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Comparative Analysis of the Role of the Shi'i Schools of Najaf and Jabal 'Amil in the Expansion of Political Thought and the Culture of Resistance in West Asia

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the role of the Shi'i schools of Najaf and Jabal 'Amil in the development of political thought and the culture of resistance in West Asia. In this regard, the intersection of two strategies—independence from political power and participation in political power—was investigated to determine how these seemingly contradictory yet complementary approaches contributed to the formation of a comprehensive model of resistance. This study employs a descriptive-analytical method and comparatively examines the two schools on the basis of six evaluative indicators: intellectual production, influence on resistance movements, cultivation of leaders, scholarly networks, political influence, and historical continuity. The findings indicate that the Najaf school, through the promotion of institutional independence and an oversight-oriented model, institutionalized the legitimacy and critical orientation of resistance within Shi'i communities and provided answers to questions concerning legitimacy and leadership. In contrast, the Jabal 'Amil school, by developing models of jurisprudential governance and structural administration, provided the practical mechanisms necessary for operationalizing resistance and addressed questions concerning methods and instruments of implementation. The results demonstrate that the culture of resistance in the region is the product of a dialectical interaction between Najaf's supervisory independence and Jabal 'Amil's structural engagement with power, which were transformed into a balanced framework within the institutional structure of a committed political system. In this context, the emergence of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a catalyst and operational center, played a pivotal role in transforming these theoretical ideas into a comprehensive regional strategy. Ultimately, the study concludes that the expansion of the culture of resistance in West Asia has resulted from the convergence of religious legitimacy and structural effectiveness within the framework of a committed political will, which has succeeded in reproducing and expanding the political identity of Shi'ism in response to colonial and authoritarian pressures.

Keywords: *Najaf School, Jabal 'Amil, culture of resistance, Shi'i political thought, West Asia.*

Introduction

Shi'i political thought and the culture of resistance, beyond jurisprudential rulings or abstract theories, essentially constitute an effort to redefine the relationship among human beings, power, and justice. In this analysis, the "culture of resistance" emerges in opposition to authoritarian structures and is rooted in a reinterpretation of the epic of Karbala, where the uprising of Imam Husayn (PBUH) is transformed from a historical narrative into a model for life,



making resistance to oppression an ethical duty in every time and place. From this perspective, concepts such as justice and enjoining good become instruments for challenging domination. It should, however, be noted that although this current of resistance has been highly influential within the framework of political Islam, it cannot be regarded as an inseparable component of the religious identity of all Shi'is, because among Shi'i scholars there is no consensus regarding the acceptance of political Islam with a resistance-oriented approach. Nevertheless, this current was able to create a foundation for the emergence of social and political movements in West Asia.

The crystallization of this political thought and its transformation into an operational approach in the field of resistance were substantially influenced by interaction with centers of religious knowledge production and scholarly institutions in the region, because the transfer of political ideas from the theoretical level to the sphere of social action generally requires scholarly support and institutional mechanisms. In this process, the Najaf School and the Jabal 'Amil School, as two influential centers, played a significant role in articulating this thought, although each adopted a different approach to the concepts of power and resistance on the basis of its particular historical background and contextual conditions.

Drawing upon its historical roots in the development of jurisprudence and legal theory and utilizing the institution of marja'iyya, the Najaf School articulated a model of responsible religious action. Within this model, religious authority functioned in such a way as to operate as a social and transnational authority capable of organizing the mobilization of the masses outside the formal structures of state power. By emphasizing the independence of the religious institution from governmental structures, Najaf defined a form of "institutional resistance" in which the religious scholar occupied the position of observer and critic of power. Under this approach, resistance was primarily pursued through the issuance of social fatwas, the guidance of public opinion, and the establishment of support networks. Accordingly, it may be argued that the Najaf School promoted a conception in which religion, rather than serving merely as an instrument for legitimizing rulers, functioned as a mechanism for monitoring power and safeguarding the rights of the masses against authoritarianism.

In contrast, the Jabal 'Amil School underwent a different experience of resistance and politics. This school, which initially developed in pluralistic environments and under pressure from the Sunni majority in southern Lebanon, primarily conceptualized resistance in terms of preserving identity. Its major turning point, however, occurred when its scholarly capital entered the sphere of political power through the migration of its scholars to Iran and their active participation during the Safavid period. During this period, Jabal 'Amil scholars became architects of the judicial, educational, and religious structures of the Safavid state and thereby implemented the relationship between jurisprudence and government in a concrete and practical manner. Within this approach, resistance was no longer limited to criticism of power but was redefined as the "construction of power," such that the establishment of a Shi'i political order and the organization of the state were themselves regarded as instruments of resistance against regional religious and political rivals. Therefore, by presenting a model of active participation in structures of power, the Jabal 'Amil School pursued the practical realization of a Shi'i political order in West Asia.

From an analytical perspective, it can be concluded that while the Najaf School contributed to the promotion of the culture of resistance through independence, critical oversight, and responses to social harms, the Jabal 'Amil School pursued this path through participation in the construction of power and the organization of state identity. Although these two approaches differed methodologically, they complemented each other in their ultimate objective of rejecting domination and expanding justice, collectively creating a politico-religious foundation in West Asia. Nevertheless, a fundamental question arises as to whether these scholarly traditions were sufficient in themselves,

or whether the expansion and operationalization of the culture of resistance in the contemporary era required the emergence of a governing political model in the form of the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to institutionalize these ideas at the macro level. In fact, the intersection of these two schools with the political thought governing the Islamic Republic of Iran may provide a key to understanding the mechanisms through which “religious theories” were transformed into “political actions” in the region. Given that the comparative examination of these two traditions and the analysis of their reciprocal influence in connection with contemporary structures of power have received relatively limited attention in the existing literature, it is necessary to investigate the intellectual and institutional mechanisms through which each school, in interaction with the contemporary political system, contributed to institutionalizing Shi‘i political thought in the region.

Research Background

In reviewing the literature related to the role of Shi‘i schools in the expansion of political thought and the culture of resistance in West Asia, the following previous studies may be considered:

- Bagheri examined “power structures in Shi‘i thought with a focus on the Najaf School” (1). The study employed a descriptive-analytical design using documentary research and content analysis of jurisprudential-political texts within the context of Najaf’s scholarly centers. Data were collected through qualitative textual analysis and examination of the historical development of marja‘iyya. The findings demonstrated that, by articulating a model of “institutional independence,” the Najaf School was able to establish an oversight structure over political power in which the religious scholar, while maintaining distance from the ruler, institutionalized the legitimacy of resistance within Shi‘i communities. The study concluded that Najaf’s role in the expansion of the culture of resistance was primarily realized through the production of critical thought and the cultivation of elites who, in confronting authoritarianism, prioritized the preservation of religious authenticity and independence from political power.
- Rahdar examined “the relationship between jurisprudence and politics in the thought of Jabal ‘Amil scholars and its effects on administrative structures” (2). The study was historical-analytical and employed an examination of classical texts and administrative documents within the context of the migration of scholars to Iran. Data were collected through historical analysis and examination of the administrative records of Jabal ‘Amil scholars. The results indicated that, by presenting operational models of jurisprudential governance, the Jabal ‘Amil School succeeded in transferring Shi‘i political thought from the theoretical to the executive level. The study demonstrated that, through its penetration of administrative and judicial institutions, Jabal ‘Amil introduced the instruments of “power management” into Shi‘i political thought and showed that, for the survival of thought in hostile environments, executive and structural power is as essential as religious independence.
- Soleimani examined “the production of political knowledge in Shi‘i scholarly centers and the redefinition of concepts of justice in confronting authoritarianism” (3). The study was theoretical and employed conceptual analysis of political-theological texts produced in Shi‘i scholarly centers. Data were collected through descriptive analysis and the inference of concepts from key texts. The findings indicated that Shi‘i political thought in West Asia, through the redefinition of concepts such as “wilāya” and “social responsibility,” provided a foundation through which the masses could reject any form of illegitimate domination. The study concluded that the culture of resistance in the region is the product of a dynamic intellectual tradition that,

in each historical period, has provided new instruments for confronting colonialism and transformed resistance into both a religious obligation and an ethical necessity.

- Eraghi examined “the recruitment and dispatch model in religious schools and its impact on the expansion of politico-religious influence” (4). The study adopted a sociohistorical design using network analysis within the context of the scholarly centers of Najaf and Jabal ‘Amil. Data were collected through examination of chains of knowledge transmission and the migration routes of elites. The results demonstrated that Shi’i political thought was transmitted not merely through books but through “human and educational networks.” The study showed that the model of “recruiting elites from peripheral regions and dispatching them back to local communities” enabled political thought and the culture of resistance to take root across a broad range of West Asian societies and transformed local scholarly centers into centers of political guidance.
- Jafari Panah and Mahboubi conducted “a comparative analysis of models of resistance in contemporary Shi’i thought and the role of political catalysts” (5). Their evaluative-comparative study employed comparative indicators in the context of political developments in West Asia. Data were collected through analysis of conceptual models and examination of the influence of political systems. The findings demonstrated that the expansion of the culture of resistance in the region resulted from the intersection of strategies of independence associated with Najaf and participation associated with Jabal ‘Amil, which became operational within the institutional framework of a committed political system such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. The study concluded that, in the absence of an executive center of power, resistance-oriented ideas would have remained at the theoretical level, whereas the emergence of the political system in Iran enabled these ideas to develop into a macro-level regional strategy.

Overall, previous studies indicate that the Najaf and Jabal ‘Amil schools influenced the development of Shi’i political thought from two apparently contradictory yet complementary perspectives. Whereas Najaf emphasized legitimacy and supervisory independence, Jabal ‘Amil focused on effectiveness and structural management. Previous studies also emphasize that the practical manifestation of these ideas at the regional level was associated with the emergence of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran as an executive center for these models.

Nevertheless, a review of previous research indicates that no study has yet comparatively assessed the reciprocal roles of these two schools in the expansion of the culture of resistance on the basis of explicit comparative indicators. Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap by articulating six common indicators and explaining a comprehensive model of resistance in West Asia through a comparison of supervisory and structural approaches.

Main Research Question

Through which models have the roles of the Najaf and Jabal ‘Amil Shi’i schools in the expansion of the culture of resistance and political thought in West Asia been explained, and what similarities and differences exist between these two approaches in terms of their mechanisms of influence?

Main Research Hypothesis

It appears that the Najaf and Jabal ‘Amil schools have exerted influence through two distinct but complementary models. The Najaf School has focused on “institutional independence and critical oversight,” whereas the Jabal ‘Amil School has emphasized “structural participation and the organization of power.” Their commonality lies in their

acceptance of the principle of resistance to domination, while their difference concerns the method through which such resistance is implemented—outside structures of power in contrast to within structures of power. Collectively, these two models have provided a foundation for the institutionalization of Shi'i political thought in West Asia.

Theoretical Framework

The expansion of Shi'i political thought and the emergence of the culture of resistance in West Asia have resulted from the interaction of a set of intellectual, scholarly, social, and historical components that developed within the two Shi'i schools of Najaf and Jabal 'Amil. Despite their historical and geographical differences, both schools played significant roles in producing and transmitting Shi'i political thought, cultivating religious elites, and strengthening the discourse of resistance. Therefore, analyzing and comparing their roles requires the identification of indicators that make it possible to compare the degree of influence exerted by each school.

From a theoretical perspective, the present study is based on the view that Shi'i intellectual schools were not merely institutions for teaching the religious sciences, but also functioned as institutions for the production, reproduction, and transmission of political thought and played a decisive role in shaping the political, cultural, and social identities of Shi'i communities. In this regard, the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Shi'i schools, in accordance with the historical, social, and political conditions of their respective periods, presented different models of scholarly, cultural, and political action that ultimately contributed to strengthening the discourse of resistance in West Asia. Accordingly, a comparative examination of these two schools allows for a more precise understanding of the mechanisms through which they influenced the intellectual, cultural, and political transformations of the region and provides a foundation for deeper analysis of the relationship between Shi'i political thought and the culture of resistance.

Within this framework, the Najaf Shi'i School, as one of the most important scholarly centers of the Shi'i world, contributed significantly to the formation and continuity of Shi'i political thought through its emphasis on the foundations of political jurisprudence, religious authority, the cultivation of scholars and elites, and the development of scholarly and educational networks. In contrast, the Jabal 'Amil Shi'i School, through its emphasis on jihadi thought, the production of scholarly works, the migration of scholars, and the dissemination of Shi'i thought across different territories, made a substantial contribution to the transmission of religious knowledge, the strengthening of the culture of resistance, and the dynamism of Shi'i political thought. Despite their differing historical and social circumstances, both schools played complementary roles in preserving religious identity, explaining the foundations of religious government, confronting domination, and strengthening an anti-oppression ethos.

According to the theoretical framework of the study, six principal indicators were selected for comparing the roles of the two schools: production of political thought, influence on the culture of resistance, cultivation of religious leaders, expansion of scholarly networks, social and political influence, and historical continuity of thought. These indicators enable a coherent and systematic examination of the capacities of each school and facilitate comparison of their respective levels of influence on the basis of historical evidence, scholarly works, the activities of scholars, and political and social developments. The selection of these indicators enables the analysis to move beyond mere description and toward a scholarly explanation of the relationships among the research variables.

According to the theoretical framework of the study, Shi'i political thought developed and evolved throughout history through the interaction of the institution of marja'iyya, ijtihad, social action, and the political conditions of Muslim societies. In this process, the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Shi'i schools, each drawing on their scholarly and jurisprudential capacities, played significant roles in explaining concepts such as justice, social responsibility, the

independence of the Islamic ummah, resistance to oppression, defense of religious identity, and support for Muslim communities. These concepts, as fundamental components of the culture of resistance, were reflected in the scholarly works, jurisprudential teachings, and social practices of the scholars of these two schools and facilitated their transmission to subsequent generations and contemporary intellectual movements.

Moreover, the theoretical framework of the present study is based on the principle that explaining the role of Shi'i schools in the expansion of political thought and the culture of resistance cannot be achieved merely by describing historical events; rather, it requires a systematic analysis of the relationships among intellectual foundations, scholarly structures, the institution of marja'iyya, the production of religious knowledge, and their social and political consequences. Accordingly, by employing a comparative approach and analyzing historical documents, the present study seeks to explain the mechanisms through which the two schools influenced the expansion of Shi'i political thought and the culture of resistance in West Asia. By elucidating the similarities and differences between the two schools, this theoretical framework provides an appropriate basis for analyzing the findings and enables the presentation of a comprehensive account of the role of each school in the formation and continuity of the culture of resistance in West Asia.

Conceptual Model of the Study

The conceptual model of the study was designed using a comparative approach. First, the specific capacities and characteristics of each of the two schools are identified and analyzed; these capacities are then assessed and compared on the basis of common indicators. Such an approach not only makes it possible to evaluate the degree of influence exerted by each school but also facilitates the identification of their similarities and differences. For each comparative indicator, historical, jurisprudential, and intellectual evidence is also collected and analyzed in order to explain the role of each school in the development of political thought and the culture of resistance in a documented and defensible manner.

According to the conceptual model, the specific capacities of each school are evaluated through these comparative indicators, and their consequences are ultimately explained in terms of the expansion of Shi'i political thought, strengthening of the culture of resistance in West Asia, formation and reinforcement of resistance movements, and enhancement of Islamic identity cohesion. Therefore, the theoretical framework demonstrates that the culture of resistance in West Asia is not merely the product of the activities of a single school but rather the result of interaction, evolution, and reciprocal influence between the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Shi'i schools in the intellectual, religious, social, and political spheres. The conceptual model of the study was designed and organized on this basis. This framework provides the theoretical foundation required for comparative analysis of the findings and enables a documented assessment of the role of each school in the expansion of Shi'i political thought and the culture of resistance in West Asia.

Based on findings obtained from the examination of historical sources, analysis of documents, and the theoretical framework of the study, it became evident that the roles of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Shi'i schools in the expansion of political thought and the culture of resistance cannot be explained through a single general variable. Rather, these roles can be compared and evaluated through a set of scholarly, intellectual, social, and political indicators. Accordingly, the conceptual model was redesigned to explain the various dimensions of the influence of these two schools so that, while presenting the specific components of each school, the shared comparative indicators would also be clearly identified. In this model, the capacities and characteristics of each school are first identified, then

assessed on the basis of comparative indicators, and finally their common consequences for the expansion of Shi'i political thought and the strengthening of the culture of resistance in West Asia are explained.

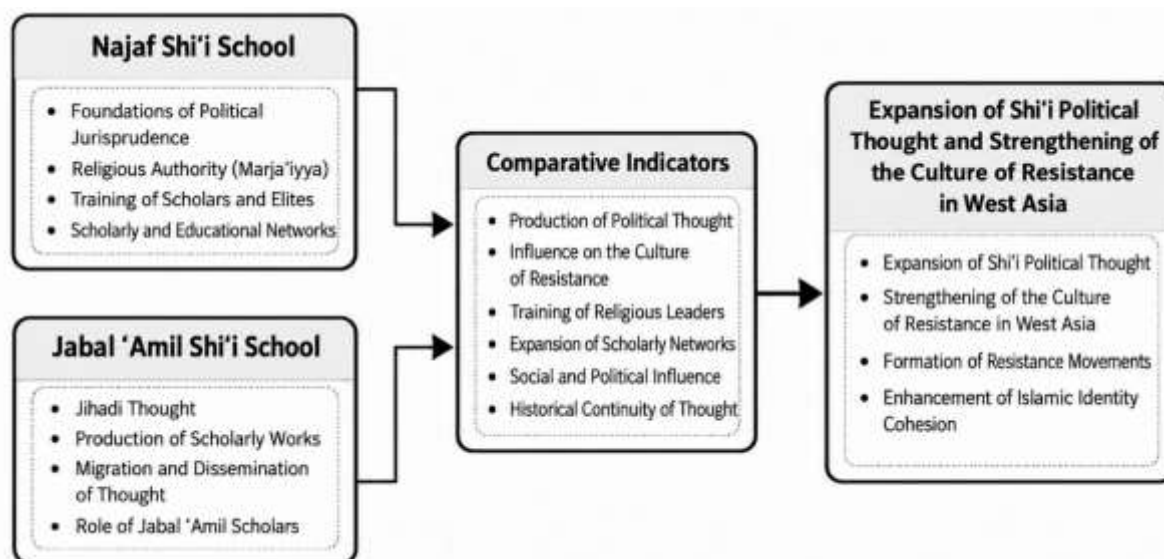


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Comparing the Roles of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Schools in the Expansion of Political Thought and the Culture of Resistance

According to the proposed conceptual model, each of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Shi'i schools contributed to the formation and development of Shi'i political thought through its specific components. Nevertheless, comparison of the two schools demonstrates that their levels of influence can be assessed on the basis of indicators such as production of political thought, influence on the culture of resistance, cultivation of religious leaders, expansion of scholarly networks, social and political influence, and historical continuity of thought. The cumulative outcome of these capacities and indicators has contributed to the expansion of Shi'i political thought, the strengthening of the culture of resistance in West Asia, the formation and reinforcement of resistance movements, and the enhancement of Islamic identity cohesion. Accordingly, the final research model provides a comprehensive representation of the interaction and complementary roles of the two schools in the formation and expansion of the culture of resistance in West Asia and provides an appropriate basis for analyzing the findings in the subsequent section.

Research Method

The overall approach adopted in this study is descriptive-analytical, using a comparative methodology. The study proceeds at two operational levels. At the first level, a descriptive approach is employed to identify and explain the fundamental concepts of political thought and the various dimensions of the culture of resistance within each tradition through the examination of texts, scholarly works, and the historical records of the schools under study. The purpose of this stage is to extract raw data and identify the constituent components of each school in order to provide a shared and comprehensive basis for subsequent comparative analyses.

At the second level, the study adopts an analytical approach to situate the extracted descriptive data within models of supervisory-critical resistance and structural-organizational resistance. At this stage, rather than merely describing the material, the internal logic of the politico-religious actions of each school is examined in order to determine the intellectual and institutional mechanisms through which each model contributed to the promotion of the culture of resistance. In fact, the analysis centers on the intersection between institutional independence and

participation in structures of power in order to clarify how these seemingly contradictory approaches collectively contributed to strengthening and expanding Shi'i political thought in the region.

To achieve the objectives of the study, comparative analysis is employed as the principal analytical instrument. This comparative approach seeks not only to identify the similarities and differences between the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil schools, but also to identify their methodological contrasts in confronting power as variables through which the evolution of the culture of resistance in West Asia may be analyzed. In this process, the comparison is conducted on the basis of the source of legitimacy and the structure of interaction with political power in order to determine how the differing historical experiences of the two schools produced two distinct models of resistance.

Finally, through qualitative textual analysis and examination of the historical development of these schools, the study seeks to investigate the intersection of these two scholarly traditions in interaction with contemporary political structures. Through this approach, the study endeavors to explain comparatively how the combination of these contrasting models contributed to the formation of a comprehensive and operational model of the culture of resistance capable of responding to the geopolitical challenges of the region.

Historical Development and Brief Evolution, and the Political-Social Characteristics of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Schools

The Jabal 'Amil School in southern Lebanon became one of the principal centers of Shi'i intellectual production between approximately the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries CE. This intellectual movement, which crystallized during the period between the First and Second Martyrs, functioned not merely as a jurisprudential current but as a comprehensive movement encompassing social and political dimensions. During its period of flourishing, this school became a major center for the production of foundational texts in jurisprudence and legal theory and acquired a prominent position among scholars of the Muslim world (6). A distinctive characteristic of this school was the organic relationship it established between jurisprudence and politics, whereby jurisprudence moved beyond the domain of ritual rulings and sought mechanisms for governing society and explaining relations of power (2). This approach led Jabal 'Amil scholars, when confronting structures of power, to seek practical mechanisms for influencing systems of governance rather than withdrawing from them.

The major turning point in the development of this school occurred during the Safavid period. Following political changes in Iran, a substantial wave of Jabal 'Amil scholars migrated to the country. This geographical relocation effectively entailed the transfer of a model of governance in which scholars, through their independent role in administrative and judicial organization, contributed to the expansion of Shi'ism (7). Indeed, the political identity of the Safavid state was influenced in many respects by the administrative and political ideas of these migrant scholars (8). Accordingly, the political characteristic of the Jabal 'Amil School may be explained in terms of structural participation in power, a model in which the religious scholar simultaneously occupied the position of a senior political and judicial administrator of society (9).

In contrast, the Najaf School in Iraq followed a different developmental path. Although the intellectual roots of this tradition can be associated with earlier scholarly centers such as the Mustansiriyya School in the thirteenth century CE, its mature development confronted a different set of challenges. Unlike Jabal 'Amil, which at one point became closely associated with political power, Najaf developed in an environment in which scholars faced multiple and competing centers of authority (10). The political-social characteristics of this school were centered on institutional independence and critical oversight. Its historical experience with political power was largely shaped

through the concept of *al-mihna*, or the experience of suffering and trial under authoritarianism. This experience contributed to the formation of a model in which religious authority preserved a strategic distance between the ruler and the jurist in order to maintain its authenticity and independence.

Within this model, resistance to political power was pursued not through the occupation of governmental offices but through the establishment of spiritual and social authority over the masses, thereby providing a mechanism for resistance to authoritarianism (5). Thus, whereas Jabal 'Amil emphasized the management of power, Najaf focused on the management of society in relation to power. This difference transformed Najaf into a center for the guidance of the masses in West Asia and promoted a conception in which the religious scholar supervises political power rather than necessarily becoming part of its administrative machinery (11).

The historical development of these two schools demonstrates that Shi'i political thought in West Asia evolved through two complementary trajectories: the Jabal 'Amil School through models of governance and organization, and the Najaf School through models of independence and resistance. This intersection reached a particularly significant stage during the Safavid period, when the administrative and political expertise of Jabal 'Amil scholars was combined with the religious legitimacy and supervisory capacities of other scholarly traditions (12). This interaction enabled the culture of resistance in West Asia to draw simultaneously upon structural and state-based instruments derived from the Jabal 'Amil experience and mass-oriented and supervisory instruments associated with the Najaf experience.

Ultimately, analysis of the development of these two schools indicates that their respective experiences with political power directed both traditions toward a common objective: safeguarding the interests of Shi'i society. The Jabal 'Amil School entered structures of power and employed governmental instruments in support of Shi'i political thought, whereas the Najaf School, by maintaining distance from power, preserved the space necessary for criticism and resistance. These two approaches thus constituted complementary dimensions of a broader strategy for the survival and expansion of Shi'i political thought in West Asia.

Comparative Indicators for Assessing the Roles of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Schools in the Expansion of the Culture of Resistance

The culture of resistance in Shi'i political thought in West Asia is not unidimensional; rather, it is the product of the intersection of two apparently contradictory yet complementary models. On the one hand, by promoting "political jurisprudence," the Jabal 'Amil School conceptualized resistance in terms of establishing alternative structures and managing power strategically. Under this approach, resistance involved reclaiming social and political space through influence within administrative and judicial structures (2). In effect, by transforming "jurisprudence" into an instrument for "governing society," Jabal 'Amil created a framework in which resistance was pursued not necessarily through direct confrontation but through "institution building" and the organization of religious actors within structures of power (7).

To achieve a systematic analysis and avoid fragmented description, six key indicators are defined in the present study as criteria for assessing and comparing the influence of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil schools on the expansion of political thought and the culture of resistance in West Asia. Each indicator assesses a dimension of the politico-religious action of these schools in order to explain, through analysis of evidence and documentation, the position of each school in the development of the culture of resistance.

The first indicator is the production of political thought. This indicator focuses on the production of theoretical texts, derivation of political rulings, and development of new models of governance. It examines how each school elevated concepts such as justice and resistance from a general level to a theoretical-jurisprudential level (13). The second indicator is influence on the culture of resistance, which concerns the operationalization of ideas through social movements, anti-oppression attitudes, and the capacity to mobilize the masses against authoritarianism in West Asia (14).

The third indicator is the cultivation of religious leaders. This criterion assesses the extent to which each school succeeded in educating elites capable of assuming political and spiritual leadership during periods of crisis and institutionalizing models of resistance among the masses. The fourth indicator is the expansion of scholarly networks, which evaluates each school's capacity to establish transnational connections, dispatch scholars to various regions of West Asia, and establish educational centers for transmitting Shi'i political thought (15).

The fifth indicator concerns social and political influence. This criterion examines the degree of penetration of each school into structures of power, its involvement in judicial and administrative affairs, or its capacity to establish spiritual authority over society in order to determine the mechanisms—structural or supervisory—through which each school influenced regional developments. Finally, the historical continuity of thought is examined as the sixth indicator. This indicator explains the extent to which the achievements of each school were reproduced in subsequent generations and how they persisted in confronting contemporary challenges and became foundations of Shi'i political thought in West Asia (16).

On the basis of these six indicators, the subsequent stages of the study undertake comparative analysis. For each indicator, historical evidence and scholarly documentation relating first to the Jabal 'Amil School and then to the Najaf School are presented, after which comparison of the two approaches is used to derive a comprehensive model of resistance in West Asia. This methodology ensures that the analysis is grounded in concrete evidence and clearly explains the methodological differences through which the two schools pursued the shared objective of safeguarding Shi'i society and rejecting domination.

Comparative Analysis of the Roles of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Schools Based on Comparative Indicators

In this section, in order to identify the similarities and differences between the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil schools in the expansion of the culture of resistance in West Asia, both schools are assessed on the basis of six common indicators. These indicators function as standardized criteria that facilitate methodological comparison and clarify the instruments through which each school pursued the shared objective of "safeguarding the interests of Shi'i society and rejecting domination."

- **Production of Political Thought as an Indicator of Knowledge Production:**

This indicator focuses on the capacity of the schools to transform religious concepts into political theories and models of governance. In the Jabal 'Amil School, the production of political thought centered on "effectiveness in governance." Drawing on political jurisprudence, this school sought to explain mechanisms through which the religious scholar could exercise justice within structures of power as a senior administrator (2). Evidence relating to this school indicates that its intellectual production generated operational outputs for governing society. In contrast, within the same indicator, the Najaf School centered political thought on "oversight and criticism of power." Political thought in Najaf was more concerned with defining the limits of the ruler's legitimacy and articulating the rights of the masses in relation to authoritarian

rule (11). Whereas Jabal ‘Amil sought the “management of power,” Najaf focused on the “management of society in relation to power.” The intersection of these two approaches in West Asia enabled Shi‘i political thought to develop both instruments of governance associated with Jabal ‘Amil and mechanisms of oversight associated with Najaf.

- **Influence on the Culture of Resistance as an Indicator of Social Action:**

This indicator assesses how the ideas of each school were translated into resistance-oriented behavior among the masses. In the Jabal ‘Amil School, the culture of resistance was promoted through “penetration of structures.” This school taught that resistance does not necessarily require withdrawal from political power; rather, administrative and judicial offices may be occupied in order to transform unjust structures from within (7). In the Najaf School, however, the culture of resistance was promoted through “institutional independence.” By promoting the culture of *al-mihna*, Najaf taught the masses that resistance consists in preserving authenticity and maintaining distance from authoritarian rulers. This approach transformed resistance into a spiritual and social value through which the independent religious scholar taught the masses how to confront authoritarianism (5).

- **Cultivation of Religious Leaders as an Indicator of Elite Reproduction:**

This indicator assesses the success of each school in training individuals capable of assuming politico-religious leadership during periods of crisis. In Jabal ‘Amil, leadership training centered on “administrative-political expertise.” The school cultivated elites who were advanced in jurisprudence and also proficient in governance, enabling them, after migrating to Iran, to enter the Safavid hierarchy of power rapidly and assume responsibility for governing society (8). By contrast, Najaf focused on educating “comprehensive and independent leaders.” The objective was to cultivate eminent scholars who, as *marāji‘*, could withstand political pressure and serve as points of reference for the masses across West Asia (15). Here, the criterion of success was not attainment of governmental office but achievement of the status of *marja‘iyya* and complete independence from the ruler.

- **Expansion of Scholarly Networks as an Indicator of Knowledge Transmission:**

This indicator examines how each school transmitted its ideas from the center to the periphery and from one region of West Asia to another. The Jabal ‘Amil School operated through the “organized migration of elites.” Knowledge transmission was accompanied by the geographical movement of scholars, enabling Jabal ‘Amil political thought to take root rapidly in Iran and other parts of the region and to contribute to the creation of new religio-administrative structures (7). The Najaf School, by contrast, operated through a “recruitment and dispatch network.” Functioning as a scholarly magnet, Najaf attracted scholars from across West Asia and, after educating them, sent them back to their regions to administer local scholarly centers (10). This broad network enabled Najaf’s ideas of resistance and oversight to circulate widely throughout Shi‘i communities in the region.

- **Social and Political Influence as an Indicator of Impact:**

This indicator focuses on the extent to which each school influenced concrete social developments and political change. The influence of Jabal ‘Amil operated at the “structural” level. By entering the governmental apparatus, the school contributed to reconstructing laws, judicial systems, and administrative institutions on the basis of Shi‘i thought (9). Its political influence thus transformed the infrastructure of power. Najaf’s influence operated at the “mass-oriented and social” level. By establishing spiritual authority over society,

Najaf created a defensive barrier against external political imposition (11). Its political impact was reflected not in the administration of the state but in transforming public consciousness and creating a society resistant to authoritarianism.

- **Historical Continuity of Thought as an Indicator of Persistence:**

This indicator examines how the achievements of each school were reproduced over time and transmitted to later generations. The continuity of Jabal 'Amil thought was manifested in "models of governance." The school's experience of administrative organization remained an operational model within the history of Shi'ism, and its experiences were repeatedly utilized whenever Shi'i political thought required institutional structuring (6). The continuity of Najaf thought was embodied in the "institution of marja'iyya." The model of independence from political power and critical oversight developed in Najaf became a central pillar of Shi'i political thought in subsequent centuries and generated new forms of resistance in response to modern colonialism and authoritarianism (14).

Ultimately, comparison of these two approaches demonstrates that although Jabal 'Amil operated on the basis of "structural participation" and Najaf on the basis of "supervisory independence," these trajectories were in fact complementary. Their intersection in West Asia contributed to the formation of a comprehensive model of the culture of resistance that possessed both state-oriented instruments associated with Jabal 'Amil and mass-oriented instruments associated with Najaf, thereby providing a multidimensional response to domination.

The Role of the Najaf School in Shi'i Political Thought and the Culture of Resistance

The Najaf School, as one of the most historically established scholarly and political centers of the Shi'i world, played a foundational role in redefining the relationship between religion and political power in West Asia. Its position in promoting the culture of resistance is explained not through control of governmental structures but through the creation of a "spiritual and supervisory center." The role of this school is analyzed below on the basis of the six indicators established for assessment and comparison.

A. Analysis Based on the Production of Political Thought Indicator (Knowledge Production Criterion):

In the Najaf School, the production of political thought was centered on "jurisprudential independence" and "critical oversight." Political thought within this center was based on the assumption that, in order to influence society, the religious scholar must maintain distance from the ruler so as to act as an honest critic and guardian of justice (1). Scholarly evidence from Najaf indicates that, rather than developing administrative models, political knowledge production within this school sought to explain the "rights of the ummah" and the "conditions of governmental legitimacy." This approach provided Shi'i political thought in West Asia with a strong supervisory dimension capable of identifying and criticizing deviations from justice within structures of power (3).

B. Analysis Based on the Influence on the Culture of Resistance Indicator (Social Action Criterion):

The role of the Najaf School in promoting the culture of resistance can be explained through the concept of *al-mihna*, or the experience of suffering under authoritarianism. Within this school, resistance was pursued not through the occupation of political offices but through "spiritual authority over the masses" (17). Najaf taught society that genuine resistance consists in preserving religious authenticity and standing against political pressure. This model encouraged Shi'i communities in West Asia to turn toward religious authority rather than submission when confronted with external impositions. In effect, by transforming "suffering" into "political capital," Najaf created a

culture of resistance in which the religious scholar, as a spiritual leader, organized society for confrontation with authoritarianism (18).

C. Analysis Based on the Cultivation of Religious Leaders Indicator (Elite Reproduction Criterion):

In the sphere of elite formation, the Najaf School focused on cultivating “comprehensive jurists,” namely individuals who, in addition to expertise in religious sciences, possessed the political insight necessary to guide society during periods of crisis. The criterion of successful elite formation in Najaf was attainment of the status of “marja’iyya,” through which the religious scholar, by virtue of financial and scholarly independence, remained protected from rulers and could function as an autonomous leader capable of defining the path of resistance for the masses (19). This model of education contributed to the emergence of leaders who acted not as state functionaries but as “supervisors of society,” thereby ensuring the continuity of Shi’i political leadership during difficult periods of colonialism in the region.

D. Analysis Based on the Expansion of Scholarly Networks Indicator (Knowledge Transmission Criterion):

The Najaf School expanded its political thought throughout West Asia through a “recruitment and dispatch” model. Acting as a scholarly magnet, this center attracted elites from across the Muslim world and, after their education, returned them to their home regions to administer local scholarly centers (4). This extensive network transformed Najaf’s political thought from the product of a single center into a transnational network. The culture of resistance was disseminated through these networks, and each scholar dispatched from Najaf effectively represented and reproduced its model of independence and oversight in his own region (20).

E. Analysis Based on the Social and Political Influence Indicator (Impact Criterion):

The influence of the Najaf School operated at the level of “social and mass-oriented structures” rather than at the administrative-governmental level. By establishing “spiritual authority” over society, Najaf created a defensive barrier against external political imposition (14). Its political influence effectively consisted of the “management of society in relation to power.” Rather than seeking to administer the state, Najaf sought to educate society in such a manner that it would not submit to authoritarian domination (21). This influence contributed to the formation of a resistant society in West Asia in which religious authority functioned as a principal institution of political guidance.

F. Analysis Based on the Historical Continuity of Thought Indicator (Continuity Criterion):

The continuity of Najaf’s thought was embodied in the “institution of marja’iyya.” The model of independence from political power and critical oversight developed in Najaf became a central pillar of Shi’i political thought in subsequent centuries (13). This continuity facilitated the emergence of new models of resistance in response to contemporary challenges and colonialism in West Asia, all of which were rooted in independence and nondependence on political authorities (22). Najaf’s principal legacy therefore lies in demonstrating how Shi’i political thought can influence historical and political developments and reproduce the culture of resistance across generations without becoming incorporated into the administrative machinery of the state.

In summary, the Najaf School played a “complementary” and “supervisory” role in the expansion of the culture of resistance. Whereas Jabal ‘Amil provided the instruments of governance, Najaf developed the instruments of “insight, independence, and criticism.” Together, these approaches contributed to the formation of a comprehensive model of resistance in West Asia that combined administrative capacity with supervisory legitimacy.

Comparison of the Roles of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Schools in the Expansion of the Culture of Resistance and Shi'i Political Thought

In a comprehensive analysis of Shi'i political thought in West Asia, the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil schools should not be regarded as two separate currents but rather as two complementary poles within a single intellectual system. If Najaf is understood as a center for the accumulation of spiritual capital and the production of legitimacy, Jabal 'Amil may be understood as a center for operational capacity and institutional structuring. The intersection of these two approaches transformed the culture of resistance in the region from a unidimensional reaction into a comprehensive strategy.

At the first level, comparison of these two schools is manifested in the production of knowledge. Drawing on the experience of *al-mihna* and suffering under authoritarianism, the Najaf School defined resistance as a religious and ethical obligation. This approach provided the foundation of legitimacy through which Shi'i communities could perceive resistance to oppression as a duty. Yet legitimacy alone was insufficient to transform political circumstances. At this point, by developing "political jurisprudence" and explaining the relationship between religion and political power, the Jabal 'Amil School provided the instruments necessary to transform legitimacy into political action (2). Jabal 'Amil taught Shi'i communities that resistance is expressed not only through warfare or protest but also through legislation, administrative management, and influence within structures of governance (7). Accordingly, comparison of these two models demonstrates that Shi'i political thought acquired both the depth of legitimacy associated with Najaf and the operational effectiveness associated with Jabal 'Amil.

At the social level, through networks of influence organized around marja'iyya, the Najaf School was able to transform dispersed masses into an organized social front. This model, whose historical roots can be associated with earlier centers such as the Mustansiriyya School, enabled Shi'i society to possess an independent point of reference in confronting authoritarian powers (10). The Najaf model thereby provided society with a source of authority distinct from state power (11). By contrast, during the Safavid period the Jabal 'Amil School introduced a structural model that complemented the mass-oriented model. The migration of Jabal 'Amil scholars to Iran represented, in effect, the transfer of expertise in state building. Through their presence within structures of power, these scholars transformed Shi'ism from a religious belief into a politico-territorial identity (8). Comparison of these approaches reveals the emergence of a strategic equilibrium within the political history of Shi'ism: Najaf preserved popular bases and legitimacy outside structures of power, while Jabal 'Amil managed executive and administrative structures from within political power (12). This balance enabled Shi'ism in West Asia to maintain a simultaneous presence in both society and government.

Ultimately, the culture of resistance in Shi'i political thought is the product of the comparison and intersection of two strategies: independence from political power and participation in political power. By promoting institutional independence, Najaf prevented Shi'ism from being reduced to an instrument in the hands of rulers and preserved a critical voice within the culture of resistance (5). In contrast, Jabal 'Amil demonstrated that independence alone is insufficient for the survival of an intellectual tradition in hostile environments and that executive power is also necessary. By developing models of jurisprudential governance, this school provided practical mechanisms for protecting the rights of Shi'i society through laws and institutions (23). The comparison of these approaches contributed to transforming the culture of resistance into a balanced system in which Najaf's revolutionary and independence-oriented ethos directed and constrained the political and structural rationality associated with Jabal

‘Amil. In other words, Najaf defined the “why” and the “who”—legitimacy and leadership—whereas Jabal ‘Amil explained the “how”—method and instrument.

Ultimately, the expansion of the culture of resistance in Shi‘i political thought resulted from the comparison and intersection of the two strategies of “independence from power” and “participation in power.” To explain the contribution of each school, evidence of their influence must be examined on the basis of the evaluative indicators. In terms of the production of political thought and influence on resistance, the Najaf School, through its promotion of the model of “institutional independence,” prevented Shi‘ism from becoming an instrument in the hands of rulers. Evidence of this influence may be observed in the formation of the institution of *marja‘iyya*, which, by maintaining distance from political power, preserved a critical voice and an ethos of independence within the culture of resistance (5).

By contrast, according to the indicator of social and political influence, the Jabal ‘Amil School provided practical evidence in hostile environments that the survival of an intellectual tradition and the expansion of the culture of resistance require not only independence but also “executive power.” Through documented models of jurisprudential governance, this school implemented practical mechanisms for protecting the rights of Shi‘i society through laws and administrative structures, thereby demonstrating its role in transforming the idea of resistance into applicable instruments (14).

Comparison based on these indicators contributed to the formation of a balanced system of resistance in the region, one in which Najaf’s revolutionary and independence-oriented ethos functions as a “directing and controlling” force over the political and structural rationality of Jabal ‘Amil. In fact, the evidence indicates that, by emphasizing indicators of legitimacy, the Najaf School answered the questions of “why” and “who”—the definition of legitimacy and leadership—whereas the Jabal ‘Amil School, by emphasizing indicators of effectiveness, answered the question of “how”—the explanation of methods and executive instruments. The intersection of these two approaches constituted the comprehensive foundation of the culture of resistance in West Asia by combining religious legitimacy associated with Najaf and structural effectiveness associated with Jabal ‘Amil.

Comparative analysis suggests that had either the Najaf or Jabal ‘Amil School operated independently, Shi‘i political thought in West Asia might have developed either into an isolated and exclusively supervisory form of political spirituality under the Najaf model or into a rigid religious bureaucracy dependent on structures of power under the Jabal ‘Amil model. Their intersection, however, enabled Shi‘i resistance to possess both spiritual and mass-oriented dimensions and strong structural and administrative foundations. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this theoretical and historical intersection did not operate in a vacuum. Rather, the practical manifestation and regional expansion of this culture of resistance became closely associated with the emergence and consolidation of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In effect, the Islamic Republic of Iran, functioning as an “executive embodiment” and “operational model,” combined Najaf’s supervisory independence with Jabal ‘Amil’s structural expertise within a single governmental system. The culture of resistance in the region was therefore not merely the product of a dialectic between independence and power but also of the intersection of these ideas with an established political will capable of transforming resistance from a “scholarly-jurisprudential approach” into a “macro-level regional strategy.” Without a committed center of power in Iran, the ideas associated with Najaf and Jabal ‘Amil might have remained confined to jurisprudential texts and religious schools and might not have developed into a broadly organized “culture of resistance” in response to colonial and authoritarian pressures in West Asia.

Conclusion

The present study, which aimed to compare the roles of the Najaf and Jabal 'Amil Shi'i schools in the expansion of political thought and the culture of resistance in West Asia, concludes that the culture of resistance in the region is not the product of a single and unidimensional approach but rather the result of the strategic intersection of two contrasting yet complementary models. Based on the comparative indicators examined, it was found that achieving sustainable influence at the regional level required Shi'i political thought to establish a balance between two pillars: "supervisory legitimacy" and "structural effectiveness."

Regarding the first dimension, the Najaf School, through promotion of the model of institutional independence, institutionalized legitimacy and leadership within the culture of resistance. The findings indicate that by drawing a boundary between scholarship and political power, Najaf prevented Shi'ism from becoming an instrument in the hands of rulers. This supervisory approach ensured that, in confronting authoritarianism and colonialism, a critical voice remained present within Shi'i communities and transformed resistance from an emotional reaction into a religious obligation and an independent identity. In effect, Najaf explained the fundamental questions of "why resistance is necessary" and "who should lead it," thereby providing the spiritual and legitimizing foundations of resistance at the regional level.

Regarding the second dimension, analysis of indicators of political and social influence demonstrated that the Jabal 'Amil School developed a model of participation in political power and structural management in response to its environmental and political conditions. The findings of the study indicate that the survival of an intellectual tradition in hostile environments requires not only independence but also executive capacity. By presenting documented models of jurisprudential governance, Jabal 'Amil transferred Shi'i political thought from the theoretical to the operational level and implemented mechanisms for protecting the rights of Shi'i society through legal and administrative structures. In effect, this school answered the question of "how resistance should be pursued" through the development of managerial instruments and methods and thereby contributed to the material and structural foundations of resistance.

A central finding of the study concerns the intersection of these two strategies. Had either school operated independently, Shi'i political thought in West Asia might have developed either into an isolated form of political spirituality or into a rigid religious bureaucracy. Their interaction, however, enabled Shi'i resistance to possess both spiritual and mass-oriented dimensions derived from the Najaf tradition and strong structural and administrative foundations derived from the Jabal 'Amil tradition. This interaction transformed the culture of resistance into a balanced system in which the revolutionary and independence-oriented ethos associated with Najaf functions as a directing and constraining force over the political and structural rationality associated with Jabal 'Amil.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that this theoretical and historical convergence did not develop in a vacuum. Its practical manifestation and regional expansion became associated with the emergence and consolidation of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this account, the Islamic Republic of Iran functioned as the executive framework and culmination of this intersection, combining Najaf's supervisory independence with Jabal 'Amil's structural expertise within a unified political system. Without a committed center of political power in Iran, the resistance-oriented ideas associated with Najaf and Jabal 'Amil might have remained confined to jurisprudential texts and religious schools rather than developing into a macro-level regional strategy for confronting colonial and authoritarian pressures.

Ultimately, the conceptual model derived from the study indicates that the expansion of the culture of resistance in West Asia is the product of a dialectic between independence and power. Within this model, the Najaf School ensured the legitimacy of resistance by maintaining distance from political power, whereas the Jabal 'Amil School facilitated the operationalization of resistance through the management of political power. The interaction between supervisory politics and structural politics was subsequently reproduced within the political framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran and contributed to the regional expansion of Shi'i political thought as an operational model of resistance capable of mobilizing social constituencies toward shared political objectives.

Accordingly, the study concludes that the development of the culture of resistance in West Asia was associated with a comprehensive framework that combined religious and ethical legitimacy derived from the Najaf tradition with structural and administrative effectiveness derived from the Jabal 'Amil tradition, while its contemporary political operationalization was linked to the political framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran. More broadly, the culture of resistance in Shi'i political thought in West Asia may therefore be understood as the product of a complex and dialectical interaction between two different historical experiences of political power. From the perspective of the present study, these two schools constitute two dimensions of a strategic triangle: one concerned with "legitimation" and the other with "operational effectiveness." Whereas the Najaf School, through institutional independence and the experience of suffering (*al-mihna*), preserved the critical consciousness of society and conceptualized resistance as a moral and religious obligation, the Jabal 'Amil School translated these spiritual impulses into administrative and structural instruments through which resistance could develop from dispersed protest into organized political action and governance.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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