basic principles of liberty, equality and religious neutrality.⁴⁴ The intelligentsia mostly favoured the model occurring across the border in Russia, but the British influence over Reza Shah ensured that was never an option.⁴⁵ However, the intelligentsia supported Reza Shah's 'modernisation project with its Western connotations',⁴⁶ essentially because they perceived him to be a 'stabilising, nationalist force'.⁴⁷ Additionally, personalities such as Hasan Taqizadeh (d. 1960) and Ahmad Kasravi (d. 1946), who were familiar with the religious establishment blamed the indoctrination of the clergy,⁴⁸ and deemed their domination in Iran as 'the greatest hinderance to progress'.⁴⁹ Subsequently, Reza Shah's secularisation plan involved 'curbing the power of the conservative religious establishment',⁵⁰ and the modernisation agenda included a multitude of reforms that hindered the activities of religious scholars. The steps that followed included the abolition of the religious hierarchy, the closing down of religious schools, the state administration of religious education, the removal of *shari'a* rulings by judicial system reforms, the prohibition of religious symbols including

hawza 'ilmiyya of Qum was conducted to provide an assessment of the distinctive internal perspectives often ignored by researchers.

⁴¹ Mustafa Qulizadeh- 'Alyar, *Shomā sarbāzān-i Imām-i Zamān Hastī* (Javan Online, 2015), para. 5. Online edition available at <https://www.javanonline.ir/fa/news/739698/> [accessed on 11 February 2020].

⁴² Anonymous, *Tafṣīl va taḥlīl vilāyat-i muṭlaqa-yi faqīh* (Nihzat-i Azādī-yi Īrān, 1987), p. 16.

⁴³ Behrooz Moazami, *State, religion, and revolution in Iran, 1796 to the present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 171.

⁴⁴ Zahra Seif-Amirhosseini, 'Socio-political change and development in Iran', *Doctoral dissertation* (London School of Economics, 2013), p. 53.

⁴⁵ The young intellectuals identified him as the 'tool of British imperialism'; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between two revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p.154.

⁴⁶ Said Amir Arjomand, Religion and Constitutionalism in Western History and in Modern Iran and Pakistan, in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *The political dimensions of religion* (State University of New York Press, 1993) p. 82.

⁴⁷ M. Reza Ghods, 'Iranian Nationalism and Reza Shah', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 27, no.1 (1991), pp. 35-45 (p. 37).

⁴⁸ Rasul Ja'fariyan, 'Idi'ayi iṣlāh ṭalabi-yi dīnī', *Nāmāh-yi Farhangitān-I 'Ulūm*, 6 (2019), pp 53-62 (p. 58).

⁴⁹ Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran. 1921-41*. (Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 50.

⁵⁰ Abbas Amanat, 'Constitutional revolution: Intellectual background', *Encyclopedia Iranica* 6 (1992), pp. 163-176 (p. 163).

the removal of *hijab*, and the introduction of European secular civil law - all indications that the new shah sought to eradicate the traditional social role of the '*ulamā*'.⁵¹

An important point to note is that traditionally education in Iran had been strictly 'Islamic'⁵² and delivered at the *maktab-khāneh*, and it covered literacy through Islamic teachings of the Qur'an. This was followed by the *madrasa*, a place of instruction and teaching of Islamic education in subjects such as theology or religious jurisprudence.⁵³ This fitted well with the structure of the traditional *hawza*, contributing to the emergence of the '*ulamā*' as the educated section of society. Literacy skill services were subsequently directly linked to the '*ulamā*' and the mosque as the focus of educational provision throughout the country.⁵⁴ Even the initiative for the first modern private school is credited to a well-known clergyman, Mirza Hasan Tabrizi (d. 1944),⁵⁵ and the modern state primary and secondary schools were supported if not initiated by the '*ulamā*' in the midst of the Constitutional Revolution.⁵⁶

Reza Shah's fostering of a modern Iranian national identity⁵⁷ needed to break this link and uprooting 'the traditional customs and patterns'⁵⁸ on the old fabric Iranian society, towards one that was primarily secular.⁵⁹ Reza Shah labeled the clergy as fossilised and backward,⁶⁰ and made education the primary and central component for achieving modernisation. For him, education 'equated with modernisation, and modernisation with that of Westernisation'.⁶¹ This required the imposition of a range of 'reformist plans', by centralising the educational system

⁵¹ Parvin Qudsizad, 'The period of Pahlavi I' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel, Mohammad J. Elmi (eds.), *Pahlavi dynasty: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 41.

⁵² Nikki R. Keddie, and Mehrdad Amanat, *Iran under the Later Qajars, 1848-1922*, in P. Avery G, Hambly and C. Melville (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge University press, 1991), Vol. 7, pp. 174-212 (p. 178).

⁵³ Hossein Godazgar, 'An analysis of social and cultural changes in rural Iran, with special reference to the impact of cultural factors on educational change', *Doctoral dissertation* (University of warwick, 1999), p. 92.

⁵⁴ Pierre Furter, *Possibilities and limitations of functional literacy: The Iranian Experience* (UNESCO, 1973), p. 9.

⁵⁵ He stated the *rushdiyah* (growth) schools; Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Literature of the early Twentieth century: From the Constitutional period to Reza Shah* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 449.

⁵⁶ Farzin Vejdani, *Making history in Iran: Education, nationalism, and print culture* (Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 37; David Merashri, *Education and the making of the modern Iran* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 57.

⁵⁷ Jalil Na'ebiyān, and Muharram Qulizadeh, 'Naqsh-i siyāsathā-yi farhangī-yi duri'yi Reza Shah dar vaṣṭiyat-i āmuzish va parvarish-i Tabrīz', *Justārha-yi Tārīkhī*, 1, no. 2 (2010), pp. 95- 118 (p. 98).

⁵⁸ Rudi Mathee, 'Transforming dangerous nomads into useful artisans, technicians, agriculturists: education in the Reza Shah period', *Iranian Studies*, 26, no. 3-4 (1993), pp. 313-336 (p. 314).

⁵⁹ Mohammad Mehdi Roshanfekr, Culture and Civilization of West from the Perspective of Kasravi, *Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication*, No. 6, pp.971-987 (p. 972).

⁶⁰ Muḥammad Taqī Falsafī, *Khātirāt va mubārāzāt-i Hujjat al-Islām Falsafī* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2003), p. 136; Yahya Dulat'abadi, *Hayāt-i Yahyā* (Intishārāt-i 'Attār, 1992), Vol. 4, p. 361.

⁶¹ David Merashri, *Education and the making of the modern Iran* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 5.

and applying a policy of ‘uniformity’ in the curriculum.⁶² Based on guidance received from the intelligentsia,⁶³ the new arrangements were based on the structure of the French style of schooling, and the importation of Western curricula.⁶⁴ The new approach included the study of European languages but removed religious and Qur’anic studies that were delivered in the traditionally structured schools.⁶⁵ Additionally, the legislation required Iranian students to be sent abroad at the public expense not just to study but to ‘make Iranian society familiar with Western values’.⁶⁶ In an address to the students being sent abroad, Reza Shah stated ‘our aim is that you should receive a moral education for we note that Western countries have acquired a high standing as a result of their thorough moral education’.⁶⁷ Such stark changes greatly concerned the religious scholars who believed education was being used as a force by an illiterate monarch⁶⁸ for eliminating people’s ‘loyalties to Islam’.⁶⁹ Subsequently the ‘*ulama*’ found the education policies and Reza Shah’s development drive as concerning because it signified a fundamental change of approach to norms and values, not from traditional to modern but from Islamic to Western. They were alarmed by gradual ‘immorality’ of the youth caused by the government’s introduction of an unfamiliar educational system. A new system that was using ‘personnel who are not religiously aware’ and some were ‘non-Muslim’. Coupled to this were the ‘elimination of religious education’ and ‘religious supervision in schools’.⁷⁰ The removal of religious education was justified by the government due to the lack of time in timetabling, but ‘there was time for everything else’.⁷¹ In actual fact, the lack of Iranian instructors familiar with the new curriculum had become a huge stumbling block to Reza Shah’s plans, and he had resorted to the use of many foreigners ‘who were not able to speak

⁶² Parvin Qudsizad, ‘The period of Pahlavi I’ in Ghulam ‘Ali H. ‘Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi (eds.), *Pahlavi dynasty: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 39.

⁶³ Ali Mir Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 94.

⁶⁴ The ‘French model of subjects and textbooks’ provided for approximately thirty hours of teaching per week; Mitra Fallahi, ‘Foundations of Education in Iran and Education after the Cultural Revolution of 1980’, *Doctoral dissertation* (Marquette University, 1993), p. 55.

⁶⁵ The traditional schools were actively closed down and prohibited; Parvin Qudsizad, ‘The period of Pahlavi I’ in Ghulam ‘Ali H. ‘Adel, Mohammad J. Elmi (eds.), *Pahlavi dynasty: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 41.

⁶⁶ David Merashri, *Education and the making of the modern Iran* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 100.

⁶⁷ Mota‘samol saltānaih Farrokh, *Khāṭirāt-i siyāsīyi Farrokh* (Intishārāt-i Jāvīdān, 1968), p. 223.

⁶⁸ He was characterized by the American minister Charles C. Hart as ‘illiterate peasant’s equally illiterate son’; Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner, ‘Introduction’ in Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (eds.), *Culture and cultural politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

⁶⁹ G.N Khaki, and Mohammad A. Bhat, ‘Pahlavi’s the pioneers of education in Iran’, *International Journal of Education*, 3, no. 3 (2015), pp. 45-50 (p. 47).

⁷⁰ Mirza Mehdi Borujerdi, *Dard-i bi darmān* (ketābfurū‘shī Burqa‘ī: 1948), p. 25, and p. 35.

⁷¹ Mirza Mehdi Borujerdi, *Dard-i bi darmān* (ketābfurū‘shī Burqa‘ī: 1948), p. 25, and p. 35.

Persian' for teaching and training.⁷² There was a clear contradiction between the idea of Reza Shah as a champion of cultural and educational reforms and Reza Shah as a man desperately trying to impress the West.⁷³ Instead of addressing the mass illiteracy problem as had been initially claimed by the intelligentsia supporting him, 'the inclination toward Westernisation' by Reza Shah had become 'the main element' of the country's new identity.⁷⁴ In effect during the Reza Shah era the percentage of primary and secondary education only rose from just below 0.5 percent of the population in 1922/23 to 2.4 percent in 1940/41,⁷⁵ and an optimistic estimate for literacy rate of Iran's overall population in 1934 is 10%.⁷⁶ This estimate is believed to be higher than the reality as the literacy rate officially recorded by the census of 1956, many years after Reza Shah's reign shows an average of around 15% for men, lower in rural and higher in urban areas,⁷⁷ and just over 7% for women.⁷⁸

Targeting *hawza* Education

Following Reza Shah's only foreign trip in 1934 to Turkey which provided a first-hand encounter of the social changes undertaken by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938),⁷⁹ his 'anti-clericalism policies' peaked.⁸⁰ The *hawza* encountered a barrage of new policies that targeted the theological institution itself and the response to these new educational challenges was more complex. In order to address the lack of instructors within the modern schools, Reza Shah had focused on the body that traditionally provided the teachers within the *madrassa* settings. He had till then avoided the use of the clergy involved with literacy work, because of their

⁷² Abdolmedhi Riazi, *The four language stages in the history of Iran* in Angel Lin and Peter W. Martin (eds.), *Decolonisation, globalization: Languages in education policy and practice* (Multilingual Matters, 2005), p. 105

⁷³ He was ridiculed by Western diplomats and observers as a 'Cosack and brutish drill sergeant'; Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner, 'Introduction' in Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (eds.), *Culture and cultural politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

⁷⁴ Abdolmedhi Riazi, *The four language stages in the history of Iran* in Angel Lin and Peter W. Martin (eds.), *Decolonisation, globalization: Languages in education policy and practice* (Multilingual Matters, 2005), p. 102.

⁷⁵ David Merashri, *Education and the making of the modern Iran* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 121; Rudi Matthee, 'Education in the Reza shah Period' in Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (Routledge, 2012), p. 140.

⁷⁶ Julian Bharier, *Economic development in Iran 1900-1970* (Oxford University press, 1971), p. 37.

⁷⁷ Pierre Furter, *Possibilities and limitations of functional literacy: The Iranian Experience* (UNESCO, 1973), p. 11.

⁷⁸ Hammed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender politics in the Islamic Republic* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), p. 38.

⁷⁹ Houchang E. Chehabi, *The banning of the veil and its consequences*, in S. Cronin (ed.), *The making of Modern Iran* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.193-210 (p. 197).

⁸⁰ Said Amir Arjomand, *The turban for the crown: The Islamic revolution in Iran* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 82.

opposition to his modernisation drive.⁸¹ Reza Shah viewed them as failing to meet the new modern standards, thereby there was a need for the clergy to be retrained.⁸² However in his replications of Atatürk's actions,⁸³ Reza Shah encountered a far greater task than that of Turkey, because of a number of fundamental points. Historically the Shi'a 'ulama' had preserved their autonomy based upon their practice of *ijtihād* (a process of jurisprudential reasoning) and by being the recipients of a religious tax *khums*, and a control in *waqf* (donation) mortmain, they were 'economically independent' of financial support from the state.⁸⁴ Thus he sought to bring the *hawza* inline with his modernisation endeavours by seeking to alter the *hawza* education.⁸⁵ As part of the government's educational reforms of 1934, a proposal was made for a new curriculum and government examinations for the 'ulama',⁸⁶ linking it to an exemption from the invoked forced wearing of European-style clothing by men, *taghyir-i libas*.⁸⁷ However, the aim of the new approach by the government was to bring the clergy at the state's service, and set new standard that would allow the clergy to take employment with the government, which in turn provided for appropriate training.⁸⁸ Although the exact details could not be traced, Ayatollah Ha'eri is known to have rejected the idea as rediciocous. He compared it with the *hawza* 'setting the Army with standards and appointing army personnel'.⁸⁹ In order to belittle the 'ulama's achievement, the government banned the use of titles such as *Siqat al-Islām*, *Hujjat al-Islām*, *Sharī'atmadār* or *Ayatollah*.⁹⁰ The state for the first time was

⁸¹ Yahya Dulat'abadi, *Hayāt-i Yahyā* (Intishārāt-i 'Attār, 1992), Vol. 4, p. 329, and p. 361.

⁸² Mohammad H. Faghfoory, 'The ulama-state relations in Iran: 1921-1941', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 4 (1987), pp. 413-432 (p. 427).

⁸³ Atatürk was seen as the man who chaged a dying Empire into a homogeneous state by transforming all traditional ideas and institutions, "a successful modernization program could not combine the old and the new"; Rebecca J. Aghazadeh, 'Science, rationalism and positivism as the basis of secularism and the disestablishment of Islam: A comparative study of Turkey and Iran', *Doctoral dissertation* (The American University, 1993), p. 204.

⁸⁴ Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and politics in contemporary Iran* (State University of New York Press, 1980), p. 11.

⁸⁵ Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 44.

⁸⁶ Muhammad Javad Khalili, 'vākāvī-yi rābiṭ-yi dolat Pahlavī-yi avval va ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya', *Pizhūhishnāmeḥ Tārīkh, Sīyāsāt va Rasaneh*, 1, no. 3 (2018), pp. 329-340 (p. 336); Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and politics in contemporary Iran* (State University of New York Press, 1980), p. 45.

⁸⁷ The turban is considered 'the quintessential semiotic making of the Iranian cleric'; Arang Keshavarzian, 'Turban or hat, seminarian or soldier: State building and clergy building in Reza Shah's Iran', *Journal of Church and State* 45, no. 1 (2003), pp. 81-112 (p. 81).

⁸⁸ Mohammad H. Faghfoory, 'The ulama-state relations in Iran: 1921-1941', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 4 (1987), pp. 413-432 (p. 427).

⁸⁹ Ahmad Najmi, *Guzārish-i az ravand-I mashrūh-i shiklgīrī ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Mu'assasah-i Muṭāla'āt va Pizhūhishhā-yi Siyāsī, 2013), para. 18. Online edition available at <https://psri.ir/?id=o6htfn7w54> [accessed on 11 September 2020]

⁹⁰ Interview in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Lutfullah Safi Golpayegani on 16th September 2010.

to determine ‘who was a member of the ‘*ulama*’,⁹¹ implying that there was a need for all scholars to be re-educated under a modern structure of education. Subsequently as part of the newly inaugurated University of Tehran in 1934,⁹² *dānishkadāh-i ma‘qūl va manqūl* (Faculty of Rational and Narrated Knowledge) was formed in 1935 to implement formal education for the clergy. It would bring ‘control over the majority of religious schools’ and the ‘management, teachers and students’,⁹³ and provide a recognized academic qualification and lucrative career opportunities to them. Such steps were deemed as imperative by the government in countering the religious scholars who were evolving within the national arena as authorities, and making judgements on issues counterproductive to Reza Shah’s agenda.⁹⁴

Ayatollah Ha’eri who was regarded by some as ‘a reformer’, ‘frustrated by the conservative inertia of his environment,’⁹⁵ did not reject the idea of having a new examination requirement. In return the government conceded by allowing for internal assessment to be managed in Qum,⁹⁶ and supervised by Ayatollah Ha’eri’s administration.⁹⁷ Records from that period show 357 clerics receiving official certification from those participating, including some very senior scholars’ names.⁹⁸ However, the ‘*ulama*’ quietly discouraged their students from taking the step of moving into governmental positions,⁹⁹ although Ayatollah Ha’eri did not express such opposition in public.¹⁰⁰ Ayatollah Hojjat and his collaborative colleagues Ayatollahs Seyyid Sadr al-Din Sadr (d. 1953) and Seyyid Muhammad Taqi Khonsari (d. 1952) are known for their involvement in the administration and structuring of the newly proposed *hawza* exams. This

⁹¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.85.

⁹² The new University was formed while absorbing the *dār al-funūn* (polytechnic) of *Amīr Kabīr* (the great prince) established in 1851 and the Tehran School of Political sciences established in 1899; Mohammad Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth century: A political history* (Lynne Rienner, 1989), Vol. 4, p.22.

⁹³ Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs* (Routledge, 2013), p. 28.

⁹⁴ Muhammad Javad Khalili, ‘vākāvī-yi rābiṭ-yi dolat Pahlavī-yi avval va ḥawza-yi ‘ilmīyya’, *Pizhūhishnāmeḥ Tārīkh, Sīyāsāt va Rasaneh*, 1, no. 3 (2018), pp. 329-340 (p. 338).

⁹⁵ Houchang E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and religious modernism: The liberation movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (I.B.Tauris, 1990), p. 104.

⁹⁶ Hawza, ‘Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah ‘Abdul-Husayn Gharavi’, *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 11, no. 62 (1991), pp 35-56 (p. 45).

⁹⁷ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Athār al-hujjah: yā tārīkh va dā‘irat al-ma‘ārīf-i ḥawza-yi ‘ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 46.

⁹⁸ Ahmad Najmi, *Guzārish-i az ravand-i mashrūḥ-i shiklgīrī ḥawza-yi ‘ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Mu‘assasah-i Muṭāla‘āt va Pizhūhishhā-yi Siyāsī, 2013), para. 20. Online edition available at <https://psri.ir/?id=o6htfn7w54> [accessed on 11 September 2020].

⁹⁹ Hawza, ‘Muṣāḥabah bā Hujjat al-Islām Mustafa Mohaqiq-Damad’, *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 21, no. 125 (2004), pp 30-148 (p. 93).

¹⁰⁰ Hawza, ‘Muṣāḥabah bā Ustād ‘Abd al-Hadi Ha’iri’, *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 21, no. 125 (2004), pp 149-194 (p. 160).

compliance with these new requirements was against Reza Shah's anticipation, he had pictured the '*ulama*' 'as agents of reaction and opponents of reform and progress'.¹⁰¹

A further decisive move made against the religious scholars by the government was the creation of an endowments directorate which channelled funds away from the *hawza*. Accessing financial resources of '*ulama*' was later extended to the collections of religious taxes.¹⁰² Additionally the cultural hostility of Reza Shah to the clergy and the religious segment of Iranian society was accentuated with the banning of Muharram programmes,¹⁰³ regarded as an avenue for reducing the clergy's interaction with society and the channelling away money earned during the programmes.¹⁰⁴ Thereafter he introduced the *mu'assasah-i vaz va khiṭābeh* (Institute for sermon and rhetoric) to control the delivery of sermons,¹⁰⁵ and the expressing of religious positions on emerging issues in society.¹⁰⁶ Such drastic moves ultimately led to the closure of many mosques,¹⁰⁷ as well as the ending of many provincial *hawzas* across Iran.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Ayatollah Ha'eri's death in January of 1937 provided an opportunity for Reza Shah to intensify his attempt to take complete control over the religious sector, by being 'more repressive, systematic, and coercive, in a final push to curtail the power and authority of the clergy'.¹⁰⁹

Recognizing the Political Challenge

Irrespective of the speculations of what would occur, Ayatollah Ha'eri had already appointed like minded Ayatollah Hojjat as his successor,¹¹⁰ whom he had personally invited to Qum in

¹⁰¹ Mohammad H. Faghfoory, 'The ulama-state relations in Iran: 1921–1941', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19, no. 4 (1987), pp. 413-432 (p. 426).

¹⁰² Mohammad H. Manzur al-Ajdad, *Marji'iyat dar 'arṣah- 'i ijtīmā' va siyāsāt: asnād va guzārish'hāyī az Āyāt-i 'izām Na'ini, Isfahani, Qumi, Ha'iri va Borujerdi* (Pardīs-i Dānish, 2000), p. 104, and p. 137.

¹⁰³ Husayn Makki, *Tārīkh-i bīst sāli-yi Īrān* (Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī, 1985), Vol. 5, p. 435.

¹⁰⁴ Muharram commemorations marks the martyrdom of Imam Husayn with the clergy delivering religious sermons and elegy.

¹⁰⁵ Muhammad Javad Khalili, 'vākāvī-yi rābiṭ-yi dolat Pahlavī-yi avval va ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya', *Pizhūhishnāmeḥ Tārīkh, Siyāsāt va Rasaneḥ*, 1, no. 3 (2018), pp. 329-340 (p. 338).

¹⁰⁶ The occasion was used in 1963 by Ayatollah Khomeini in delivering his famous speech against the Pahlavi regime; Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government* (Manor Books, 1979), p. xiii.

¹⁰⁷ Muhammad Samiei, *Nabard-i qudrat dar Īrān* (Nashr-i Nay, 2017), p. 326.

¹⁰⁸ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭḥār al-ḥujjah: yā tārīkh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ Parviz Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭḥār al-ḥujjah: yā tārīkh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 89.

1930.¹¹¹ They had worked closely throughout the tense Reza Shah's modernisation period, and he had in fact delegated authority to Ayatollahs Hojjat and Sadr during the last year of his life whilst severely ill,¹¹² for educational as well as financial matters.¹¹³ As such after Ayatollah Ha'eri's death in 1937, Ayatollah Hojjat boldly came out to the *hawza* students urging them to continue with their studies as if nothing had changed.¹¹⁴ He was in total agreement with Ayatollah Ha'eri in that political activism was not the solution, but rather the approach of dynamic quietism was best suited to circumvent the social and educational circumstances facing them.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the prodigious task of preserving the *hawza*'s independence despite reports of increased fear amongst the clergy,¹¹⁶ indicates that he was politically aware.¹¹⁷ Firstly, having identified the Pahlavis as opportunistic politicians with links to colonizing powers,¹¹⁸ Ayatollah Hojjat avoided any direct association with them whatsoever.¹¹⁹ In fact he remained the only marja' whom neither of the two Shahs, Reza Shah or Mohammad Reza, ever met.¹²⁰ Moreover, during his leadership he avoided any meetings directly with governmental authorities,¹²¹ and communicated with them through Ayatollah Behbahani. Secondly, in order to make strategic adjustments to meet the required educational transformations and address the social and political environment of the State,¹²² he opted for a collective approach to *hawza*'s leadership, and the management of social, educational or

¹¹¹ 'Abd'ul Rahim 'Aqāqī-Bakhshāyishī, *Yakṣad sāl-i mubārakah-'i rūḥānīyat-i mutaraqqī* (Daftar-i Nashr-i Navīd-i Islām, 1982), Vol. 3, p.58.

¹¹² Ayatollah Sadr briefly stayed in Qum in 1927 but moved on to the *hawza* of Mashhad before returned to Qum in 1935 at Ayatollah Ha'eri's invitation; Muhsin Kamalian, *Ṣadr-i Dīn* (Mu'assasah-i Farhangī Taḥqīqāt Imām Mūsā Ṣadr, 2012), p. 187.

¹¹³ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭhār al-ḥujjah: yā tārīkh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 201.

¹¹⁴ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ustād 'Ali Meshkat', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 6, no. 31 (1989), pp 41-58 (p. 44).

¹¹⁵ Mustafa Qulizadeh-'Alyar, *Marāje' thālath* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2012), p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Mohammad H. Faghfoory, 'The ulama-state relations in Iran: 1921–1941', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19, no. 4 (1987), pp. 413-432 (p. 428).

¹¹⁷ Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Ayatollah Mohammad Javad 'Alavi Borujerdi' in *Hojjat-i faqīhān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Mustafā, 2015), p. 357.

¹¹⁸ Based on the British assisted coup d'état of 1921 which had elevated Reza Khan's position from a Colonel in the Cossack Division to later as Shah of Iran and the accession of Mohammad Reza following the 1941 with the Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran and the forced abdication of Reza Shah; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between two revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p.103 & p. 176; According to Ayatollah Ha'eri 'Politics in Iran is very complex, particularly due to implications linked to the colonizing powers'; Imaduddin Fayazi, *Haj Sheikh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'eri* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1999), p. 78.

¹¹⁹ Ghulam Reza Karbaschi, *Tārīkh-i shifāhī-i inqilāb-i Islāmī: tārīkh-i ḥawzah-yi 'ilmīya-yi Qum* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2001), p. 203.

¹²⁰ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭhār al-ḥujjah: yā tārīkh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 103.

¹²¹ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭhār al-ḥujjah: yā tārīkh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 104 & p. 112.

¹²² 'Ali Davani, *Mafākhir-i Islām* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2007), Vol. 13, p. 91.

political declarations.¹²³ As such, he urged the senior scholars' to work together for collective action,¹²⁴ in order to prevent the closure of the institute of the *hawza*.¹²⁵ He worked in particular with two scholars of different political standing to himself, Ayatollahs Sadr¹²⁶ and Khonsari¹²⁷ and thereafter they became known as *maraje' thalath* (triumvirate of *Shi'a* jurists).¹²⁸ Thirdly, in pursuit of collaborative decision-making and the sharing of responsibilities,¹²⁹ he arranged for regular weekly consultation meetings for the scrutinization of decisions,¹³⁰ and also met other senior clergy regularly. There was a need for the clergy to work together as they were all being targeted by Reza Shah in one way or the other, attempting to erase their ability to operate.¹³¹ Fourthly, to avoid any rivalry with Najaf and also to swing Reza Shah's attention from activities in Qum, he indicated his acceptance of the pre-eminence of the *hawza* of Najaf over Qum. In recognizing Ayatollah Isfahani's status,¹³² the *hawza* was given *ijazah* (permission) to use any financial resources or religious taxes collected locally which was essential considering Reza Shah's decisive move in channelling funds away from the *hawza* with the creation of an endowments directorate.¹³³ Fifthly, he kept a particular connection to Azerbaijan, where Reza Shah's drive for national identity had created ethnic cultural resentment.¹³⁴ This had great benefits as their financial support helped in continuing *hawza* activities during the acute shortage of resources resulting from Reza Shah's policies and later

¹²³ Muhammad 'Ali Mudarris-Tabrizi, *Rayḥānat al-adab fī tarājim al-ma'rūfīn bi-al-kunyat aw al-laqaḥ* (Intishārāt-i Khayyām, 1948), Vol. 2, p. 24.

¹²⁴ Ayatollah Hojjat has given the tribute for such collaborative approach to Ayatollah Ha'eri before his death, he 'warned against an individualistic or political approach'; Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Ayatollah 'Allama 'Abbas Mesbahzadeh' in *Hojjat-i faqīhān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 394.

¹²⁵ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ustād 'Ali Meshkat', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 6, no. 31 (1989), pp 41-58 (p. 44).

¹²⁶ A key scholar in the reconstruction of the *hawza*, he was also active against the Russian invasion and involved in the tense anti-government protests of Mashhad; Muhsin Kamalian, *Ṣadr-i Dīn* (Mu'assasah-i Farhangī Taḥqīqāt Imām Mūsā Ṣadr, 2012), p. 187

¹²⁷ A key scholar who was an early companion of Ayatollah Ha'eri, he is known for fighting against the British in his youth; Qudraullah 'Effati, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqī Khonsari (Imām Khomeini Portal. 2018), para. 4. Online edition available at <http://www.Imām-khomeini.ir/fa/n146020/> [accessed on 11 September 2020].

¹²⁸ Mohammad Mesbahi, 'Collective *hawza* Leadership in a Time of Crisis: The Period of *maraje' thalath* (1937–1953)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2021), DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2021.1886657.

¹²⁹ Muhammad 'Ali Mudarris-Tabrizi, *Rayḥānat al-adab fī tarājim al-ma'rūfīn bi-al-kunyat aw al-laqaḥ* (Intishārāt-i Khayyām, 1948), Vol. 2, p. 24.

¹³⁰ Meetings were held in the house of Ayatollah Murtaza Ha'eri (d. 1986) Ayatollah Ha'eri's son and Ayatollah Hojjat's son-in-law; Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ustād 'Abd al-Hadi Ha'iri', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 21, no. 125 (2004), pp pp 149-194 (p. 163).

¹³¹ Mustafa Qulizadeh- 'Alyar, *Marāje' thālath* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2012), p. 5.

¹³² 'Abdu'llah Ash'ari, *Bar maḥmel-i akhlāq va modīriyat*, (Imām-Sadr.Com, 2009), para. 17. Online edition available at <http://www.Imām-sadr.com/tabid/177/smid/735/ArticleID/14806/Default.aspx> [accessed on 11 February 2020].

¹³³ This permission was removed by Ayatollah Isfahani in 1945 upon Ayatollah Borujerdi's arrival in Qum; Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Ayatollah Mohammad Javad 'Alavi Borujerdi' in *Hojjat-i faqīhān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 353.

¹³⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between two revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p.163.

economic hardship during WWII. Importantly, Ayatollah Hojjat's position and guidance helped in addressing cultural and linguistic challenges, in confronting communism, and later in non-separation of the territory from Iran when it came under Soviet occupation, but at the time, he received many hate mail for his stance.¹³⁵ As a final step, Ayatollah Hojjat presented the *hawza* 'ilmiyya to the government as a confined community of learning, with reference to its literal meaning.¹³⁶ He used the period of time as an opportunity to shift from the external activities to an internal drive that concentrated on theological learning and pedagogic abilities. These crucial steps not only convinced Reza Shah that the *hawza* was no longer a threat,¹³⁷ and stopped further initiatives against the *hawza*; but allowed for the consolidation of religious and cultural entity with education at its heart.¹³⁸

In this regard, Ayatollah Hojjat is particularly remembered for avoiding public denunciations, including the intelligentsia such as Ahmad Kasravi, he merely pointed out their disenchantment with the regime and predicted the failure of their ideas in time.¹³⁹ Unlike some within the *hawza* who shunned the modern approach to learning, Ayatollah Hojjat passionately believed that learning literacy and mathematical skills were urgently needed for all children including girls, and advocated them ardently.¹⁴⁰ Ayatollah Hojjat addressed issues of concern such as the religious studies vacuum within the modern structure of schooling by endorsing a set of complimentary textbooks, helping families to support their children's religious education outside the school settings.¹⁴¹ This trend in his approach continued even after the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, till his death in 1952, months before the 1953 CIA sponsored coup d'état. In 1943 he resolutely refused to meet or accept the offer by the young monarch Mohammad Reza to formally recognize him as the single religious authority for the Shi'a.¹⁴² During the transitional interval when 'power was to shift back and forth' between different components of

¹³⁵ Interview in Mashhad with Ayatollah Seyyid 'Izzuddin Zanjani on 26th September 2010; Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Mirza Javad Gharavi 'Alyari' in *Hojjat-i faqihān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 324.

¹³⁶ Reference to realm, domain or territory of scholarship by the term *hawza* was first made Shi'i scholar Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), 'The fact that *hawza* connotes as a defensible territory may indicate that Shi'i scholars felt that their institutions of learning were under attack and needed to be defended'; Zackery M. Heern, 'One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf: Myth and History of the Shi'i Ḥawza', *Iranian Studies*, 50, no. 3 (2017): 415-438 (p. 420).

¹³⁷ Ayatollah Musa Shubayri Zanjani, *Jur'ae-i az daryā* (Mu'assasah-i Ketābshināsī Shi'a, 2018), Vol. 3, p. 418.

¹³⁸ 'Ali Davani, *Nahzat-i rūhāniyūn-i Īrān* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1981), Vol. 2, p. 148.

¹³⁹ Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, *Hojjat-i faqihān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 230.

¹⁴⁰ Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, *Hojjat-i faqihān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 180.

¹⁴¹ Tahir Khushnivi-Tabrizi, *Talīmāt-i dīnī* (Shirkat-i Ṭab'-i Kitāb, 1951), p.1.

¹⁴² Mohammad J. Ardalan, 'The life and work of a Grand Ayatollah in historical context', *Doctoral dissertation* (Oxford University, 2013), p. 118.

the Iranian political fabric,¹⁴³ there were many urging the triumvirate to revolt and take action against the newly formed government.¹⁴⁴ However Ayatollah Hojjat refused to support either political activism or revolutionary clerics such as Seyyid Mojtaba Navvab-Safavi (d. 1956) and Ayatollah Seyyid Ab'ul Qasem Kashani (d. 1962).¹⁴⁵ His reluctance to become politically involved ultimately led in 1945 to the change of leadership of the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum.¹⁴⁶ Following the unique orderly and organized transfer of power to the new leadership,¹⁴⁷ Ayatollah Hojjat continued to 'focus on education, and staying clear of politics',¹⁴⁸ while addressing the needs of the people such as the lack of essential commodities. To the surprise of the political activists, the new leader Ayatollah Borujerdi, likewise would not let political issues 'take priority' over his religious positions,¹⁴⁹ questioning the sincerity and belief of such clerics¹⁵⁰ who wanted to make Qum an arena of combat against the monarchy.¹⁵¹ The approach of the senior '*ulama*' such as Ayatollah Hojjat during this defining period shows that political change does not necessarily need to come through activism but at times political responsiveness dictates an approach of non-interference.

Recognizing the Educational Challenge

Ayatollah Hojjat had grown up in an educated and scholarly family in Tabriz, at a time when the literacy rate in Iran was extremely low. He is noted for having studied modern pre-medical sciences in his youth alongside his traditional studies, before departing for Najaf in 1921.¹⁵² Although he had received personal schooling during his early life, this acceptance of modern education can be seen by his references to scientific theories such as those in Physics while

¹⁴³ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between two revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p.327.

¹⁴⁴ Hamid Basirat'manish, '*Ulamā' va rizhīm-i Reza Shāh: naẓarī bar 'amalkard-i siyāsī-farhangī-i rūḥānīyūn dar sālḥā-yi 1305-1320* (Mu'assasah-i Chāp va Nashr-i 'Urūj, 1997), p. 290.

¹⁴⁵ Hawza, '*Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Vā'iz'adah-Khurasani*', Majalla-yi Hawza, 8, no. 43 (1991), pp 195-238 (p. 230).

¹⁴⁶ The other members of the triumvirate were more inclined towards political activism, the three jurists thereafter agreed to invite Ayatollah Borujerdi to lead the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum; Ayatollah Musa Shubayri Zanjani, *Jur'ae-i az daryā* (Mu'assasah-i Ketābshināsī Shi'a, 2018), Vol. 3, p. 644.

¹⁴⁷ Mohammad J. Ardalan, 'The life and work of a Grand Ayatollah in historical context', *Doctoral dissertation* (Oxford University, 2013), p. 71.

¹⁴⁸ Interview in Mashhad with Ayatollah Seyyid 'Izzuddin Zanjani on 26th September 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Heinz Halm, *The Shiites: A short history* (Markus Wiener Pub, 2007), p. 122.

¹⁵⁰ Rasul Ja'fariyan, *Jaryānhā va sāzmānhā-yi maḏhabī* (Nashr-i 'Ilm, 2013), p. 179.

¹⁵¹ Ayatollah Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri, *Matn-i kāmeli khāṭirāt-i faqīh va marja'-i 'ālīqadr Āyatollah al-'uẓmā Muntaziri* (Nashr-i Bārān, 2000), p. 74.

¹⁵² Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, *Hojjat-i faqīhān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 55.

explaining complex jurisprudential arguments as a leading Shi'i scholar.¹⁵³ While in Najaf he continued to receive mathematical tuition from the renowned scholar 'Allama Haydar-Quli Afghani known as Sardar Kabuli (d. 1953), who had been educated in British India.¹⁵⁴ Ayatollah Hojjat's arrival in Qum took place at the peak of Reza Shah's educational reforms, and began focusing on education from the outset.¹⁵⁵ Being acknowledged within the *hawza* for his pedagogical abilities,¹⁵⁶ his intellectual engagement went beyond the traditional religious scholarship. In other words, he was a traditional scholar that took modern scientific thought seriously, an approach that he sought to adapt in his style of teaching and theological lectures.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently, his broad knowledge is noted for familiarity with material beyond what is delivered and learnt within the *hawza*.¹⁵⁸ Referred to within the *hawza* as *kitābkhāne-yi mutaharik* (the moving library), he spent most of his time in private libraries and book shops, looking for manuscripts and reading material of all kind and would not be satisfied only with books of traditional religious scholarship.¹⁵⁹ Consequently he familiarised himself with the modern structure of education and its delivery, an approach which he sought to adapt in his style of teaching and theological lectures.¹⁶⁰ In his leadership, he regarded the survival of the clerical establishment within Iran to be dependant on the 'ulama's continued engagement in education and culture, without political entanglement.¹⁶¹ He was of the opinion that education

¹⁵³ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Seyyid 'Izzuddīn Zanjānī', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 4, no. 23 (1987), pp. 35-52 (p. 50).

¹⁵⁴ Sardār (Army commander) is an inherited honorary title, and Ayatollah Hojjat has referred to him as his teacher; Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭhār al-ḥujjah: yā tārikh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 197.

¹⁵⁵ 'Abd'ul Rahim 'Aqīqī-Bakhshāyishī, *Yakṣad sāl-i mubārakah-'i rūḥānīyat-i mutaraqqī* (Daftar-i Nashr-i Navīd-i Islām, 1982), Vo. 3, p.58.

¹⁵⁶ Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmīyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 44.

¹⁵⁷ All accounts of his life by his students' involves his unique style of teaching that was regarded as exceptional, creating an environment that challenged the students into work. Ayatollah Ha'eri's son, Dr Mahdi Hā'iri Yazdi (d. 1999) states that 'ten minutes of lecture by Ayatollah Hojjat was equivalent to two hours of lecture by others', a similar quote is also given to Ayatollah Ali Safi Golpayegani; Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Mirza Javad Gharavi 'Alyari' in *Hojjat-i faqihān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣtafā, 2015), p. 323.

¹⁵⁸ Interview in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Ja'far Subhani on 15th September 2010.

¹⁵⁹ A student promises to bring him a new book of history translated into Arabic from English, upon receiving the book, thanking him and giving him a gift, Ayatollah Hojjat notes that 'the book is not of history but rather anthropology, but still an excellent book to read'; Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah 'Abdul-Husayn Gharavi', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 11, no. 62 (1991), pp 35-56 (p. 49).

¹⁶⁰ All accounts of his life by his students' involves his unique style of teaching that was regarded as exceptional, creating an environment that challenged the students into work. Ayatollah Ha'eri's son, Dr Mahdi Hā'iri Yazdi (d. 1999) states that 'ten minutes of lecture by Ayatollah Hojjat was equivalent to two hours of lecture by others', a similar quote is also given to Ayatollah Ali Safi Golpayegani; Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Mirza Javad Gharavi 'Alyari' in *Hojjat-i faqihān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣtafā, 2015), p. 323.

¹⁶¹ Interview in Mashhad with Ayatollah Seyyid 'Izzuddin Zanjani on 26th September 2010.

was the central component of the secular politics of Reza Shah's with the support of intelligentsia,¹⁶² regarding this to be an attempt for a change the identity in Iran.¹⁶³

Ayatollah Hojjat alongside his two colleagues Ayatollahs Sadr and Khonsari¹⁶⁴ used the occasion positively in providing capacity for securing a transformative change,¹⁶⁵ central to the consolidation of the *hawza* in its most difficult circumstances.¹⁶⁶ The holistic approach to the management of theological learning undertaken by Ayatollah Hojjat,¹⁶⁷ was based on requirements for reforms that were initiated by the founder of the *hawza* 'ilmiyya of Qum Ayatollah Ha'eri. During the period of the triumvirate of Shi'a jurists (1937-1953) dynamic quietism had replaced active opposition, and the focus on education proved to be timely, the approach made Qum thereafter relatively immune from Reza Shah's policies and reforms. Ultimately with Mohammad Reza Shah's rise to power, this gave rise to the prominence of Qum as the hub of traditional Islamic learning¹⁶⁸ 'thriving with scholarly vigour' with the overpowering leadership of Ayatollah Borujerdi.¹⁶⁹ Within this holistic approach to learning that was continued and expanded by Ayatollah Borujerdi after his takeover of the leadership from *maraje' thalath*, formal and informal learning were included in an innovative single structure of management. What the modern *hawza* of Qum advocated was to bring the multiplicity of forms of Shi'i theological learning that existed within the *hawza*,¹⁷⁰ to be recognized under one umbrella.¹⁷¹ Such an approach encompassed different formats of religious learning and different locations used for that provision, being involved in the development of the *hawza* 'ilmiyya learning. Within the various *madrasas*, studies also needed

¹⁶² Through his time with Sardar, he had an awareness of the educational changes instigated throughout the Middle East and particularly in Turkey by Western-oriented elites.

¹⁶³ Interview in Virginia with 'Allama 'Abbas Mesbahzadeh on 10th February 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Mohammad Mesbahi, 'Collective hawza Leadership in a Time of Crisis: The Period of maraje' thalath (1937-1953)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2021), DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2021.1886657.

¹⁶⁵ From a newly formed *hawza* in danger of closure towards a structured, innovative and enhanced *hawza* 'ilmiyya.

¹⁶⁶ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭḥār al-ḥujjah: yā tārikh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 90.

¹⁶⁷ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭḥār al-ḥujjah: yā tārikh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 88.

¹⁶⁸ Sadegh Zibakalam, 'To rule or not to rule', in A. Adib-Moghaddam (ed.), *A critical introduction to Khomeini* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 263.

¹⁶⁹ Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 46.

¹⁷⁰ Zackery M. Heern, 'One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf: Myth and History of the Shi'i Ḥawza', *Iranian Studies*, 50, no. 3 (2017): 415-438 (p. 419).

¹⁷¹ This was to include activities from sermons being given by scholars in public squares attended by crowds, to the study circles often held in scholar's homes, from lectures delivered in mosques and later at the shrine, to the discipleship of student with some living in proximity of a scholar.

a formalized structure and this was put into practice by registering students for receiving various stipends and bread coupons, while making a distinction for their level and ability,¹⁷² and between single and married students. This process is still in effect within the *hawza* of Qum, and structuring was formalised in later years by Ayatollah Muhammad Reza Golpayigani's (d. 1993).¹⁷³ The administrative component provided alongside the required exams and weekly quizzes were all managed by the triumvirate and in particular Ayatollah Sadr.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after Ayatollah Borujerdi's arrival in Qum, there was a suggestion for the creation of a committee of scholars to take responsibility for administering the *hawza*,¹⁷⁵ but the idea was rejected in 1948 when they sought to take a political stance on behalf of the *hawza*.¹⁷⁶ The administration of examinations also annulled following 'objections from religious authorities in Najaf'.¹⁷⁷ This student centered development of different methods of teaching, learning and examination governed by a single structure of *hawza* authority is a recognition of Ayatollah Ha'eri's acceptance of Reza Shah's challenging requirements.¹⁷⁸ In practice, its reinforced existence is owed to Ayatollah Hojjat and later Ayatollah Borujerdi and referred to as '*hawza* cultivation'.¹⁷⁹ This grounding of Ayatollah Ha'eri's approach led to the widening of the curriculum by *hawza* of Qum's senior scholars beyond *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *uṣūl* (principles of jurisprudence), and *rijāl* (authenticity of their transmitters) to other fields.¹⁸⁰ This expansion of topics was to include '*aqā'id* (theology), *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), *al-hadīth* (knowledge of narrations), *falsafah* (philosophy), '*irfān* (gnosis), *akhlāq* (moral social code) and even topics such as mathematics and astronomy. This promoted the modernisation of the curriculum, while the methods in teaching, training and behaviour remained traditional, allowing the student to make the choices.¹⁸¹ Ayatollah Hojjat's perspective to broaden the

¹⁷² The various levels of education of students was classified from *muqadamat* to *sharhi lom'a*, *qawanin*, *rasa'il*, *makasib*, *kifaya*, leading to *kharij*.

¹⁷³ Abu Muhammad vakili Qumi, *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya Qum*, (Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1969), p. 79 & 111.

¹⁷⁴ Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 45.

¹⁷⁵ Ghulam Reza Karbaschi, *Tārīkh-i shifāhī-i inqilāb-i Islāmī: tārīkh-i ḥawzah-yi 'ilmīya-yi Qum* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2001), p. 203.

¹⁷⁶ Seyyid Hamid Ruhani, *Barrasī va taḥlīl-i nihẓat-i Imām Khomeini* (Daftar -i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1982), p. 99.

¹⁷⁷ Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 59.

¹⁷⁸ Hamid Basirat'manish, '*Ulamā'* va *rizhīm-i Reza Shāh: naẓarī bar 'amalkard-i siyāsī-farhangī-i rūḥānīyūn dar sālḥā-yi 1305-1320* (Mu'assasah-i Chāp va Nashr-i 'Urūj, 1997), p. 252.

¹⁷⁹ 'Abd'ul Rahim 'Aqīqī-Bakhshāyishī, *Yakṣad sāl-i mubārakah-i rūḥānīyat-i mutaraqqī* (Daftar-i Nashr-i Navīd-i Islām, 1982), Vo. 3, p.58.

¹⁸⁰ Muhammad Sharif-Razi, *Aṭḥār al-ḥujjah: yā tārīkh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i ḥawzah-i 'ilmīya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 177.

¹⁸¹ Interview in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Lutfullah Safi Golpayegani on 16th September 2010.

hawza by launching a philanthropic, pedagogical, and theological initiative culminated in the restructuring of the *hawza 'ilmiyya* of Qum during Ayatollah Ayatollah Borujerdi's era.

Although much is written about Ayatollah Borujerdi's pedagogic abilities following his 1945 arrival in Qum, Ayatollah Hojjat was also 'an exceptional scholar'¹⁸² who was charged with scholarly and pedagogical responsibilities of the *hawza* by Ayatollah Ha'eri.¹⁸³ His teaching and learning style is regarded as 'distinctive' in what his student's have labelled as facilitated or nurtured learning.¹⁸⁴ Learning was considered by Ayatollah Hojjat as a 'personal approach to knowledge', and the students were required to link to the explicit and implicit instructions that were given through his lectures to find their own way through the 'journey of learning'.¹⁸⁵ He is amongst the pioneers of a huge educational legacy that has started in Qum,¹⁸⁶ renowned for providing 'structured and organized lectures',¹⁸⁷ 'classifying the topic in a way that the students could make clear notes' in order to further research the topics being discussed.¹⁸⁸ He did not view theological learning in an abstract format, but through his 'excellent and articulated lectures',¹⁸⁹ he insisted on 'reflection and research' from students.¹⁹⁰ Ayatollah Hojjat did not expect students to become simply 'educated scholars' but required them to 'deduce and evaluate' and 'not merely repeat what others have said'.¹⁹¹ He made the assertion that *hawza* education was traditionally 'value-oriented learning', as such required to develop the student's skills in reasoning and ethical judgment,¹⁹² particularly in the light of the modernising drive being championed by Reza Shah. 'Allāma Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (d. 1981) states that 'I have never seen anyone more expressive in opening out and clarifying

¹⁸² Nishast, 'Khāṭiragu'-yi mushtarak aqāyan Sajjadi, 'Abayi, Ibrahimī, Ma'ādhikah, J'afari-Gilani, Murvarid', *Faṣlnāme Yād*, 2, no. 5 (1986), pp. 34-52 (p. 39); Mohammad J. Ardalani, 'The life and work of a Grand Ayatollah in historical context', *Doctoral dissertation* (Oxford University, 2013), p. 63-64 footnote.

¹⁸³ His impact is huge as all the *maraje'* and major Shi'i scholars of our time are either his students or have studied at his madrasa.

¹⁸⁴ This is limited the likes of Ayatollah Borujerdi and Ayatollah Seyyid Abul Qasim Khoei (d. 1992); Personal conversation in Najaf with Ayatollah Seyyid 'Ali Sistani on 20th January 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Muhammad Alvansaz-Kho'ei, 'Interview with Ayatollah Sheikh 'Ali Muhsinī-Kho'eī' in *Hojjat-i faqīhān* (Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjuma va Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 2015), p. 371.

¹⁸⁶ 'Abd'ul Rahim 'Aqīqī-Bakhshāyishī, *Yakṣad sāl-i mubārakah-'i rūḥānīyat-i mutaraqqī* (Daftar-i Nashr-i Navīd-i Islām, 1982), Vol. 3, p.58; 'Ali Davani, *Mafākhir-i Islām* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2007), Vol. 13, p. 66.

¹⁸⁷ Ayatollah Hojjat's name is always placed with a mention of his structured lectures without fail. He is regarded as a pioneer of the *hawza* lecturing style that has an opening, sequencing, pacing and closure to their lectures, ideal for note taking. Also, he encouraged student engagement during or after lectures while taking time to go through student notes; Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Vā'iz'adah-Khurasani', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 8, no. 43 (1991), pp 195-238 (p. 208).

¹⁸⁸ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Barqī-Aharī', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 12, no. 72 (1995), pp 37-48 (p. 42).

¹⁸⁹ Ayatollah Musa Shubayri Zanjanī, *Jur'ae-i az daryā* (Mu'assasah-i Ketābshināsī Shi'a, 2018), Vol. 3, p. 472.

¹⁹⁰ Personal conversation in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh 'Ali Safi Golpayegani on 30th June 2008.

¹⁹¹ Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari, *Ta'līm va Ta'llum dar Islām* (Intishārāt-i Ṣadrā, 1988), p. 20.

¹⁹² Interview in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Ja'far Subhani on 15th September 2010.

narrations like that of Ayatollah Hojrat'.¹⁹³ Other students have mentioned Ayatollah Hojrat always discussing 'for and against an opinion' and 'its originality' before giving his own opinion.¹⁹⁴ He undoubtedly was very cognisant and 'aware of the jurisprudential opinions of his contemporaries',¹⁹⁵ whereas others would give the rulings of early scholars, he was known for giving the opinion of scholars of his own era.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, with the view to broaden the *hawza* student's vision, he encouraged student research by giving prizes to learners,¹⁹⁷ particularly when referring to an 'expanded' reading of books that was not limited to those routinely used within their subjects.¹⁹⁸ When the *hawza* begun to implement the required educational changes in 1936, there was a significant loss of many talented scholars and students.¹⁹⁹ However by 1941, the same year as Reza Shah's abdication, the trend began to reverse and Ayatollah Hojrat commenced the building of the *hujjatiyah* madrasa,²⁰⁰ indicative of increased student demand within the *hawza* 'ilmiyya of Qum.²⁰¹ The school designed by 'Allāma Tabataba'i and completed in 1947 is recognised to be the pivotal base for Shi'i knowledge and authority and is linked to all the *maraje* 'including the supreme leader of Iran Ayatollah Khamenei.²⁰² Encompassing the former British barracks in Qum and the old *nāyib al-salṭanah* building as part of the newly built school,²⁰³ the school has become influential second only to the *faiziyah* madrasa and contains the earliest known Madrasa libraries within Qum.²⁰⁴

¹⁹³ Ayatollah Musa Shubayri Zanjani, *Jur'ae-i az daryā* (Mu'assasah-i Ketābshināsī Shi'a, 2018), Vol. 3, p. 460

¹⁹⁴ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Ayatollah Nuri, *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 5, no. 27 (1988), pp 29-37 (p. 33).

¹⁹⁵ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah 'Abdul-Husayn Gharavi', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 11, no. 62 (1991), pp 35-56 (p. 47); Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Ayatollah Nuri, *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 5, no. 27 (1988), pp 29-37 (p. 34).

¹⁹⁶ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Ayatollah Mubarrq'i, *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 8, no. 43 (1991), pp 69-76 (p. 72).

¹⁹⁷ Ayatollah Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri, *Matn-i kāmeli-khāṭirāt-i faqih va marja'-i 'ālīqadr Āyatollah al-'uẓmā Muntaziri* (Nashr-i Bārān, 2000), p. 43.

¹⁹⁸ Interview in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Ja'far Subhani on 15th September 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Isma'il Baghistani, 'Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid 'Abbas Radawi, 'Qum' in Ghulam 'Ali H. 'Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi 'ilmiyya, Shi'i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 44.

²⁰⁰ Following the Islamic revolution of 1979, the school continues to be the intellectual nucleus of Shi'i propagation as the *hawza* base for non-Iranians; MIU, *Al-Mustafa International University* (MIU.ac.ir, 2020) Available at <http://en.miu.ac.ir> [accessed on 11 September 2020].

²⁰¹ Muhammad Yazdi, *Khāṭirāt-i Ayatollah Yazdi* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2001), p. 128; Seyyid Mohammad Husayn H. Tehrani, *Shining Sun* (ICAS Pres, 2011), p. 361.

²⁰² Husayn 'Ali Akbariyan, *Khāṭirāt-i shinīdānī az Hojra-yi rahbar-i Inqilāb* (Howzehnews.Com, 2001), para. 4. Online edition available at <https://hawzahnews.com/news/241605/> [accessed on 11 September 2020].

²⁰³ Rasul Ja'fariyan, *Barg'hāyī az tārikh-i hawza-yi 'ilmiyya-yi Qum* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2002), p. 31.

²⁰⁴ Reza Ustadi, *Gurūhī az dānishmandān-i Shī'ah*. (Intishārāt-i Ustadi, 2005). P 689.

Recognizing the Cultural Challenge

During the demanding period that coincides with Ayatollah Hojjat's leadership, he was seen to be greatly concerned by the cultural dimension of Reza Shah's reforms. Ayatollah Hojjat reminded the clergy that the future prominence of the clergy could only be secured if the *hawza* incorporated personal, spiritual, academic and social development of students concurrently.²⁰⁵ Like Ayatollah Ha'eri, he regarded lectures as part of a larger development of *hawza* learning²⁰⁶ that involved spiritual formation and growth in personal maturity and development.²⁰⁷ According to Ayatollah Hojjat, understanding the text and its application was 'a skill to acquire', and mere knowledge would no longer suffice, as such he would encourage students to view topics in light of new circumstances.²⁰⁸ This in turn would encourage students to employ 'skills of applying the rulings' to new demands prompted by society.²⁰⁹ The Triumvirate of jurist concentrated on this particular aspect and in particular Ayatollah Khonsari helped immensely.²¹⁰ The concern was that after years of Reza Shah's misinformation about the clergy that had tarnished the '*ulama*' image, there was a need to regain public trust.²¹¹ As such, every opportunity was used by senior scholars within the *hawza* for effective integration of *hawza* theological education with the development of students' spiritual character formation, as well as their social and cultural skills. In other words developing the transition from formal theological leaning towards a holistic training that included considerations of society, spirituality and *akhlāq* (the moral social code).²¹² This approach by Ayatollah Hojjat and other senior *hawza* scholars developed and nurtured students²¹³ to be conscious and reflective in their spirituality.²¹⁴ Thereafter advocating social outreach with the aim of disseminating religious

²⁰⁵ Interview in Virginia with 'Allama' Abbas Mesbahzadeh on 10th February 2011; Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ḥujjat al-Islām Mustafā Mohaqiq-Damad', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 21, no. 125 (2004), pp 30-148 (p. 68).

²⁰⁶ Muhammad 'Ali Mudarris-Tabrizi, *Rayḥānat al-adab fī tarājim al-ma'rūfīn bi-al-kunyat aw al-laqaḥ* (Intishārāt-i Khayyām, 1948), Vol. 2, p. 23.

²⁰⁷ This approach of Ayatollah Hojjat has an element of influence by the events between his uncle Ayatollah Seyyid Husayn Kuh Kamari (d. 1879) known as *seyyid-i turk* and Ayatollah Sheikh Murtaza al-Ansari's (d. 1864); Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari, *Insān va Imān* (Intishārāt-i Ṣadrā, 2011), p. 25 & '*Adl-i Ilāhī*' (Intishārāt-i Ṣadrā, 2009), p. 347.

²⁰⁸ Interview in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Ja'far Subhani on 15th September 2010;

²⁰⁹ Such as Ayatollah Hojjat's review of the ruling for the age of girl's puberty; Personal conversation in Qum with Ayatollah Yusif Sane'i on 12th May 2001.

²¹⁰ Interview in Tehran with Ayatollah Seyyid Muhammad Baqir Khonsari on 30th October 2010; Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Nuri', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 5, no. 27 (1988), pp 29-37 (p. 35).

²¹¹ Interview in Mashhad with Ayatollah Seyyid 'Izzuddin Zanjani on 26th September 2010.

²¹² Personal conversation in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Muḥammad-Faḥr al-Lankarani on 28th June 2008.

²¹³ Muhammad 'Ali Mudarris-Tabrizi, *Rayḥānat al-adab fī tarājim al-ma'rūfīn bi-al-kunyat aw al-laqaḥ* (Intishārāt-i Khayyām, 1948), Vol. 2, p. 23.

²¹⁴ Ayatollah Hojjat is regarded as unique in this respect, 'I have never met anyone as exemplary in *Taqwa* (piety) as him'; Personal conversation in Najaf with Ayatollah Seyyid 'Ali Sistani on 20th January 2010.

sentiments and knowledge made the *hawza* the hub of religious and cultural activity within Iranian society following Reza Shah's abdication.²¹⁵

Alongside Ayatollah Borujerdi, Ayatollah Hojjat stands out as an articulate Shi'i scholar who had recognized that religious socialisation was essential for the *hawza*,²¹⁶ considering those in politics were seeking to redirect the cultural orientation of the Iranian society.²¹⁷ Subsequently, he did not accept calls from within the *hawza* for political action by the clergy, because he believed that it was education that determined socio-cultural attainment.²¹⁸ Contrary to the environment of political activism in the *hawza* in our time, he was of the mind that it was such cultural production that influenced politics in the long run, and preferred to concentrate on social outreach.²¹⁹ Through his unique approach to leadership and the intrinsic link to the people and his followes, he was able to contribute in the reshaping of society, countering the failures of Reza Shah in the social, political, and economic life of Iran.²²⁰ He countered the agenda for cultural Westernisation by equipping the clergy with the required skills to move beyond their theological learning in benefiting the society. Following the initial isolation with the fall of Reza Shah, *hawzas'* trained religious scholars were 'scattered all over the country', 'in cities, districts and villages',²²¹ guiding and leading the people to reattach with their religious duties and cultural values. The policy that was aimed at the destruction of religious, ethical and social identity moving towards alienation of the 'Persian-Islamic' culture, identity and heritage of Iran had been defeated.²²² While the Pahlavis were implicitly entangled with foreign governments' policies for Iran, Ayatollah Hojjat and his collective leadership programme actively invoved themselves, the clergy and *hawza* establishment in helping the people to manage through the economic hardships of the period.²²³ The Allied invasion of Iran

²¹⁵ Hawza, 'Muṣāḥabah bā Ayatollah Seyyid 'Izzuddīn Zanjānī', *Majalla-yi Hawza*, 4, no. 23 (1987), pp. 35-52 (p. 40).

²¹⁶ Personal conversation in Qum with Ayatollah Sheikh Muḥammad-Faḥr al-Lankarāni on 28th June 2008.

²¹⁷ Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (eds.), *Culture and cultural politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

²¹⁸ Such discussion was also prevalent with Ayatollah Muḥammad Kazim Shari'atmadari's (d. 1986) establishment of *dar al-taḥqīq*; Mohsen Kadivar, *Shikastah Shudan-i Namus-i Inqilāb* (Kadivar Website, 2015), p. 350.

²¹⁹ During the years of economical constrains, the triumvirate were involved jointly and individually in a range of social welfare initiatives; Muḥammad Sharif-Rāzi, *Aṭḥār al-hujjah: yā tārikh va dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i hawza-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Dār al-Kitāb, 1953), p. 90.

²²⁰ Ghulam Riza Karbaschi, *Tārikh-i shifāhī-i inqilāb-i Islāmī: tārikh-i hawzah-yi 'ilmīyya-yi Qum* (Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2001), p. 52.

²²¹ Agah Hazir, 'Beyond Religion: Ulama and Politics in Pre-revolutionary Iran', *Iran Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 1, no. 2 (2017), p. 51.

²²² Interview in Tehran with Ayatollah Seyyid Muḥammad Baqir Khonsari on 30th October 2010.

²²³ Mohammad Mesbahi, 'Collective hawza Leadership in a Time of Crisis: The Period of maraje' thalath (1937–1953)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2021), DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2021.1886657.

during WWII ‘shattered the image that Reza Shah had portrayed’ of himself and of Iran, as a secular, modernised, and strong state.²²⁴ Ayatollah Hojjat’s period of leadership had started off from highest point of Pahlavi power when Reza Khan’s autocratic rule had reached its totalitarian phase, but his life ended at the lowest point of Pahlavi power when Mohammad Reza Shah was only able to hang on to power through foreign intervention in 1953. The importance of Ayatollah Hojjat’s approach to leadership that leads to the overpowering period of Ayatollah Borujerdi is highlighted by the religious scholar influence increasing when everyone has assumed it would be totally erased. The *hawza*’s power was entrenched during his period in every aspect of Iranian life and used as a counterweight to Communism, even by the new monarch Mohammad Reza Shah.²²⁵ Thus, the *hawza* experienced a paradigm of change and Iran experienced a quasi-democratic phase of its history. In the years that followed 1945 with Ayatollah Borujerdi’s leadership in place, the required ‘governmental pretexts’ that had governed during Reza Shah’s era were removed, allowing for the promotion of the *hawza* with its new outlook, making the period 1945-1953 known as the era of the great educators.²²⁶

Conclusion

The transition from the Qajar dynasty to the Pahlavi occurred within the same time frame as the establishment of the modern *hawza* ‘*ilmiyya*’ of Qum. But the newly formed *hawza* soon became the unbreakable fortress for the ‘*ulama*’ with the huge congregation of religious scholars in Qum, forming an obstacle that preoccupied Reza Shah until his forced abdication. The battle for power and influence with the ‘*ulama*’ steered Reza Shah’s government through a series of modernisation reforms. Reza Shah’s initiatives downplayed religion in favour of modernisation, Westernisation and secularisation under a banner of nationalism. By 1934 when the educational reforms became the central component to Reza Shah’s modernization, the initiative was expanded to include the *hawza* religious establishment. But the founder of the *hawza* in Qum Ayatollah Ha’eri adapted to a quietist position to ensure its continuation, but his death in the midst of such reforms added to the speculations that Reza Shah policies would lead to the elimination of the *hawza* altogether. Reza Shah was determined to enforce a Western

²²⁴ Mohammad Samiei, ‘Najaf and Iranian Politics: Analysing the Way the *hawza* of Najaf Influenced Iranian Politics between Two Revolutions’, *Journal of Shi’a Islamic Studies*, 5, no. 3 (2012), pp. 277-294 (p. 285).

²²⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.99.

²²⁶ Isma’il Baghistani, ‘Ali Akbar Dhakiri and Sayyid ‘Abbas Radawi, ‘Qum’ in Ghulam ‘Ali H. ‘Adel and Mohammad J. Elmi and Hasan Taromi-Rad (eds.), *Hawza-yi ‘ilmiyya, Shi’i Teaching Institution: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Ewi Press, 2012), p. 46.

style secularism, ‘differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms’, enabling control in the pursuit of ‘secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices’, and the ‘marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere’.²²⁷

Research into the life of his successor Ayatollah Hojjat has found him to be the catalyst for change, highlighting fundamental points about the clerical authority during this critical phase of Iranian history. The key to his success seems to be multi-layered but firmly positioned on his style of absolute non-political interference. Ayatollah Hojjat repositioned the *hawza* towards the state to ensure its independence and survival by a number of concrete and pivotal steps. These included a new approach to leadership, offering a collective and cooperative arrangement in order to unite the *hawza* against the state. Also there was a positive approach to administrative reforms which centralised the organisation and structure of the *hawza* that was later formalized by Ayatollah Borujerdi. Both eminent scholars are famed for concentrating on the personal, spiritual, academic and social development of students. Ayatollah Hojjat was able to take the required steps during a crucial phase of *hawza* history through strategic adjustments such as partially complying with new state requirements, and recognising the pre-eminence of Najaf, to divert the state's attention from the *hawza* ‘*ilmiyya*’ of Qum. Finally, the *hawza* redefined the clergy-state relations through his approach of dynamic quietism²²⁸ and the emphasis that the *madrassa* and *masjid* should once again become the hub of religious and cultural activity within society. By concentrating on social welfare, in what he regarded as real issues of hardship such as food shortages within Iran, instead of political activism he was able to guide the clergy towards religious socialisation. This effectively countered the Pahlavis’ plan for cultural and social Westernisation and the alienation of the clergy from Iranian society. The prominent ‘*ulama*’ such as Ayatollah Hojjat are remembered for challenging the secularist agenda and being instrumental in consolidating the *hawza* through their timely responses to the numerous challenges posed by Reza Shah, securing the Islamic fabric of Iranian society.

²²⁷ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 211.

²²⁸ Ayatollah Hojjat’s views of disengagement from state politics but dynamically involved in concerns of the people was praised as an ideal example of leadership by his student Ayatollah Sistani; Personal conversation in Najaf with Ayatollah Seyyid ‘Ali Sistani on 20th January 2010.

