

ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
THE CASE OF THE QUBAISYATE MOVEMENT IN SYRIA

By

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Abstract of The Dissertation

Syria has prided itself throughout modern history of being a secular state, with no official religion, in the heart of the Islamic and Arab world. The reality however, is that the country is facing the same wave that is overcoming the whole region and battling the same issues as other Islamic and Arab states that are currently being overwhelmed with the phenomenon of religious revivalism. One of the major instruments of Islamic revivalism in Syria is an all-women grassroots social movement called the Qubaisyate, which was successful in becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism, not only in Syria, but also in other Arab and Muslim countries, reaching as far as Europe and the United States. This study argues that the emergence of the Qubaisyate Islamic movement in the heart of the capital of Ba'athist Syria since the early 1960s, and multiplying to hundreds of thousands of followers in the present day, is due to the rising influence of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East which had influenced the growth of the Islamic sector in Syria, including the Qubaisyate movement.

This study will embark on the major theoretical approaches to studying social movements; by combining the concept of political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, as well as the concept of cultural framing and identities in order to bring in ideas, meanings and cultural element. In addressing these three general areas, this research tries to answer how and why the Qubaisyate movement is rising as a significant socio-religious player in Syria despite the totalitarian and secular environment of Syrian politics, which was enforced by the Ba'ath regime for more than five decades.

Dedication

For the most,

Kind

Honest

Amazing

Loving

Encouraging

Devoted

Human being in my life;

The eternal.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I. Idea

The idea for this research was spurred by my personal experiences as a woman who was born and raised in Syria, witnessed by personal account and was affected by the ideological and political shifts the country went through in the past fifty plus years. One of the major shifts the country has witnessed was the return to Islam and the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, driven by an all-women grassroots social movement.

The Qubaisyate¹ quickly became a topic that matched my interests and drove me to believe that it would provide a rich source for research.

My own intellectual curiosity was provoked after a wide search on the subject produced only a booklet and a handful of simple newspaper articles referring to the movement in a very casual way. After almost five decades of operating within Syria, expanding beyond the borders to other Arab and Muslim countries, and reaching as far as Europe and the United States, is a success worthy of a far more significant in-depth examination.

These reasons made the subject more appealing for investigation; the challenge satisfied my aspiration to convey to the research community a phenomenon that has not yet been studied closely before and whose effect on the local, regional and global scene has yet to be explored. My proficiency in the Arabic language was utilized to translate materials and the primary and secondary data needed for such research. My combined Syrian and Western education helped to bridge the body of theory and cultural elements and my personal connections to the movement has gained me access to research materials and interviews that other researchers may have found extremely difficult to obtain.

¹ “*Qubaisyate*” (pronounced koo-BAY-see-YAHT).

II. The Subject

Syria has prided itself throughout modern history of being a secular state, with no official religion, in the heart of the Islamic and Arab world (Mubayed 2006). In spite of where its government stands on the issue of religion, compared to its neighbors, the reality is that the country is facing the same wave that is overcoming the whole region, and battling the same issues as other Islamic and Arab states that are currently being overwhelmed with the phenomenon of religious revivalism.

The eclipse of secular ideologies, and the rise of religious conjecture in the Middle East, has provided a fertile ground for “faith-based” social and political activism in Syria after long decades of silence and government oppression. As a result of the religious vacuum, an exclusively women’s Islamic movement started to surface within the prominent neighborhoods in the ancient capital Damascus. Far away from the reach of the government’s private eyes, the movement kept safe by meeting at trusted members’ private homes, knowing that even the government would exercise social limits when it came to dealing with women.

Named after their founder, Munira Al-Qubaisy, this Islamic study-group movements distinctiveness lay in its ability to erect paths into the houses of the prominent middle and upper classes of the Syrian state through its women, a feat other religious groups, that are also concerned with Islamic revivalism, had been unsuccessful at accomplishing. The Qubaisyate were not only successful in evading the government’s crackdown on religious activities of any kind, they were also successful in becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria.

Their work became visible in the recent increase in Islamization of public spaces in a society where public spaces have long been religiously neutral. The movement's presence can be clearly seen in the streets of Damascus through the styles of dress adopted by Qubaisyate members, the charity work being done under their name, the hundreds of schools throughout the country that they run, and various public events and entertainment activities they regularly organize.

This study posits that the emergence of the Qubaisyate Islamic movement in the heart of the capital of secular Ba'athist Syria since the early 1960s, multiplying to hundreds of thousands of followers in the present day, represents a key analytical puzzle, one that warrants closer examination of Syria's political environment and its evolution during the past five decades. Ultimately, this study argues that Islamic revivalism in the Middle East has influenced the growth of the Islamic sector in Syria, including the Qubaisyate movement. The movement has successfully reinforced the Islamic identity, which is challenging the long-established secular identity and altering the social structures of Syrian society by sacrificing secularism and minority rights to Islamic revivalism. Despite the fact that secular governance continues to be the predominant tenet of the Syrian state, this movement of Islamic revivalism is infiltrating the long-off-limits political sphere, raising a challenge -although still indirectly- to the secular state apparatus (Moubayad 2006).

III. Goals

In conducting this study I am aiming to fulfill three different objectives: Personal goals, intellectual goals and practical goals (Maxwell 2005).

On a personal level, my own intellectual curiosity was the main motivation for this research. I, as a native anthropologist, was puzzled by why so many women of the same socio-economic class I belonged to were changing their behavior and lifestyle in the ways they were and joining a movement that commands the way they dress, act and live their daily lives. I wanted to interview the women, hear their personal stories and share their experiences in order to comprehend why they decided to choose piety via the Qubaisyate rather than any other path. The goal of this research is to gain insights into the rationale and motivation for women's engagement with religion via the Qubaisyate movement, and subsequently understand why the Qubaisyate movement was successful in gaining a foothold in Syrian society, via its all-exclusive female members, through patterns that have emerged from this research.

In addition to my personal goals, this study aims to fulfill intellectual goals.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant shortage of published work that examines Islamic revival and social movements in Syria. Indeed, there is an immense need for research to study the substantial social and political authority that Islamic movements in Syria have attained during the reign of Bashar al-Asad given the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class contrasts². This absence of research has

² Syria is a melting pot of ethnicities and religious sects; with majority of Arabs (90 percent), and a mix of Kurds, Armenians, Circassians and few others for the remaining 10 percent of ethnicities, and a religious divide of a Sunni Muslim majority (75 percent), a mix of other Muslim sects such as Alawite, Shiaa and Druz (15 percent), and Christians of various denominations make up the last 10 percent. (See the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009 Syrian Statistical Abstract, online: www.cbssyr.org; the CIA World Factbook at www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/goes/sy.html).

led to neglect of the fact that Syria is in a state of crisis and its ruling command is slowly losing control over the multifaceted variables lurking in the country, mainly in the Islamic sector.

In addition, this research embarks on a topic that has not been studied before; the case of the Qubaisyate movements has been in the shadow for over five decades without a single study that can explain the causes of their emergence, expansion and longevity.

Furthermore, studying the Qubaisyate in light of the major theories of social movements can further our knowledge of Islamic social movements and how these theories can be applied to Islamic activism. This research will not only encourage other students of Islamic social movement studies to take advantage of their special knowledge of Muslim countries to enrich the research community, it will advance our knowledge of contentious politics at large. Moreover, close analysis and major theory application can contribute to the solution of problems that Western specialists have not yet resolved; under what conditions, how and why governmental behavior could weaken or empower grassroots non-violent Islamic social movements.

Finally, this study aims to achieve more practical goals concerned with policy on a global level. The rapid spread of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and its implications for global terrorism is a subject worthy of a focused examination. The 2011 revolution in Syria and the polarization of its Islamic movements proved to be a bigger challenge than the ruling regime in Syria and the global community can handle. For years, Syrian government officials strongly denied the rising influence of Islamic activism in the country while, in fact, the country was indeed becoming more and more religious and in the process was losing its national secular identity, which served for decades as an

umbrella to unite the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class distinctions. Ba'athist ideology and its political centrality, which has been an upholder of secular Pan-Arabism, makes it a good basis on which to examine the resurgence of its Islamic movements as a way to shed light on future ideological trends within the regional political context.

On the other hand, some observers are concerned that the Qubaisyate and other more traditional Islamic forces, who are challenging the country's overarching national identity and replacing it by an Islamic one, are providing a base for the evolution of radical religious movements in Syria and the region (AKI 2005). No one is more knowledgeable about this matter than the Syrian regime, which for many years had front-row seating as Hezbollah drew Lebanon to war with Israel, Islamic jihadists poured death into Iraq and the Muslim Brotherhood, temporarily at least, undermined the powerful military junta in Egypt. Although Syria's government supports these groups away from home, it has been always careful to keep the trend outside its borders (Zoepf 2006).

This strategy proved a success until 2011, given that after thirty decades of domestic peace in the country, when an uprising took place in every part of the Syrian state including the heart of the capital city, Damascus. The uprising that started in March 2011 in Syria warns of possible broader and regional implications, in that a need to understand the internal factors that are de-stabilizing Syria will also help shed light on the forces that are causing turmoil and factionalism in the region. The predicament lies in the fact that any forces that affect the country's long standing secular identity and environment will not only destabilize the country but will also have an aftershock, spreading the forces of destruction and instability throughout the whole region.

Syria plays an essential role in the Middle East where outcomes of domestic politics often spill over to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq and have wide regional implications. As a result, examining the resurgence of its Islamic movements can help to enlighten on future ideological trends within the regional political context.

Looking at the topic through the wider lens of political science and sociology, this study will help to shed light on how the system's strains can explain the emergence of collective movements and how regimes, in their efforts to ensure survival, change the balance of the socio-economic and political environment in the country. More particularly, it enables us to examine the options and the limitations faced by the Syrian regime so as to restrain the growing threat of a viable Islamist option, including its co-option of a political Islamic alternative.

Furthermore, given the struggle of the international community to understand global terrorism, the roots of fundamentalism and the growing influence of Islamist parties in the Middle East and on the Muslim world's governments, a study that can take a first look at a movement that has established a foothold in countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt and which has gone as far as Europe and the United States, would prove vital (Hamidi 2006).

For these reasons, the present study argues that in order to develop an understanding of the key elements at the core of Islamic revivalism in Syria there is a need to examine one of the dominant Islamic movements in Syrian society today; the Qubaisyate.

IV. Research Questions

The present study aims to investigate the on-going chronological relationship, spanning a time period from the early 1960s to the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, between two key variables in the Syrian state: Islamic revival in the greater Middle East and its effect on the rise of a local Islamic revivalist message advocated by the Qubaisyate Islamic women's movement.

The study will attain its aim by concentrating on a single central question; how and why the Qubaisyate movement is rising as a significant socio-religious player in Syria despite the totalitarian and secular environment of Syrian politics, which was enforced by the Ba'ath regime for more than fifty decades.

In addition, numerous contributory empirical questions will be addressed:

How did the Syrian governing regime's measures of oppression, tolerance or co-option chosen to counter the growing presence of Islamic revivalism and balance the country's religious and ethnic mix from one end, and the government's secular and authoritarian political culture on the other, contribute to the rise and continuation of the Qubaisyate movement?

Beyond the governing body of the state, how did the leadership of the Qubaisyate movement utilize shifting large-scale political, cultural and economic events to modify resources, organizational structure and grievances to present widely accepted cultural and ideological frames and design and implement a successful mobilization structure that evolved the movement to become a micro-power within the totalitarian and secular environment of Syrian politics?

How religion as a collective identity was successfully formed and utilized to gain societal legitimacy and keep ties to the main populace, establish a sense of solidarity that distinguishes members of the movement from other Syrian citizens and attract women into joining the movement and taking the risk, knowing that the state was targeting all religious activities?

Besides the main research questions and the contributory empirical questions that will be addressed by this research, answers to other secondary questions might rise out of the data. Such questions as: Why was the movement successful in establishing a foothold beyond Syrian borders and in gaining influence in the region? How Qubaisyate is a factor to large-scale cultural and political changes, which affect successive Islamic activism? And what role, if any, has the movement played in the 2011 uprising in Syria?

V. Research hypotheses

In order to answer the stated research questions, this study has embarked on the major theoretical approaches to studying social movements; by combining the concept of political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, as well as the concept of cultural framing and identities in order to bring ideas, meanings and cultural elements into the study. In addressing these three general areas, this research hopes to answer key issues in the major literature on Islamic social movements and how they relate to the subject under study; the Qubaisyate movement.

This study has an overarching primary hypothesis arguing that the rise of the Qubaisyate Islamic women movement in Syria is likely due to the rising influence of the Islamic

revival movement in the greater Middle East. In this positive relationship, the degree of the influence of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism on Syria will be viewed as the independent variable and its effect, the degree of growth and rise of the Qubaisyate Islamic social movement in Syria, will be, in turn, viewed as the dependent variable. In addition, this study proposes three explanatory/intermediate hypotheses to the primary hypothesis. The study argues that the rising influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival in Syria has helped the rise of the Qubaisyate through effecting three different dimensions of the movement: political opportunities, entrepreneurial-organizational, as well as, identities and cultural framing (see appendix A).

a. First dimension: State-centered approach

This intermediate hypothesis, based on political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, emphasizes the role of the state and the political environment it generates on the Qubaisyate materialization and longevity. The focus is on the degree of openness or closeness that the Syrian political system enjoys and to what extent it allows access to its institutions and substantive entities.

The present study argues that the Ba'ath regime in an attempt to offset the pressure of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East based on the growth of socio-religious movements in Syria and to prevent it from transforming into a militant religious opposition, had relied on a policy of co-option and state-sponsored Islam to limit popular unrest whilst ensuring its popularity among the majority urban Sunni Muslims in the country. The state has chosen to modify its behavior from being a strong advocate of secularism and attempting to grind down its Islamist rivals, to promoting Islamic revivalism through the religious bourgeoisie, such as Munira Al-Qubaisy, and ex-communicating their loyal left

wing associates. This behavior modification came in the form of numerous attempts to reposition the state's image from a secular, socialist and minority-run government to a god-fearing, religiosity promoting and Shari'a based popular governing apparatus.

As a result, new state-Islamic dynamics were born in Syria to enable the state to hold a monopoly over the fastest growing sector in Syrian society, which is the Islamic movement.

This aspect of the study, therefore, will concentrate on the constant efforts of the ruling command to reach a state of equilibrium in Syria by ensuring its survival while controlling the growing threat of Islamic movements within the country, including the Qubaisyate.

b. Second dimension: Entrepreneur-Organizational

This intermediate hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, emphasizes the role of Munira Al-Qubaisy, the movement's entrepreneur, as a designer of a successful movement-business model, as well as the role of the effective organizational structure of the Qubaisyate in maximizing impact and efficaciousness of the movement.

The present study argues that the leader of the Qubaisyate movement, Munira Al-Qubaisy, has played a major role in the rise and success of the movement in Syria. The leader's exposure to the influence of Islamic revivalism in the greater Middle East has supplied Ms. Al-Qubaisy with the necessary resources and tools to design a successful mobilizing structure capable of withstanding numerous fluctuating political and cultural pressures. The preexisting organizational model of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt and Syria, and the tactics they used for mobilizing support, collecting resources and

dealing with the government, served as a pilot case for Ms. Al-Qubaisy to build on its success and failure, perfect its weaknesses and utilize its strengths, while building a brand new vision for her movement.

As a result, a better, more successful organizational model was created and the Qubaisyate movement flourished in Syria, even in times of great political repression. This aspect of the study, therefore, will concentrate on the role of the leader of the movement, Ms. Al-Qubaisy, in the design of a successful organizational structure based on allocating essential resources to maximize impact and efficaciousness, which immensely influenced the movement's tactics and strategic decision making process, attracted great numbers of women to join and determined the movement's longevity and durability in a hostile political environment.

c. Third dimension: Identities and Cultural Framing

This intermediate hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on collective identity and cultural framing theory of social movement, emphasizes the role of frames used by the Qubaisyate movement as interpretive designs that propose a language and cognitive tools for understanding the issues and events in Syria, as well as the role of 'collective agency' that inspired and legitimized the movement's existence and longevity. The present study argues that Islamic revivalism in the Middle East has established a master frame, "Islam is the Solution", as well as a sense of solidarity around the idea of the "Muslim cause", which the Qubaisyate movement has used as a tool to rise in Syria by gaining religious and cultural legitimacy in the Syrian society. The movement had used the message of "Islam is the Solution" to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society; argue that there is a problem that needs to be

addressed and only a return to the original teaching of the religion is the solution; suggesting tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the damage and offer rational for solidarity and active participation in the movement.

As a result, the movement has enjoyed great legitimacy and support among elite houses of the capital city of Damascus and infiltrated the community through a message of religion and piety; a feat other religious groups who are also concerned with Islamic revivalism have been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

This aspect of this study, therefore, will concentrate on the role of framing Islam as a solution and the collective identity created around the idea of unification under religion, in promoting and legitimizing the Qubaisyate as a religious movement, enabling it to gain support from the influential families of Damascus and becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria for more than five decades, as well as expanding beyond the borders to other Arab and Muslim countries to reach as far as Europe and the United States.

Before moving on to discuss my choice of methodology and presenting an outline of the chapters in which this research will unfold, there are several issues that need to be addressed. First, there is a need for a concise description of the terminology to be used in this study. Perplexing terms such as Islamic and Islamist must be distinguished from each other, as well as defining what exactly is referred to by an Islamic renewal movement and Islamic revival. Second, I would like to discuss the literature related to research under study and the state of the field.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

I. Definition of Terms

Given the plethora of terms that have recently emerged within the Muslim and the Western world as the topic of terrorism-occupied front-page news, it is wise to construct a narrow definition tailored to the “Islamic” environment in Syria. For the sake of this study, there is a need to define and differentiate the terms ‘conventional Muslim’, ‘*Mutadayen*’ (Islamic), and ‘*Muta’aseb*’ (fundamentalist).

There are several aspects that determine the membership of a Syrian citizen in Islam; the most common thread would be being born into a Muslim family, followed by how actively involved in the religion the person is. The term ‘actively involved in the religion’ constitutes the following:

- Observing the five pillars of the religion:
 - *Shahada*: Believing in the divinity and oneness of Allah and declaring membership in Islam by accepting Mohammad as the messenger from God.
 - *Salat*: Praying five times a day as an obligatory pillar from God and additional optional prayers as per choice following the example of the prophet.
 - *Sawm*: Fasting the holy month of Ramadan as an obligatory pillar from God and additional optional fasting days throughout the year as per choice following the example of the Prophet.

- *Zakat*: a specific percentage of income and assets to be given to charity at the end of the holy month of Ramadan as an obligatory pillar from God and additional optional charitable amounts throughout the year as per choice.
- *Hajj*: Pilgrimage to the holy temple in the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in a lifetime as an obligatory pillar from God and additional optional trips called “*Omrah*” as per choice.
- Regular religious meditation using prayer beads “*Tasbeeh*” and reading of the Qur’an and other religious materials and Islamic literature.
- Adhering to an Islamic code of conduct based on the concepts of *Halal* (allowed) and *Haram* (prohibited), outlined by the Qur’an and the prophet’s teachings; mainly abstaining from gambling, drinking alcohol, eating pork and premarital sex.
- Celebrating common religious holidays, such as the breaking of the fast Feast at end of the month of Ramadan and the Feast of the Sacrifice.
- Adhering to an Islamic dress code, men usually grow full beard as a sign of devotion and piety while women wear loose and long garments over their outfits and cover their hair with a headscarf called “*Hijab*”.
- Person to attend organized religious services within and outside the mosque if a male, and/or at home if a female, on some regular basis.

- Participating in religious charitable activities, which provide medical assistance, money, food, clothing and other social services to the poor.
- Sending his/her children to an Islamic school rather than public schools to receive an Islamic-based education as an additional subject to the already-set curriculum by the state.

Consequently, we can define the terms according to the above-mentioned religious activities to differentiate between different levels of engagement of Syrian citizens in the religion of Islam.

The term ‘conventional Muslim’ would serve as a label to distinguish individuals who define themselves as such in social settings, interpret Islam with no political or militant tendencies and rarely or occasionally are active in the religion; practicing none or few of the above mentioned obligatory activities without any additional duties.

The term ‘*Mutadayen*’ or ‘Islamic’, which will be used interchangeably in this study, will be used as a reference to characterize the faithful Muslim who is very active in the religion, observes all the aspects of the above-mentioned list, as well as the additional non-obligatory duties set in the teaching of the prophet. It is a specific appellation used to distinguish the robustly active in the religion from other conventional Muslims in the Syrian community.

The term ‘*Muta’aseb*’ or ‘Fundamentalist’ has two distinct forms: violent and peaceful. In this study the violent form will be referred to as: ‘*Mutataref*’ or ‘Islamist’ and the peaceful form as: ‘*Mujaded*’ or ‘Revivalist’.

The term “Islamist” will be borrowed from Wiktorowicz’s (2004) work on Islamic activism. His work denotes that “Islamists are Muslims who feel compelled to act on the

belief that Islam demands social and political activism, either to establish an Islamic state, to proselytize to reinvigorate the faithful, or to create a separate union for Muslim communities” (Wiktorowicz 2004, 2).

The Islamists believe in a need for political action statewide to overthrow the political regime and replace it with an Islamist government, which in turn will demand utilizing Islamic laws and values by society. Valentine Moghadam (2009) refers to this action by the Islamists as “Islamism.” He defines the term as “a militantly politicized movement, network or ideology selectively based on Islamic theology and history but motivated by contemporary Islamism in word-systemic and globalization processes while also recognizing the gendered nature of Islamist politics and practices” (Moghadam 2009, 41).

The ‘Revivalist’, which may or may not have a political agenda, tends to concentrate on the restoration of the early days of Islam, which is considered to be the golden era.

Revivalists aim at launching a peaceful revolution from below through the ‘re-Islamization’ of society, one person at a time. The end product would be a society that runs on a model based on Islamic ethics and teachings of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad. The idea behind putting ethics ahead of political actions stems from the belief that once society has evolved into an Islamic model, political leadership will follow suit. Changing citizens into pious subjects, who abide by Islamic laws and norms of their own accord, will eventually require the government to adapt and enforce these laws as laws of the land or face the masses who are sure to demand an Islamic state (Roy 1996). The way by which the Revivalists are working to reach their aim has been referred to as “Islamic Revivalism” or “Islamic Renewal.”

The term, 'Islamic revivalism', as 'a movement back to Islamic roots', was under study by many scholars who concentrated on Islamic social movements. Dekmejian (1995) defined the term as "a return to Islam and its fundamental precept" and described it as "a powerful self-propelling dynamic with significant religious, political, economic and strategic implications" (Dekmejian 1995, 3-4). Other scholars, (e.g. Goodwin 2009; Mahmood 2005; and Jasper 1997) have tackled the subject of Islamic revivalism and Islamic renewal from a societal, ahead of a religious, point of view.

Mahmood (2005) argued that the term does not necessarily means an increase in religiosity; nevertheless, it is an indication of the overall increase in the evident, societal religiosity. In other words, "Islamic revival is the permeation of society with activities; organizations, speech and attire that are considered to be "Islamic," and that palpably impact upon the way of life of the public masses on a daily basis" (Mahmood 2005: 3).

This means, as Goodwin and Jasper (2009) put it; "the reinvention of an attire tradition" by the adopting of headscarves and modest dress for women, as well as attending public performance of prayers and abstaining from alcohol and other intoxicators for men.

Another indication lies in the flourishing of neighborhood mosques as epicenters for charity and spiritual education, which exceed its guiding role to partly supplant the state's role in providing a social safety net for public welfare and medical assistance.

With so much talk of "going back to the roots" it is necessary to clarify one thing before moving on to the next section. It is important to mention that Islamic revivalism does not entitle the dismissal of modern technology and useful technological innovations.

Goodwin and Jasper (2009) argued that fundamentalists, as agents of Islamic revivalism, are characterized by being highly educated and are usually graduates of modern schools.

They often share progressive values such as human rights and equality and value the rule of law. They align themselves with modernity by advocating the use of the latest technology in science and medicine and keep up to date with modern innovations and literature. They seek Islamic revival that utilizes all aspects of useful and positive modernity, which, in their view, not only should not be limited to Western culture but also should be adopted because it stems from the work of great historical Muslim and Arab personalities (Goodwin and Jasper 2009).

II. Religion and Social Movements

In contemporary social movement studies, the debate on the relationship between religion and social change has been active and lively. Scholars have been emphasizing the trend that religion is becoming increasingly influential in the sphere of social movements and social change and have actively called for the increase of research on the correlation linking religion and social movements. (See, e.g., Hannington 1991; Kniss and Chaves 1995; and McCarthy and Zald 1987). A call that fell short of generating enough literature to cover this important topic given that the events of our contemporary world proved again and again that religion has had a tremendous impact on social movements.

While this trend of lack of emphasis on religion in the study of social movements existed, another plague was distressing its offshoot of Islamic social movements. The study of Islamic social movements found itself in a realm of its own. It did not belong to the main stream of Western social movements' body of theory and conceptual developments, neither did it find its own path to theory building and research mechanism, instead, publications on Islamic activism took a narrative or a descriptive approach to ideology, structure and goals of various Islamic movements (Wiktorowicz 2004).

Even though the Islamic social movement has enjoyed near-autonomy from mainstream social movement theory, due to its ideological worldview that differentiated it from Western and other social movements, close examination shows that it has encountered similar developments. There are evident commonalities of the collective action itself and associated methods, which indicate that the dynamics, process and organizations of Islamic social movements can be seen as a part of wider contention that transcend the exclusivity of Islam as a base for collective action and requires a closer attention in an aim of the possibility of cross-fertilization.

David Snow and Susan Marshall (1984) were the pioneers who saw the need to integrate the research on Islamic social movements into the main body of social movement theory. They called for “the integration of research on both religious and political movements” (1984, 146) by utilizing the common tools used in social movement research-cultural strains, religion as mobilizing ideologies and resource mobilization to analyze the inherit basis of Islamic activism that stems from cultural imperialism. In addition, few scholars have encouraged the study of Islamic Activism in particular and were actively seeking a theory-building mechanism to understand Islamic contention in the light of the framework of the broader body of theory in social movement study. (e.g., Foran 1994; Verges 1997; Tehami 1998; Wolff 1998; Munson 2001; Wiktorowicz 2001; Schatz 2002; Wickham 2002; Clark 2003; Hafez 2003).

While the trend towards including Islamic activism in the main body of theory on social movement was increasing in the west, in Syria and the Middle East the trend was a decrease in any kind of publications concerning Islamic social movements.

Despite the massive literature dealing with the subject in neighboring countries, such as Egypt and Turkey, present-day studies of religious revivalism have failed to address the Syrian case for several reasons.

The main cause lay in the government's policy of planting countless political hurdles to fieldwork in Syria as an attempt to suppress freedom of speech and political activism against the ruling Ba'ath regime, as well as the problem of the relative absence of reliable previous research focusing on this study's subject. Consequently, literature addressing the issue of Islamic revivalism in Syria in general and the case of Qubaisyate in particular failed to surpass a handful of scattered articles on the Internet and a couple of shy books dealing with the subject from a subjective point of view of the author.

As a result, this research will be looking for appropriate insights from the broad social movement body of theory to describe and explain the Qubaisyate Islamic movement, to which the body of theory had not yet been systematically applied.

Accordingly, this research will utilize the wide literature dedicated to the main body of theory on social movement as well as the specific literature concerning Islamic social movements and find points of intersections and apply it to explain the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. A good start would be surveying the literature in an attempt to explain the phenomenon of social movement in general and how it relates to Islamic social movement in particular.

III. Theories of social movements

a. Collective behavior theory (Structural Strains)

Considered to be “the classical model of social movement” (Staggenborg 2011), this early approach to analyze and explain the formation of social movements has its roots in the “functionalist social psychology account of mass behavior” (Wiktorowicz 2004). This theory is cemented in the notion that societies normally enjoy a natural state of equilibrium; any disruption to this system will produce psychological distress, which, in turn, will generate collective behavior (Wiktorowicz 2004).

Pioneers of structural strain theory posit that collective behavior would be better explained by looking at the period in which the movement existed in, particularly if it contained any social disruption. The idea is, when grievances are deeply felt in society, social movements tend to rise as an indigenous response rather than being a normal component of the institutionalized political structure. (Jenkins 1981; Marx and Wood 1975; McAdam 1999[1982]; Morris and Herring 1987).

In general, collective behavior theorists focus on the structural and psychological roots from which collective action escalates. They assume that collective behavior intensifies in situations where the overall social system has been strained or broken down, thereby creating a shared sense of social anxiety, which, in turn, forces individuals to look for alternatives to guide their lives and behavior. Therefore, social movements emerge as a useful escapist coping mechanism, alleviating psychological distress stemming from various social strains, such as industrialization, modernization, political or economic crisis. (Morris and Herring 1987:147).

This socio-psychological approach has been dominating the sphere of Islamic activism for years. Many scholars in this field have opted to use the logic of structural strains to interpret the emergence of Islamic social movements based on the structural crisis generated by the malfunction of secular modernization policies in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries. (Waltz 1986; Hoffman 1995; Dekmejian 1995; Faksh 1997).

In an effort to promote economic development in their countries, Arab leaders decided to adopt a Western model of industrialization. This policy of modernization did not come unaccompanied, a wave of Western cultural attributes swept Arabic and Muslim societies spreading secularization, the application of foreign languages, as well as Western attire. Westernization of society and deterioration of Islamic values, corruption and concentration of wealth, political and economic exclusion were some of the negative by-products of the failed state-controlled economic policies that were amplified by the devastating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in a sense of general social anomie and economic and political impotence among citizens of countries such as Egypt and Syria. (Wiktorowicz 2004:7)

Islamic activism scholars, who explain Islamic movements in the light of the structural strain theory, agree that psychological distress generated by these conditions played a major role in the creation of Islamic social movements. What they did not agree was the relative significance of these various factors. Several scholars contend that socio-economic factors and the grievances they entail can serve as the main explanation as to why individuals are attracted to join Islamic movements (Ibrahim 1980; Ansari 1984; Munson 1986; Waltz 1986).

Unemployment, social uprooting of individuals to look for a job in main economic hubs, as well as blocked social mobility can generate psychological distress and anxiety, which make the individual more receptive to the message of Islamic movements (Ibrahim 1996).

Others argue that the wave of Western influence that swept the region using social, economic, political and even military vehicles was to blame for creating a sense of cultural imperialism and the belief that Islam was under attack through undermining the culture of Muslim societies, weakening its governments or replacing it by Western proxies and even dominating Muslim countries to extract its natural resources (Burgat and Dowell 1993; Wiktorowicz and Taji-Farouki 2000).

Other scholars view the political nature of the ruling governments in Arab and Muslim countries to be the main origin of Islamic contention. Decades of authoritarian regime rule and political oppression, as well as deterioration of the economic quality of life with no appropriate political channel to voice grievances, created a sense of political impotence and alienation. Furthermore, the crackdown on civil society as a whole, outlawing opposition parties and criminalizing political dissidents, made Islamic activism the only vehicle in which individuals could use as an effective political option (Wiktorowicz 2004:8).

This initial socio-psychological approach to social movements, although favored by Islamic activism scholars, was under critique by their Western counterparts who believed that there was a need for a deeper look into the theory for multiple reasons.

First, critics of collective behavior theory argued that structural strains make an overly simplistic explanation of collective action (e.g., McAdam 1982). The linkage between

social movement formation and the existence of a social strain in a society is a weak pilot to be steered by. If we examine the societal context at the time of birth of any social movement, it is inevitable to find some kind of strain lurking in the background at that time (Useem 1975:9; Wilson 1973:35). More importantly, despite that, strains are always present at the time of formation of social movements, the opposite is not always true. Many societies experience multiple societal strains and pressures and yet fail to elicit a collective behavior as a correspondent. In fact, this argument of strain-movement pairing could not prove more fallible than in countries, which suffer extreme pressure and constant societal strains. Poor countries, for example, which suffer the wrath of political oppression, severe deterioration of standards of living and many other forms of discontent, are the last countries to produce social movements compared to their rich democratic counterparts who enjoy long cycles of stability paired with robust social movements (Wiktorowicz 2004:9).

Moreover, the theory of collective behavior assumes that societies enjoy a constant state of balance and equilibrium, which sounds naive and Utopian. Systems are usually marked with dynamic cycles of positive and negative events; societal and political changes; government and citizens' interactions, to name just a few. In fact, it seems that societal strains in their different forms are a natural phenomenon in most societies and therefore cannot serve as a proper indicator for the formation of social movements (Staggenborg 2009).

Not only did the structural strain approach fall short of proving that societal strains are the main cause for social movement formation, it generated more criticism based on the notion of "irrationality of social movement actors". The assumption that participants are

irrational actors suffering from psychological distress generated by several societal pressures and, looking at social movements as a mere survival coping mechanism, undermines the purposive, political and organized dimensions of social movements at large. Studies show that social movements are often extremely focused and follow a well-calculated course toward a political objective (McAdam 1982; Buechler 1993).

Furthermore, members are not irrational, stressed individuals looking for a lifebuoy; they are typically well-adjusted individuals who belong to the educated and professional strata of society (Wiktorowicz 2004:9).

In conclusion, the initial socio-psychological approach to social movements went through severe criticism and collective behavior theory alone was proven to be inadequate to explain the formation of social movements. Western scholars changed routes and moved to re-address these theoretical deficiencies through other alternatives while Islamic activism scholars remained confined to the limitations of the socio-psychological mold. The study of Islamic activism did not only suffer from being enclosed in the parameters of an outdated theoretical model, alas, its scholars competed to outnumber each other in generating endless complex lists of strains and grievances. The framework by which Islamic activism was studied became a melting pot of endless lists of societal strains that made mobilization in the Arab and Muslim world virtually inevitable.

The work of Dekmejian (1995) on Islamic activism and revival is anchored in the classic structural strain theory and can serve as a great example to highlight the tremendous accumulation of grievances used by Islamic activism scholars. Dekmejian argues that the rise of Islamist movement is deeply rooted in the crisis milieu in that region. He explains:

“the crisis milieu produced an indigenous response - a return to Islam and its fundamental percepts” (Dekmejian 1995; 3).

He states that Islamic groups who call for Islamic revival could be found in virtually every Muslim community regardless of its size or its political, economic and social affiliations, and has been characterized by a localized grassroots base that shifts into action as a response to an existing or a new national crisis that is similar in nature to crises in other Islamic societies and eventually could expand to unite and turn into a trans-national movement.

His lists of predicaments surpassed the classical narrowly focused socio-economic approach and the recycled rendition of psychological grievances and included an array of more comprehensive and multidimensional causes for social crisis that included identity crisis, legitimacy crisis, elite misrule/coercion, class conflict, military impotence, modernization and culture crisis. In turn, each of these categories was expanded as a framework that included an extensive list of precipitating causes and additional complicated lists of strains and grievances.

This example reflects the stage of Islamic activism writing today. The structural strain theoretical approach has given birth to a massive accumulation of diverse societal strain in the Arab and Islamic world that makes mobilization seem nearly certain.

This problem, combined with the already existing flaws highlighted by Western scholars has deemed collective behavior theory unfit to answer central questions about the emergence of social movements in general and its Islamic activism component in particular.

The theory cannot explain the dynamic by which Islamic movements organize and attract members to an Islamic message rather than to a liberal or a democratic message, especially under political repression.

The theory also fails to explain why some Islamic movements remain non-violent while others become aggressive, whilst forming under the same social strains. These, among other questions, remain unanswered and raise doubts that structural strains and discontent, albeit important, are alone adequate to serve as a casual explanation of social movements and Islamic activism. Consequently, a new theoretical frame to study the phenomenon of social movements was necessary.

b. Resource Mobilization theory

In contrast to the previous socio-psychological approach to social movements, which viewed social movements as a mere escapist mechanism for distressed irrational actors, resource mobilization theory suggests that movements are indeed coherent, structured and well-organized means, by which rational actors bring about change. Emerged as a response to the shortcoming of its predecessor, this theory adopted a central approach; that even though grievances are omnipresent, movements are not. Consequently, there must be a conciliatory variable that translates individual grievances into collective action (Wiktorowicz 2004). For that reason, resource mobilization theory, as its name implies, emphasizes that resources and organization are an essential factor for the formation and continuation of a successful collective action (Freeman 1979).

There are numerous types of resources utilized by social movements including, but not limited to, *material resources*, such as money and other tangible assets; *human resources*, such as experienced participants and robust members; *social-organizational resources*,

including organizational makeup and networks; *cultural resources*, including organic tactics and customized approaches; and *moral resources*, such as legitimacy and authenticity (Edwards and McCarthy 2004:125-128).

While stressing the importance of resources in general, such as funds, time and skills, resource mobilization theorists have emphasized the entrepreneurial-organizational component of the theory, arguing that social movement organizations and their leaders are of special importance and are vital to the success of collective action.

McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) emphasized the role of the movement's entrepreneurs as designers of a movement-business model based on: allocating essential resources to maximize impact and efficaciousness, drawing on public sentiments to define goals and objectives and offering selective incentives (tangible, intangible as well as purposive) to widen the circle of participation and attract individuals to the message of the movement.

Other scholars called attention to the various structures of social movement organizations; being formal or informal for example, which can determine the movement's longevity and durability and immensely influences their tactics and strategic decision making processes (Staggenborg 2009). Studies have shown that the more formalized the structure of a social movement is, the higher the chances of survival over a long period of time compared to movements that followed an informal structure. In turn, informal structure can facilitate a faster reaction to sudden and unanticipated events and generates more rapid innovative tactics to face the new environment (Gamson 1990; Staggenborg 1988; 1989). Theorists have also identified additional types of organizational structure, such as formal and informal social networks, groups and other

mobilizing vehicles that are used to recruit members and organize collective action (McAdams et al. 1996:3).

In contrast to the collective behavior theory's claim of social movement irrationality, resource mobilization theory asserts the rationality of collective action manifested in the strategic dimension of social movement organizational structure. Over time, successful social movements rely upon a process of bureaucratization to create an enduring formal infrastructure based on professional staff, advance communications and reliable resources to develop into an organizational adaptation of existing bureaucratic social and political institutions (Oberschall 1973; Gamson 1975; Tilly 1978; Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 1987).

This organizational model, although proven a success in the West, can be persistently challenged in the political environment of a Muslim or Arab country. Liberal democratic polities have a component of tolerance that can harbor and support the creation and growth of social movement organizations while providing multiple resources to ensure its longevity. In contrast, the prevalence of one party rule and dictatorship in Middle Eastern politics proved to be lethal to the formation and progress of any form of civil society and collective behavior regardless if it was politically, socially or religiously based. For that reason, Islamic activism studies tend to opt-out of the resource mobilization theory debates and concentrate on the role of organizational resources in collective action, such as informal networks, Islamic NGOs, mosques and other vehicles of mobilization (Wiktorowicz 2004:12).

Unlike the West, where visibility means wider message transmittal, movement visibility in Muslim or Arab countries can be fatal. Accordingly, Muslim and Arabic societies are

known to favor informal involvement in collective action through complex networks based on personal relationships due to the repressive political environment that these countries are plagued by. This network-based activism signifies authenticity, provides legitimacy and ensures the security essential to recruit members in an environment where authoritarian regimes are increasingly criminalizing collective action.

Few Islamic activism scholars have studied the phenomenon of network-based activism to mobilize and construct collective identities in countries such as Egypt, Yemen and Iran (e.g. Singerman 1995; Clark 1995; Smith and Schwedler 1995). Although most of these networks remain underground or hidden, they serve as important resources for a culturally accepted movement building mechanism. Furthermore, the adaptation of the use of the Internet and the widespread use of social networks (e.g. Facebook) played a major role as a tactical evasion of public surveillance and an informal resource for mobilization in recent collective actions all over the Middle East.

Islamic NGOs, such as charity societies, medical clinics, cultural centers and Islamic schools, comprise an additional compilation of broadly utilized meso-level organizations that spread the message of Islamic revival in Muslim and Arab countries without a direct confrontation with the existent political regime (Sullivan 1994; Clark 1995, 2003; Shadid 2001; Wiktorowicz 2001). These entities provide social services wrapped in an Islamic message, which naturally promote the need to come back to religion while indirectly highlighting the failure of the state's economic secular modernization model to provide essential social services as basic as education and medical services (Sullivan 1994).

Another important pillar of Islamic activism has been the mosque and its affiliated entities (e.g. religious schools and religious study groups). Throughout history, the

mosque played a dual role as a religious institution as well as a central resource for mobilization for various Islamic groups (Moghadam 2009:56). Mosques provide a natural environment for collective action to flourish where networks can be organically formed, organized and mobilized. Although the role of mosques had declined due to the infiltration of security services, nevertheless, many Islamists still utilized the religio-spatial role of the mosque to promote their message, allocate resources and recruit members in various Islamic and Middle Eastern countries (Parsa 1989).

In addition to these organizational vehicles, Islamic activism can also be carried through the already existent structure of professional syndications, student associations and political parties (Wickham 1997; Fahmy 1998).

The eclipse of secular ideologies and their supporting movements after the conclusion of the Cold War, gave way to a clear stage for the Islamic message and its promoters in the Middle East. While rejecting democracy and calling for Islamic rule, Islamic movements hijacked the already present political arena through the window of limited liberalization measures and the political vacuum caused by the collapse of the communist party (Espino and Voll 1996; Robinson 1997; Akinci 1999; Langhore 2001; Lust-Okar 2001).

Even though there are few formal structures that can be utilized by Islamic social movements, informal institutions and social networks proved to be more effective for mobilization in an environment plagued by surveillance and political oppression. In countries that enjoy very limited polities, social movements tend to avoid formal resources, which become an obvious target to the repressive regime, and opt for more secure personal networks impeded in everyday life and hence more resistant to regime infiltration (Scott 1990; Opp and Gern 1993; Schneider 1995; Zuo and Benford 1995;

Pfaff 1996; Loveman 1998; Zhao 1998). While informal networks may constrain the growth of Islamic social networks, the collection of tools it offers: personal relationships, informal gatherings and study circles, supply valuable resources for movement endurance in an authoritarian regime environment that persistently limits formal resource accessibility (Denoeux 1993; Ismail 2000).

The amalgamation of decentralized Islamic authority, omnipresence of personal networks and social connection, and the proliferation of political repression in a majority of Arab and Muslim countries, make Islamic activism studies a crucial aspect to understanding the essential role of informal structure in the study of social movement organization (Wiktorowicz 2004:13). Despite the fact that the role of informal networks has been elucidated in the body of social movement theory at the level of recruitment, the dynamic by which those networks influence social movement in the phases to follow is yet to be explored. The lens by which informal social networks are seen only as a recruiting device falls short of explaining how these networks can be reshaped and utilized beyond this role of recruiting members to support the movement's objectives. Islamic activism research can be used as a tool to shed the light on how formal social movement organizations can manipulate informal networks to further the mission of the movement beyond the recruitment phase.

c. Political Process Theory

No matter how influential grievances are, how many resources are available or how functional the mobilization structure of a social movement, the reality is that social movements do not function in a vacuum; they are part of the greater whole and are both empowered and limited by external factors. The environment, in which social movements

exist, is full of opportunities and restraints that can permit or bound the formation and growth of collective action. This realization prompted scholars of social movements to adopt a political process model based on the notion of the influence of external opportunities and restraints as factors in social movement mobilization.

Although scholars who support this model do not necessarily share a common definition of what makes a specific factor more important in facilitating collective action than others, they do agree on the function of political opportunities in the mobilization and effects of social movements (Staggenborg 2011:19). Political process theorists emphasize the role of the state, and the political environment it generates, in influencing movement materialization and longevity. The focus is on the degree of openness, or closeness, that a political system enjoys and to what extent it allows access to its institutions and substantive entities (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 277). Sidney Tarrow (1998:77-80) offered the most cited determinants of political opportunities, which included the degree of openness in the polity and the formal and informal rights of entry to political institutions and decision creation; shifts in political alignments and the degree of political system receptiveness to contestant groups; the stability, or the divisiveness, of the ruling elites; the pervasiveness of allies and availability of influential opponents and the nature of repression or facilitation adopted by the state.

Whilst these dimensions serve as a key factor to facilitate or inhibit mobilization, the interpretation of opportunities and threats by the movement plays a major role in determining how these factors impact the movement. The assumption is when actors perceive opportunities or threats; they will weigh their options and reply rationally to exploit openings or bound adversities (Berejikian 1992). This assumption of rationality of

actors is shared with the resource mobilization theory even though there is macro-micro difference to the theories. Unlike resource mobilization theory that highlights the rationality of movement entrepreneurs to mobilize resources and personnel as well as to construct a social movement organization that maximizes mobilization, the political opportunity approach concentrates on structural factors as determinants for mobilization (Wiktorowicz 2004:13). This approach successfully addresses the gap in resource mobilization theory and goes beyond that initial phase to analyze not only factors that influence the emergence of social movements, but also, the structural conditions that alter the strategies and outcomes of protest along the road. Consequently, focusing on structural factors sheds light on analyzing social movements beyond its initiation phase and adds to the understanding of collective action from a different angle to serve as a revised and improved approach to the previous attempts in the study of social movement. Political opportunities can be a major factor in understanding Islamic social movements, given the fact that most Arab and Islamic countries have been under dictatorial rule for decades; the Syrian case is no exception. While most of the literature dealing with Islamic activism in the Middle East concentrated on structural strains theory and dealt with state repression as one factor in the long list of grievances, the small literature on Syria had focused mainly on a state-centered approach. Few Islamic activism scholars have attempted to modify the direction of Islamic social movement theory towards the concept of rationality of actors who evaluate their political environment to adjust their goals and decisions (Anderson 1997; Alexander 2000; Ismail 2000).

In Syria, despite the scarcity of literature tackling the subject of Islamic movements, few recent publications have followed suit by concentrating on the relationship between these movements and the Asad regime (Khatib 2011; Pierret 2011; Khatib, Lefevre, and Quraishi 2012). Most of the literature has taken a narrative bibliographical approach without going deeply into the theoretical explanation of the phenomenon with very little exception. Khatib (2011), for example, argued that the Syrian regime's response to the Syrian Islamic movement has influenced the livelihood of these movements in Syria. In an attempt to ensure survival in the face of Islamic growth in the country, the Syrian regime has promoted Islamic movements and empowered the religious sector of the society to a point where it cannot be controlled anymore. At the same time, Islamic movements in Syria seized the political opportunity given by the state and grew rapidly to fill the religious vacuum left in the country after the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982 (Khatib 2011).

Despite that political process theory was favored in North America in the 1980s and 1990s by scholars of social movement; it had its share of criticism. Critics argued that the theory was exceedingly structurally focused; emphasizing the predictability of the political opportunity structure while downplaying the agency of the activist who reacts to these opportunities and sometimes creates them (Goodwin and Jasper 1999). McAdam et al. (2001), who is considered one of the pioneers of the theory, points out that the theory proved to be too static, falling short of explaining the vigorous dynamics of collective action. He argued that opportunities and threats must not be viewed as objective structures detached from the interaction of activists; on the contrary, they should be considered subject to the contributions and reactions of collective actors. This was clear

in the Syrian case, where the interaction between the state and the Islamic movement and the modification of behavior by activists depending on the political openings allowed by the government contributes to the understanding that participants are strategic thinkers who are aware of their political surroundings and the influence of opportunities and constraints on their decisions and choices (Mufti 1999; Alexander 2000; and Khatib 2011).

Furthermore, the main theory of political opportunity and constraints was developed in the West to explain social movements in democracies and most of the literature examined its applicability to social movements that formed in the West in a democratic atmosphere. Only few scholars have assessed its relevance and compatibility with social movements formed within a non-democratic context in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes and subjected to violent suppression. For example, Schock (1999) examines the relevancy of the political opportunity approach in the Philippines and Burma and concludes that although political opportunity framework was appropriate for explaining social movement mobilization and outcomes in non-democratic contexts, it proved to have serious limitations.

While the framework was successful in predicting the impact of influential allies and elite divisions on mobilization and outcomes of the movements in both countries, it still had many shortcomings in applicability to a non-democratic environment; the downplayed theoretical role of the international context of political opportunities and the under-emphasized function of a free press and information flows. Furthermore, the comparison established that state repression, whose influence on social movements varied substantially between democratic and authoritarian regimes, was found to impact each

movement differently depending on whether other opportunities were present or missing in the environment in which the movement occurred (Schock 1999).

In addition, other scholars argued that the theory failed to address the cultural elements of movements and the environment that they operated within. Culture, and its consequences on the movement's mobilization and outcomes, is underplayed in the political process theory (Staggenborg 2011: 24). There was a dire need to integrate culture and politics; Polletta (2004) argues that "culture" as in agency and "structure" as in politics should not be treated separately. Culture, indeed, as in its definition "the symbolic dimensions of all structures, institutions and practices" (Polletta 2004:100), encompasses political opportunities and restraints that enable, or hinder, collective action.

Additionally to the strategic and structuralist scopes of mobilization, social movement theorists were increasingly concerned with the role of ideas, meanings and culture on collective action (Morris and Mueller 1992; Larana et al. 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). This concern prompted a new discourse in the study of social movement where cultural framing took center stage.

d. Identities and Framing Processes; a synthetic approach

Resource Mobilization theory and Political process theory were viewed sometimes as two distinct models by some scholars (e.g. McAdam 1999), and others went as far as categorizing Political Process theory as a component of a variant of Resource Mobilization theory (Gamson 1996; Oberschall 1978; and Tilly 1973). However, increasingly, the two approaches were becoming more integrated and viewed as part of one evolving perspective while scholars were contributing to the evolution of one synthetic model (McAdam et al. 1988, 1996).

This new synthetic resource mobilization/political process model categorizes social movements as “Political entities aiming to create social change” (Staggenborg 2011: 24). Theorists sympathetic with this model tried to analyze the various features of the movement’s environment, organization and strategies to explain sources of mobilization and outcomes of collective action. In the process, they developed the concepts of ‘framing’ and ‘collective identity’ as a way to capture the magnitude by which meanings and ideas can influence mobilization (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; and Benford and Snow 2000).

‘Frames’ signify interpretive designs that propose a language and cognitive tools for understanding the issues and events in the world that inspire and legitimize collective action (Wiktorowicz 2004), while ‘collective identity’ refers to “the sense of shared experiences and values that connects individuals to movements and gives participants a sense of ‘collective agency’ or feeling that they can effect change through collective action” (Snow 2001). Movement leaders use framing to construct cultural meanings by framing issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight injustices and argue that there is a problem that needs to be addressed; project liability and points to a responsible target who are to blame for the crisis; suggest tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the damage; and offer rationale for mobilization to provoke collective action (Snow and Benford 1986).

In addition to framing, movement leaders created a process that forms and maintains cognitive frameworks, stimulates social relationships among various actors and triggers the commitment of bonding emotions, which lay the foundations for solidarity and collective action (Melucci 1988).

Even though ideas or ideologies may be underlining for collective actions, the lens through which movement's leaders socially construct, grammatically interpret, and articulately deliver these ideas creates the ground for contentious action. The importance of framing and collective identity employment lies in the ability of movement leaders to utilize cultural symbols, language and identities to transform the bystander public, who already understand the problem and see solutions but are not motivated to act, into active participants in the movement (Wiktorowicz 2004:16).

This model could be seen frequently while studying Islamic social movements that are robustly occupied with producing meaning and related framing processes. While research on Islamic activism is deeply rooted in the study of political Islamic social movements, which are concerned with establishing an Islamic state, reality is, these and other Islamic social movements share a common core of aspiring for a society based on the guidance of *Shari'a* law or Islamic teachings and values (Wiktorowicz 2004:16). A state-based approach to study Islamic movements might be only a piece of the puzzle. While having power over and reshaping state institutions could help accomplish an Islamic vision, it is only a partial transformation if a cultural revolution did not get on board. In other words, the state is a means, not an end, to disseminating meanings; in fact, Islamic activism has been known to launch, organize and mobilize through societal means and cultural vehicles rather than through established state institutions or government decision-making entities (Melucci 1996).

One of the most frequently utilized frames in Islamic activism is the multifaceted ill effect of globalization and Westernization on Muslim societies. The infiltration of Western language, attire and ways of living are looked upon as an erodent to Islamic

culture and values. The failed modernization models have brought along negative externalities that only a retreat back to the religious path could rid these impurities and re-establish a healthy Islamic society and righteous Muslim institutions (Wiktorowicz and Taji-Farouki 2000).

Most frames used in Islamic activism stem from this idea and advance to even suggest that this wave of Westernization is a deliberate, imperialistic strategy aimed at controlling and undermining Islamic societies through political, social and military means.

The United Nations and other international institutions; all media vehicles whether written, aired or disseminated online; the global markets with their western culture based products; and the modernization projects implemented by western-puppet rulers, all are framed as means of the imperialistic West to undermine the Muslim identities, societies and countries, and to control their resources (Burgat and Dowell 1993).

Islamic social movements, as well as other social movements, can suffer from the concepts of *frame disputes* and loss of solidarity. The existence of various non-unified actors with a range of ideological prospective in a movement (hard-liners, soft-liners, conservatives and liberals) leads to frequent disagreements, failure to maintain solidarity and contests about the framing schemata, which may lead to tension and decline in collective action (Benford 1993). Such competition not only exists across movements, it is also present within movements themselves where members with varying ideologies tend to push their prospective to be the adopted frame of the movement creating intra-movement divisions in the process (Benford 1993; Benford and Snow 2000, 625-27).

These extrapolative framing disagreements are widespread amongst Islamic activists. The majority will agree upon the need to go to an Islamic way of life and break away from the

West; the way by which this needs to be established is still contested. Some groups, for example, tend to favor the grassroots approach to a personal revolution. The idea is that when an individual goes through a personal discourse and modifies his behavior to reflect Islamic teachings and practices, he sets an example and encourages his family, friends, coworkers and his entire community to follow his lead. Ultimately, this practice will proliferate to incorporate the entire society in which case the ruling government will modify state institutions to reflect the Islamic values of the majority (Wiktorowicz 2004:18). Other groups favor formal political participation and established political parties to directly impact state policies and institutions and launch Islamization from above. They rely upon utilizing grassroots projects in the community to fill gaps of the failed state's modernization initiatives and portray Islam as the solution, in an attempt to gather support for the next local and regional elections (Wickham 1997). Still, other groups have adopted and advanced violent extrapolative frames that call for popular revolutions or direct military coups to topple the Western imposed ruling regimes. The notion that the ruling elites are detached from the populace and are working to advance the imperialistic Western agenda in Muslim countries has been used historically over and over again to create collective identities, promote solidarity and mobilize contentious action (Wiktorowicz 2004).

In addition to intra-movement framing competition, social movements find themselves competing with the state over "official frames" (Noakes 2000). Due to the fact that Arab and Muslim societies are deeply rooted in Islamic doctrine, religious affiliation tends to produce immense authority and legitimacy. Often, military coup induced leaders and kings and princes find it extremely essential to seek legitimacy for decades-long rule

within the scope of the religion. They are constantly engaging in “Muslim politics”; the rivalry over the control of religious institutions and the interpretations of ideas and symbols produced by them (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 5). In an effort to gain legitimacy and ensure survival, regimes tend to control religious establishments to disseminate frames that highlight the idea of individual salvation and downplay the notion of state’s transformation. They tend to adopt a policy of co-optation of mosques, Islamic schools, scholars and religious media outlets to propagate regime frames and individual salvation while limiting all other vehicles that advocate alternative contrary frames and collective identities that might lead to collective action (Wiktorowicz 2004). Failure of state employed scholars to address major economic shortcomings of the government, as well as exposure to other forms of framing and ideas through satellite Islamic TV channels and the internet, led the disappointed public to lose faith in the “official Islam” figures and turn to other reputable community leaders, including Islamic activists who tend to advocate “clandestine frames” through secure personal networks or social sites away from the eyes and ears of the government’s secret services (Tehami 1998).

In conclusion, movements that thrive in constructing swaying and articulate frames, as well as establish solidarity and strong collective identity, can be more effective in attracting members and winning public consent, forming coalitions with other movements and attracting media attention, influencing the state and overcoming the lack of political opportunities (Poletta and Ho 2006).

The utilization of the concepts of framing and collective identity in Islamic activism sheds the light on the cultural and ideational aspect of mobilization. Although the impact

of frames are hard to assess and framing alone can fall short of explaining all dimensions of collective action, nevertheless it is an important tool to understand how grievances are translated and how opportunities are perceived and used as mobilization resources.

This study will be combining the concept of political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, as well as the concept of collective identity and cultural framing in order to bring in ideas and cultural elements into the study of Islamic social movements. In addressing these three general areas, this study hopes to answer key issues in the study of Islamic social movement and how it relates to the subject under study; the Qubaisyate movement.

These key issues will be tackled based on the previous theoretical approaches to studying social movements in three different levels Macro (external), Meso (organizational), and Micro (individual) (Staggenborg 2011).

On the macro level, this study will address how large-scale events and changes modified resources and organizational structures and formed grievances that inspired the formation of Qubaisyate? How cultural and political opportunities aided the emergence of the movement? How shifting political, cultural, and economic dynamics influenced and continue to affect tactics, evolution, and outcomes of the movement? How the Qubaisyate is a factor in large-scale cultural and political changes, which affect successive Islamic activism?

On the Meso level, key issues that will be addressed are what resources, networks, and existent organizational structures were present at the time of the movement's conception? How did its leader Munira Al-Qubaisy utilize societal and material resources, premeditate

and present widely accepted cultural and ideological frames, and design and implement a successful mobilization structure? How does the organizational structure of the movement help expansion and continues to aid the longevity of the movement and affect its strategy and objectives? How were collective identities formed and utilized to distinguish members of the movement from other Syrian citizens at the same time keep them tied to the general public? What forms of interaction did the movement carry with other religious movements, entities, the state, and the media?

Finally, the Micro level will address issues that are concerned with individual members of the movement. How religion was utilized to attract members? How participants adopted the new collective identity and gained a sense of solidarity with the movement and its objectives? Why did participants feel that the gain from joining the Qubaisyate was well worth the risk knowing that the state was targeting all religious activities? How were members of Qubaisyate affected by joining the movement? Why some individuals decide to continue as active members while others cease to participate or even drop out all together?

In addressing these issues, this study anticipates to contribute to the building of the main body of social movement theory in general, as well as, the study of Islamic activism in particular. Building on the previous literature review, this study will help to bridge the chasm between these two traditions and propose a parallel paradigmatic development based on similar concepts that allow for cross-fertilization.

This research aspires to join in the movement to reposition the study of Islamic activism away from the Orientalism approach and view the topic with a consciously theoretical lens that accentuates the legitimacy and rationality of indigenous subject voices.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

It is well known in the research community that some ideas are more difficult to investigate than others; the Qubaisyate ranks on top of the scale of difficulties. This is due to the fact that Syria, as a research location, is guarded by what are called gatekeepers (Feldman, Bell & Burger, 2003), who can hinder or even block formal research in the country.

Since ascending to power in 1963, the Ba'ath ruling regime in Syria has followed a policy of oppression and criminalization of social movements that resulted in an enormous deficiency of formal data on the subject. As a result, press reports, official materials and secondary data on Islamic social movements in Syria are unavailable. Furthermore, this policy had prompted Islamic activists to organize underground and secure social networks, based on trust and social connections, which make accessing these networks for study an impossible mission. The Qubaisyate movement in particular is known to be very exclusive and extremely secretive; utilizing private homes as meeting places away from the reach of the eyes and ears of surveillance apparatus. These conditions make research on Islamic activism in Syria in general and the Qubaisyate movement in particular a challenging assignment and the literature dealing with the subject has been limited for decades. No matter what research on the Qubaisyate movement entails, there is a dire need for close examination of the movement and its members, their social setting, social and religious activities and influence on the Syrian society and beyond. We need to know how these women make sense of themselves, others and their environment by utilizing symbols, rituals, social arrangements, social position and so forth, through tried and trusted systematic methods and tools.

Before exploring the methods that were followed in conducting this research, a look into the researcher's philosophical background will be helpful to understand the research paradigm chosen for this research, which in turn established more coherent and well-developed research strategies and methods for collecting and analyzing data appropriate for such research.

I. The Researcher

Traditionally, what an inquirer brings to research from his background and previous experiences have been known as biases and were seen as an imperfection, and elimination from the design was necessary in order to strengthen the objectivity of the research (Maxwell 2005). For the sake of this research I would beg to differ; my unique personal experiences with the movement, my affiliation with the same social class as its members, my gender, racial, cultural and ethnic prospective make me who I am as a person and a researcher and should serve as a strength and a valuable component for building this research.

In opposition to the traditional view, some scholars argued that separating the personal experience of the researcher cuts off a major source of insights, hypotheses and validity checks and called in favor of using personal experiences of the inquirer to enrich the research under study (e.g., Berg and Smith 1988; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Jansen and Peshkin 1992; Glesne and Peshkin 1992; and Mills 1959).

Many scholars have emphasized the role of the researcher and recognized that all research is essentially biased by each researcher's individual perception (Trochim 2000) and any view is a view from some kind of perspective and, as a result, is fashioned,

screened, translated, distorted and possibly discarded by the information that was previously collected in the researcher's cognitive apparatus (Lythcott and Duschl 1990). This argument, however, did not serve as a license to uncritically enforce my assumption and values on the research, but rather, it provided me with the needed awareness to use the richness of my experiences as part of the inquiry process and raise it to consciousness without being overwhelmed or swept away by it. Acknowledging my subjectivity in this research early on motivated me to be extra cautious in assessing any implications that this subjectivity might entail on my methods and conclusions later on.

II. Theoretical Paradigms and prospective

Knowing that I cannot fully separate myself from the phenomenon I am studying, I tend to adopt a subjectivist ontological point of view when it comes to gaining knowledge about the world around me. This stand has made me more inclined towards choosing qualitative research measures in tackling the research under study. I prefer a "hands on" approach to knowledge and feel that I have personal interests, abilities and skills that qualitative fieldwork requires.

Studying the Qubaisyate movements involved a great deal of interaction to understand the phenomenon closely from the point of view of its members. Furthermore, I have chosen a process research question, which asks to examine the process by which the Qubaisyate movements are rising in Syria and showing how that occurred. Qualitative research is usually better at explaining how this process works and the outcome of such events (Maxwell 2005).

My interests and abilities, the process research question I have chosen for this study and the compatibility of qualitative inquiry to address my research questions and hypotheses,

made qualitative strategy the appropriate method for tackling the research under study and a qualitative-based research design most suitable.

I have not taken an extreme philosophical stand in my research, as in advocating constructivism over positivism, I am more pragmatic; I believe research philosophy to be a continuum, and objective and subjective perspectives should not be mutually exclusive. Accordingly, I have addressed my research problem through testing the hypotheses using primary qualitative data, but was open to the use of any secondary quantitative data when available and appropriate.

III. Research Design and Strategies

Research questions and research goals are the initial cornerstone of this research design because everything in the research should come back to address and assess these questions (see appendix B). Due to the fact that the objective of this study is to examine an in-depth, real-life, contemporary social phenomenon, over which the investigator has no control, and the research question is presented in a “How” and “Why” format, consequently, the most appropriate method that facilitates a deep investigation of such a phenomenon was a *case study* (Yin 2012). A holistic single-case study approach was targeted and utilized as a revelatory case to concentrate the research effort on the single unit of analysis, which is the movement of the Qubaisyate in Syria. The rationale behind choosing a single case study was generated by the opportunity given to me as an investigator to examine this phenomenon up close and personal; a fate that has not been accessible to the social science inquiry before, which makes it a valuable revelatory case to advance knowledge of the research community.

This study is deductive in nature and follows a “Theory-before-data” design by constructing a preliminary theory deducted from the major theoretical literature on social movements, which made a case study design the most appropriate strategy among methods (Yin 2012).

IV. Methods of collection

The data collected for this study used a *data triangulation* technique (Berg 2009), which constituted the use of primary and secondary data collected through three different resources: interviews, observations and documents.

The primary data was mostly collected using *semi-structured interviews* conducted with active and former members of the movement. The interviews followed an *in-depth* and *open-ended* format to gain insights into why the women were attracted to join the movement and to keep enough flexibility so the women can share their experience freely regarding their membership in the Qubaisyate.

The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and took place in the women’s own homes. After all, the movement itself utilizes its members’ homes for meetings and study circles where women usually feel safe and comfortable to talk about their experiences and relationship with Islam and the Qubaisyate movement. Other interviews were conducted on-line or over the phone due to the travel restrictions imposed by the country’s on-going civil war. Furthermore, an ethics clearance was obtained from Rutgers University to conduct interviews and was secured before initiating the interview stage process.

In addition to interviewing, I have utilized observation techniques to examine members outside the formal interview situation and got insights on the effect of their membership

on their day-to-day lives and interactions with others. I thought that observing women outside the formal interview setting could better inform of the true self of the women beyond the pious self that they might feel obliged to project during our official interview. Aside from formal interviewing and observation, a less formal technique of collecting data was utilized. For instance, information collected from the socio-cultural context in the country was observed and documented; the presence of Islamization in the street whether in the changed attire of men and women to reflect a more Islamic identity and the presence of religious educational and commercial materials enforcing that identity on the general population. Moreover, conducting informal interviews with street patrons or even shop-keepers (especially men) have shed light on what men and non-members of the movement think of this widely present social phenomenon and the religious trends it is setting in the community, and why they think women are joining the Qubaisyate and what do they understand of the movement. These informal interviews enabled me to understand how society at large and men perceive the Qubaisyate movement and have clearly defined the boundaries between the “cultural”, “official” and the Islamic message promoted by the Qubaisyate in Syria.

The secondary data for this research was mostly collected from Western and Arabic publications written about the movement as well as the few publicly available data on the Internet discussing the topic. Data and publication concerning the effect of Islamic revival in the Middle East on the political discourse of the Syrian regime to shift from secularization to promoting Islam was conducted from news articles, official press releases and other publications to examine the tactics in which the secular Ba’ath regime exercised in dealing with Syrian Islamic movements, from its rise to power in 1963 to its

victory over the Muslim Brotherhood in the battle of Hama in 1982, to establish a background for the birth of the Qubaisyate in Syria. Afterwards, data was collected to highlight the shifts in the government's attitude towards Syrian Islamic movements after this victory, particularly, the relationship between the commands of Hafiz Al-Asad and his son, Bashar Al-Asad, and the Qubaisyate Islamic women movement.

In addition to the previous methods, I have conducted a *content analysis* on a considerable number of materials written by members of the Qubaisyate, including prayer booklets, religious books, pamphlets and other materials, which I have assembled from previous trips to Syria or obtained from various Internet sites, in order to understand the difference between the “official”, “mainstream” and the Qubaisyate Islamic message in the country.

Taking into consideration the gatekeepers that hinder fieldwork in Syria, the lack of previous research and literature focusing on the topic of Islamic revivalism in the country, as well as the ongoing civil war, all combined have truly made field research in Syria an unsafe mission. Data collection techniques were thought of very carefully in order to jump through the hoops and reflect all of these obstacles; the Internet was utilized to a great degree to overcome these research difficulties.

Due to the current political situation and the sensitivity against Islamic social movements by the government, I have conducted all of my interviews “off the record.” Given the sensitive issues dealt with in this study, as well as the Syrian regime's history of conflict with the country's Islamic movement, I have faced tremendous difficulty in convincing active members to give an interview, even if they remained totally anonymous. I have made extra efforts to convince and explain fully to the participant of how I would be

using the information provided and have emphasized the freedom of the interviewees to remain unidentified or not be quoted at all.

I have constantly utilized my strong connections to the movement and my own unique position within the socio-cultural fabric of the Syrian society as a fellow Syrian, a woman and a member of the same social class to help me create both trust and legitimacy to gain access to initial contacts with current members, who, in turn, put me in touch with others and facilitated the process of snowballing to gain access to higher ranking members in the movement. I have also utilized my societal and family ties to establish rapport and start the interviews with informal conversations, which helped tremendously to find common intersections and make the women more talkative. For instance, some of the women I interviewed attended the same high school as I did, had been my neighbors, childhood friends, married to a friend and so on.

V. Methods of Analysis

The hypotheses proposed by this study were tested through a *process tracing* technique (Yin 2009) by exploring the chain of events by which the initial case conditions were translated into case outcomes. A close examination of the cause-effect link that connects the rising influence of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East on Syria (IV) and the outcomes and effects on the rise of The Qubaisyate in the country (DV) was unwrapped and divided into smaller steps; the effect on the government's policy, the influence on the movement's leader and structure and the permeation of the Islamic message in Syria. In turn, each of these steps were examined further for observable evidence linking the stimulus (IV) to the outcome (DV) within the sequence and structure of events and in the testimony of actors explaining the motives behind their actions.

Moreover, the use of *chronological time-series analysis* was very beneficial to trace the movement's inception, rise and continuation over time, as well as to cover and analyze the chronological sequence by which the multiple variables had influenced the rise of the Qubaisyate in Syria. The analytical goal aspired to by combining these techniques was to compare the chronology of events presented by the raw data with that previously predicted by the proposed explanatory theory of this study.

Furthermore, qualitative raw data for this study was transcribed into text, translated from Arabic into English, coded and analyzed using *content analysis* techniques in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings. This step was performed using a *social anthropological approach* (Berg 2009) where information collected from the field (e.g. relationships, behavior, rituals and language use) was additionally analyzed to further our knowledge about the movement in its natural setting and how it relates to the initial conceptualizations of the study.

VI. Validity

Being aware of what Bosk (1979: 193) once said: "All fieldwork done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?" I had to address the issue of validity of this research, knowing the extreme involvement of myself as a researcher in this project. I have for the duration of this study constantly posed the questions: how might I be wrong and what other alternative hypotheses might the research generate that I need to address the plausibility of?

I started this study with an Idea, which was purely a product of my own experience.

Knowing that this whole research is based on my personal experience, personal

interaction with participants and personal selection and analysis of data compelled me to address the topic of subjectivity of the researcher (Maxwell 2005).

Due to the fact that I had to utilize my social connections to gain access to interview members of the movement, as well as employ my linguistic skills to conduct, translate and analyze these interviews, it was impossible for me to eliminate my values, beliefs and perceptual lens. What I did do, however, was to recognize the influence of these biases and aim for minimizing the negative effects of these predetermined conceptions while maximizing the positive benefits on the research.

Another threat to the validity of this research was the *reactivity* (Maxwell 2005) of the women I had interviewed, where the participants sometimes felt influenced to say or act in a manner to please me as a researcher. Unfortunately, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) stated, eliminating the actual influence of the researcher on the participants is an impossible task, nevertheless, I have constantly aimed to understand such influence as I progressed through my interview stages and tried to use it in productive, constructive and meaningful ways while cautiously avoiding leading questions and comments.

In order to maximize the validity of this research, I have embarked on a long journey of exploring literature concerned with research validity that armed me with the tools necessary to deal with any validity concerns of this research. Some scholars (Becker 1970; Kidder 1981; Patton 1990; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Miles and Huberman 1994; and Maxwell 2005) have created checklists to deal with the issue of research validity that I have kept as a compass for my data collection, analysis and conclusions. Although I have followed their advice in using a triangulation method to increase validity for conducting my data, I was still unsatisfied as my selections of techniques (interviews,

observations and documents) were all subject to the self-report bias of the researcher. In order to overcome this issue, I planned an approach of systematically soliciting feedback about the data and conclusions from the women I was interviewing to make sure that what I was interpreting and concluding was, in reality, what was going on. Furthermore, I established a non-formal feedback committee that comprised a member of the Qubaisyate who is currently active, an ex-member of the movement that is no longer active or affiliated, a Syrian Muslim man and a Syrian Christian woman that have no relationship to the movement and served only as cultural observant to the phenomenon under study. In conclusion, the issue of validity has accompanied every step of this research in order to present a well-balanced study worthy of joining other Islamic movement literature in the vast library of social movement studies.

VII. Chapters Outline

Before wrapping up this introduction, I would like to give a layout and a concise overview of the chapters of this research to serve as a skeleton for the organization of this study.

Chapter Four starts by providing an account of the historical roots of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East in general, and Syria in particular, and sets out the environment that gave birth to the Qubaisyate movement. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the political opportunity created by the state and follows the Ba'ath regime's discourse from promoting secularism to co-opting social religious movements and how the Qubaisyate movement reacted and adapted to each of these periods in order to survive and flourish in the country. This chapter concludes by analyzing the applicability and relevancy of

Political opportunity framework in explaining the mobilization and rise of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in Syria.

Chapter Five starts by examining the background and life of the movement entrepreneur, Munira Al-Qubaisy, and explores the effect of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East on her ideology and decision making process. Furthermore, this chapter examines the organizational structure of the Qubaisyate and how it influenced the movement's activities and recruitment tactics, which attracted great numbers of women to join the movement. This chapter concludes by analyzing the applicability and relevancy of resource mobilization framework in explaining the mobilization and rise of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in Syria by examining the available resources that determined the movement's longevity and durability in a hostile political environment. Chapter Six starts by providing an account of the several variations on the Islamic message in the Middle East in general and Syria in particular, and sets the background to the sources of the Qubaisyate Islamic message and frames. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the roots of the 'collective agency' founded by the Qubaisyate movement, which enabled it to become a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria and beyond. This chapter concludes by analyzing the applicability and relevancy of identity and framing approach in explaining the mobilization and rise of the Qubaisyate, as well as the outcomes of the movement.

The last chapter presents an overall evaluation of the research conducted by linking the three intermediate hypotheses together to paint an overall picture of the rise and growth of the Qubaisyate movement and provides reflections on the ramifications of this study on Islamic activism discourse, global policy implications and future research endeavors.

Chapter Four: State Centered Approach

Introduction

This hypothesis, based on political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, emphasizes the role of the state and the political environment it generates on the Qubaisyate materialization and longevity. The focus is on the degree of openness or closeness that the Syrian political system enjoys and to what extent it allows access to its institutions and substantive entities.

This hypothesis argues that the Ba'ath regime, in an attempt to offset the pressure of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East, based on the growth of social religious movements in Syria and to prevent it from transforming into militant religious opposition, had relied on a policy of co-optation and state-sponsored Islam to limit popular unrest whilst ensuring its popularity among the majority urban Sunni Muslims in the country. The state has chosen to modify its behavior from being a strong advocate of secularism and attempting to grind down its Islamist rivals, to promoting Islamic revivalism through the religious bourgeoisie and excommunicating their loyal left wing associates. This behavior modification came in the form of numerous attempts to reposition the state's image from a secular dictatorship to a Shari'a based popular governing apparatus. As a result, new state-Islamic dynamics were born in Syria to enable the state to hold a monopoly over the fastest growing sector in Syrian society, the Islamist movements. This aspect of the study, therefore, will concentrate on the constant efforts of the ruling command to reach a state of equilibrium in Syria by ensuring its survival while controlling the growing threat of Islamic movements in the country, including the Qubaisyate.

I. Islamic Revival in the Middle East

a. Historical background

The resurgence of the trend to return to Islamic roots in the Middle East is not a unique phenomenon to our contemporary era. An Islamic renaissance has been a reoccurring pattern in Islamic history with consecutive periods of quietness and resurrection. The current segment of Islamic revival can be viewed as in compliance with the recurring emergence of revivalist movements reaching back to the era of early Islam that call for a return to the fundamentals of the faith (Dekmejian 1995). The fundamentals of the faith refer to the teachings and religious commandments found in what is known in Islam as *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. The *Qur'an* is the accumulation of the words of god in the holy book of Islam as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. *Sunnah* is the collection of sayings and verbal statements of the Prophet, which is known as *Hadith*, and the practices, deeds and judgments performed by the Prophet throughout his life, narrated by his close companions, and passed on as narrative traditions to the current era.

The contemporary wave of Islamic revivalism took root in the beginning of the 1900s when Arab Muslims were fed up of Ottoman misrule and the decline of the Muslim empire in the face of Christian European imperialism. An Islamic reform movement, known as *Al-Salafiyah*, took place all over the ailing body of the Ottoman Empire by the hands of its Arab subjects. A call to the return of the fundamentals of Islam, Pan-Islamic solidarity and resistance to European imperialism was carried on by many charismatic personalities who became known as the pillars of Islamic revivalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Jamal al-Deen al-Afghani, his disciple Mohammed Abdo and Abdo's disciple Rashid Ridha, were known as the essence of the *Salafiyah* Movement in the Muslim and Arab world (Dekmejian 1995).

The *Salafiyah* movement had started as a moderate, reformist and intellectual movement concentrating on using the technical innovations and intellectual advancement of the West to better the daily lives of Muslims in the Middle East within an Islamic context. Slowly, this movement was transformed from its non-violent nature into a rigid, conservative and revolutionary movement after the death of its founders and the political tension during the intra war period.

The mid 1930s was a period plagued by political turmoil, socio-economic decline and European imperialism in the Arab and Muslim world, which promoted the rise of yet another cycle of Islamic revivalism carried by a plethora of Islamic renewal movements in the Arab and Muslim world.

The closing stages of World War II gave rise to the revolutionary Muslim Brotherhood movement, under Hasan AL-Banna of Egypt, which substituted the moderate revivalism *Salafiyah* movement in the Middle East signaling a new form of radical Islamic revival (Dekmejian 1995). The Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the main catalyst to Islamic revival in the Arab World, followed by a wave of *Shi'ia* militancy movements in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and some Gulf States, which rose as a result of the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of a long awaited Islamic state. Furthermore, the Iranian Revolution gave rise to a balancing Sunni reaction to offset the growing *Shi'ia* influence in the Muslim world by mobilizing some Sunni fundamentalist groups, such as the *Wahhabis* in Saudi Arabia (Dekmejian 1995).

b. Origins of contemporary Islamic Revival

National and global politics played a major role in feeding the growth of Islamic revivalist movements in the Middle East and Muslim countries.

The Cold War and the robust quest of the United States to eliminate communism, the movements that supports its ideology, and national left-wing governments in the Arab World, led to major unbalancing events in the area and to some unlikely alliances.

A military coup in Iran against Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953 eliminated a populist government, a coup in Indonesia in 1965 eradicated the communist party, the support of Mujahedin in Afghanistan against the left-wing government, the alliance with dictatorship governments in Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as the coalition with *Wahhabi* influenced royals of Saudi Arabia, all facilitated the decline of communism and the opportunity for an Islamic ideology to take center stage (Dekmejian 1995).

Due to the secular ideology of the communist movement it made enemies with many Muslim scholars and clerics who called on the Muslim public to reject this spread of satanic ideas carried within the teachings of the socialist ideology. The belief that secularism promoted the idea of rejecting the existence of God crossed a very sensitive red line for Muslims, regardless of their degree of adherence to religion.

Furthermore, the major defeat of the Arabs by Israel in 1967 marked an era of a change in ideology in the Arab world where the general thinking revolved around the idea that God had abandoned Arabs in the battle field because they had abandoned him by adopting secular and socialist ideologies. The idea of religion in politics, 'Victory will not be achieved unless God is on our side; and to be on our side, we have to be on His side,' started to grow, and Islamist groups started to gain stronger ground all over the region.

Additionally, the United States has enticed various Arab and Middle Eastern governments in the 1970s with multiple incentives to encourage the Islamic tide as a counter-balancing act, in a hope to neutralize the influence of communism. For example, Sadat in Egypt had set free Islamist Muslim Brotherhood prisoners after being previously incarcerated by the Nasser left wing government. Iranian and Turkish governments followed suit and released their Islamist prisoners in the 70s and 80s. Moreover, Islamic education in some Middle Eastern countries became compulsory in public schools to spread Islamic ideas in a sustained effort to rid the public and society of Marxist ideologies and doctrine (Moghadam 2009).

Furthermore, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the establishment of an Islamic government in 1979 inspired multitudes of Islamists throughout the region to peruse the dream of an Islamic state run by a governing body based on *Shari'a* and Islamic doctrine. As a result, Islamists assassinated Sadat of Egypt in 1981, the Mujahedin in Afghanistan overthrew the communist government of Najibullah in 1992 and Islamists networks were in full bloom all over the Muslim world at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reigning of Islam over the socialist ideology.

Meanwhile, a new rising star was being introduced to the global arena; an emergent new international neo-liberal economic order was reshaping the international political economy. The shift of local economies from a socialist model and a state-centered development to the introduction of privatization and economic liberalization had created economic conditions resulting in concentrations of wealth, social inequality, corruption and unemployment throughout the Muslim world (Moghadam 2009). This new economic order was transforming Middle Eastern societies and reshuffling the economic

equilibrium by impoverishing the middle class while creating a nouveau riche bourgeoisie class.

The new policy of liberal economic and modernization did not come unaccompanied; a wave of globalization carrying Western cultural attributes swept Arabic and Muslim societies spreading secularization, the application of foreign languages as well as Western attire and ideas. The wave of Western globalization that swept the region using social, economic, political and even military vehicles became the trigger for creating a sense of cultural imperialism and religious inferiority. These circumstances, in turn, produced the belief that Islam was under attack by the West through undermining the culture of Muslim societies.

In addition, the West was also blamed for weakening Middle Eastern and Islamic governments by replacing some with Western proxies, supporting unpopular dictatorships and even occupying and dominating Muslim countries to extract their natural resources (Burgat and Dowell 1993; Wiktorowicz and Taji-Farouki 2000). As a result, Middle Eastern and Muslim countries became plagued with decades of Western-backed authoritarian rule; cracking down on civil society as a whole, outlawing opposition parties and criminalizing political dissidents, in order to hold on to power in countries ailed by social and economic collapse.

The dynamics of the Cold War, the introduction of a neoliberal economic order and the infiltration of globalization in Muslim and Middle Eastern countries, combined with decades of authoritarian regime rule and political oppression, resulted in a deterioration of social and economic quality of life, with no appropriate political channel to voice grievances, which created a sense of political impotence and alienation and made Islamic

activism the only vehicle in which individuals could use as an effective political option in the Middle East (Wiktorowicz 2004).

c. Islamic revival in Syria

Contemporary Islamic revival in Syria had lived in the same context as its counterpart in the neighboring countries of the Middle East. There have been no noteworthy movements in the country other than the Syrian branch of the main Muslim Brotherhood movement. The Muslim brotherhood of Syria started as an offshoot of the movement carrying the same name in Egypt, which was formed by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928 as a reaction to Western domination in Egypt and with an aim to overthrow the Western influenced government in Cairo (Gambill 2006).

The Egyptian movement gained public support in the 1940s as anti-Western feeling swept the whole area in a reaction to the developing situation in Palestine, which represented a Western attack on Arabs and Muslims at the same time. Soon enough, the movement started gaining support in neighboring Arabic countries such as Jordan and Syria. The Syrian branch was established in the mid-1940s by a group of Muslim scholars who studied in Egypt and were exposed to the ideas of the movement during their stay in the country.

The movement's ties to traditional Islam were greatly welcomed by the majority Sunni Muslims in Syria, who attributed their economic success and wealth to God's blessings and their devotion to their religion. Although Islam was a major pillar in the lives of Syrians, it was a personal relationship with God and didn't go past the walls of their houses and mosques.

Syria, throughout the ages, was known for its tolerance of other religions and nations; Muslims had lived and worked side by side with Christians, Jews and many other religions and sects dwelling in the cities and villages.

Throughout history, political situations were dealt with through the emphasis on the ideology of nationality rather than religion. Syrians of all religious beliefs had fought numerous wars as a single unit for the good of the country as a whole. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood came to emphasize the difference between citizens and declared holy war between Arab Muslims and the allies of the Christian West and Jewish Israel in the country.

While the Egyptian Brethren became very active in Egypt, viewing democracy as a Western idea to be discarded, and started to take on a more aggressive role, such as the failed attempt to assassinate President Jamal Abdul Nasser in 1954, the Syrian branch participated in Syrian political life and established itself as an opposition member in the Syrian parliament and stayed tolerant throughout the 1940s and 1950s with no known involvement in any radical actions (Gambill 2006).

The actions of its sister branch in Egypt soon fired back when Syria and Egypt united to form the United Arab Republic in 1958 under the rule of the Egyptian president Jamal Abdul Nasser, who banned the movement in both countries due to its actions in Egypt. The collapse of the union in 1961 lifted the ban and brought the movement back to be active in the political life of Syria.

Change came to awaken the beast when the Ba'ath party, carrying a socialist secular agenda, ascended to power in 1963 and banned the movement from participating in Syria's political scene.

The new government tightened its control over religious institutions and mosques to weaken the social support for the movement, limited freedoms of all kind and political pluralism by a declaring of a state of emergency, while introducing economic policies and a campaign of nationalization that stripped the Sunni commercial class of its established prosperity and weakened its influence in the country.

The transformation of the government's attitude was echoed in the movement through resorting to violence as a mean to push its ideas and demands in an atmosphere where political contest had proved pointless. The movement took up arms against the government in 1964, however, its poor training and equipment shortage proved useless in the face of the government's strong and well-trained armed forces. The movement's leader went into exile while its members moved their operations underground to prepare for a jihad against the "apostate regime" (Rubin 2007).

The political events in the area and the war with Israel cooled the internal struggle in the country while all parties were watching major events in history unfold. The major defeat of the Arabs by Israel in 1967 marked an era of a shift in ideology in the Arab world, forming secular Pan-Arabism into religion as a savior. The idea of religion in politics started to grow, and Islamists groups started to gain stronger ground all over the region.

In Egypt, the new president Anwar Al-Sadat recognized this new tie between the masses and the Muslim Brotherhood and tried to take a different direction from the one taken by his predecessor, Nasser. Sadat allowed the movement to resume its activities, which Nasser had previously banned, and permitted their publications to reach a wide range of audiences while shutting down the press of the Lefties who were hammering him for not following the footsteps of Nasser (Gambill 2006).

This major support in Egypt encouraged the movement elsewhere, including Syria, and disseminated the religious idiom as the idiom of political discourse in the Arab world.

While Syria was watching the events unfold on the Egyptian front, Hafiz Al-Asad became president of Syria in 1970 denoting a new era of hands-off Sunni control over the government's top ranking positions, leading to an aggravated Sunni majority to see the Alawite minority taking control of the source of their economic prosperity, and an empowered Muslim Brotherhood threatening a change in the balance of power.

II. Government Discourse

a. Secularism: Ba'ath rise to power (1963-1970)

Syria's unique history, geographic location and religious and ethnic mix have turned it into a melting pot of various ideologies. Throughout history, the Syrian constitution reflected this diversity by leaning towards a secular path, as well as keeping *Shari'a* as the main source of jurisprudence. The constitution was leaning towards secularism, in a sense that it guaranteed freedom of faith, separated religious practice from state institutions, and did not promulgate Islam as an official religion, although it required the president to be a Muslim (Khatib 2011). Secularism, in a way, was essential to bond Syrians around national unity, with its ability to transcend ethnic and religious idiosyncrasy, by affirming an inclusive political identity.

This held true until the Ba'ath party's ascendance to power in 1963, which brought in a different form of secularism; based on increasing the social base of the working-class populace, as well as a new economic agenda pushing towards state socialism.

The Ba'ath party advanced the dictum of *Wahda, Huryah, Ishterakyah* (Unity, Freedom and Socialism). Unity was affirmed by the notion of Syrians abandoning their existing divisive sectarian, religious and tribal identities and uniting with the greater Arab world, with whom they share the same language and history; freedom was asserted by the notion of the right of Syrians to sovereignty and to live in a country free of foreign occupation or influence; and socialism meant social equality for all Syrian citizens, and was promoted as the mechanism for ethically civilizing the masses and replacing the existent religiously driven morality.

The Ba'ath party steered clear of intertwining Islam and Arab identity, opting to delineate Arab nationalism, absent from religion in general and the Sunni Islam in particular, through stressing secular values that took away religion's role in Syrian society in an effort to construct a practical, non-reactionary, non-religious and non-sectarian identity for the Syrian public (Khatib 2011).

When it came to religion and government, the Ba'ath party, with its Marxist vision, was suspicious of the existing influence of religious clerics in the administration and tried to follow a path of dismantling religious bureaucracy and implementing a strictly security-focused approach. The initiatives taken to implement this policy started by replacing the Grand *Mufti* (the highest religious icon in government) Abu Al-Yusr Abdin, who was viewed as antagonistic by the Ba'ath party, with Ahmad Kaftaru, a religious cleric who was well known for his submissive character. Furthermore, in 1965, the prerogatives of the clerical councils were transferred to the Minister of *Awqaf* (Religious Endowments), signaling an end to the formal committee of 'high clergies,' which was the country's senior Muslim scholars representative board endowed with a sense of responsibility toward the state (Pierret 2013).

In addition, the religious sector fell behind when it came to representation and development in the Ba'ath social and economic agenda. Multitudes of unions and syndicates were established to represent factions of society such as laborers, teachers, engineers, farmers, women and the youth, with representatives to the main body of national congress, while religious clerics and clergies were neither represented, nor organized, in a fashion similar to other societal groups.

Furthermore, the religious sector fell short of the trail of development that targeted societal and economic sectors of the country (Pierret 2013). The ministry of *Awqaf* (Religious Endowments) suffered severe shortages of employees due to the disadvantages and lack of benefits compared to the civil servants of other sectors in the country.

In a way, the Ba'ath regime was intentionally trying to reshuffle the social order in the country and to replace the existing foundation of society, which consisted of religious clerics and notable Sunni families, by establishing a new social and economic infrastructure that would, in turn, generate a social order based on diversity and communism.

The Ba'ath economic program was populist and aimed at achieving full social and economic transformation through the implementation of agricultural reform, through partially co-operatizing land under state control as well as funding infrastructure projects and the agro-industrial economy. This economic policy was designed to achieve a total redistribution of resources, by regulating ownership of land and of small industries, nationalizing of public entities, major industries, and medium-sized companies (such as gas, oil, and transportation), as well as canceling all companies, foreign concessions and increasing state control over foreign trade (Article 29 of the Ba'ath constitution).

The Ba'ath's economic populist agenda was very attractive to the marginalized rural population, ethnic and religious minorities, and to the lower and middle classes, while having severe tangible consequences on the notable families, the old urban mercantile class, landowners and political elites in the country. Policies such as the nationalization of industries, increased state control over foreign trade, restriction of imports and the implementation of a socialist fiscal policy, as well as price regulations and a subsistence

peasant policy, all contributed to irritating the notable families and was seen as an attack on business and property as a whole (Pierret 2013).

The urban, traditional elite felt that their cities and sources of wealth were being taken over by the ethnic and religious minorities storming from nearby villages due to the rapid social and political changes implemented by the Ba'ath party. This sense was further fanned in 1970 by the rise of Hafez Al-Asad, a member of the Alawite minority group, to power through a bloodless *coup d'état* called the Corrective Movement (*Al-Haraka AL-Tas'hehya*), marking an era of hands-off politics for the traditional Sunni families.

In keeping with the programme of his Ba'ath party, Al-Asad published a draft of a new constitution stripping Islam of the special status it has enjoyed for decades under the previous constitution. Furthermore, Asad's new constitution proposed broadening the clause that asserted the non-promulgation of Islam as an official religion and to remove the requirement of the president of Syria to be a Muslim. This amendment meant that non-Muslim minorities, Christians of all denominations as well as seculars and atheists could run for the Presidency of Syria and hold the power of the majority Sunni population. This action furthermore enraged the by now dissatisfied and disenfranchised great traditional notable families, old urban merchants and landowners as well as the *ulama* (religious clergies) and Political elites.

As a result, political Islam became an appealing idea to the traditional Sunni families in Syria; because it appeared to be the only possible vehicle that reflected these social and religious classes' values, whilst also holding out the possibility of a return to the old social, political and economic order and uniting them with a big segment of the urban masses against their Ba'ath antagonist (Hinnebusch 1982).

b. Confrontation: The Muslim Brotherhood (1970-1982)

These changes in the area, and within the borders of Syria, started to give birth to small and intermittent armed clashes between the ‘Sunni Islam backed’ Muslim Brotherhood and the secular government, which escalated at the end of the 1970s to become well organized, large urban demonstrations accompanied by violence and the burning of government buildings, as well as a wave of assassinations of top political Ba’ath leaders, army cadets and Alawite influential figures.

The situation reached its climax with the failed assassination of President Asad in 1980. The government sought revenge by launching a campaign of the arbitrary arrest of members of the movement, their entire families, friends and neighbors, or anyone vaguely associated with them. Furthermore, “Law 49” was passed on July 7th 1980 punishing all members of the Muslim Brotherhood with the maximum punishment allowed by law, which was the death penalty (MacFarquhar 2000).

The Defense Companies, a group of elite army cadets led by the President’s brother, opened fire killing nearly 700 hundred members of the Brotherhood that were incarcerated at the infamous Tadmur prison in the middle of the Syrian desert.

Additionally, the Defense Company went on a killing spree of hundreds of males over fourteen years of age in the cities and neighborhoods known to harbor members of the movement, which led to a wave of strikes, demonstrations and increased violence in Sunni areas.

Government stores and buildings were vandalized and burned by members of the Muslim Brotherhood in major cities of the country spreading revolution seeds up in the air (MacFarquhar 2000).

Syria was witnessing intense domestic unrest and the loss of stability. People were afraid to leave their houses to go to work, in fear that they would be caught up in middle of one of the Government's vicious raids or be killed if the Brethren suspected them of being a Government spy. Fulfilling daily living requirements became suicide missions for average Syrian citizens. An all-out war was in place within the civilian neighborhoods in Syria and victims were falling by the dozen everyday including army officers, Brotherhood members and innocent bystanders.

As the confrontations continued, the Brethren recruited more people who were enraged by the loss of a brother or a friend, and the Government became more brutal in its campaign to suppress the uprising. The clash between the two sides came to an ultimate confrontation in 1982 when the Syrian city of Hama was seized completely by the Muslim Brotherhood, who then executed top Government and Ba'ath party members of the city and declared it as a liberated city beyond the control of the Government and urged its citizens to rise against the 'infidels' (MacFarquhar 2000).

With this clear declaration of war against the Government, the regime in Damascus immediately mobilized units of the army and the Special Forces to recapture the city and bring it under control.

The Regime started by blockading the city to prevent people from receiving adequate food and medical supplies, shutting off all communications between the city and the rest of the country and launching a bloody attack, after warning civilians to leave the city if they didn't want to get hurt. The assault on the city of Hama included warplanes, tanks and bulldozers that leveled entire residential neighborhoods, including the city's historic center.

The 'intelligent services', commanded by the President's younger brother, launched a campaign of massive arrests of the city's civilians who were suspected of having ties with the Brotherhood, most of them never returned and no information was provided to their families from the Government about their whereabouts, till present day this information has never been provided. This campaign was accompanied by torture, humiliation and even execution of the suspects.

Whole sections of the city were destroyed on top of their inhabitants. Businesses were ambushed and vandalized by Government forces, especially pharmacies to prevent the injured and wounded from seeking care. Hospitals became death houses where government forces were stationed to finish off the incoming injured and wounded. Entire families, men, women and children, were rounded up, tortured and executed. Others were led to detention centers where they were subjected to inhumane treatment consisting of the deprivation of food, water and sleep for several days, as well as humiliation and torture.

Women and children were not spared the violence. Although it was not systematic, rape was a frequent occurrence, and execution of women and girls who resisted and fought back was been reported. Children were made to stand and witness the execution of their family members, if their life was indeed spared.

Religious symbols, churches as well as mosques, were destroyed to prevent civilians from seeking shelter and to prevent insurgents from using them as mobilizing centers.

Terror was the regime's main tool to break down the spirit of the members of the Brotherhood and their supporters. Mutilated bodies of victims were scattered in full view

and under the watchful eyes of the army preventing families from burying their loved ones, leaving the corpses to become a meal for hungry street dogs (Quiades 2009).

The siege lasted twenty-seven days and the result was casualties amounting to between 15,000 and 25,000, imprisonment of thousands of Brotherhood members who vanished without a trace and a magnitude of people fleeing the country to neighboring Arab countries, Europe and the United States. A total wipeout of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters marked the beginning of an era of a brutal authoritarian government with no domestic opposition.

c. Co-optation: state-sponsored Islam (1982-2004)

The Syrian regime's encounter with the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982 produced both crisis and opportunity. On one hand, Syria was transformed into a true police state; the Government adopted a zero tolerance attitude toward any public gathering regardless of being secular or Islamic. An army of private eyes roamed the country and a barrage of reports were mounted on the desks of the Secret Service detailing every citizen's comments about the Government or the President, written by Government spies against their neighbors, family members, friends or any innocent person with whom they had a social conflict. Being reported meant days of interrogation where no one had the slightest idea regarding the person's whereabouts or they were still alive. Upon completion of the interrogation period, the person would either be found guilty and then proceed to become one of the many who vanished without trace in one of the country's infamous prisons, or would be found innocent with no ties to any party, but regardless to be taught a lesson through days of torture, just as a reminder not to consider joining any political party in

the future. Fear and suspicion became the daily bread of Syrians around the country. Citizens learned to mind their own business and to never get involved in any political discussions. They found themselves under the pressure to hide their basic religious beliefs and to continually show support of the regime in public as a way to deter any future trouble and prove their loyalty, even if they felt otherwise. The Government's aggressive raid on the Brotherhood ensured the removal of every trace they had in the country and ensured the regime's survival for years to come with no domestic opposition whatsoever.

On the other hand, the regimes realized that in a country with a population of 75 percent Sunni Muslim, the power of Islam combined with suppression could generate a death sentence to the regime. There was a necessity, not only to fill the religious vacuum generated after the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood, to create a peaceful religious vehicle for the majority Sunnis to exercise their religious needs in a peaceful, passive way under the watchful eyes of the Government.

For that reason, in the 1980s, the Syrian regime adopted a strategy of a 'state-sponsored Islam' to control the vehicles by which the Muslim Brotherhood used to recruit members. Government money was spent to build mosques, religious schools, sponsor Quran recitation competitions and subsidize higher religious education. Islamic teachers and preachers were appointed by the government to teach in religious schools and to lead prayers in mosques.

Furthermore, the 1990s witnessed the prime of the government's official sponsorship of Islam, when tolerance for greater public religious observance, such as wearing the *hijab* for women and attending the mosque by men for daily prayer, was increasing.

In an attempt to prevent the mosque from becoming a source of rebellion, the surveillance service kept a close eye on every religious institution and gathering to ensure that every appointed person was doing what he was supposed to do. All mosques had their *Imams* (Islamic preachers) licensed by the Ministry of *Awqaf* (Religious Endowments), and their Friday sermons were pre-screened, monitored and fashioned to present Quranic exegesis denouncing Syria's enemies as well as praising of the Syrian ruling regime (Emre 2010).

In 2000, after Hafiz Al-Asad's death, Bashar Al-Asad succeeded his father and continued the initiatives to bridge Ba'athist 'secular' Syria and Islamist 'Shari'a' Syria. Evidence for the continuation of the policy of co-opting Islam was clear from the outset. The new president of Syria started his term with executive decisions, signaling the Syrian regime's explicit willingness to open up the previously secular public sphere to an Islamic vision of society, including the repeal of his father's 1982 decree, which prohibited the wearing of *Hijab* (Islamic headscarf) by girls and women in any part of the country's educational system, as well as opening mosques between prayer times after long decades of restriction.

In 2001, Al-Asad signed a bill permitting political exiles, opposition figures and members of the Muslim Brotherhood to return to their homeland after long decades of forced residence abroad. Furthermore, the new president commanded the release of 800 political prisoners, including prominent opposition figures and members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Other measures included eliminating the monopoly of secularism over the military apparatus by lifting the long-standing ban on prayer in military barracks, as well as

allowing Muslim and Christian religious figures to lecture cadets in the military academy, a place known to be a religion-free environment and off limits to any religious activities (Zisser 2005).

The most significant and shocking compromise was the acceptance of the plan to create an Islamic political party within the very secular Syrian Progressive National Front,³ an idea that would have been unimaginable less than ten years previously (Moubayed 2006). These numerous initiatives taken by the Ba'ath regime came about within the context of the re-emergence of a religious bourgeoisie as an imperative agent to the authoritarian regime; an acute economic downturn in the commercial hubs and a severe draught in the agricultural countryside widening the gap between the rich and the poor; and the US-led invasion of neighboring Iraq and the surfacing of militant Islamist movement in the region. When taken together, these conditions worked to influence the secular Syrian authority into further compromising with domestic Islamic groups in order to consolidate its power and in an attempt to retain a considerable degree of control over one of the most active sectors in society (Khatib 2012).

Looking at the collective developments implemented by the Syrian regime in the years that followed the clashes with the Muslim Brotherhood reveals an obvious eagerness on the part of the Syrian command to unlock a new episode in its relationship with the country's Islamic groups.

Moreover, these various initiatives indicated a new discourse taken by the Ba'ath regime and an official modification in the country's long-established secular position. There was a clear and explicit willingness by the ruling regime to open up the previously religiously

³ The National Progressive Front is a coalition of left-wing political parties in Syria established by Hafez al-Asad in 1972 in order to create an entity in the Parliament that supports the socialist and Arab nationalist orientation of the government and accepts the leading role in society of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party.

off-limits secular public sphere to an Islamic vision of society, signaling the departure from the earlier understanding promoted by the secular Ba'ath party; that religion was to linger remotely from the field of politics in particular and the public realm in general.

d. Threat/revolution: Losing control over the Islamic sector (2004-revolution)

The greater Middle East and the Muslim World was witnessing a great shift toward Islamic revivalism and Islamist actions. *Al-Qaeda's* growing presence in Iraq, Yemen and Somalia; Islamic governments in Iran and Turkey; Islamist movements in Somalia and Algeria; Muslim brotherhood growing influence in Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian territories; as well as *Hezbollah's* control over Lebanon, all were a clear indication of the spread of Islamic revivalism throughout the greater Middle East. The Syrian regime was aware of the growing threat outside its borders and tactically decided to engage in an admixture of incentives and disincentives to secure its grip over command and to ensure its continuous survival. In the process, it also invented new-fangled government-Islamic dynamics in an effort to maintain a significant extent of control over the rapidly growing Islamic sector in Syrian society.

Ironically, this co-optation policy did not only fail to control the Islamic sector, it resulted in the Government losing its grip over the Islamic groups and Islamists movements that it helped to initiate and mobilize. Moreover, this failure created an unprecedented opportunity for Syria's Islamic groups to mobilize and recruit at the expense of the initially more active and influential secular groups, turning the latter from a progressive, democracy-seeking cluster to a pariah in Syrian politics and society.

As a result of the regime's schema of re-organizing government-society relations, as well as manipulating the socio-political organization of the Syrian Islamic element, new

dynamics in the country had emerged and a fertile soil for the promoting of Islamic revivalism and Islamist movements in secular Syria was established (Khatib 2011).

Slowly, a number of Islamist groups and Islamic movements gained a presence in Syria.

Starting with *Jund Al-Sham* (Soldiers of the Greater Syria) and *Ghuraba'a Al-Sham* (Foreigners of the Greater Syria), who are remotely linked to *Al-Qaeda* and had claimed responsibility for shootouts carried in the capital Damascus in 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Syrian authorities claimed that members of the group had in their possession CDs containing anti-American sermons of *Ghuraba Al-Sham's* leader that called for establishing an Islamic state based on *Shari'a* in Syria (Wikas 2007).

Due to the isolated attacks of these groups, the vagueness surrounding the events, the minimal or no loss of life it had led to, the killing or capturing of the suspects, and an obtained confession every single time, pointed to the regime as a good suspect in the fabrication of such groups and events to control the radical Islamist element in Syria and granted them a staged censored outlet. The war on terror, carried out by the United States at the time, accompanied by the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, and the accusation that the Syrian regime was behind the event, could have prompted the Syrian regime to clear its image and present the country as yet another victim of international terrorism. The attack on the American Embassy in Damascus in September 2006 is a case in point where all suspects were killed, no civilians or embassy personnel were injured, and the government accused Saudi Arabia of being behind the attack at a time of great Saudi-Syrian political strain (Wikas 2007).

In reality, before the outbreak of the revolution in 2011, there had been no organized Islamist party in Syria for several reasons. First, the only truly organized Islamist party

that ever existed in Syria was the Muslim Brotherhood, which was wiped out internally and exiled more than twenty-five years previously. Second, the domestic opposition parties and their allies were mostly democratically driven and called for a secular Syria where any citizen had the right to rule, regardless of his religious background, which is in deference to any Islamic party with an ultimate aim of a *Shari'a* driven government and an Islamic state. Third, the regime's creation of state-sponsored Islam eliminated every outlet for political Islam of another flavor, combined with the threat of the arrest and imprisoning any suspected Islamists, especially those suspected of ties with the Muslim Brotherhood (Wikas 2007).

This policy of de-secularization and Islamic co-optation proved to become a bigger challenge than the ruling regime could handle. The rapid spread of Islamic revivalism, which in part was a result of the new apolitical guise adopted by the state's co-opted Islamic groups, had left the country in a state of crisis with its ruling command slowly losing control over the multifaceted variables lurking in the country, mainly, in the Islamic sector. Though Government officials strongly denied the increasing Islamization of the country, the reality was that Syria was indeed becoming more and more religious and in the process, losing its national identity. The pan-Arab national identity served for years as an umbrella to unite the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class distinction. If an Islamic identity prevailed instead, it would certainly dishearten the harmony of a society that had been governed for more than forty years by the Alawite minority sect, which incorporated in its state apparatus an array of representatives of many religious and ethnic groups (Zoepf 2006).

Furthermore, Islamic revivalism impacted directly the daily lives of the minority population in Syria; Syrian secularists, moderate Muslims, Christians of all factions, non-Muslim minorities and sects, had all been seeing their own freedoms being impacted by the phenomenon. Their concerns related to changes to the tolerant nature of their society and the lack of a balancing trend for the actively religious sector. The change was clear in the active closing of pubs in the vicinity of mosques, and of restaurants' owners being hassled for serving alcohol to their customers or playing loud music during the call to prayer, as well as the increased reporting of incidents of women being verbally, or even physically, harassed due to wearing short skirts or revealing clothing (AKI 2005).

Indeed, the uprising that had taken place in every part of the country, including the heart of the capital city Damascus, proved that the strategy of co-optation, although proven a success for over thirty decades of domestic peace in the country, had provided a base for the evolution of radical religious movements in the country and the region.

The regime had thought that it played the balancing game of Islamic co-optation successfully while having front-row seats when Hezbollah pulled Lebanon to war with Israel, Islamic jihadists poured death to Iraq, and the Muslim Brotherhood undermined the powerful military junta in Egypt. Although Syria's Government supported these groups away from home, it had been always cautious to keep the phenomenon outside its borders. Little had the regime known that its policy of state-sponsored Islam would create a local army for the Arab spring wave that swept the Middle East, carried by a multitude of citizens who were disillusioned with their countries' economic, cultural, political and military breakdown of the 'imperialistic West' backed development and fuelled by a sense of Islamic solidarity. Hundreds of thousands of citizens flooded the streets driven

by a subconscious and overpowering pursuit, longing for a genuinely and authentically Arab and Muslim society, free of Western influence, based on an Arab identity and deep-rooted in indigenous Arab Islamic traditions and principles.

III. Rise of Qubaisyate

a. Secularism: During Ba'ath secularism initiatives 1963-1970

Movements typically do not emerge without a cause; a number of factors influence mobilization, including large-scale socio-economic and political changes (Staggenborg 2011). the Qubaisyate movement was initiated in a context of the proliferation of secular ideologies, Westernization of society and the deterioration of Islamic values in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries combined with the malfunction of modernization policies causing corruption, concentration of wealth and political and economic exclusion. These grievances were amplified by the devastating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in a sense of general social anomie and economic and political impotence among citizens of countries such as Egypt and Syria (Wiktorowicz 2004). The wave of Western influence that swept the region using social, economic, political and even military vehicles was to blame for creating a sense of cultural imperialism and the belief that Islam was under attack through undermining the culture of Muslim societies and challenging the Arab Islamic identity and traditions. In addition, the authoritarian political nature of the ruling governments in Arab and Muslim countries, political oppression, as well as deterioration of economic quality of life with no appropriate political channel to voice grievances, created a sense of political impotence and alienation.

Furthermore, the crackdown on civil society as a whole, outlawing opposition parties, and criminalizing political dissidents made Islamic activism the only vehicle, which individuals could use as an effective political option (Wiktorowicz 2004:8).

These conditions had given rise to religious conjecture and provided a fertile ground for “faith-based” social and political activism in the Middle East, including Syria.

As a result, an exclusively women’s Islamic movement started to surface within prominent neighborhoods in the ancient capital Damascus. Far away from the reach of the Government’s private eyes, the movement kept safe by meeting at trusted members’ private homes, knowing that even the Government would exercise social limits when it came to dealing with women.

Named after their founder, Munira Al-Qubaisy, this Islamic study group movement’s distinctiveness lay in its ability to erect paths into the houses of the prominent middle and upper classes of the Syrian state through its women, a feat other religious groups, also concerned with Islamic revivalism, have been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

The movement slowly started to attract attention for its evidently rising social and political influence, due to its strategy of recruiting members from influential Sunni families that included wives, sisters and daughters of highly influential businessmen and top ranking Sunni politicians. Such an example is Amira Jibril who is considered to be in the top rank leadership of the movement following the leader Munira Al-Qubaisy, and is the sister of Ahmad Jibril, the founder and head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who resided in Syria at the time.

The movement’s main objective was to promote traditional Islamic values using networks of loosely organized study groups and private schools, which appeared to grant women an opening to organize in a socially and religiously-sanctioned, although very conservative, way. The movement started by teaching housewives about religion in daily life issues and consulted them on traditional subjects, such as childbearing and basic

religious education, as well as assisting young women to obtain a good education and suitable jobs. The main objectives were Islamic revival and teaching the right form of Islam, as well as teaching women about their rights in religion and correcting decades of patriarchal interpretations of the holy texts.

Even though the movement had adopted from the onset a strain of the Sufism approach to Islam that promoted withdrawal from worldly affairs, the secular Ba'ath establishment was wary of their presence and had long monitored their leader Munira Al-Qubaisy and kept a close eye on her movements. Ms. Qubaisy had been summoned, interrogated and imprisoned by the regime several times in the early 1960s which drove her to keep a very low public profile and to opt to work in extreme secrecy, a strategy that the rest of the movement followed suit until today (Khatib 2011).

Extreme measures were taken to avoid the watchful eyes of the regime. All interviewees asserted that the movement was extremely cautious in recruiting only trustworthy women from the same social circle as the recruiter, whom they had known for years. The recruiters would collect background information about each participant before allowing her to attend their study circles. Women or girls who had ties to the government, the army or the Ba'ath party, either themselves or through a member of their family, were rejected and prohibited from attendance. Meetings took place in private members' homes, and the attendees would not know about the time of the meeting until a few hours prior to the event. An address was never given and a private car, belonging to the movement, would collect attendees and return them to their houses after the conclusion of the meeting. A location for the meeting could be changed a few minutes prior to the gathering without giving reasons for the decision.

The Qubaisyate were not only successful in evading the Government's crackdown on religious activities of any kind, they were also successful in becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria.

Their work became visible in the increase in Islamization of public spaces, in a society where public spaces had long been religiously neutral. The city of Damascus witnessed the fall of its women under the conservative trend that was sweeping the region. The most apparent indication of this trend was the phenomenon of wearing the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf), which was, and still is, an identifying feature of the members of the movement due to the peculiar way of wearing it, which is exclusively their own invention. Covering one's hair was a prerequisite to joining the movement, although a woman was able to initially attend the meetings uncovered while a novice and cover soon after joining. Wearing *hijab* was on the rise as a symbol of piety, an assertion of self-identity, and a religious pathway into gaining independence and acquiring equality within Syrian society. It was clear that the movement was planting the seeds of women's empowerment through the reinterpretation of the holy texts in a non-patriarchal lens, which attracted women within the deeply conservative class of Syrian society, and found a medium that advocated greater rights and freedoms for Syrian women from within Islam's very own accepted traditions in the country. This fact had encouraged women into joining the movement fully recognizing that by doing so they were taking a great risk, given that the state was targeting all religious activities. Members of the movement were slowly flooding the houses and streets of major cities in Syria, where explicit secularization initiatives from above carried by the Ba'ath regime, were being implicitly challenged by a counter wave of Islamization from below carried by the Qubaisyate.

b. Confrontation: During Muslim Brotherhood conflict (1970-1982)

During the first decade of Ba'ath's secular rule in Syria, any type of spiritual devoutness was seen as suspicious and untrustworthy. This feeling was intensified in the light of the new developments in the country and the spurs of small and intermittent armed clashes between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Government. The Government launched a campaign of arbitrary arrests following the violence and burning of Government's buildings, as well as the wave of assassinations of top political Ba'ath's leaders, army cadets and Alawite influential figures. The Muslim Brotherhood became an enemy of the state and turned any Islamic activity into a taboo with harsh punishments that could lead to death.

However, while Muslim Brotherhood members were repeatedly questioned and detained, the Qubaisyate movement carried on their work, although with extreme cautiousness, into the houses of Sunni Syrian families. The movement did not face the same fate as its radical counterpart for several reasons.

First, the Muslim Brotherhood was an exclusively male organization. Few trials to extend the membership to female relatives of their members through establishing a women's wing for the movement came back fruitless. Accordingly, women were known not to be associated with membership of the Muslim Brotherhood, therefore did not comprise a target of the Government's aggressive campaign- with the few exceptions of wives and sisters of high ranking members of the Brethren who were arrested, interrogated and tortured to give information about the hiding place of these members. Furthermore, the Qubaisyate themselves had no apparent relationship with the movement that the government could pin against them.

Second, the idea of subjecting women to interrogation, detention or torture in a conservatively patriarchal state such as Syria was a risk the government could not afford. Syrian society is rooted in the idea of honor; mothers, wives and daughters are the carriers of the family's reputation, any harassment to these symbols would bring shame and humiliation and would bring about a public chorus of disapproval that the government could not afford during those precarious times. Even a casual approach by government forces to any of the women could mean the outrage of an entire neighborhood of a city that was already plagued by discontent with the violence and loss of peace caused by clashes with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Third, the Qubaysiate strategy of recruiting women from influential rich families in Syria, granted them special status with limited immunity. Some of the members came from notable Sunni families that were too influential for the government to reach or disturb. Harassing these women would furthermore enrage the by-now dissatisfied and disenfranchised great traditional notable families, old urban merchants and landowners, as well as the *ulama* (religious clergies) and political elites in the country, whom lost their sources of power and wealth due to the Ba'ath's social and economic initiatives and whom might consider political Islam, carried by the Muslim Brotherhood, as an appealing idea; a thought that the government could not afford to entertain at this critical stage.

Fourth, Al-Qubaisyat's apolitical stance and the passive ideology of relying on the Nakshbandi tradition, a style of Sufism based on temperance and abstinence from worldly affairs, as well as their focus on teaching women about good morals, traditional issues concerned with daily living, their rights within Islam and concentrating on basic

religious education without promoting critical thinking about religion, presented them as a non-threatening movement at the time, and their examination could wait until later times while the government's attention was fully focused on the present and imminent danger of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Finally, the leader, Ms. Qubaisy, had a great personal relationship with the most influential and trusted religious figure in the government, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, the grand *Mufti* of the republic, who was known for his subservience to the ruling regime. Munira had a lifelong relationship with the Kuftaro family where she spent many years studying religion under the late Amin Kuftaro, and afterward under his son Ahmad Kuftaro, the founder of the prominent Abulnoor Islamic society and institute in the capital Damascus. This connection gave Munira and her movement a safety net against the government's suspicion and the skepticism of every religious movement in the country. The Qubaisyate women had taken advantage of the government stance and their somewhat lack of restrictions to keep on organizing their Islamic study groups, albeit with extreme cautiousness and secrecy to the point of paranoia of avoiding being followed by members of the security services and by assigning members to guard the doors to prevent eavesdropping.

They continued their work and despite the repressive environment, they became extremely embedded in Syrian society and evolved as a subversive force to offset the government attack on Islam and spread a strict and conservative form of the religion within their families and communities (Zoepf 2006).

Although they carried no political agenda, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, nevertheless, the success of the Qubaisyate women and their increased social influence in Syria was

slowly attracting the government's attention. The Ba'ath Party regime, which had zero tolerance for any Islamic activity, became suspicious of their secrecy and the fast growing numbers of their followers. The command in Damascus became skeptical after having difficulties measuring the extent of the Qubaisyate's power in a country where political and religious activities were closely monitored and controlled. Nevertheless, it was clear that they were acquiring strong social influence beyond the reach of the eyes and ears of the surveillance apparatus, a fact that the ruling command found very disturbing. Consequently, the leader of the movement was summoned and interrogated multiple times before finally being ordered by government authorities to leave the country. Munira Al-Qubaisy had no other option but to seek refuge in the Islamic government of Saudi Arabia, where she went into exile for several years. She continued to supervise the Qubaisyate movement from abroad, as well as working locally in her host country until Saudi *wahhabis* had enough of her women-empowering ideology and campaigned the country's officials to prohibit her from preaching while residing in the country or leave the kingdom (U.S. Embassy in Damascus cable, 2006). Ms. Qubaisy found no other solution but to return to her motherland and carry on her work from close proximity. She campaigned to return to Syria by contacting none other than her main personal lifeline and the very influential and trusted religious figure Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, the grand *Mufti* of the republic. Kuftaro convinced the command in Damascus that the movement was a harmless, spontaneous group that aimed to teach women about piety and religion and had no political agenda whatsoever and there was no risk in permitting them to conduct their work in the country. Accordingly, Ms. Qubaisy was permitted to return to Damascus in the mid-1980s, where she carried on her preaching

under the cover of the Kuftaro based Abulnoor society to get around Government prosecution (Embassy cable, 2006).

c. Co-optation: During state-sponsored Islam approach 1982-2010

The Ba'ath government's blessing for Munira Al-Qubaisy to return to Syria in the 1980s, despite the considerable military campaign launched to eliminate the Muslim Brotherhood, fitted into the Government's new policy of state-sponsored Islam.

In the aftermath of the battle of Hama, the regime recognized that its secularization policy in a country with a population of 75 percent Sunni Muslim and a minority leadership proved to be catastrophic. Secularism and eliminating a core pillar of the Syrian society combined with socialism and redistributing the wealth of the majority, almost sent the regime to its demise.

Recognizing the power of Islam, there was a need for the regime not only to fill the religious vacuum generated after the downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also a necessity to create a peaceful religious vehicle for the majority Sunnis to exercise their religious needs in a peaceful, passive way under the watchful eyes of the government. The best vehicle for the new policy was none other, and none better, than the already established and popular movements who follow the apolitical Sufi Nakshbandi order that promoted good morals, self-examination, temperance and abstinence from worldly affairs, such as the case of the Qubaisyate. The apparent popularity of the movement made it a great candidate for government blessing. Accordingly, the Qubaisyate women were given a green light to resume their activities while the Muslim Brotherhood were being erased.

The new government initiatives of building 6000 new mosques, 600 Islamic schools, and

sponsoring more than 120 Quranic competitions, created an unprecedented opportunity for the Qubaisyate in Syria, whom for years were excluded from public space by hiding behind closed doors (AKI 2005).

The main and most important development in this period had to be the acquisition of the Qubaisyate of permits to establish pre-K, kindergarten and elementary private schools run solely by trusted members of the movement, which gave them the flexibility to bypass the control and regulation of the Ministry of Education (Khatib 2011). Furthermore, the movement managed to impose and teach their own developed, religiously-based curriculum side by side with the official state curriculum, which allowed the movement to target children, both male and female, from a younger age, where their study circles were limited only to adolescent girls and women.

An observer of their schools at the time could not help but notice that these schools differed from their public counterparts. One of the interviewees mentioned that her school was completely isolated from the outside world. Windows were tinted, the main door was always locked and the students would be collected in school buses in order for parents not to drop them off personally and to keep parents out of daily contact with the school. The schools resembled little forts where the movement felt safe and away from the eyes and ears of the government surveillance apparatus.

Regardless of their secrecy, the schools were very popular among urban Sunni Syrian families for several reasons. First, they were considered a safe haven for their children at these dangerous times when government raids on the Muslim Brotherhoods were common among residential neighborhoods and risked the lives of residents and bystanders and did not discriminate against the elderly, women or children.

Furthermore, the Qubaisyate schools were always established within the proximity of major Sunni neighborhoods and offered school buses to collect children from their houses, which is not the case for public schools where kids had to walk for several miles to reach their destination, taking the risk of coming face to face with government and Muslim Brotherhood shootouts.

Second, these schools taught their own developed religion-based curriculum side by side the official state curriculum, an advantage for Sunni Muslim families who thought of the official state curriculum as a secular brainwashing tool for their children to be raised on the principles of the Ba'ath party ideology, which was against their deeply-rooted traditional upbringings. In addition, the Qubaisyate schools were thought to be better vehicles to teach children the official state curriculum, rather than public schools, due to the advanced education and religious morals of their teachers compared to the teachers hired for public schools by the regime.

Teachers coming from Alawite minority villages, with minimal teaching experience and lower education, had started to flood the cities as part of the Ba'ath education reform agenda and had filled the positions of retired Sunni public school teachers in urban neighborhoods. The Qubaisyate schools became a good alternative to public education and, as an added bonus, were holding many religiously based activities and teaching the children about ethics, good morals and the right form of Islam, a subject well distorted and under-developed in public schools.

In addition, the Qubaisyate schools, compared to their public counterparts which were free to the public, had to offer better learning environments to convince people that they were worth the money. Accordingly, while public schools were plagued with the lack of

essential teaching supplies, poor furnishing and fixtures, absence of heat in the cold winters and the proliferation of dirty interiors and filthy bathrooms, the Qubaisyate schools were established in brand new buildings designed to contain the best educational tools available at the time, and enjoyed state of art equipment, supplies and furniture. The number of Qubaisyate schools grew tremendously all over the capital, as well as other large metropolitan cities in the country, where generations of students were attending and absorbing their fundamental ideology.

Appropriately, the 1990s can be well considered the golden epoch for the Qubaisyate movement in Syria, when their followers were reaching every corner of the Syrian state, their schools infiltrated many cities and neighborhoods, and they became a household name due to their charity work and religious and social activities. Becoming a member of Qubaisyate became not only a religious, but social status as well.

Another development in this period was the Qubaisyate's crossing of Syrian borders and the formation of branches beyond their country of origin. Munira's disciples were setting down roots in the nearby countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and also reaching as far as Europe and the United States. The movement's presence could be clearly seen in the streets of their host countries through the styles of dress adopted by Qubaisyate members, the distinctive way of tying their headscarves, as well as the color-coding of their attire, which indicated the different rank in the movement.

As for the West, the Qubaisyate were active in arranging marriages between their well-influenced young members and Syrian businessmen and expatriates residing in Europe and the United States to ensure expansion beyond the Muslim world (Hamidi 2006).

Before embarking on her new journey, a newlywed would be summoned and directed on

how to form her very own Qubaisy study circle among Muslims in the host country. This strategy ensured the transmittal of the seeds of Qubaisyate ideology to Western countries, as well as spreading Islamic revival beyond the Middle East.

d. Threat/revolution: the position the movement took (2004-revolution)

The growing presence of *Al-Qaeda* to the east in Iraq, the success of the Islamic governments to the north in Turkey, the rising influence of the Muslim brotherhood to the south in Jordan, the emergence of *Salafi* presence in Northern Lebanon to the west, as well as the slow, but steady, infiltration of Islamists' influence in the country, prompted the regime in Damascus to re-evaluate its policy towards the Islamic sector residing within its own borders, including the well-known apolitical movements, such as the Qubaisyate.

The growing power of the Qubaisyate in the country was starting to raise concern with the ruling regime about their loyalty and the extent of their influence on society and politics. In 2004, a concerned Chief of the State Security Branch of General Intelligence, Bahjat Sulieman, approached the grand *Mufti* of the state, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, to provide him with an insight and evaluation of the movement. Sheikh Kuftaro asserted that the movement was a spontaneous apolitical group that aspired to disseminate good morals and Islamic ethics in Syrian society and there was no harm in allowing them to preach in mosques under the authorities' supervision (U.S. Embassy in Damascus cable 2006).

Despite the fact that they had no political agenda or motives, the Qubaisyate's influence in the political sphere became noticeable due to their deep connections in the houses of many prominent Syrian politicians. On one occasion, for example, several senior

Qubaisyate members were detained in 2005 for the claim that they were preaching without government authorization. Only a few brief hours later, the women were free, allegedly after the Syrian President himself was overwhelmed with phone calls from well know politicians asking for their release. As a result, shortly after the incident, the Syrian Minister for Religious Trusts issued licenses to five Qubaisyate members to give lessons in Damascus mosques, a decision that was objected by security apparatus but approved by high-level officials, including Asad's office chief principal, seemingly acting on the President's instructions. (U.S. Embassy in Damascus cable 2006).

Furthermore, in 2006 the movement was encouraged and was legally permitted to conduct lessons and hold meetings openly in mosques rather than private homes, where the surveillance apparatus' tools and monitoring equipment could be implanted in order to keep a close eye on their activities, a mission that previously proved impossible due to the movement's extreme secrecy and carefulness in choosing trusted members' homes as meeting places (Pierret 2013). In addition, a number of government trusted clergies, including the grand *Mufti* of the state Ahmad Kuftaro, and the well-known Islamic scholar and government sympathizer Sheikh Sa'eid Ramadan Al-Boti, had convinced the ruling command in Damascus that it was in its best interest to allow the movement to work in the open. They had argued that the Qubaisyate have nothing to hide and their secrecy, not because they were concerned with politics or had an anti-regime stand, was simply due to the fear of persecution and harassment by the security apparatus that had become intolerant of Islamic activities in the aftermath of the Muslim Brotherhood clashes (Hamidi 2006). Accordingly, the regime turned a blind eye to the movement on the ground that it comprised a harmless group of women who aimed to reach self-piety

and to fulfill religious advancement without the concern of improving politics or the Government, which they left in the hands of God. Following the government's position, neither the Government-controlled Syrian press nor the private media has covered the growing phenomenon in the Syrian state, leaving an important factor of Islamic revivalism and conservatism working in the shadows and gaining influence without being checked.

Other than scattered Internet Arabic articles attacking the movement for its secrecy, the first ever-published work about Qubaisyate was the very critical Arabic study written by Sheikh Usamah al-Sayyid, who is connected to the Al-Ahbash Salafi group in Lebanon, entitled (translated) "A serious women secret organization". He talked about the ideology of the movement and its founder Munira Al-Qubaisy and some of its prominent members, such as Amira Jibreel in Syria, Sahar Harbi in Lebanon and Fadiya Al-Tabba'a in Jordan. Moreover, the Western and the main Arabic media did not catch the trend of Qubaisyate until the AKI, an Italian press agency, published a report in 2005 titled (translated): "Islamic Women's movement gains foothold," giving a only a five-page, concise short summary of the movement and their activities. Soon after, two prominent Arabic newspapers Dar Al-Hayat and Al-Arabiya, reported the movement's history in Syria and in other Arab countries and gave a more detailed account of their activities. This coverage caught the attention of the US embassy in Damascus, which prompted a detailed report of the movement just two days after the publishing of the above articles titled: "Syrian Women Flocking to Muslim Movement," which was sent as a confidential

priority cable to Washington on May, 4th, 2006⁴ under the category “Arab Israeli collective priority.” Three months later, Western media attention finally caught notice in August 2006 when the New York Times published a two-page article titled: “Islamic Revival in Syria is led by Women,” which stirred a few conversations via Internet blogs and faded away shortly after. In 2009, the BBC published a report titled “Syrian Islamic revival has women’s touch,” which raised concern about the increase of *hijab* wearing among Syrian women and the influence of Qubaisyate in spreading conservatism in Syria.

Despite the sudden local and international attention, the Qubaisyate did not acknowledge any of the reports or even come out to defend the movement in the face of the wave of critical blogs in Arabic, which were scattered around the internet, accusing them of secrecy, corrupting youth and spreading nontraditional Islamic ideology. The movement continued its low-profile, secretive path to flourish among the strong social base it had acquired throughout the last four decades and, by the late 2000s, the movement became the number one prominent female Islamic movement in the country, and was estimated to have control over more than half of the capital religious schools in Syria (Lefèvre 2013). The fame came to a stall following a car bomb, which killed 17 people in the capital Damascus, in 2008, when the regime lost its patience of the growing Islamist influence in the country. Accordingly, the government tightened its grip over Islamic activities and followed a policy of cracking down on Sunni Islamists by closely monitoring Mosques and Islamic centers. Imams became required to record their Friday sermons and

⁴ The confidential cable was obtained in September 2012 as part of Wiki leaks online from <http://dazzlepod.com/cable/06DAMASCUS2066/>

restrictions on preaching inside mosques were imposed. This policy was extended even toward women, were female government employees who worked in education and the public sectors were prohibited from covering their faces at work. The new changes did not discriminate against the Qubaisyate and included them to be barred from preaching and meeting at specific mosques the way they had done for the last few years (Brooks 2010). Slowly, it was clear that the state-Islamist dynamics in the country had started to shift; Islamism was on the rise and the Government's patience was running out. The situation reached its climax in 2011 after the burst of a grassroots revolution all over the country, including the heart of the capital, driven by an Islamic fervor. Ordinary people in Syria found themselves face-to-face with a tough choice, either to support the revolution by taking a great risk and jeopardizing their safety, knowing that the regime had no tolerance and no mercy dealing with activists, or to keep safe and support the oppressive Ba'ath dictatorship in its bloody quest to crush the opposition. The choice was not easy and as part of Syrian society, the Qubaisyate women were no exception when it came to making this decision. The exception laid in the fact that the movement did not comprise only of a person, a family or a neighborhood; the movement was an entire idle army that could be recruited to be on either side of the conflict. It was clear that members of the movement had conflicting opinions about the events in Syria for different reasons. The top leadership of the movement, who witnessed years of regime hostility and the famous fate of the Muslim Brotherhood's uprising, decided to do what they knew best; to implement the strategy of 'wait and see'. They decided to hide until the storm passed, the dust settled and the situation became clearer, to take sides. As in the past, they stood behind the principles of self-distancing from politics and to remain devoted to personal

religious revival without getting into anything that could cause unrest or harm to themselves or others, a strategy that proved vital to their survival throughout the years of Ba'athist rules in the country. This strategy of “non-involvement” suited the majority of Qubaisyate members who came from prominent merchant families and who had financial and economic ties with the existing regime. The fall of the regime could carry disastrous consequences for their political and economic status and could mean loss of their sources of power and wealth. Therefore, a substantial number of the Qubaisyate did not support the revolution on the claim that the rebels were risking the lives of peaceful Syrians in order to change the government, which was a purely worldly matter, while they should be carrying on a peaceful revolution of self-righteousness and changing to become a pious citizen.

Despite this widely adopted stance from top leadership and the majority of Qubaisyate members, a few women had left the movement claiming that the movement was supporting the regime, although indirectly, by taking a neutral position. On December 12th, 2011, a group of Qubaisyate members published a YouTube video announcing their defection from the movement and joining the revolution on the ground that the leadership was hostile to the revolution and strongly supporting the Asad regime (Pierret 2013). Observers argued that such defection could have strong consequences to the future of the revolution. The strong base of supporters in the major cities in Syria that the movement had managed to build in the last few decades, and the connections to the most influential, religious and wealthy families in Syria and with Syrian expats abroad, could mean a disaster for the regime. Such an exodus could aid in the rebuilding of the social base of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country through the influence of women (Lefèvre 2013).

The regime recognized this threat and acted quickly in order to neutralize it. Accordingly, on December 12th 2013, following the annual formal meeting held at the Ministry of Endowment between mosques' clerics and the minister, which included 300 Qubaisyate preachers, 80 Qubaisyate members were chosen to stay while other attendees were dismissed. The Qubaisyate preachers were promptly transported to the presidential palace to meet with the president himself for more than two hours. Bashar Al-Asad talked about religion, morals and the importance of spreading the right form of non-violent Islam. The Syrian state official media channel was present and promptly transmitted the event via state satellite television all over the country. This meeting was a strong indicator of the regime's recognition of the importance of the Qubaisyate and the threat, if the opposition was successful, in recruiting its wide social base in these critical times in Syrian history.

Analysis

This chapter explored the first hypothesis, based on political opportunities that reflected the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, which emphasized the role of the Syrian state regime and the political environment it generated on the Qubaisyate materialization and longevity. In the light of the data collected from interviews and literature on the topic, we need to assess the relevancy of the political opportunity framework for the mobilization and rise of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria, given the fact that it had to survive within the context of the authoritarian rule of the Ba'ath regime. The major and frequently cited literature on Political opportunity theory presents four major core dimensions to this framework: the degree of openness in the polity, stability or the divisiveness of the ruling elites, the pervasiveness of allies and availability of influential opponents and the nature of repression or facilitation adopted by the state (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1998).

For the purpose of this study I would like to go beyond these customary dimensions and adopt the extremely important, but often downplayed, theoretical role of the international context of political opportunities offered by Schock (1999) to explain the effect of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East on the change in behavior and policy of the Syrian regime towards Islamic movements in the country.

This analysis will dissect and analyze each of these dimensions individually to assess the relevancy of each to the topic under study, the Qubaisyate. The analysis will start by examining the international context dimension first as it makes up the backbone of the other dimensions used in this analysis.

a. The international context

National and global politics played a major role in feeding the growth of Islamic revivalist movements in the Middle East. A few factors led to increased Islamization in the region and the birth of a multitude of Islamic social movements.

The Cold War, and the robust quest of the United States to offset the presence of the Soviet Union, led to major unbalancing events in the Middle East, as well as to encourage an Islamic tide as a counter-balancing act to neutralize the influence of communism.

Furthermore, the major defeat of the Arab by Israel in 1967 followed by the Islamic revolution in Iran and the establishment of an Islamic government in 1979 inspired a multitude of Islamic movements throughout the region to pursue the dream of an Islamic state based on *Shari'a* and Islamic doctrine rather than Pan-Arabism ideology.

In addition, the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt had spread to neighboring Arabic countries such as Jordan and Syria, where the movement started gaining support as anti-secular feeling was sweeping the whole area as a reaction to the situation in Palestine. Meanwhile, a new rising star was being introduced to the global arena; an emergent new international neo-liberal economic order was reshaping the international, political economy and a wave of Globalization, carrying secularization and modernization, was undermining Islamic values, language and culture, creating a wave of Islamic revivalism in the process and driving the masses into a retreat to the roots of original Islam.

This multitude of international factors drove the Ba'ath regime in Syria, as an attempt to offset the pressure of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism and control its influence on the growth of social religious movements inside the country, to rely on a policy of co-

optation and state-sponsored Islam to limit popular unrest whilst ensuring the regime's popularity among the majority urban Sunni Muslims in the country. The state has chosen to modify its behavior from being a strong advocate of secularism and attempting to grind down its Islamist rivals, to promoting Islamic revivalism through the religious bourgeoisie, such as Munira Al-Qubaisy.

This behavior modification came in the form of numerous attempts to reposition the state's image from a secular, socialist and minority-run government to a god-fearing, religiosity promoting and Shari'a based popular governing apparatus. These numerous initiatives taken by the Ba'ath regime came about within the context of the US-led invasion of neighboring Iraq and the surfacing of militant Islamist movements in the region. The greater Middle East and the Muslim World was witnessing a great shift toward Islamic revivalism and Islamist actions. *Al-Qaeda's* growing presence in Iraq, Yemen and Somalia, Islamic governments in Iran and Turkey, Islamist movements in Somalia and Algeria, the Muslim Brotherhood's growing influence in Egypt, Jordan and Palestinian territories, as well as *Hezbollah's* control over Lebanon, were all strong indicators of the growing presence of Islamic fervor in the region. The Syrian regime was aware of the growing threat outside its borders and decided to engage in an admixture of incentives and disincentives to secure its grip over command and to ensure its continuous survival. In the process, it also invented new-fangled government-Islamic dynamics in an effort to maintain a significant extent of control over the rapidly growing Islamic sector in Syrian society. As a result, this new State-Islamic dynamics and the policy of co-opting Islamic movements enabled the Qubaisyate to flourish and mobilize in a country ruled for decades by a secular dictatorship.

b. Political access in Syria

Since its launch, the Ba'ath advanced a policy of restricting and demarcating religion and government institutions by following the path of dismantling religious bureaucracy and implementing a strictly security-focused approach. The initiatives taken to implement this policy started by replacing the Grand *Mufti* with a government sympathizer, transferring the prerogatives of the clerical councils to the Minister of *Awqaf*, and ending the formal committee of 'high clergy,' endowed with a sense of responsibility toward the state.

Furthermore, the ruling command restricted government paid positions to only members of the Ba'ath party and its affiliates. Multitudes of unions and syndicates were established to employ Ba'ath members whom represented factions of society, such as laborers, teachers, engineers, farmers, women and the youth with representatives to the main body of the national congress, while religious clerics and clergies where neither represented, nor organized, in a fashion similar to other societal groups. In addition, the religious sector fell short of the trail of development that targeted societal and economic sectors of the country. The ministry of *Awqaf* suffered severe shortage of employees due to the disadvantages and lack of benefits compared to other civil servants who belonged to the Ba'ath party and were employed in other sectors in the country (Pierret 2013).

This policy continued until the pressure of Middle Eastern Islamic revival was felt and clashes with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s drove the Syrian regime to adopt the strategy of 'state sponsored' Islam to control the vehicles by which the Muslim Brotherhood used to recruit members. Government money was spent to build mosques, religious schools, sponsor Quran recitation competitions, and subsidize higher religious

education. Islamic teachers and preachers were being appointed by the government to teach in religious schools and to lead prayers in mosques.

Furthermore, in 2001, the decree that prohibited the wearing of *Hijab* (Islamic headscarf) by girls and women in any part of the country's educational system was repealed, mosques were open between prayer times after long decades of restriction, political exiles, opposition figures and members of the Muslim Brotherhood were allowed to return to their homeland after long decades of forced exile, as well as the release of 800 political prisoners, including prominent opposition figures and members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood. Other measures included eliminating the monopoly of secularism over the military apparatus by lifting the long-standing ban on prayer in military barracks, as well as allowing Muslim and Christian religious figures to lecture cadets in the military academy, a place known to be a religion-free environment and off-limits to any religious activities (Zisser 2005).

The most significant and shocking compromise was the acceptance of the plan to create an Islamic political party within the very secular Syrian Progressive National Front, an idea that would have been unimaginable at the time of the establishment of such secular entity, which indicated an official modification in the country's long-established, closed political position and an explicit willingness to open up the previously religiously off-limits secular political sphere to an Islamic vision of society (Moubayed 2006).

Looking at the numerous initiatives taken by the Ba'ath regime reveals an obvious eagerness on the part of the Syrian command to unlock a new episode in its relationship with the country's Islamic groups in an attempt to prevent it from transforming into a militant religious opposition.

c. Influential allies

Generally, political parties, professional associations, unions and syndications play fundamental roles as important allies to social movements (Schock 1999). In non-democratic contexts, however, such as the case in Syria, these entities are created, possessed and controlled by the secular regime, thus precluding their role as influential allies to opposition and Islamic movements. Therefore, the Qubaysiate movement had to establish allies from areas outside the control of the state, such as religious institutions and social circles.

The existence of influential allies helped the rise and continuation of the Qubaysiate movement tremendously; the movement flourished and took strength due to the recruitment and mobilization of members belonging to the influential families in the country. This strategy facilitated the mobilization and success of the movement by providing economic assistance, recruitment skills, as well as providing a safety buffer between the movement and the state.

The Qubaysiate strategy of recruiting women from influential rich families in Syria, granted them special status with limited immunity. Some of the members came from notable Sunni families that were too influential for the government to reach or disturb. Harassing these women meant furthermore enraging the by-now dissatisfied and disenfranchised great traditional notable families, old urban merchants and landowners, as well as the *ulama* (religious clergies) and political elites in the country, whom lost their sources of power and wealth due to the Ba'ath's social and economic initiatives. Furthermore, the leader, Ms. Qubaisy, had great personal allies in a number of government trusted clergies and the most influential and trusted religious figures in the

government, including the grand *Mufti* of the state Ahmad Kuftaro, and the well-known religious and pro-government scholar Sheikh Sa'eid Ramadan Al-Boti. These allies had convinced the ruling command in Damascus on several occasions that it was in its best interests to allow the movement to work in the open because they had nothing to hide, and their secrecy, not because they had political or an anti-regime agenda, was simply due to the fear of persecution and harassment by the security apparatus, who became intolerant of Islamic activities in the aftermath of the Muslim Brotherhood clashes (Hamidi 2006). These connections gave Munira Al-Qubaisy and her movement a safety net against Government suspicion and their skepticism of every religious movement in the country and came to good use in many occasions where the Government had lost patience with the rising influence of the movement in the country. Accordingly, the regime turned a blind eye on the movement on the grounds that it comprised a harmless group of women who aimed to reach self-piety and fulfill religious advancement without concerns about improving politics or the government.

Despite the fact that they had no political agenda or motives, the Qubaisyate's influence in the political sphere became noticeable due to their deep connections in the houses of many prominent Syrian politicians. On rare occasions, when the security apparatus dared to detain members of the movements, the Syrian President himself ordered their release after being overwhelmed with phone calls from well know politicians, ministers, and high-level officials, including his very own office's Chief Principal.

The Qubaisyate women definitely had taken advantage of their influential allies in politics and society, and their somewhat lack of restriction by the government, to keep on organizing their Islamic study groups, albeit with extreme cautiousness and secrecy.

d. Divided elites

Unlike democratic countries, where political systems are relatively stable and elites' division tends to occur due to economic or social policies rather than over the form of political rule to be implemented, elites in non-democratic countries divide over economic, social, as well as political policies (Schock 1999). Syria is a case in point, where elite divisions were generated not only over economic and social policies, but also over the type of political system, the religious affiliation of the President and the ruling party. The lack of access of the elites to fair and institutionalized methods of headship competition and election success; the monopoly of the ruling Ba'ath party over top leadership positions; as well as the control of a minority sect over the sources of wealth, government and the army, created a schism between the prominent and religious elites and the newly created government' ruling class.

The Ba'ath party's policy of reshuffling the social order in Syria and replacing the existing foundation of society, which consisted of religious clerics and noble Sunni families, by establishing a new social and economic infrastructure that in turn generated a social order based on diversity and communism, aggravated a whole class of traditional elites who were in power in Syria for decades. The Ba'ath economic program was populist, aimed at achieving full social and economic transformation through the implementation of agricultural reform, by partially co-operatizing land under state control, as well as funding infrastructure projects and the agro-industrial economy. This policy was designed to instigate redistribution of resources, by regulating ownership of land and small industries, nationalizing of public entities, major industries and medium-sized companies (such as gas, oil, and transportation); as well as canceling all companies,

foreign concessions and increasing state control over foreign trade (Article 29 of the Ba'ath constitution). This social populist agenda was very attractive to the marginalized rural population, ethnic and religious minorities, and resulted in a new ruling and middle classes, while having severe tangible consequences on the notable families, old urban mercantile class, landowners and political elites in the country. Policies such as the nationalization of industries, increased state control over foreign trade, restrictions on imports and the implementation of a socialist fiscal policy, as well as price regulations and a subsistence peasant policy all contributed to irritating the notable families and was seen as an attack on business and property as a whole (Pierret 2013).

The urban traditional elite felt that their cities and sources of wealth were being taken over by ethnic and religious minorities storming from nearby villages due to the rapid social and political changes implemented by the Ba'ath party. This sense was further fanned in 1970 by the rise of Hafez Al-Asad, a member of the Alawite minority group, to power, marking an era of hands-off politics for the majority Sunni population.

In keeping with the programme of his Ba'ath party, Al-Asad published a draft of a new constitution, stripping Islam of the special status it had enjoyed for decades under the previous constitution. This development furthermore enraged the by-now dissatisfied and disenfranchised great traditional notable families, old urban merchants and landowners, as well as the *ulama* (religious clergies) and political elites in the country. Therefore, Islamic revivalist movements, such as the Qubaisyate, became an appealing idea to these sectors of Syrian society because it appeared to be the only possible vehicle that reflected their values whilst also promoting unity and solidarity of a big segment of the urban masses against their Ba'ath antagonists.

e. State repression

In non-democratic countries, such as the case in Syria, which is plagued by decades of authoritarian regime rule and political oppression, the use of violence and repression by the Ba'ath ruling party is widespread and has been used in a nondiscriminatory manner against the entire population on many occasions.

During the first decade of Ba'ath's rule in Syria, any kind of religious piety or political interest was viewed with suspicion and skepticism, resulting in a crackdown on civil society as a whole, outlawing of opposition parties and criminalization of Islamists and political dissidents. This feeling was intensified in the light of the armed clashes between the Muslim Brotherhood and the government in Hama, where the government responded by launching a campaign of arbitrary arrests and punishing membership of the Muslim Brotherhood with death.

However, while Muslim Brotherhood members were repeatedly questioned and detained, the Qubaisyate movement carried on their work, although with extreme caution, into the houses of Sunni Syrian families. The movement did not face the same fate as its radical counterpart for several reasons. First, the Muslim Brotherhood was an exclusively male organization; accordingly, women were known not to be associated with membership of the Muslim Brotherhood, therefore did not comprise a target by the government's aggressive campaign. Furthermore, the Qubaisyate themselves had no apparent relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood that the government could pin against them. Second, the idea of subjecting women to interrogation, detention or torture in a conservatively patriarchal state such as Syria was a risk the government could not afford. Syrian society is rooted in the idea of honor; mothers, wives and daughters are the

carriers of the family's reputation, any harassment to these symbols would bring shame and humiliation and would cause public outcry that the government could not afford during those precarious times. Even a casual approach by the government forces to any of the women could mean the outrage of an entire neighborhood of a city that was already plagued by discontent about the violence and loss of peace caused by the clashes with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Third, Al-Qubaisyat's apolitical stance and peaceful ideology of relying on the Nakshbandi tradition, a style of Sufism based on temperance and abstinence from worldly affairs, presented them as a non-threatening movement at the time and their examination could wait until later times while the government's attention was fully focused on the present and imminent danger of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Later on, the Qubaisyate women had taken advantage of their somewhat lack of restrictions and the government's "state-sponsored Islam" policy to keep on organizing their Islamic study groups, albeit with extreme caution and secrecy to the point of paranoia about avoiding being followed by members of the security services and by assigning members to guard the doors to prevent eavesdropping.

The Qubaisyates were not only successful in evading the government's crackdown on religious activities of any kind; they were also successful in becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria. Despite the repressive environment, they became extremely embedded in Syrian society and evolved as a subversive force to offset the government attack on Islam and spread a strict and conservative form of the religion within their families and communities.

Conclusion

Several main conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, it supplies evidence for the application of the political opportunity framework in explaining the rise and outcomes of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in secular Syria. Elite divisions, influential allies, degrees of state repression and openness in the polity, indeed, have affected mobilization and outcomes as predictable by the political opportunity framework and extension of the theory to account for the formation and mobilization of Qubaisyate highlights the applicability of this approach to Islamic social movement studies.

Second, this analysis exemplifies the significance of the international context of political opportunities, which political opportunity literature has under-utilized or even ignored.

No matter how influential its allies are, how open the polity in the country is, or what degree of repression it had to endure, the reality is that the Qubaisyate movement did not emerge in a vacuum, it is part of the greater Islamic revival movement and is both empowered and limited by external factors, sometimes indirectly, beyond its country of origin. The international environment, which the Qubaisyate movement was launched in, was full of opportunities that permitted the formation and growth of this Islamic revivalism movement.

This analysis confirms that adaptation of a political process model based on the notion of the influence of external opportunities and international context, as factors in social movement mobilization, can explain the rise of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. The influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival movement has indeed changed the role that the Syrian government played and the political environment it generated, which in turn influenced the movement's materialization and longevity.

The Syrian regime's response to Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and the adoption of a "state-sponsored" Islam policy has influenced the livelihood of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. In an attempt to ensure survival in the face of Islamic growth in the country, the Syrian regime has promoted Islamic movements and empowered the religious sector of society to a point where the regime it cannot control anymore. At the same time, the Qubaisyate Islamic movement in Syria has seized the political opportunity given by the state and grew rapidly to fill the religious vacuum left in the country after the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982.

A third conclusion can be deducted from this analysis, the application of rationality of actors of the political opportunity theory to the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. Whilst the core dimensions of political opportunity framework served as a key factor to facilitate the Qubaisyate's mobilization, the interpretation of opportunities and threats by the movement's leader and members played a major role in determining how these factors impacted the movement. The assumption of rationality of actors, when actors perceive opportunities or threats and accordingly weigh their options and reply rationally to exploit openings or bound adversities, proves to be in the case of the Qubaisyate in Syria. In conclusion, the political opportunity approach has successfully addressed the rise and growth of the Qubaisyate and goes beyond that initial phase to analyze not only factors that influence their emergence, but also the structural conditions that altered their strategies and outcomes along the road. Consequently, focusing on structural factors can shed light on analyzing Islamic social movements beyond its initiation phase and adds to the understanding of collective action from a different angle, to serve as a revised and improved approach to the previous attempts in the study of Islamic social movements.

Chapter Five: Entrepreneur-Organizational Approach

Introduction

This hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, emphasizes the role of Munira Al-Qubaisy, the movement's entrepreneur, as a designer of a successful movement-business model, as well as the role of the effective organizational structure of the Qubaisyate in maximizing impact and efficaciousness of the movement.

This chapter will argue that the leader's exposure to Islamic revivalism influence in the greater Middle East supplied Ms. Al-Qubaisy with the necessary resources and tools to design a successful mobilizing structure capable of withstanding numerous fluctuating political and cultural pressures. The pre-existing organizational model of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and the tactics they used for mobilizing support, collecting resources and dealing with the Government served as a pilot case for Ms. Al-Qubaisy to build on its successes and failures, perfect its weaknesses and utilize its strengths, while building a brand new vision for her movement. As a result, a better, more successful organizational model was created and the Qubaisyate movement flourished in Syria, even in times of great political repression. This aspect of the study, therefore, will concentrate on the role of the leader of the movement, Ms. AL-Qubaisy, in designing a successful organizational structure based on allocating essential resources to maximize impact and efficaciousness, which immensely influenced the movement's tactics and strategic decision making process, attracted great numbers of women to join and determined the movement's longevity and durability in a hostile political environment.

I. Movement's Entrepreneur: Munira Al-Qubaisy

a. Background

Munira Al-Qubaisy was born on January 1st, 1933 into a religious middle class family residing at Al-Salhyeh neighborhood in the heart of the Syrian capital, Damascus. She is part of what is considered to be a large family by Syrian standards, consisting of ten siblings; six brothers; including Bah'jat, Maher, Momtaz, Muwafaq, Redwan and Waleed, who mostly are well educated professionals and belong to 'white collar' professions, and four sisters, who chose not to work but to stay at home to concentrate on caring for their families' needs⁵.

Munira's childhood and adolescence are unknown due to the fact that an interview with the leader was out of the question. Her whereabouts and location was vague, and multiple attempts to locate her place of residence came back fruitless. The reply that kept surfacing every time her location was asked of one of the movement's members was that she lived between Syria and Saudi Arabia for a while and probably was residing in the Saudi capital city of Riyadh. Finally, a senior member of the movement confirmed that she was actually residing in the Syrian capital, Damascus, with her entourage, consisting of a very close net of senior members of the movement in an area located between the Alsha'lan and Alrawdah streets. I tried to arrange for a face-to-face interview, a Skype session or even a phone call with Munira through many connections to the movement. My attempts were turned down by all of my contacts, claiming that she was too ill to conduct any kind of an interview, even a short phone call.

⁵ Syrian society is rooted in the idea of honor; mothers, wives and daughters are the carriers of the family's reputation. Accordingly, my male interviewee asked not to mention the names of Munira's sisters or any information leading to their identities fearing that by doing so, he would be harassing their husbands in an indirect way.

This response did not come as a surprise, after all, every member of the movement that was interviewed asserted that Munira have never given any public interviews, never dealt with any form of media outlet nor even met with her very own members. Even top-level members of the movement had ever met Ms. Munira in person or spoke to her in their entire lives; the close ones who did meet with her had rarely seen her face, which was usually covered behind a black veil. Only a handful of people know what Munira looks like in person and they are mostly family members, top leadership women or very close relatives and friends.

What is known about Munira is that she is tall with a dark complexion and always with a very serious look on her face. She always dresses in black from head to toe, which is a sign of the higher-ranking member of the Qubaysiate movement. She is also known to be bright, sharp and seems to be very well educated.

Munira's education started in public schools where she attended state-run, all-girls elementary, secondary and high schools in her neighborhood in the capital Damascus and advanced to graduate with a bachelor of science from Damascus University in the 1950's, where she majored in the natural sciences. Upon graduation, she utilized her degree and education to work as a biology teacher in various public schools in different areas of the capital Damascus (AL-Hayat 2006).

Munira's social and family ties to the Kuftaro family, a well-known religious family of preachers and clergies in the city of Damascus, had played a major role in her religious education, upbringing and direction. She spent many years studying religious texts and teachings under Amin Kuftaro and after his death she continued under his son, the famous Ahmad Kuftaro, the founder of the prominent Abulnoor Islamic society, a very

well-known religious institution in Damascus. Her ties to the Kuftaros and the Abulnoor institute initiated Munira in the study of religion in general and the Sufi Nakshbandi order in particular, making her one of the first women preachers to enter the patriarchal domain of religious preaching in Syria.

Her religious education, combined with her teaching skills, as well as her closeness to the Kuftaro family, granted Munira the opportunity to preach to Damascene women associated with Abulnur institute, marking the first steps to her long career of preaching and religious empowerment of women.

Munira's work, which tied daily living to traditional Islam, was greatly welcomed by the prominent Sunni houses in the old city of Damascus for many reasons. First, Munira was preaching in the realm of girls and women where no man can enter, and accordingly, these women were left out of religious education other than what their mothers had taught them, consequently, there was an immense need for a knowledgeable female teacher to advance the religious education of these girls and women. Munira's religious and scientific education, her teaching career and abilities, as well as her ties to Abulnoor institute made her a great candidate to carry out this task.

Furthermore, fathers and husbands of these women, who attributed their economic success and wealth to God's blessings and their devotion to their religion, felt that by allowing these lessons to be carried on at their houses they were thanking God for his blessings and ensuring that this wealth and good fortune continues in their lives.

Accordingly, the early 1960's witnessed the initial steps in what will later be known as "the Qubaisyate women" Islamic movement, which was named for Munira's last name by public observers and members of the movements.

b. Emergence

The early 1960s were not only important due to the religious seeds that Munira was planting and the birth of the Qubaisyate movement, nevertheless, there was a whole host of international and local events that shaped the region, the country and Ms. Qubaisy personally.

On the macro level, Munira was active within the context of increased Islamization in the region and the birth of a multitude of Islamic social movements as a result of the Cold War dynamics. The robust quest of the United States to offset the presence of the Soviet Union by encouraging an Islamic tide, as a counter-balancing act to neutralize the influence of communism, became a turning point that changed the geo-political balance in the Middle East for years to come.

In addition, the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt had spread to neighboring Arab countries such as Jordan and Syria, where the movement started gaining support as anti-secular feeling swept the whole area in a reaction to the wave of secularization and modernization implemented by local government with communist connections. These policies of secularization were seen as undermining Islamic values, language, culture and resulting in a counter wave of Islamic revivalism in the process, driving the masses into a retreat back to the roots of original Islam.

Furthermore, the major defeat of the Arab by Israel in 1967 marked an era of a change in ideology in the Arab world, where the general thinking revolved around the idea that God had abandoned the Arab in the battlefield because they had abandoned him by adopting secular and socialist ideologies. The idea intertwining religion and politics, 'Victory will not be achieved unless God is on our side and to be on our side, we have to be on His

side,' started to grow, and Islamist groups started to gain stronger ground all over the region.

On the meso level, a new opposite power was on the rise in the political and social realm in Syria; Munira was publically active in preaching conservative religious ideology to women at the same time when the Ba'ath party, with its rigid secular ideology, ascended to power in Syria. The Ba'ath party steered clear of intertwining Islam and Arab identity, opting to delineate Arab nationalism, absent from religion in general and the Sunni Islam in particular, through stressing secular values that took away religion's role in Syrian society in an effort to construct a practical, non-reactionary, non-religious, non-sectarian identity for the Syrian public (Khatib 2011)

Due to the secular ideology of the Ba'ath party, it made an instant enemy with many Syrian Muslim scholars and clerics who implicitly called on the Syrian public to reject the teachings of socialist ideology, based on the belief that secularism promoted the idea of rejecting the existence of God, which is a very sensitive matter for Syrians regardless of their degree of adherence to religion. Accordingly, the Ba'ath party's explicit policy of secularization from above was being implicitly challenged by a counter wave of Islamization from below, carried secretly by the dissatisfied and disenfranchised great traditional notable families, old urban merchants and landowners as well as the *ulama* (religious clergies) and political elites in the country.

On the personal level, Munira's preaching activities while being a government employee, teaching the youth in public schools and being a role model, was not welcomed by the new secular government, who stressed secular values that aimed to eradicate religion's role in Syrian government and society. The Ba'ath government was trying not only to

subject the Syrian society to a new secular vision, it was also trying to recruit the youth at public schools and attract them to join the party from an early age through establishing the *Tala'ea Al-Ba'ath* (Ba'ath scouts) in elementary schools and Shabebat Al-Thawra (Revolution youth) in secondary and high schools. Teachers were encouraged to join the party through many incentives that ensured their advancements to higher positions within their schools or even the luxury of being assigned to schools close to their houses as an added convenience. Teachers who opted not to join the Ba'ath party suffered the fate of being at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts. Promotions were limited to teachers who belonged to the party regardless of qualifications and seniority. Certain positions were reserved only for higher-ranking teachers of the party, including the positions of principals and vice-principals. In addition, the degree of religiosity that the teacher conveyed was an open indication to her advancement or not in the school system. Religious teachers who adhered to an Islamic dress code and opted to wear the *hijab* (Islamic head cover) were viewed as less loyal to the party and were dealt with as inferior and with suspicion by other teachers who belonged to the Ba'ath party.

For Munira, she had a deadly combination as a government employed teacher in the public school system; she was a Sunni Muslim, a non Ba'ath party member, wore *hijab* and adhered to an Islamic lifestyle, as well as being a preacher for women outside her working hours. This combination was threatening enough for the regime to allow her to handle the precious youth that the regime worked extra hard to brainwash early on in life. As a result, Ms. Qubaisy was banned from teaching in public schools and lost her job permanently, an event that reshaped her future and made her change direction and career path completely.

c. Exposure to Middle Eastern Islamic Revivalism

Munira reached a dead end by her mid-thirties; she was unemployed with a degree that was useless outside the teaching realm of public schools, single with no husband to support her or children to raise while sitting at home, and her preaching activities brought no income to buoy up even her transportation to the study circles and back.

She decided not to give up and reacted to her new situation by reapplying to Damascus University, where four years later she graduated from its *Shari'ah* College of Islamic studies, where she had her first direct contact, and became influenced by, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (US Embassy Cable 2006).

At the time of her attendance, the *Shari'ah* College of Islamic Studies was heavily influenced by the thinking and activities of the Muslim Brotherhood. The collapse of the union between Syria and Egypt in 1961 lifted the ban imposed by President Abdul Nasser, who barred the movement in both countries due to its violent actions in Egypt and brought the movement back to be active in the political life of Syria.

Shortly after, the Ba'ath party, carrying a socialist secular agenda, ascended to power in 1963 and banned the movement again from participating in Syria's political scene, while tightening its control over religious institutions and mosques to weaken the social support for the movement. As a result, the Muslim Brotherhood was secretly active in the vicinities of mosques and religious institutions, as well as at the *Shari'ah* College at Damascus University where Munira was obtaining her degree in Islamic studies. Munira was exposed to the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood, which marked the development of her preaching activities to reflect that exposure.

The situation in Syria was slowly escalating when the Muslim Brotherhood resorted to violence as a mean to push its ideas and demands against the government in 1964, while Munira was actively preaching to women in the city of Damascus. Her activities soon got the Government's attention and she was mixed up as a Brethren sympathizer.

Accordingly, Ms. Qubaisy was summoned, interrogated and imprisoned by the regime a few times in the early 1960s, which drove her to change tactics, keep a very low public profile and opt to work in extreme secrecy, a strategy that the rest of the movement follows until today (Khatib 2011).

The major defeat of the Arab by Israel in 1967 marked an era of a shift in ideology in the Arab world from secular Pan-Arabism into religion as a savior. The idea of religion in politics started to grow and Islamist groups started to gain stronger ground all over the region. In addition, the authoritarian political nature of the ruling governments in Arab and Muslim countries, political oppression, as well as deterioration of economic quality of life with no appropriate political channel to voice grievances, created a sense of political impotence and alienation.

These conditions gave rise to religious conjecture, provided a fertile ground for "faith-based" social and political activism in the Middle East and made Islamic activism the only vehicle in which individuals could use as an effective political option. As a result, Movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Qubaisyate became welcomed among the men and women in Syrian society.

Munira continued her work and despite the repressive environment, her movement became extremely embedded in Syrian society and evolved as a subversive force to offset the government attack on Islam and spread a strict and conservative form of the religion

within their families and communities (Zoepf 2006).

Although they carried no political agenda, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, nevertheless, the success of the Qubaisyate women and their increased social influence in Syria was slowly attracting the Government's attention. The Ba'ath Party regime, which had zero tolerance for any Islamic activity, became suspicious of their secrecy and the fast growing numbers of their followers. The command in Damascus became skeptic after having difficulties measuring the extent of the Qubaisyate's power in a country where political and religious activities were closely monitored and controlled. Nevertheless, it was clear that they were acquiring strong social influence beyond the reach of the eyes and ears of the surveillance apparatus, a fact that the ruling command found very disturbing. Consequently, Munira Al-Qubaisy, the leader of the movement, was summoned and ordered by government authorities to leave the country permanently. Munira sought refuge in the Islamic Government of Saudi Arabia where she went into exile for several years. This event in her life marked Munira's second exposure to Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism and had, yet again, shaped the future of the Qubaisyate movement for years to come. Her years of exile in the Saudi kingdom ensured the leader's exposure to the fundamental Islamic revivalist *Salafi/Wahabi* thoughts, which in turn were reflected in the teachings and future direction of the movement itself. Furthermore, being an exiled Sunni preacher by the 'evil' secular Ba'ath government ensured that Munira gained the social and financial connections needed to sustain the movement from abroad. Munira continued to supervise the movement from Saudi, as well as working locally in her host country until Saudi officials had enough of her women empowering ideology and prohibited her from preaching while residing in the country.

d. The “Grand *Sheikha*”

Ms. Qubaisy felt that she overstayed her welcome in Saudi Arabia and found no other solution but to return to her motherland and carry on her work from close proximity. She campaigned to return to Syria by contacting none other than her main personal lifeline and the very influential and religious figure trusted by the regime, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, the grand *Mufti* of the republic. Kuftaro convinced the command in Damascus that the movement was a spontaneous group that aimed to teach women about piety and religion, had no political agenda whatsoever and that there was no harm in permitting them to conduct their work. Accordingly, Munira was permitted to return to Damascus in the 1980s where she carried on her preaching under the cover of the Kuftaro based Abulnoor society to get around government’s prosecution (US Embassy in Damascus cable, 2006).

The Ba’ath government’s blessing for Munira Al-Qubaisy to return to Syria in the 1980s, despite the considerable military campaign launched to eliminate the Muslim Brotherhood fits into the Government’s new policy of state-sponsored Islam. The command in Damascus realized that the best vehicle for the new policy was none other, and none better, than the already established and popular movements who follow the apolitical Sufi Nakshbandi order that promoted good morals, self examination, temperance and abstinence from worldly affairs, such as the case of the Qubaisyate. The apparent popularity of Ms. Qubaisy’s movement made her a great candidate for government blessing; accordingly the Qubaisyate women were given a green light to resume their activities while the Muslim Brotherhood was being erased.

Munira, by that time, had her share of experience with the Ba'ath regime; she didn't dare to deal with it as an enemy but was wise enough not to be friends and trust its intentions. Accordingly, Munira managed the movement from behind a thick curtain while allowing the senior members who ran it, while she was in Saudi Arabia, to take center stage. She was known among her disciples as the “*el-Sheikha el-kbeireh*” (Grand Sheikha),⁶ “*el-Anseh el-kbeireh*” (Grand Miss) or the “*el-Anseh el-oum*” (Mother Miss), while lower ranking leaders of the movement were referred to as “*Anseh*” only.

The title ‘Anseh’ in Syria is used to refer to an unmarried woman, as the word ‘Miss’ is used in English, and it is also used to refer to a schoolteacher. The title “Anset el-deen” (religious teacher) in Syria quickly became associated with members of the Qubaisyate movements who held religious circles at home. Munira, being a teacher by trade and a non-married woman, had acquired this title early on and was distinguished from other “misses” in the movement by pairing her name with the title ‘Grand’ to refer to her status or the title ‘mother’ to refer to her connection to her members.

Munira, in her mid-fifties, became a mystical symbol for the members of the movement and the Syrian society; she was running the show while keeping a very low public profile, including within her own movement. She outsourced management of day-to-day activities of the movement to senior members and was in charge of keeping strong connections with influential religious and political figures to ensure having a safety net in case the Ba'ath Government decided to change course again towards the Islamic sector. She was visible to only a few close members of her family and social circle and kept traveling between Syria and Saudi Arabia to ensure limited interactions with both

⁶ *Sheikha* is the Arabic name for a female religious scholar or a high-ranking person.

countries' security services, while keeping her connections with her disciples and financiers in both places. Munira's uniqueness laid in her ability to balance a good enough connection with the Syrian and Saudi governments to stay welcomed in both countries while keeping good connections with other religious institutes and religious groups. She was extremely successful in playing the balancing game, which resulted in some very powerful connections in the realms of politics, religion and economics.

In the Government, she had very powerful allies including the Grand *Mufti* of the country Sheikh Ahmed Kuftaro and the scholar Mohammed Sa'ed Ramadan Al-Boti who was the most prominent pro-regime Islamic thinker in the country and had great connections to the ruling families in the Gulf. Munira was also very close to the Islamic Fateh Institute, an affiliate of Al-Azhar institute in Egypt, which is the second most powerful Islamic entity in the Muslim world following Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, she had managed to attract allies in Saudi Arabia, including members of the royal family, and religious wealthy Syrian expats who provided financial support to the movement based on its mission of spreading Islamic values in the country of the secular Ba'ath regime. Perhaps Munira's most powerful connections financially, politically and religiously came not through the influential men in religion, government and commerce, but indirectly through the wives, mothers and daughters of powerful politicians, wealthy merchants and senior religious scholars. Munira's early policy of attracting women from prominent families of social status, political weight, religious influence and financial capital, ensured a social, financial, and political safety net for the Qubaisyate to flourish within Syria where their followers reached every corner of the country and they became a household name due to their charity work and religious social activities.

e. In the spotlight

Despite Ms. Qubaisy's constant efforts to stay in the shadows, the success of the movement that carried her name was continually bringing her name into the spotlight. Munira's disciples were successful in setting up roots to the movement in the nearby countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and reaching as far as Europe and the United States, turning her into a household name in some of these new countries. The movement's presence can be clearly seen in the streets of their host countries through the styles of dress adopted by Qubaisyate members, the distinctive way of tying their headscarves, as well as the color-coding of their attire, which showed the extent of the influence acquired by Ms. Qubaisy and drew attention to her status in the Islamic world from multiple sources.

For example, in 2009 The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center, an affiliate of The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, which is part of the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, ranked Munira Al-Qubaisy as the thirty first most significant Islamic scholar on a list of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world. The publication named the Qubaisyate movement as "The largest women-only Islamic movement in the world" while calling Munira "The most influential Muslim woman in the world, albeit with great discretion."⁷ The report explained that Ms. Qubaisy's ranking came in the light that she was successful in carrying on a women's religious educational movement, a domain that had been needed but constantly neglected before, hence, making her movement very popular.

Furthermore, the report added that Ms. Qubaisy was successful in leading an Islamic revival in Syria by establishing a huge network of Islamic schools while evading the

⁷ <http://themuslim500.com/2009report/pg80>.

condemnation of the Government, a fate that had been traditionally unsuccessful by large networks of Muslim organizations.

In the following years of 2010 and 2011, Munira ranked at 24, surpassing the prominent and very influential leader of the “Hezbollah” militant Islamic movement in Lebanon, Mr. Hasan Nasrallah himself. Her achievement was attributed to the success of being able to gain permission from the government to preach in mosques and hold study circles since 2006 after years of working in secret, while other movements failed to gain the same status. The report described Munira as “the leader of an incredibly successful educational movement” and that she “has made Islamic knowledge widely accessible, and is credited for the resurgence of Islamic education in the country.”

Furthermore, the report stated that the Qubaisyate women “are provided a unique role within Arab society as scholars and teachers exclusively catering to the needs of Muslim women; they provide an open forum to address religious questions and discuss religious issues.” In addition, the report claimed that the students of the Qubaisyate are “at the forefront of a significant achievement in Islamic history in regards to education” due to the memorization of Islamic texts consisting of important narratives that date back to the Prophet Mohammad himself.

Munira kept climbing up the list throughout the years to move to rank number 21 in 2012 and finally reaching the rank of 17 in the year 2013, a few spots closer to the highest authorities in the Muslim world, including the grand scholars in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia and Iran, a feat no Muslim woman has reached before.

Munira’s fame was also distinguished among non-Muslim Arabs, where she was chosen as the 42nd most influential Arab among 500 others in the world by an Arabian Business

publication in 2012⁸. This report surpasses religious influence in the Arab world and includes men and women from varied domains in life. Furthermore, a special report by the same publishing house looking at the 100 most powerful Arab women in the world chose Munira Al-Qubaisy as the 94th most influential Arab woman in 2011 and chose her again in 2012 as the 7th most influential Arab woman in the world⁹. This report included Muslim and non-Muslim Arab women from around the world who belonged to the realms of politics, science, art, entertainment and religion to name just a few. The report stated that Munira's work "has been regarded as instrumental in the spread of religious sentiment amongst young women in the region," a fact that became undeniable in the light of the great success of the movement in Syria and other Arab countries.

Taking into account Munira's low public profile and secrecy for the past thirty-some years and having had no direct connection with any sort of media or publication houses truly emphasizes the importance of these reports. Munira's presence, which has been deliberately kept a secret in Syria and other countries where the movement operates, is strongly present despite her constant efforts to stay behind the scenes. The success of her movement is persistently bringing her name to the forefront, despite the fact that she does not directly operate the movement and her members have never had any direct contact with her. The role of Munira Al-Qubaisy as an entrepreneur, and her leadership style, although proven a success in mobilizing members in Syria and beyond, nevertheless, could not be comprehended without examining her role as a designer of a successful movement-business model. Therefore, an examination of the role of the effective organizational structure of the Qubaisyate movement is essential.

⁸ <http://power500.arabianbusiness.com/power-500-2012/profile/15259/>

⁹ Arabian Business Special Reports » 100 Most Powerful Arab Women 2012 » 7 <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/100-most-powerful-arab-women-2012-448295.html?view=profile&itemid=448140>

II. Organization

a. Organizational Structure

The movement is a solely socially based, non-registered organization in any country, including its birthplace Syria, and has no official base or headquarters anywhere in the world. The movement follows a federated structure of authority as the basis for its organizational structure, where ubiquitous, well-organized and loosely connected study circles throughout the main cities of Syria, are connected to the top leadership in Damascus. Each study circle consists of three elements: attendees, an assistant and an *Anseh* (religious teacher), and works as an independent structure from other study circles. This system of independent study circles ensured the survival of the movement at the micro level, and the loyalty of members throughout the country to their own study circle, as well as the movement as a whole. The study circle system worked as mini-branches for the movement throughout the Sunni neighborhoods in the Syrian cities, where members were gathered together based on their age group at ages below 20, and based on their social status, education and degree of religiosity for ages above that.

Applied to this amalgamated system of study circles is a three-tier hierarchal membership design. Despite being loosely organized, the movement is known to be exceedingly hierarchical; with women advancing through the tiers of the movement based on their social status, seniority and leadership skills.

A sure way to help distinguish the ranks of the Qubaisyate, within the movement and from the main populace, is the way they dress. There is a dress code that the members follow regardless of their rank; a unified uniform consisting of a wide ankle-length pleated navy skirt, thick dark beige knee-high stockings, low-heeled plain black shoes,

long over coat, and a headscarf. The way the Qubaisyate members tie their headscarves, distinguish them from other covered women in society, with a special knot under the chin that is exclusively theirs. Furthermore, as members advance in their rank to the next tier in the movement, the color of their headscarf and overcoat color changes to reflect their new statuses.

The three different tiers of the Qubaisyate movement are arranged as follow:

- **General Members tier (Study circles):** This tier consists of study circles scattered around the various Sunni neighborhoods of each Syrian city with Qubaisyate influence in an aim to advance the religious education of girls and women in these areas, proliferate Islamic revival by spreading good morals and Islamic ethics and strengthen their influence in Syrian society by recruiting new members to the movement. Based on the structure of the main study circle of the movement, this level consists of three elements:
 - Attendees: They are called *Mureedeh* (seeker) at this level, which consists of invited potential recruits, new members and established members who do not have strong financial or political ties in the society, or do not demonstrate good leadership skills or have no time to be more active in advanced circles, so they do not advance further in the movement. Their duties consist of attending religious lessons and activities to further their religious education and to employ it in their personal lives, as well as preach what they have learned to their friends and family members to help spread religious revival within their own communities. The women in this rank usually wear white

headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with long non-color specific overcoats or even regular modest outfits.

- Assistant: Consists of established members who have advanced from being students at the initial level due to having strong financial or political ties in the society or having demonstrated good leadership skills. Their duties consist of recruiting new members from their families, schools and neighborhoods; organizing the study circles by arranging times, locations and transportations of the students and the teacher; facilitating communications between the students and the teacher, as well as allocating the funds needed for the meetings. Furthermore, the women in this position work as mentors for teenage girls as well as teachers of basic religious education for girls in elementary schools, which are owned by the movement. The women in this rank usually wear white headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with long khaki or grey colored overcoat.
- *Anseh* (religious teachers): She is the head of the study circle and has full authority over the students and the assistants. The *Anseh* usually is a teacher by profession or a highly educated graduate of other accredited university degrees. The *Anseh* also must have a strong background in religious education, either through the movement itself or other known religious institution in the country. She has a dual responsibility; where she teaches general members about their religion and reports to the next tier about her study circle, members and new recruits. Women in this rank usually wear blue

headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with a long navy overcoat.

- **Middle tier (Study/Organizational circles):** This tier consists of higher-level study circles centered only in the prominent Sunni neighborhoods of each Syrian city with Qubaisyate influence in an aim to advance the religious education of teachers of the study circles in the general membership tier in these areas, collect feedback from these teachers about their activities, as well as recruiting women from prominent, wealthy and influential families to strengthen the safety net of the movement in Syrian society.

Based on the structure of the main study circle of the movement, this level also consists of three elements:

- Attendees: Consists of lower-level *Anseh* (religious teachers) who are in charge of running the general members level study circles, as well as women members who belong to upper religious, political and financial Sunni classes in Syrian cities. Their duties consist of attending the religious lessons to perfect their religious education curriculum for their study circles, preach the Qubaisyate ideology to their influential friends and family members to help strengthen the influence of the movement in politics and society. The women in this rank usually wear blue headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with long navy colored overcoats.
- Assistant: Consists of established higher-ranking *Anseh* (teachers) who have advanced from being general members' *Anseh* and being prepared for a higher position at the middle tier. They usually advance due to having strong

financial or political ties in the society, having special leadership skills as well as having demonstrated immense religious knowledge. Their duties consist of organizing the study/organizational circles for the middle tier, facilitating the communication between the lower level *Anseh* and the senior *Anseh*, as well as allocating the funds needed for the lower level study circles and meetings. The women in this rank usually wear dark navy headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with a long dark navy overcoat.

- **Senior *Anseh*:** Is usually an *Anseh* that has seniority in the movement and has moved up the ranks throughout the years to gain legitimacy for her authority through her religious knowledge and exceptional leadership skills. The *Anseh* at this rank is usually a highly educated graduate of medical or engineering schools or holds a graduate diploma from other accredited university degrees. She is usually the head principal of one of Qubaisyate run schools in the city. She has dual responsibilities; where she teaches the other *Anseh* about higher religious education, manages finances of the middle and lower tier and reports to top management about her study circle, activities and other managerial issues in her city, if she is not located in Damascus. The women in this rank usually wear navy headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with a long black colored overcoat.

- **Top Leadership tier (Organizational circles):** This tier consists of organizational circles located in a couple of Sunni neighborhoods in Damascus

with a specific aim to organize the various branches of the movement in Damascus and other Syrian cities, where the movement is operating.

Based on the same structure of the main study circle of the movement, this level consists of three elements:

- Attendees: Which comprise the senior *Anseh* (teachers) with seniority in the movement and the head principals of Qubaysiate run schools in the city of Damascus and other Syrian cities. Their responsibilities include reporting to top management on the activities in their cities, the finances of the schools, top members recruited by their circles, relationship with government authorities as well as receiving direction and insight from top leadership about their specific circles and cities. The women in this rank usually wear navy headscarves tied with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with a long black colored overcoat.
- Assistant: This level comprises higher-ranking senior *Anseh* (teachers) who are second in command to the leader Munira herself. They are the closest and most trusted members of the movement. They have shown extreme leadership skills, ultimate loyalty and dedicated their entire lives to serving the movement. Their duties consist of passing communications between the senior teachers throughout the country to top leadership command as well as disseminating orders coming from top leadership to senior *Anseh* throughout the country. This rank is the active leadership side where they mobilize major resources in cases of need and organize the daily functions of the movement in the country. The women in this rank usually wear black headscarves tied

with the exclusive trademark knot of the Qubaisyate paired with a black overcoat.

- Grand *Anseh*: This level consists of Munira Al-Qubaisy herself and the handful of other companions who directly run the movement in Syria and abroad.

These companions are: Nuhaida Tarakji, Kheiryeh Jiha, Muna Quwayder, Nabila Al-Kuzbary, Sua'ad Meibar, Saryah Al-Zayed, Khuloud Sruji, and the late Fatmeh Khabbaz and Dalal Al-Chishakly in Syria, and Amira Jibreel and Sahar Halabi in Lebanon as well as Fadyah Al-Tabba'a in Jordan.

These women, as Munira herself did, have served the movement for decades and dedicated their entire lives to the cause; most of them have forgone their rights to get married and bear children to advance the movement further in Syrian society. They are known to dress totally in black and cover from head to toe, especially Munira, who even conceals her face behind a thick black veil. A close companion to Munira stated that she chose to dress in black as a sign of sorrow over the deterioration of the status of religion in Muslim lives and Muslim societies.

Members of the leadership circle meet rarely at Munira's own residence in Damascus and the meeting would include one or two senior members at a time, while other top leadership meetings are held at one of the senior members' houses and consist of a handful of participants. Their duties include organizing major funding from within Syria, such as private donors, schools income and influential members, as well as funds from abroad, such as Saudi

Arabia and Gulf States contributions, wealthy Syrian expats, royal Arab families and friends. Also, members at this level are concerned with the vision and planning for the movement within Syria and the Middle East, as well as Europe and the United States. A major task at this level is government relations; women in leadership keep good contacts with connections within the Syrian government, as well as governments of other countries with Qubaisyate influence to ensure the safety net for the movement within governments of these countries.

Furthermore, women at this level are known to be major writers of the Qubaisyate publications. Dr. Saryah Al-Zayed and Sua'ad Meibar have authored the most famous works of the movement, such as the ten-volume book "*Al-Jame'e Fe Hayat Al-Rasool*" (The Comprehensive on the Prophet's life) by Al-Zayed and "*A'keedat Al-Tawheed Min Alkitab Wal Sunnah*" (Monotheism Doctrine in the Holy Book and the Prophet's Tradition" by Meibar).

This hierarchal organizational structure of the Qubaisyate ensures the flow of information and instructions from both directions and throughout all tiers of the movement, the autonomy of each study circle and its survival in case of increased government oppression, and loyalty to the individual study circle, as well as to the main movement. Furthermore, this precise system of uniform, the exclusive way of tying their headscarves, and the color coding, has helped the members of the movement to recognize each other on the streets, as well as the rank of each member in the movement instantly.

Indeed, when you have knowledge of their dress code and color rating system, you can stroll down not only the streets of Damascus and other Syrian cities, but also the streets in other Middle Eastern countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and other country's with Qubaisyate influence, and spot the members with their famous attire and specially knotted white headscarves under their chin.

b. Recruitment

The movement has no official tracking system or membership recording method. It relies on referrals of existing active members to attract new women into the movement. There are no financial dues to be paid upon joining the Qubaisyate, on the contrary, new recruits are showered with religious gifts and attention as a reward for joining, and, depending on her social status, she may receive a fancy celebration after deciding to wear the *hijab* (Muslim headscarf).

Recruitment seems to have a pattern within every circle of the movement; it is clear that the movement try to single out the wives, daughters and close female relatives of the well-known senior politicians and the most wealthy and influential Sunni families in Syria, or girls that demonstrate unmistakable intelligence and leadership skills. This policy turned membership or association with the Qubaisyate into a social status and a very prestigious stance that every woman and girl in Syria wants to be privileged with.

Teenage girls are usually approached by relatives or classmates belonging to the movement and are invited to one of the study circles run by the Qubaisyate in her neighborhood, and women are approached during social celebrations or funerals.

The movement was extremely cautious to avoid the watchful eyes of the regime by recruiting only trustworthy women from the same social circle as the recruiter, whom

they had known for years. The recruiters would collect background information about each participant before allowing her to attend their study circles. Women or girls who had ties to the government, the army or the Ba'ath party, either themselves or through a member of their family, were rejected and prohibited from attendance. Meetings took place in private members' homes, and the new recruit would not know about the time of the meeting until few hours prior to the event. An address was never given and a private car, belonging to the movement, would collect the new recruits and return them to their houses after the conclusion of the meeting.

Recruited women were treated differently, depending on their education and social status; poor women were invited to simple study circles that teach basic religious education and is only concerned with day to day religious issues, such as their role as mothers and wives, while rich and educated women are placed in more sophisticated study circles that teach religion from an intellectual and scientific approach, where they can dive more into the faith, using reason and learn about the right way to approach equality in religion and their rights as women and wives in Islam.

This targeted specialization of recruitment and the prestigious treatment of the educated and wealthy attracted middle, upper-middle and upper class women in the capital Damascus, as well as other cities in Syria. In 2005, the AKI Italian news agency estimated their numbers in Damascus to be around 30,000¹⁰, while in 2006, Al-Hayat newspaper estimated their numbers to more than 75,000 followers. No one truly knows the number of Qubaisyate, specially the general membership tier due to the complex network of study circles that rotate attendance on a regular basis. Their number might be

¹⁰ 12/30/2005 the Italian Press Agency Adnkronos International (AKI)
<http://www.souria.com/em/hl/article.asp?at=59>

vague but their influence is quite observable; the city of Damascus has witnessed the fall of its women under the conservative trend that is sweeping the region. The most apparent indication of this trend was the phenomenon of wearing the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf), which was, and still is, an identifying feature of the members of the movement due to the peculiar way of wearing it, which is exclusively their own invention.

The chain of recruitment for the Qubaisyate went beyond its birth country and advanced, first to neighboring countries of Lebanon and Jordan, where Munira's top ranking companions such as Amira Jibreel and Sahar Halabi established the movement's Lebanese branch, and Fadyah Al-Tabba'a was in charge of establishing the Jordanian branch. Soon enough, Kuwait, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were witnessing their own share of the movement's activities by the hands of Qubaisyate movements who were relocating for multiple reasons to these countries. Members were recruited from Syrian expatriate communities in these countries, as well as local women who showed interest in learning more about their religion.

Furthermore, Qubaisyate's influence was surpassing the Middle East and reaching as far as Europe, Canada and the United States. Their study circles were popping up in Vienna, Paris, Toronto, Detroit, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Houston and Boston to name just a few. Qubaisyate were successful in arranging marriages between their well-influenced young members and Syrian businessmen and influential expatriates residing in Europe and the United States to ensure expansion beyond the Muslim world. One of the interviewees stated that when she was newly wed to a Syrian doctor in Boston and was ready to travel to unite with her groom, she was summoned by a senior *Anseh* and was directed on how to form her very own Qubaisyate study circle by recruiting Syrian and

Muslim women in the host country. This strategy of recruitment beyond Syria ensured the transmittal of the seeds of Qubaisyate ideology to Western countries and the flow of financial, political and social support for the movement locally. This new brand of more conservative Islamic women's group was not only successful in cutting across class boundaries in Syria, but also cutting across political, geographical, and cultural borders as well.

c. Activities

The main activities of the Qubaisyate are the famous study circles, as well as the *Moulid*, day camps and charity. The study circles are basically a group of 6-15 members that gather twice a week in a private home, and belong to the same age group, social class, neighborhood or school. The homes that are chosen as locations for the study group are known to belong to the wealthiest families in the city. Two rooms will be used for the gathering; the first one will have a buffet of the most expensive local cuisines, deserts, fruits and drinks, while the other will be used for conducting the lesson and is arranged in a way that gives the *Anseh* (religious teacher) a raised platform where she can be seen and heard by all attendees. Younger girls sit on the floor over a carpet and face the teacher in their study circles while women are provided chairs that circle the room and face the teacher. The teacher, usually an educated upper-class woman, would arrive to the location in a brand-new top-of-the-line vehicle, dressed in an expensive navy overcoat and blue scarf and carried an air of holiness and authority that captivated the minds of the attendees for the duration of the lesson. The lesson would last about an hour and comprise of parts about day-to-day religious education (basic for girls and advanced for women), Qura'an explanation, Islamic dogma rationalization and religious hymns in

between. Questions for the teacher are not allowed during the girl's study circles; the assistant will collect their questions and hand them to the teacher at the conclusion of the lesson and they are then answered during the next study circle. Women's circles are different; questions could be asked at the conclusion of the meeting and the teacher addressed each question using Quranic interpretations and the prophet's teachings as a basis for answering. Both girls and women's circles are required to keep a religious diary, where they keep track of their religious duties of praying and reading from the Qur'an and other religious literature, and share it with their teacher. The teacher, who is in charge of the group, works as a mentor for the members, both in religious education and social settings. The teacher is also present, giving advice and guidance, in cases of social occasions, such as marriages, funerals and other social events for the members.

The second activity that the Qubaisyate are famous for is the *Moulid*. A *Moulid* (meaning birth in Arabic) is a Sufi religious celebration intended to commemorate the birth, life and death of the Prophet Mohammad. It is usually held at times of major social events, such as the birth of a new baby, weddings of traditional religious Sunni families, returning from pilgrimage to Mecca and even funerals as a way to thank God for the good event or to symbolize acceptance of his will in case of sad ones. The *Moulid* is an organized event where women preachers narrate the events describing the birth and life of the Prophet with chanting and singing of happy hymns in the cases of happy occasions, or describes the life and death of the Prophet in cases of funerals. It is an interactive experience where the women attendees sing and chant behind the preacher with well-known hymns used for the appropriate occasion.

Funerals, in particular, are the principle events for recruiting new members. Relatives, friends and associates of the deceased will be extremely vulnerable to the Islamic message of the Qubaisyate. The preacher will emphasize the closeness of death and the need for immediate repentance, especially for the women who are not covered with the *hijab* (the Islamic headscarf) and the ones who are not performing their Islamic duties, such as praying and fasting. The preachers will build a case for personal Islamic revival before it is too late and death takes away the person's ability to repent. The assistants will hand out scarves for the uncovered women and invite them to commit in front of their relatives, friends, and neighbors to wearing the scarf for the rest of their lives, a social commitment that is not easy to break later on due to societal norms and restrictions.

Another major activity that the Qubaisyate run is day camps for teenage girls. Girl members of study circles from nearby neighborhoods will be invited to attend a full day camp in one of the close mountain resorts (e.g. Bludan, and Zabadani) in the suburbs of the city of Damascus. Invitees would be collected in luxurious buses and taken to one of the summerhouses of the wealthiest families in Damascus. The full day retreat will offer religious education, fun games, Islamic trivia, prizes, expensive food and drinks as well as performance of daily religious duties. New recruits will be celebrated and girls who decided to wear the *hijab* receive special attention from the *Anseh* and her assistants.

Charity is also one of the main activities of the Qubaisyate, although it is only within their own circles. Help for the poor and needy consists of donations from the wealthy members of the movement to the poor women belonging to their own study circles rather than random giving to the poor. The movement is known to advance financial loans to

their middle class and poor members to open up their own businesses, such as day care centers, computer-learning centers and after school programs in their neighborhoods. Charitable work does not only consist of financial assistance; it includes services provided by their professional members to other women members who are in need. Such services are treating poor women for free at the clinics of their physician, giving free medications and medical devices at cost value from their pharmacists, giving private lessons for needy students of young members or the children of a member by their teachers, as well as employing their children and family members at their enterprises. The Qubaisyates have also many links to multiple services and businesses, such as Al-Salamah Hospital in Damascus, behind the U.S. Embassy in Abo Romanneh neighborhood, Al-Salam bookstore, near the Syrian immigration and passport agency in Al-Baramkeh neighborhood, as well as multiple language and computer teaching institutions. The movement has utilized these enterprises and services to serve the poor and needy members for free medical care, educational tools and various religious books. The activities of the Qubaisyate are always linked to one important factor, the political situation in the country and the degree of the regime's tolerance of religious activities. During the first couple of decades, activities were mostly conducted in secret at private homes and included a handful of members to avoid being spotted, while the last couple of decades witnessed openly held activities in their schools and mosques. Surprisingly, funding of the movement's activities was not an issue at any given time during the movement's life. Unlike other grassroots movements and women's charity initiatives in Syria, which depend on members' help, charity bazaars and trickling outside donations from wealthy Syrian businessmen, expatriates or various Arab nations,

Qubaisyate were, on the most part, self-sufficient at any given time due to multiple reasons. First, the Qubaisyate's strategy of recruiting educated and wealthy women provided the movement with the financial resources and the professional caliber to sustain its local study circles. This successful strategy not only provided the movement with the funds needed to sustain its local activities, it also ensured a free, professional, willing and able personnel to keep its operations at maximum productivity.

Second, Munira's vision of Islamic revival in secular Syria facilitated good connections to members of the royal families in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, Syrian expatriates, wealthy businessmen and exiled Muslim Brotherhood members, who wanted to create a nuisance for the state apparatus of the Ba'ath regime and ensure the growth of an Islamic vision in Syria for government and society, and had ensured continuous gifts and contributions to the movement at times of needs.

Finally, the most important factor was the organizational business model, which paired Islamic revivalism with educational investment and proved extremely lucrative. The combination of the economic dimension with the moral dimension, by investing in establishing private schools early on, ensured continuous funding for the movement, as well as employing its members, while passing on the message of Islamic revival to generations of Syrian children.

d. Schools

The capital Damascus witnessed the establishment of multiple Qubaisyate schools in several Sunni neighborhoods by Munira personally and her senior disciples from the 1970s and onward when only public or missionary private schools were the norm in the country. They started as small, ordinary kindergartens and elementary schools teaching

the state official curriculum with an emphasis on Islamic education and good morals, and slowly started growing by adding more classes to serve the increasing demand. The schools became such a success in the middle class communities in the major cities in Syria because they offered a better alternative to the secular teaching of the state-run public schools and a cheaper alternative to the outrageously expensive, and Christian-biased, missionary schools. As an added bonus, the Qubaisyate schools held many religion-based activities and taught the children about ethics, good morals and the right form of Islam, a subject well distorted and under developed in Syrian public schools. The schools enabled the movement to reach children, especially boys, from a younger age where their study circles were limited only to adolescent girls and women. This added bonus ensured the transmittal of their Islamic fundamentalist ideology to generations of students who were attending their religious classes, as well as exposure to both sexes from an early age. A close companion to Munira stated that the Grand Miss believed that the only way to change a society is through teaching its children from an early age, thus, the movement was very active in establishing daycare centers to take charge of children's education as early as ages three and four.

The number of Qubaisyate schools grew tremendously all over the capital, as well as other large metropolitan cities in the country. They were called cheerful names, such as *Dar Alfarah* (House of Joy) in Al-Mhajreen neighborhood, *Dar Alna'eem* (House of Abundance), and *Dawhet Almajed* (Stardom Oasis) in Almaliki neighborhood, *Albawader* (The Superiors) in Kafer Sooseh neighborhood, and *Dar Al-Bayan* (House of Knowledge), *Alyasameen* (Jasmine), *Rawdet Al-Ons* (Happiness Daycare) and *Alhayat Alholwah* (Happy Life) in Alvelat Algharbeyeh neighborhood. They also used the names

of famous Islamic characters, such as Omar Ibn Alkhattab and Omar bin Abdel Azeez Schools in Almazzeh neighborhood.

Neither the government, nor the movement has ever issued any official data or statistics about the number of schools associated with the Qubaisyate. The only data present on this subject was a survey presented by Al-Hayat Arabic newspaper in an article discussing the rise of Islamic schools in Syria, which concluded that about forty schools in the capital Damascus were affiliated with the Qubaisyate movement with no information about other Qubaisyate affiliated schools in the rest of the country (AL-Hayat 2006).

It is truly hard to estimate the schools in Syria affiliated with the movement due to the fact that a different member of the Qubaisyate runs each school autonomously and there are no direct links to the main body of the movement that can be pinned down. The only way to know that a school is associated with the Qubaisyate would be to look at the teachers and the headmistress and recognize their tie to the movement by the way they dress. The famous Qubaisyate uniform worn by the teachers is a clear indicator of the connection of the school to the movement, as well as the dark colored uniform worn by the headmistress as a sign of status and loyalty to the Qubaisyate.

In conclusion, the Qubaisyate oversee the education of hundreds of thousands of Syrian schoolchildren (of both sexes) from daycare to high school graduation within their privately owned schools; administers religious education to majority of girls and women in Damascus and other Syrian cities outside of their schools and in the privacy of their own homes; conduct publicly open religious lessons and lectures in mosques, as well as run multiple charity networks and businesses in the major cities of the Syrian state,

making them a powerful vehicle to spread fundamentalism and an influential tool to proliferate Islamic revival influence in Syrian society. Their complex network of study circles, educational and social activities, schools, businesses and charity projects, ensured multitudes of followers of the movement throughout the years of their existence in Syria, and showed the different successful dimensions of their organizational structure. This tremendous success is worthy of in-depth examination to uncover its origin and to analyze the applicability of resource mobilization model to such unique mobilization structure.

Analysis

This chapter explored the second hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, which emphasizes the role of Munira Al-Qubaisy the movement's entrepreneur as a designer of a successful movement-business model, as well as the role of the effective organizational structure of the Qubaisyate in maximizing the movement's impact and efficaciousness.

In light of the data collected from interviews and literature on the topic, we need to assess the relevancy of the resource mobilization framework for the growth and outcomes of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria given the fact that it had to survive within the context of a multifaceted cultural, political and social environment.

The major and frequently cited literature on resource mobilization theory presents two major core dimensions to this framework of mobilizing structures, which are resources and organizations. While stressing the importance of resources in general, this analysis will emphasize the entrepreneurial-organizational component of the theory by dissecting and analyzing each of these dimensions at the mezzo level (entrepreneurial mode) and the macro level (organizational mode) to assess the relevancy of each to the topic under study (McCarthy and Zald 1987:45). Furthermore, this analysis will encompass the numerous types of resources utilized by the Qubaisyate movement, such as moral resources (legitimacy and authenticity), cultural resources (organic tactics and customized approaches), material resources (money and other tangible assets), social-organizational resources (organizational makeup and network) and human resources (experienced participants and robust members), as it makes up the backbone of the other dimensions used in this analysis.

I. Entrepreneurial Mode (mezzo level)

At this level, the analysis will emphasize the role of the Qubaisyate movement's entrepreneur, leaders and cadre in the success of the movement and how have they managed to pool funds, resources and people into strategic and tactical actions.

Various social movement literatures were concerned by the rule of leaders in social movement organizations. McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) emphasized the role of the movement's entrepreneurs as designers of a movement-business model based on: allocating essential resources to maximize impact and efficaciousness, drawing on public sentiment to define goals and objectives and offering incentives to widen the circle of participation and attract individuals to the message of the movement. Additionally, numerous other researchers (e.g. Zurcher and Snow 1981; Klandermans 1989; Melucci 1996; Staggenborg 2009; and Morris 2011) emphasized the important role of leadership in the success of social movement; by defining clear goals, shaping proper strategies and developing organizational structures and networks that facilitate good communication. Most of the literature on the role of the leader in social movement has two main themes in common: first, it fell short of theorizing that role in a way that adequately addresses the phenomenon; second, it failed to completely incorporate agency and structure into the major theories of social movements. Thus, this analysis will examine the actions (resource mobilizing strategies) of the Leader Ms. Munira Al-Qubaisy within the structural context, while recognizing the role of multitude of movement' entrepreneurs, who take on leadership positions at the different levels of the organization, and their sustained work of capacity building to expand and maintain the movement' growth and success for fifty some years.

a. Moral Resources

Moral resources encompass legitimacy and authenticity of the cause of the movement and its relevant actors, solidarity and loyalty of its members and sympathetic position of its supporters (Snow 1979; Cress and Snow 1996). The most important moral resource, and the one that has attracted the most attention, has to be the legitimacy aspect, where theorists have concentrated on the connection between cultural outlook and its reflection on the movement's processes. Thus, arguing that movements and actors, who were successful in creating positive public opinion and gaining societal legitimacy, had an advantage over other movements that did not reflect the same social stance and had less difficulty convincing people to join the cause (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Powell and DiMaggio 1992). Moral resources typically originate outside of the movement itself and are usually bestowed upon the movement by an external source of authority who is known to have them (Edward and McCarthy 2010). Gaining and acquiring such resources is not an easy task, nevertheless, the Qubaisyate were successful in obtaining and keeping their legitimacy for decades.

Munira's social and family ties to the Kuftaro family, a well-known religious family of preachers and clergies in the city of Damascus, played a major role in giving her the legitimacy needed in the Damascene community. She had spent many years studying religious texts and teachings under Amin Kuftaro, and after his death she continued under his son, the famous Ahmad Kuftaro, the founder of the prominent Abulnoor Islamic society, a very well known religious institution in Damascus. Her ties to the Kuftaros and the Abulnoor Institute initiated Munira in the community as one of the first acceptable women preachers to enter the patriarchal domain of religious preaching in Syria.

Furthermore, her religious education, combined with her teaching skills and academic degrees, granted Munira the access to preach to Damascene women associated with the Abulnoor Institute, marking the first steps in her long career of preaching and religious empowerment of women. Munira's vision, which tied personal excellence to reviving Islam, was greatly welcomed by the prominent religious Sunni houses in the old city of Damascus, and later by similar social and religious classes throughout Syria.

The Qubaisyate movement started with a clear objective of Islamic revival, with an emphasis on female education, and continued for more than five decades true to its goal, which gave the movement its authenticity and dependability in the Syrian community.

The generations of female members, preachers, students, teachers and headmistresses speak volumes about the impact of the Qubaisyate in society in general and as a major step toward Islamic revivalism at large. The charity work fulfilled by its members is a clear sign of the path of the movement and its genuine aim to uplift the society in an Islamic manner, which rallied thousands of supporters for the movement in the Syrian society.

In addition, the movement was accepted by female members who found the Qubaisyate to be a tool for personal excellence and freedom within religion in a highly patriarchal society, as well as men in the community, who found the movement to be a religious guard for their female relatives who otherwise could fall into the path of Western modernization and bring shame to the family. Most importantly, the tactic of recruiting women from influential and religious families in Syria gave the movement the needed support and legitimacy to be accepted by the prominent houses in the country, a fate that other movements concerned with the issue of Islamic revivalism failed to achieve.

b. Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are the widely available “cultural capital” (artifacts and cultural products), which a movement uses to build its organizational model, tactical repertoires and technical schema. It is a customized approach to mobilization using tacit knowledge, organic tactics and cultural conceptual tools to accomplish specific tasks such as forming an organization, running meetings, initiating conferences and events (Edward and McCarthy 2010). This group of cultural resources comprises movement or causes relevant products, such as literature, music, pamphlets and videos, which aid the recruitment and socialization of members and improve the movement’s message to the outside world. The Qubaisyate movement was very skillful at utilizing the cultural capital available at their hands. They were able to take charge of religious and social activities, such as the *Moulid* (an event to commemorate the birth, life, and death of prophet Mohammad), and turn them into a recruitment event held at major social events, such as the birth of a new baby, weddings of traditional religious Sunni families, returns from pilgrimage or funerals. The *Moulid* witnessed the creation of Qubaisyate-exclusive hymns and songs, where members paired the music of the highly decimated pop-culture Arabic songs with religious relics of their creation to spread an atmosphere of joy and celebration in a religiously accepted manner. The result was an interactive experience in which young girls and women attendees sang and chanted behind the preacher with the well-known hymns directed at the love of God instead of the immoral pop-culture lyrics. Furthermore, the Qubaisyate day camps for teenage girls were taken from the idea of day camps established for boy and girl scouts in Syria. Due to its nature of mixing genders and sleep over activities, the scout’s camps did not appeal to traditional Syrians other

than those with secular point of views or Christians. The Qubaisyate introduced a new socially accepted form of day camps where girl members of study circles from nearby neighborhoods would be invited to attend a full day camp in one of the summerhouses of the wealthiest families in Damascus. The full day retreat would offer religious education, fun games, Islamic trivia, prizes and expensive food and drink, an idea that was appealing to parents of these girls, knowing that their daughters were in good, God-fearing, hands. The most important tool used by the Qubaisyate was the weekly meeting via study circles that gathered in a private home belonging to one of the trusted members. It was a cultural norm in Syria for housewives to gather on a regular basis in one of their friends' houses for socializing, snacking and drinking coffee. The Qubaisyate built on that social tradition to gather their members in a cultural manner accepted by the society at large, using well-known members' houses, offering food and drinks, and, as an added bonus, a dose of religious education. Women were comfortable in attending the 'meetings' as they resembled their already socially accepted social gatherings that they had integrated in their daily schedules for years. The informality of the weekly meetings was inviting for new recruits to come and check out the movement without being committed to a formal meeting or the need to explain its purpose to their friends and family.

Both girls and women's circles consist of a group of members that belonged to the same age group, social class, neighborhood or school. The teacher, who is in charge of the group, works as a mentor for the members, both in religious education and social settings, leading the group in participation in social occasions, such as marriage, funerals and other social events for the members, making the study circle an integrated part of the social and cultural setting of the individual members.

c. Material resources

Material resources are, basically, the financial and physical capital owned by a movement. Material resources encompass monetary resources and assets, physical space and properties, supplies and equipment, transportation and employment. This category of resources usually receives the most analytical attention, for good reason. Movements need financial resources to survive, expand and offset costs. No matter how many other forms of resources the movement can obtain, monetary resources are a necessity for survival and longevity. Money, for example, is tangible, fungible and more proprietary than other form of resources, which makes it an essential form of material resources for any movement to survive (Edward and McCarthy 2010).

Surprisingly, funding of the movement's activities was not an issue at any given time during the movement's life. Unlike other grassroots movements and women's charity initiatives in Syria, who depend on members' help, charity bazaars and trickling outside donations from wealthy Syrian businessmen, expatriates or various Arab nations, Qubaisyate were, on the most part, self-sufficient at any given time for multiple reasons. First, the Qubaisyate's strategy of recruiting educated and wealthy women provided the movement with the financial resources and the professional caliber to sustain its local study circles. This successful strategy provided the movement with the funds needed to sustain its local activities, by utilizing members' monetary resources to finance day-to-day activities of the movements. Meetings, study circles, and *Moulids* were held for free at the houses of active members, who even provided a buffet of the most expensive local cuisines, deserts, fruits and drinks. Day camps were also held in one of the summerhouses of members who belonged to the wealthiest families in the close and very

expensive mountain resorts (e.g. Bludan, and Zabadani) in the suburbs of the city of Damascus. The full day retreats would offer prizes, expensive food and drink, as well as religious materials, which were all provided by wealthy members of the movement. Furthermore, participants of the study circles and day camps are collected in luxurious cars and buses belonging to members of the movement or relatives of members who donated their time and transportation services for free. These wealthy members also provided cash donations and expensive gifts as well as employment for poor members and their families at their business and enterprises.

Second, Munira's vision of Islamic revival in secular Syria facilitated good connections to members of the royal families in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, Syrian expatriates, wealthy businessmen, and exiled Muslim Brotherhood members, who wanted to create a nuisance in the state apparatus of the Ba'ath regime and to ensure the growth of an Islamic vision in Syria for government and society, combined had ensured continuous gifts and contributions to the movement at times of needs.

Finally, the most important factor was the organizational business model, which paired Islamic revivalism with educational investment and proved extremely lucrative. Thus, combining the economic dimension with the moral dimension, by advancing financial loans for their middle class and poorer members to open up their own businesses, such as daycare centers, computer-learning centers and after school programs in their neighborhoods, and by investing in establishing kindergartens and private schools run by the higher circle in the movement ensured continuous funding for the movement, as well as employing its members, while passing on the message of Islamic revival to generations of Syrian children.

d. Human resources

Human resources include leadership (entrepreneurs and managers), personnel (volunteers and laborers), as well as human capital (experience, skills and expertise). This category of resources is contingent upon multiple factors, such as the movement's ability to reach the desirable personnel, the participants' willingness to make their services available and utilizable by the movement, as well as the constraints and limitations that affected such participation (economic factors, social relationships, physical competence, and competing obligations) (Edward and McCarthy 2010).

Clearly, the Qubaisyate's strength throughout the years has been their human resources. Starting with the leadership tier, these women, such as Munira and her close companions, served the movement for decades and dedicated their entire lives to the cause, risking their safety at times of political upheavals, giving their time and money continuously, and forgoing their rights to get married and bear children to advance the movement's cause of Islamic revivalism further in the Syrian society.

These leaders also managed to organize major funding from within Syria (private donors, schools income and influential members), as well as funds from abroad (Saudi Arabia and Gulf States contributions, wealthy Syrian expats, royal Arab families and friends), while advancing the vision and planning growth for the movement within Syria and the Middle East, as well as Europe and the United States. Another major success of the leadership of the Qubaisyate was balancing good government relations. Women in leadership kept good contacts with connections within the Syrian Government, as well as governments of other countries with Qubaisyate influence, which ensured the movement's safety at times of immense government oppression.

Furthermore, the Qubaisyate has recruited an army of human resources spanning every trade and line of work, which facilitated organization of the movement internally and externally. Within the movement, members were busy organizing study circles by arranging times, locations, transportations and allocating the funds needed for the meetings; teaching and mentoring teenage girls and women in private homes, mosques and day camps; running kindergarten, elementary schools and other educational institutions owned by the movement; running social events, *Moulids* and other activities alongside recruiting new members from their families, schools and neighborhoods and preaching the Qubaisyate ideology to their influential friends and family members to help strengthen the influence of the movement in politics and society.

Moreover, their professional members included teachers, doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers and many other white-collar professions. The services provided by their professional members were utilized to help bring in funds and donations for the movement as well as to help other women members and their families who were in need. Such services were treating poor women for free at the clinics of their physician, providing free medications and medical devices at cost value through their pharmacists, giving private lessons for needy students of young members or the children of a member by their teachers as well as employing their children and family members at their enterprises. The Qubaisyates have also many links to multiple services and businesses, such as hospitals, book stores, language training centers, computer teaching institutions, and many other services owned by a member of the movement or one of their families. The movement utilized these enterprises and services to serve the poor and needy members for free medical care, educational tools and various religious materials.

e. Social-Organizational Resources

Three general forms can identify the resources in this category: infrastructure, social networks and formal organizations (Edward and McCarthy 2010). These forms can include both categories of intentional social organization that is created specifically to promote the agenda of a social movement, and appropriable social organization that exist for non-movement use but for members to utilize to obtain entry into other resources by means of it (Coleman 1990). Regardless of their accessibility, both forms have been essential to give explanation of patterns of mobilizations by increasing the likelihood of movement mobilizations in social settings where these resources have been present (Edward and McCarthy 2010).

The Qubaisyate made great use of public schools to recruit new members, especially the daughters, and close female relatives of well-known senior politicians and the most wealthy and influential Sunni families in Syria, or girls that demonstrated unmistakable intelligence and leadership skills at their schools. Teenage girls were usually approached by classmates belonging to the movement, away from the watchful eyes of the regime, and were invited to one of the study circles run by the Qubaisyate in her neighborhood. Moreover, public schools also helped to gather information about the new recruit, where recruiters would collect behavioral and background information about each participant from her classmates before allowing her to attend their study circles.

Another institution that was utilized by the Qubaisyates was the local mosque. For example, Al-Zahraa mosque and Omar Bin Alkhattab mosque and its affiliated entities (e.g religious schools and religious study groups) have played a dual role in the rise of the Qubaisyate in Damascus.

As a religious institution, it offered vast facilities, teaching instruments, religious materials, as well as technological appliances, to hold and serve large numbers of students at any given time. These mosques also provided a natural environment for recruitment and organization, where networks can be organically formed, controlled and mobilized. Although the role of mosques for Qubaisyate's rise did not come into play until the mid-2000s, due to the restriction by the state of organized religious activities and infiltration of security services, nevertheless, many the Qubaisyate has utilized the religious-spatial role of the mosque to promote their message, allocate resources and recruit members in various neighborhoods in the country.

Due to the repressive political environment with which Syria was plagued for decades, where movement visibility could be fatal, the Qubaisyate had to turn into a system of "network-based" activism to keep safe from the watchful eye of the Ba'ath regime.

Accordingly, the movement has been known to favor informal involvement in complex, hidden or underground networks based on personal relationships, family ties and social connections. This network-based movement building mechanism granted authenticity, provided legitimacy and ensured security essential to recruit members in an environment where the Ba'ath authoritarian regime was increasingly criminalizing Islamic activities.

Furthermore, the adaptation to the use of the Internet and the widespread social networks (e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, and Viber) played a major role as a free and available communication mechanism both locally and internationally, a way to disseminate literature and educational materials to active members in the privacy of their own homes, a tactical evasion of public surveillance and the security apparatus and an easy and informal resource for recruitment in recent years.

II. Organizational Mode (macro level)

At this level, the analysis will be twofold; the first will emphasize the Qubaisyate's organizational structure and how it relates to the general theory of resource mobilization, the other will compare this structure to the imported structure of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to Syria to show an example of the effect and influence of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalist movement on the structure of the Qubaisyate.

In the study of social movements, scholars have called attention to the various structures of social movement organizations; being formal or informal for example, which can determine the movement's longevity and durability and immensely influence their tactics and strategic decision-making process (Staggenborg 2009). Studies have shown that the more formalized the structure of a social movement is, the higher the chances of survival over a long period of time compared to movements that follow an informal structure. In turn, informal structure can facilitate a faster reaction to sudden and unanticipated events and generates more rapid, innovative tactics to face the new environment (Gamson 1990; Staggenborg 1988; 1989). Theorists have also identified additional types of organizational structure, such as formal and informal social networks, groups and other mobilizing vehicles that are used to recruit members and organize collective action (McAdams et al. 1996:3).

In the case of the Qubaisyate, the movement follows a successful combination of a formal overall structure for the movement, as well as a system of informal social networks for the chapters (study circles). A federated structure of authority works as the basis for its formal organizational structure; where ubiquitous, well organized and loosely connected study circles throughout the main cities of Syria, are connected to top

leadership in Damascus and make up the base for the informal social network of the movement.

Each study circle consists of three elements: attendees, an assistant and an *Anseh* (religious teacher), and works as an independent structure from other study circles. An important element of the study circle is the homogeneity of its members, where all women come from similar social and religious background and live in close proximity to each other. This element did not only facilitate ease of gathering, it also maintained secrecy, conformity and prevented conflicts.

The study circles worked as mini-branches for the movement throughout the Sunni neighborhoods in the Syrian cities with enough autonomy and flexibility to be run semi-independently from top leadership in Damascus. This system of independent study circles ensured the survival of the movement at the micro level, the loyalty of members throughout the country to their own study circle and to the movement as a whole, as well as the control of a wider pool of financial resources and recruits. Applied to this amalgamated system of study circles is a three-tier hierarchal membership design that includes a general membership tier, middle tier and leadership tier.

Despite being loosely organized, the movement is known to be exceedingly hierarchical; with women advancing through the tiers of the movement based on their social status, seniority and leadership skills. The movement is solely a socially based, non-registered organization in any country, including its birthplace Syria, and has no official base or headquarter anywhere in the world, giving it the flexibility and liquidity to be steered from any country in the world. This fact ensured the survival of the movement in different political circumstances, in multiple countries and during leadership relocation.

There is a striking resemblance between the organizational structure of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Qubaisyate movement organizational structure.

Both movements have a basic organizational aspect of depending on a federated structure of authority, both movements rely on a network of branches throughout the country of operation and both movements are unified by a central headquarter in the capital city of the country of operation. Furthermore, members in both movements show extreme loyalty; not only to their branch/study circle, but also to the mother movement as a whole and the branch leader/*Anseh* played a vital role as an intermediary between common members and top leadership. The branch system helped both movements to survive during periods of extreme political repression, when leadership had to relocate or shift organization and planning responsibilities of the movement to ensure smooth communication (Munsoon 2001).

It is noteworthy to mention that the Muslim Brotherhood have used the basic structure of a branch system from the beginning of its foundation while the Qubaisyate adopted it few years later after it has gained popularity and numbers. One explanation would be that the Muslim Brotherhood was founded as a movement with an aim of growth, while the Qubaisyate was started by one person with a vision and grew to become a popular movement.

Another similarity between the Muslim Brotherhood organizational structure and the Qubaisyate's is the of a three tier membership structure based on the degree of its members' commitment. This tier system divided both organizations into: First-level members, which were called "assistants" by the Muslim Brotherhood and "Mureeda" (seekers) by the Qubaisyate. This level in both movements is similar in the way that it

requires only minimal participation of members but differs where the Muslim Brotherhoods oblige members to sign membership cards and pay society dues (Munsoon 2001) .

At the second level of membership, both movements utilized members to facilitate the smooth operation of the movement. Called “related” members by the Muslim Brotherhood and “assistants” by the Qubaisyate, members at this level are the ones who had shown commitment and loyalty to the movement and demonstrated knowledge of the goals and principles of their society. The Muslim Brotherhood went further by requiring members at this level to take an oath of allegiance, whereas the Qubaisyate depend more on the members’ unspoken commitment driven by faith.

The third level membership tier in both movements consists of the members who devoted their entire life to advance the cause of the movement. Members at this level are called “active” by the Muslim Brotherhood, while called “Anseh” by the Qubaisyate, and in both organizations have been top achievers in the realm of leadership, Islamic education and societal recognition.

The resemblance in both movement leads to the question: did the Qubaisyate model their organizational structure based on that of the Muslim Brotherhood? After all, the Qubaisyate was initiated at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood was the only established and organized movement in Syria, it had infiltrated the university where Munira Al-Qubaisy attained her Islamic education degree, and was a household name in most of the Sunni mosques and homes in the country. It seems that at the time when the Qubaisyate movement started to grow and needed a well-thought-of organizational structure, the model of the Muslim Brotherhood was readily available to be adopted.

With a few alterations to suit female members and adapt to Syrian societal norms and security requirements, the Qubaisyate came up with an improved version of the Muslim Brotherhood organizational model that stood the test of time and withstood severe state repression. There is no doubt that the federated organizational structure of the Qubaisyate has played a major role in the movement's impressive growth in Syria and beyond and ensured its survival in the context of major political and societal turmoil.

The federated organizational structure used by the Qubaisyate was hailed in numerous works in the field of resource mobilization theory. Several scholars have argued the importance of a federated organizational structure to the growth and success of a social movement, stressing the advantages of such approaches to the long-term sustainability and longevity of the movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Lichbach 1994; McAdam 1996; Musoon 2005). This organizational model, although proven a success in the West, proved to be persistently challenged in the political environment of Syria and the Middle East. Liberal democratic polities have a component of tolerance that can harbor and support the creation and growth of social movement organizations while providing multiple resources to ensure its longevity. In contrast, the prevalence of one party rule and dictatorship in Middle Eastern politics proved to be lethal to the formation and progress of any form of civil society and collective behavior, regardless if it was politically, socially or religiously based. For that exact reason, the Qubaisyate had to alter the model used by the Muslim Brotherhood and perfect it to adapt to the hostile political environment it had to operate within. Accordingly, a secretive, women exclusive, Islamic revivalist movement based on a federated system of informal networks of loosely organized study circles proved a major success.

Conclusion

Several main conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, it supplies evidence for the application of resource mobilization framework in explaining the rise, growth and outcomes of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in secular Syria. Numerous available resources, effective leadership, and a well-planned organizational structure, indeed, have all affected mobilization and outcomes as predicted by the resource mobilization framework, and the extension of the theory to account for the formation and mobilization of the Qubaisyate highlights the applicability of this approach to Islamic social movement studies.

Second, this analysis demonstrates that the leader of the Qubaisyate movement, Munira Al-Qubaisy and the top leadership cadre played a major role in the rise and success of the movement in Syria and other Arab and Muslim countries and the tactful expansion to Europe and the United States. The leader's exposure to Islamic revivalism influence in the greater Middle East early on supplied Ms. Al-Qubaisy with the necessary resources and tools to design a successful mobilizing structure capable of withstanding numerous fluctuating political and cultural pressures. The pre-existing organizational model of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and the tactics they used for mobilizing support, collecting resources and dealing with the government, served as a pilot case for Ms. Al-Qubaisy to build on its success and failure, perfect its weaknesses and utilize its strengths, while building a brand new vision for her movement. As a result a better, more successful organizational model was created and the Qubaisyate movement flourished in Syria even in times of great political repression. That same model was further carried, implemented and proved a success in multiple other countries with Qubaisyate influence.

This analysis also confirms that the adaptation of a resource mobilization model, based on the notion of the effective entrepreneurs and successful organizational model as factors in social movement mobilization, can explain the formation of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria and beyond. The influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revivalist movement has indeed changed the role that the leadership of the Qubaisyate played and the organizational structure it created which, in turn, influenced the movement's materialization and longevity. The Qubaisyate leadership's response to Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and the adoption of the existent organizational structure of the Muslim Brotherhood has influenced the livelihood of the Qubaisyate in Syria for decades making them a success that other Islamic revivalist movement failed to achieve. A third conclusion can be deducted from this analysis, which is the applicability of rationality of actors of the resource mobilization theory to the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. Whilst the core dimensions of resource mobilization framework served as a key factor to facilitate the Qubaisyate's growth, the utilization of these resources by the movement's leader and cadre played a major role in determining how these factors impacted the movement. The assumption of rationality of actors, when actors recognize the availability of opportunities and chose to exploit certain resources to advance the movement's goals and objectives, proved to apply to the case of the Qubaisyate in Syria. In conclusion, the resource mobilization approach has successfully addressed the growth of the Qubaisyate in Syria and focusing on resource mobilization can shed light on analyzing Islamic social movements beyond its initiation phase and add to the understanding of collective action from a different angle to serve as a revised and improved approach to previous attempts in the study of Islamic social movements.

Chapter Six: Cultural Framing Approach

Introduction

This intermediate hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on collective identity and cultural framing theory of social movement, emphasizes the role of frames used by the Qubaisyate movement as interpretive designs that propose a language and cognitive tools for understanding the issues and events in Syria, as well as the role of ‘collective agency’ that inspired and legitimized the movement’s existence and longevity. The present study argues that Islamic revivalism in the Middle East has established a master frame, “Islam is the solution”, as well as a sense of solidarity around the idea of the “Muslim cause” which the Qubaisyate movement has used as a tool to rise in Syria by gaining religious and cultural legitimacy among Syrian society. The movement had used the message of “Islam is the solution” to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society and to argue that there is a problem that needs to be addressed and only a return to the original teachings of the religion is the solution. As a result, the movement enjoyed great legitimacy and support among the elite houses of the capital city and expanded to cover the rest of the country, as well as abroad, by infiltrating the communities through a message of religion and piety; a feat other religious groups who were also concerned with Islamic revivalism had been unsuccessful at accomplishing. This aspect of the study, therefore, will concentrate on the role of “framing Islam as a solution” and the “collective identity” created around the idea of unification under religion, in promoting and legitimizing the Qubaisyate movement as a religious movement, enabling it to become a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria and abroad for more than five decades.

I. Frames

a. Middle Eastern Islamic Revival message

In general, Islam is practiced around the world by millions of Muslims in peace and with gentle and humble poise. Adherents to the faith pride themselves on their close relationship with God and close following of the right path in life based on the teaching of the Quran and Prophet Mohammed's example.

Global events, such as the satirical cartoons about the Prophet published in a Danish newspaper, or the awarding of a British medal of honor to the author Salman Rushdie for his book "Satanic Verses," are just mere examples of what is perceived in the Muslim world as an insult to Islam, which becomes a trigger that can spark off major anomies and upheavals in Muslim societies at large (Moghadam 2009).

These sporadic occurrences, combined with on-going concerns about globalization and the Westernization of Islamic societies, which had swept the region using social, economic, political and even military vehicles, and the deterioration of Islamic values in many Muslim-majority countries, has created a sense of cultural imperialism and the belief that Islam is under attack through undermining the culture of Muslim societies.

A perceived war on Islam has mandated Muslims worldwide with various degrees of religious adherence to defend their faith, as well as to go back to its rich history to relive the Golden Era of Islam. The defenders of the faith broke into two opposites camps: a militant '*Mutataref*' (Islamist) camp and a peaceful '*Mujaded*' (revivalist) camp.

The "Islamists", on one hand, felt obligated to take violent action on the conviction that Islam required social and political activism in order to establish an Islamic state, or to bring back the Islamic golden age to reinvigorate the faithful (Wiktorowicz 2004).

The ‘Revivalists’, on the other hand, concentrated on the restoration of the early days of Islam, which is considered to be the golden period, by launching a peaceful revolution from below through the ‘re-Islamization’ of society one person at a time.

Both camps are united in their means and objectives; returning to Islam is the only solution to bring back dignity and pride to Muslims around the world, thus, with either violent or peaceful interpretation of the religious texts. The end product, which is a society that runs on a model based on Islamic ethics and teachings of the Quran and Prophet Mohammed, is only attainable through going back to the fundamentals of religion.

In general, Islam became the only solution for the number of ills brought on by the new globalized system on the Muslim community.

A few revivalist movements adopted the message of “Islam is the solution” in the greater Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the main catalyst to the Islamic revivalist movement in the Arab World, followed by a wave of *Shi’a* militancy movements in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and some Gulf States, which rose as a result of the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of a long awaited Islamic state. Furthermore, the Iranian Revolution gave rise to a balancing Sunni reaction to offset the growing *Shi’a* influence in the Muslim world by mobilizing some Sunni fundamentalist groups, such as the *Wahhabis* in Saudi Arabia (Dekmejian 1995).

The Sunni¹¹ Islamic revivalist movement in the Arab world was concentrated in the hands of two major movements, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the *Wahhabis*

¹¹ Sunni Islam makes up 90 percent of total Muslim population worldwide.

(*Salafyah*) in Saudi Arabia, which were both founded upon highly politicized religious ideology characterized by violence and a reformist approach toward traditional Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded by Hasan Al-Banna in 1928, was a reformist movement born in opposition to British rule in Egypt. The idea behind the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood was to rid Muslim societies from the occupation and exploitation of the colonizing powers who were destroying the rich Muslim culture and replacing it with foreign elements, by reviving Islam and giving it a central role in the general public's lives through education and charitable works. The fundamental worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood was derived from the Islamic *Hanbali* school of thought (Munson 2005). This Islamic tradition, which is used to interpret Islamic law, is known to be the least flexible and the most conservative among the four major schools of Islamic thought. Adopting this tradition meant relying on the literal reading and understanding of the Quran and other religious texts and materials and rejecting modern interpretations that might have been useful in the current era.

Armed with this point of view, the Muslim Brotherhood fashioned a political Islamic message "Islam is the solution," to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society. The movement argued that there was a problem that needed to be addressed (foreign occupation of Muslim land) and only a return to the original teachings of the religion was the solution. It suggested tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the cultural damage produced by the colonizing powers by uplifting Muslim citizens from the ills of the occupation through charitable work and education. In addition, the movement offered rationale for solidarity and active participation in the movement based on the idea that all Muslims were part of one

interconnected community and must be united together and fight the infringement of Western influence in the Muslim land.

As with the Muslim Brotherhood, the *Wahhabis/Salafyah*¹² movement's fundamental worldview was also derived from the Islamic *Hanbali* school of thought. The *Salafyah* movement, at its essence, is inspired by the strict and rigorous teaching of the medieval Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiya, as well as the puritanical ideas of the eighteenth century theologian Mohammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab (Moghadam 2009).

As its name implies, the *Salafyah*, meaning predecessors in Arabic, emphasized the return to the original form of Islam practiced by the Prophet Mohammad and his disciples and advocated the rule of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) in Muslim majority countries. The movement relied on the *Hanbali* tradition in the literal interpretation of the Quran and religious texts, while downplaying the role of reason and critical thinking in theology. They believed in the Islamization not only of their societies, but also the political systems and governments ruling Muslim citizens.

The *Salafyah* movement used the expression "return to the *Salaf's* ways" to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society. The movement argued that there was a problem that needed to be addressed (Islamic identity was in danger) and only a return to the original teachings of the religion was the solution. It suggested tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the cultural damage produced by Western influence in the Muslim lands by implementing *Sharia'a* Islamic law and establishing an Islamic government based on the original form of Islam.

In addition, the movement offered rational for solidarity and active participation in the

¹² These two terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same movement in Islam, which started as *Salafyah* and later adopted the name of its greatest influence Mohammed ibn 'Abd al Wahhab (1703-1792 CE)

movement based on the idea that all Muslims were part of one interconnected community and must unite together and fight the infringement of Western influence in Muslim land.

b. Societal/ unofficial Islamic message in Syria

Islam, as with any major religious tradition, supplies an ideological framework with a clear message that is relevant to the individual Muslim's life, character and actions. This message in turn, becomes the cornerstone for society's message in general and is accepted by the majority of the population. In Syria, majority Sunni Muslims belonged to traditional Islam and practiced their religion peacefully, had great tolerance of other religions and sects and lived and worked side by side with Christians, Jews and many other religions and sects dwelling cities and villages.

Although Islam was a major pillar in the lives of Sunni-Muslim Syrians, who attributed their economic success and wealth to God's blessings and their devotion to their religion, however, religion was a personal relationship with God and didn't go past the walls of their houses and mosques. Throughout history, cultural and political situations were dealt with through the emphasis on the ideology of nationality rather than religion. Syrians of all religious beliefs had fought numerous wars as a single unit for the good of the country as a whole. Syria's unique history, geographic location and religious and ethnic mix have turned it into a melting pot of various ideologies. Throughout history, the Syrian constitution reflected this diversity by leaning towards a secular path as well as keeping *Shari'a* as the main source of jurisprudence. The constitution leaning towards secularism was, in a sense, that it guaranteed freedom of faith, separated religious practice from state institutions and did not promulgate Islam as an official religion, although it required the president to be a Muslim (Khatib 2011). Secularism was essential to bond Syrians around

national unity with its ability to transcend ethnic and religious idiosyncrasy by affirming an inclusive political identity.

This equilibrium started to shift after the country became exposed to the message of highly politicized religious ideology of the Islamic revivalist movement in the Arab world carried by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the *Wahhabis (Salafyah)* in Saudi Arabia. The establishment of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood branch brought with it a message characterized by violence and a reformist approach toward traditional Islam, emphasized the difference between citizens and declared a holy war between Arab Muslims and the allies of Christian West and Jewish Israel in the country.

Moreover, the Ba'ath party's ascendance to power in 1963 brought in a different form of secularism; based on increasing the social base of the working-class populace as well as a new economic agenda pushing towards state socialism. The urban traditional elite felt that their cities and sources of wealth were being taken over by ethnic and religious minorities due to the rapid social and political changes implemented by the Ba'ath party. As a result, political Islam became an appealing idea because it appeared to be the only possible vehicle that reflected the social and religious classes' values.

Furthermore, the major defeat of the Arab by Israel in 1967 marked an era of a change in ideology in the Arab world, including Syria, forming secular Pan-Arabism into religion as a savior and disseminated the religious idiom as the idiom of political discourse in the Arab world. The general thinking revolved around the idea that God had abandoned the Arab in the battlefield because they had abandoned him by adopting secular and socialist ideology. The idea of religion in politics, 'Victory will not be achieved unless God is on our side; and to be on our side, we have to be on His side,' started to grow, and the

message of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood started to gain even stronger ground all over the country.

c. State's official Islamic message in Syria

The Ba'ath party, carrying a socialist secular message, ascended to power in 1963 and started its secularization process by banning the Muslim Brotherhood from participating in Syria's political scene. The new government tightened its control over religious institutions and mosques to weaken the social support for the movement while introducing economic policies and a campaign of nationalization that stripped the Sunni commercial class of its established prosperity and weakened its influence on the country. This transformation of the government's attitude was echoed in the movement of resorting to violence as a mean to push its ideas and demands in an atmosphere where political contest had proved pointless. Furthermore, in 1970, Hafiz Al-Asad became president of Syria denoting a new era of hands-off Sunni control over the government's top ranking positions, leading to an aggravated Sunni majority to see the Alawite minority taking control of the source of their economic prosperity and an empowered Muslim Brotherhood threatening a change in the balance of power.

After the bloody events in the city of Hama in 1982 with the Muslim Brotherhood, the regimes realized that in a country with a population of 75 percent Sunni Muslim, the power of Islam combined with suppression can generate a death sentence to the regime. There was a need not only to fill the religious vacuum generated after the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also a necessity to create a peaceful religious vehicle for the majority Sunnis to exercise their religious needs in a peaceful, passive way under the watchful eyes of the Government. For that reason, in the 1980s, the Syrian regime shifted

direction and adopted a strategy of a 'state sponsored Islam' to control the vehicles by which the Muslim Brotherhood used to recruit members.

The Ba'ath regime used the message "peaceful Islam" to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the damage that the violent Muslim Brotherhood brought upon Syrian society. Many Syrian cities suffered from the aftermath of the battle between the Government and the Muslim Brotherhood and residents were looking forward to the peace and security that were lost during the bloody events. The regime took advantage of this situation and argued that there was a problem that needed to be addressed (violent Islam was destroying the country) and only a return to the peaceful teaching of the religion was the solution. The regime suggested tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the societal damage produced by the Muslim Brotherhood by implementing an individual Islamic revival based on the teachings of Sufi Islam. In addition, the regime offered rationale for solidarity and active participation in the state co-opted movements based on the idea that all Syrian Muslims must unite together and fight the infringement of the violent Muslim Brotherhood in their country.

Furthermore, in the mid 2000s, the message was further advanced by the regime to counter the influence of the Islamist *Salafi* influence in the country by adopting the slogan of "*Tajdeed Alkhetab Aldeeni*" (Renewal of the Religious Dialogue) to promote the "correct" form of Islam; mutually progressive and temperate. The Ba'ath regime, in its annual conference in 2005, asserted that Syrians should embrace the right form of Islam and must support the revival of moderate, peaceful and personal Islamic transformation and not to shy away from it. The regime went further to assert that denying Islamic groups a platform to vent and communicate their concerns could prove

disastrous; emphasizing that frustration could only trigger fanaticism, a clear sign to the bloody events of Hama in 1982 and the effects of the aftermath on the country as whole (Khatib 2011).

d. Qubaisyate's Islamic message/ideology

Qubaisyate's message was a product of many different factors that played a major role in shaping of the message, such as the international context at the time of its establishment, the ruling Ba'ath regime and the influence it had on the movement early on and the life experiences and background of the movement's entrepreneur Munira Al-Qubaisy herself. First, Munira's religious family background played a major role in shaping her ideology and the religious direction she took in life. Munira belonged to a traditional religious Sunni family with a religiosity degree that can be characterized as *mutadayen* (Islamic). This characteristic encouraged her to spend many years studying religious texts and teachings under Amin Kuftaro, a well-known religious scholar in the circle of the Damascene *Ulamaa* (religious scholars). After his death, Munira continued her studies under his son, the famous Ahmad Kuftaro, the founder of Abulnoor Islamic society, a prominent and extremely influential religious institution in the country. The Kuftaros helped to initiate Munira in the study of religion at depth in general and specialization in the Sufi Nakshbandi¹³ order in particular.

One of the most important aspects of the Nakshbandi *tariqa* (way) is the constant quest to reach a direct experience of God through the process of initiation realized through the guidance and close supervision of a Sufi *sheikh* (scholar), who acted as a mentor to the

¹³ The Nakshbandi order is a strain of Mystic Brotherhoods (Sufism) approach to Islam, which was founded by Bahauldeen Naqshaband (d. 1389 CE) in the city of Bukhara (modern day Uzbekistan) and gained influence in Asia, North Africa, Europe and America (The Royal Islamic Strategic Study Center' website).

mureed (seeker) (Pinto 2003). The Kuftaros, in this aspect, became the mentors to Munira Al-Qubaisy and influenced her ideology, and the ideology of the Qubaisyate movement afterward, by shaping her religious views to be free of political agenda and to aim for the revival of religion through a personal quest for moral excellence.

The Nakshbandi ideology is based on promoting withdrawal from worldly affairs, such as politics and the state, and emphasizing the saving of one's soul through good morals and close connection to God. The Kuftaros, throughout the years, were well known for their neutral stance towards politics and managed to distinguish themselves from the rigid ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and to avoid severe government crackdown on religious activities during the clashes of the Brethren with the Ba'ath regime. This particular ideology was transmitted to Munira and played a major role in influencing the Qubaisyate to have a non-political agenda and to stay neutral at times of severe political upheaval in Syria.

A second factor that influenced the Qubaisyate's message was the fact that Munira was active within the context of two opposite ideological influences pulling the region apart, secularism and Islamism. As a result of the Cold War dynamics, the Middle East became a battleground for an ideological war causing political and societal implications on the government and citizens of many countries, including Syria. The robust quest of the United States to offset the presence of the Soviet Union by encouraging an Islamic tide, as a counter-balancing act to neutralize the influence of communism, became a turning point that changed the geo-political balance in the Middle East for years to come.

On one hand, local government, with communist connections, carried out a variety of policies aimed at spreading secularism in their countries to gain Soviet's political,

economic and military aid. These policies of secularization were seen as undermining Islamic values, language and culture, and resulted in a counter wave of Islamic revivalism in the process, driving the masses into a retreat to the roots of original Islam. On the other hand, the increased Islamization of the region gave birth to a multitude of Islamic social movements with rigid religious ideology and strengthened the existing influence of the puritanical Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafyah* movements, leaving no space for the peaceful Islamic ideology known to dwell in the region. Citizens of Syria, including Munira, were presented with two extreme alternatives, either to join the Ba'ath party's efforts to spread secularism, or to join the Islamists movements and go into a path of violence and extremism.

On one hand, leaning towards secularism meant denouncing your Muslim identity and joining the masses of different religions, ethnic backgrounds and religious sects, and adopting the greater Arab nationality. This meant stripping Munira of her identity as a Sunni Muslim from the traditional Damascene houses; an honor that the dwellers of the capital were very keen to obtain and hold onto for generations, as well as to adopt a secular way of life, which conflicted a great deal with her religious background and upbringing.

On the other hand, for Munira, joining the wave of Islamists and being associated with the Muslim Brotherhood or the *Salafists*, meant risking her safety and becoming an enemy of the state, as well as denouncing her Sufi ideology that called for withdrawing from worldly affairs, by getting involved with politics and concentrating on the need to replace the state regime by an Islamic government instead of emphasizing saving one's soul through good morals and close connection to God. Furthermore, the Islamists rigid

ideology is based on the literal patriarchal interpretation of the religious texts where women's role in religion is confined to being a daughter, a wife and a mother; a role that did not fit Munira's strong leadership personality as an independent, professional and highly educated woman, both scientifically and religiously. Munira felt excluded from the realm of women's empowerment because it was hijacked by the secular ideology movement and left out of the religious realm of Islamic revival due to the control of the patriarchal Islamist movement. Munira felt the need for a third alternative; a movement that's main objectives were Islamic revival to teach the right form of Islam, as well as empowering women and informing them about their rights in religion, and to correct decades of patriarchal interpretations of the holy texts. For all these reasons, the Qubaisyate movement was born, advocating Islamic revival one woman at a time. The Qubaisyate used the message "peaceful Islamic revival" to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the damage that secularism and rigid Islamic ideology brought upon Syrian society, especially the women. The movement argued that secularism was destroying Islamic culture, while rigid Islam was bringing women backwards, and only a return to the true teachings of the religion was the solution. It suggested remedies and solutions to undo the societal damage produced by secularism and patriarchal interpretation of Islam, by implementing an individual Islamic revival based on the teaching of Sufi Islam, as well as promoting women's rights within religion. In addition, the Qubaisyate offered rationale for solidarity and active participation in the movement based on the idea that all women had a duty and must be united together to fight the infringement of secularism and wrong religious interpretation on their lives, whilst promoting the right form of Islam within their families and societies.

All this talk about identities and the role they played in the conception of the Qubaisyate and the construction of their message and organizational structure, leads us, naturally, to an in-depth examination of the concept of identity and its role within the movement.

II. Identities

a. Status of women in Islamic societies

The topic of status of women in Islam is a very complicated and sensitive subject and it is relative to the time, place and ideology of the Islamic societies in which women belong. For the purpose of this study, we will be examining the status of women in the Middle East in the period of the forming of the Qubaisyate movement and abstain from digging deep into the origins of women's status in Islam. This overview of the topic is a mere background instrument, which will aid our understanding of the context surrounding Qubaisyate's inception.

The Qubaisyate were initiated as part of the greater Middle Eastern Islamic revivalist movement, which is a fundamentalist movement calling for the return to the teachings of original Islam in the region. As with the religious fundamentalists in other major religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism, there is a common tendency to interpret the religious texts in their literal sense and, unfortunately, frequently women fall victim to such interpretations and their rights are jeopardized in the process.

The wave of fundamentalism and the re-Islamization of Middle Eastern societies have reinforced many cultural stereotypes about the role of women in Islam, which some Muslim scholars argue is alien to the religion and is a mere product of long inherited patriarchal cultures and traditions. Regardless of these stereotypes' origins, women in the Middle East are generally perceived only as wives and mothers, and gender segregation is

a common cultural tradition, if not legally imposed in some countries, such as the case of Saudi Arabia (Moghadam 1993).

In general, Middle Eastern countries with majority Muslim populations have suffered from the wrath of great gender discrepancies for ages. There is an inherent belief in these societies that women are “different” from men, where by different they mean “inferior”; an idea that constantly brings women down and reinforces societal blockades to women’s advancement in the region. Women, in general, are considered second class-citizens in Middle Eastern countries with majority Muslim populations, which effect their rights and freedoms in areas such as the law, the criminal justice system, economy and education (Moghadam 1993; Nazir 2005; and Tomppert 2014).

The Middle East, evidently, is not the only region in the world that suffers from inequality of the genders. Many women in regions of Africa, Asia and even Europe and America still suffer from various degrees of a gender-gap that hinder their paths to equality and human rights. However, the topics of feminism and women’s rights in Arab countries have different connotations than that of other regions plagued with gender inequality. Western powers that colonized the countries of the Middle East continuously brought into play the concern about women’s status in Islam as the forefront of the colonial assault on those countries. The “oppression” of women in the Arab world became evidence of the savageness of Muslim societies and a justification of the domination of those countries (Ahmed 1992).

This idea came into play again and again on multiple occasions to the point of turning the quest for women’s right and the idea of feminism in the Arab world into an attack on

Islam and Arab culture and values. Therefore, as the wave of Westernization, secularization and communism adopted the subject of women empowerment, fundamental Islamists in the Arab world pushed the *hijab* as a symbol of resistance. Islamic revivalists of both genders advocated the return to the indigenous culture of Islam and the rejection Western attire, language and cultural tools being imposed on the Muslim world to spread Western practices and beliefs. The emphasis on wearing the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf) by the religious revivalists became a measuring tool for success and a symbol of struggle over Islamic identity and culture.

Therefore, women's attire (what she can or cannot wear) and her privileges in society became the cornerstone in the debate of women's right between Secularist and Islamists. The attitude towards female empowerment in the Middle East took a turn and became a litmus test of piety or modernism. In this polarized environment, any form of Western-rooted ideas about gender equality were dismissed and viewed as infringements of Arab and Muslim values.

Furthermore, a return to the original teachings of Islam brought with it a restoration of a set of customs and laws that dated back to the early days of Islam and were highly influenced by the status of women pre-dating the religion. These laws were considered the basis of the male-privilege system in Islamic societies, such as the continuously contested family law, which reflect the status of women in Islam dating back almost 1500 years. These laws and customs were slowly adopted by governments in the Middle East in various degrees, depending on the power hold of the religious class on those governments, as well as the economic, social, and political atmosphere in their countries.

Accordingly, women's status and rights in Islam in each Middle Eastern country varied substantially depending on the different circumstances that each country had to deal with. This holds true in the case of Syria; therefore, a look at women's status in Syria is exceedingly essential.

b. Status of women in Syria

Syrian culture is a typical example of a gender-biased patriarchal society, where the social custom of son-partiality reigns throughout layers of the societal fabric, encompassing an array of religious affiliations, economic status and educational background. Moreover, Syrian society is rooted in the idea of honor; mothers, wives and daughters are the holders of the family's reputation, accordingly, the way girls and women act, dress and carry themselves in the public domain is the measurement of their families' honor and reputation, any deviation from the accepted societal customs and norms, could mean bringing shame and humiliation for the entire family.

Traditionally, Syrian society has been divided into a public sphere, which is dominated by men, and a private sphere, which is occupied by women. Syrian women, regardless of their societal position, face numerous restrictions on their freedoms and mobility within the public sphere, generated by various conservative religious norms and inherited societal traditions. Generally, rural women and urban women who belong to lower socioeconomic or religious classes are under harsher scrutiny and usually encounter greater societal limitations on their accessibility into the male-dominated public sphere (Bellafronto 2005).

The Syrian union with socialist Egypt in late 1950s, followed by the ascendance of the secular Ba'ath regime to power in the early 1960s, brought a new vision for Syrian

women; a wide open invitation to the long, hands-off public sphere. Socialism became an attractive option for women in Syria; it liberated them from the socio-religious ceiling that limited their advancements for decades.

Women were encouraged to throw away their *hijabs* (Islamic headscarf) and liberate themselves, both expressively and economically, from the control of patriarchy by advancing their education and joining the work force (Moubayed 2006).

Furthermore, the Ba'ath regime introduced a new constitution, which was ratified in 1973, giving Syrian women an equal position with men in regards to rights, responsibilities and freedoms. Article 45 of the constitution asserts, "The state guarantees women all the opportunities that enable them to participate fully and effectively in political, social, cultural and economic life. The state works to remove the restrictions that prevent women's development and their participation in building a socialist Arab society" (Bellafronto 2005).

Yet, the constitution had multiple areas where the rights of female citizens lagged behind those of her male counterpart. A clear example lay in the nationality code of 1969, which disqualifies women from giving Syrian citizenship to their foreign husbands or their children, unlike Syrian men who are guaranteed that right (Bellafronto 2005).

Another example is the personal status code, which is the set of laws governing family relationships matters, such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. These laws clearly deny the woman the agency of a legally independent adult and consider her dependent on a male custodian, such as her father or husband. The situation is also repeated in the penal code where a woman does not have the same status in the eyes of the law and is punished for the same crime differently to a male citizen (Bellafronto

2005). These setbacks in the secular government position were a result of the direct pressure from the traditional and religious bourgeoisies of Syria who pushed for the enforcement of *Sharia'a* (Islamic law) to manage their financial and family relationships. Furthermore, the increased influence of the Islamic revivalist movements in Syria, such as the *Salafyah* and the Muslim Brotherhood, pushed the secular government into further compromise with the traditional religious powers in the country in an effort to control and avoid political Islam from rising (Moubayed 2006). Women's right, yet again, became politicized and the secular government gave up the fight for more changes to the status of women in Syria to curry favor with the Sunni elites in order to gain their loyalty as the Muslim Brotherhood influence was on the rise in the country.

Losing the government's support meant that women had to return to a societal-imposed prison depriving them of their basic social rights which was enforced by the patriarchal social structure, as well as to deal with discriminatory laws that deprived them of their basic legal rights, enforced by the authoritarian government.

Additionally, the Ba'ath government's restriction on freedom of association meant that women's right movements couldn't form and organize in the country. Every gathering, with the exception of religious services must contact the ministry of interior for permission, which was always denied (Bellafronto 2005). Consequently, there was no legal instrument to deliver social or legal change to a women's status in Syria.

Driven to become a somehow powerless entity caught between an authoritarian government, who gave up women's rights in order to hold on to power, and the inherent stereotypes of the patriarchal traditions, society and religion, women in Syria found no other power stronger than God Almighty to help pull them from the extreme injustices

they faced in everyday life. As a result, religion became an appealing idea, because it appeared to be the only possible vehicle that could bring back women's rights, while giving them the space to organize and be heard.

c. Qubaisyate women

The deterioration of the status of women in Syria and the decline of peaceful religious values gave birth to a movement that's main objectives were Islamic revival to teach the right form of Islam, as well as to empower women and inform them of their rights in religion, and to correct decades of patriarchal interpretations of the holy texts.

The Qubaisyate women aimed at launching a peaceful revolution from below through the 're-Islamization' of society, one woman at a time. Each woman, in turn, would influence her household and community, and the end product would be a society that ran on a model based on Islamic ethics and the teachings of the Quran and Prophet Mohammed. Their work became visible through the recent increase in Islamization of public spaces, in a society where public spaces had long been religiously neutral. The movement's presence could be clearly seen in the streets of Damascus through the styles of dress adopted by Qubaisyate members. Not only had they adopted Islamic dress to represent them in the public sphere dominated by men, they also adopted a specific uniform to distinguish them from other women wearing traditional Islamic attire. The manipulation of the traditional Islamic dress signaled the crossing from the private sphere into the male dominated public sphere through an Islamic point of entry, a move that legitimized their presence within it. This uniform became a sign of the affirmation of their autonomy and equality by choosing their own style away from the mandatory attire prescribed by male scholars of the religion. The Qubaisyate, in a way, were redefining the public space to

accept and accommodate them through carving out a legitimate space for themselves in the male-dominated public sphere at the grass-roots level and signaling the determination to continue occupying more space as they grew.

The Qubaisyate women were also affirming their identity and independence through revisiting the religious texts and using their feminist lens to review and interpret the Holy Scriptures with known patriarchal interpretations. It had been a tradition for almost 1500 years throughout the Muslim world to depend on male scholars to interpret the holy texts, lead congregations and publish Islamic materials. Nowadays, the Qubaisyate have their own curriculum of textbooks written by their own members to teach in their study circles instead of depending on the traditional religious books written from a male point of view. In fact, the Qubaisyates are one of the few movements in the Muslim world that are challenging the old tradition of male *Sheikh* (religious scholars) by calling their leader Munira “the grand *Sheikha*” (female religious scholar) and depending on female teachers for their religious education and guidance, unlike other male-led traditional religious movements.

Qubaisyate have taken control of their lives within the patriarchal Syrian society and solved the problem of women’s agency to empower herself by encouraging their members to pursue their education, work outside their homes and to gain financial independence; the growth of their schools and affiliated businesses can attest to this fact. Middle class women in Syria, who belonged to the Qubaisyate, went further than the traditional high school degree for girls and advanced to finish a college degree before getting married. Rural women on the other hand, finished attending high school before getting married unlike their mothers who finished elementary school only and married at

a young age. In addition, a number of women, who advanced further in the movement, have gone further to get higher education and obtained Masters and PhDs in religious studies from Damascus Islamic University or Al-Awza'ey Islamic University in Beirut, Lebanon.

Furthermore, after finishing their education, multitudes of Qubaisyate women have joined the workforce as doctors, engineers, teachers, pharmacists and business owners. The movement is known to advance financial loans to their middle-class and poorer members to open up their own businesses, such as daycare centers, computer-learning centers and after school programs in their neighborhoods. Qubaisyate women became known in Syrian society for their strong will, determination and leadership personalities, excelling at their jobs and businesses, as well as being admirable daughters, wives and mothers. The movement's emphasis on independence through education and work has transformed generations of girls in Syria into extremely productive, highly educated and exceptionally disciplined generations of women. Moreover, the Qubaisyate are vigorous in educating and teaching women about their rights in Islam by highlighting texts that promoted gender equality within the religion. They focus on topics such as the woman's right to approve or disapprove of the man asking for her hand in marriage, her right to fashion the marriage contract the way she finds fit and her rights in case of a divorce. Also, the Qubaisyate teach women to add clauses to their marriage contracts, such as preventing their husband from future polygamy or prohibiting the husband from preventing his wife from continuing to work outside the house or to start working after marriage if she wanted to. The Qubaisyate women enforce these actions by bringing examples from the life of the prophet and his wives to confirm the rights of women within religion and

society at large. These examples, combined with an Islamic awareness, armed girls and women in Syria with the tools and knowledge to face their fathers, brothers and husbands, as well as patriarchal society at large to obtain their basic rights back.

d. Islamic feminism

Although the movement seems to be quite feminist, it represents what is more appropriately called “Islamic feminism” rather than the Western notion of the phenomenon. Islamic feminism works within the discourse of Islam, hence cannot be framed as secular, and poses less threat to the Islamic identity than its Western counterpart.

Islamic feminism was broadly defined in literature as “the promotion of women’s rights through Islamic discourse” (Coleman 2010, *xviii*). The idea was to challenge the patriarchal notion of women’s rights in Islam with the argument that Islam, at its core, called for the advancement of women and equality between genders. Accordingly, Islamic feminist movements devoted their efforts and energy to encourage women to fight for their rights within the space allowed by the religion and never to stretch beyond the accepted role of a woman in Islam. By grounding their argument within an Islamic framework, these movements ensured legitimacy and acceptance by the religious community and society at large, as well as keeping the Islamic identity intact.

Islamic feminism, in a way, is a form of Islamic revival, but from a feminist approach. Women are trying to revive the religious texts and literature that demonstrate the equality bestowed upon women in the early days of Islam by the Prophet, his wives and his companions and use these resources to push towards greater freedom and flexibility for women within an Islamic discourse. In addition, Islamic feminist revivalists advocate the

revisiting of the interpretation of Quran (holy book) and the Hadith (the Prophet's oral legacy), putting it into its original historical context, and separating it from any patriarchal additions and gender-biased cultural influences (Coleman 2010).

There are many aspects that link the Qubaisyate's version of Islamic revival to the notion of Islamic feminism and away from the Western version. The Qubaisyate teachers focus mostly on the basic rights and responsibilities of women in Islam and society without using critical thinking to analyze these roles beyond the accepted traditions and norms in Islam. For example, the Qubaisyate support the *Sharia'a* based family law set by the state; such laws deprived the women of her agency to represent herself in the matters of marriage and divorce and value a women's entity as half of that of a man in matters of inheritance and legal testimony. Furthermore, the Qubaisyate teaches women to obey their husbands and give him all the rights he is entitled through religion and society and keep their activities and interests for times of his absence. Some teachers go further to encourage women to hide the fact that they are attending Qubaisyate study circles from their own husband if he does not allow his wife to be part of the movement.

Some Qubaisyate women understood that there was a ceiling to their work and there were societal and religious limits to women's advancement in Syria that would be impossible to eliminate. The new privileges and rights they gained after joining the movement were still very limited and bound by the social and religious context in Syria. They knew that in order to enjoy more freedom, they had to go as far as denouncing marriage and having a family to hold on to the space of freedom they worked so hard to obtain in the public sphere. Some women abstained from being second-class citizen by liberating themselves from the control of a male relative, husband or boss, and devoted their entire lives to the

service of the movement, women such as Munira, her close net group and the higher-ranking teachers of the organization.

Another setback to the Qubaisyate as a feminist movement was the problem of complete submission to the *Anseh* (religious teacher), where this norm helped to encourage an environment of submission to authority and reinforced the women's loss of identity and agency they were already plagued with within religion and society.

The Sufi Nakshbandi order, which the Qubaisyate chose as a path to reach piety within Islam, promotes the relationship of a master/student as a framework to construct identities within the Sufi community. The complete submission of the student to the master is a fundamental part of the path towards finding the truth. The experienced master is the primary source of guidance that can utilize his knowledge and wisdom to help the students in their mystical quest for the divine reality (Pinto 2003). Accordingly, the Qubaisyate put the *Anseh* (religious teacher) at a high position, stressing the importance of complete obedience, devotion and unconditional love that is part of the love of God and compares even to the love of the Prophet himself (Hamidi 2006). Some interviewees asserted that at some study circles, the *Anseh* would be placed on a raised platform and the students would be fighting to serve her, praise her and kiss her hands and feet.

The *Anseh*, in this sense, becomes a strong influence and the closest person to the 'Mureedeh' (seeker) and has the ultimate say above the parents, husband or any source of authority in the life of the woman. In many cases, teenage girls were so attracted and attached to their teachers that the higher-level *Anseh* had to replace their mentor with a new one to break up the girl from her teacher, following the advice in the chapter "*Al-*

a'walek wal a'laek” (the obstacles and the relations) in the religious book “*Al-Fawa'ed*” (the benefits) by the Islamic scholar Ibn Al-Qayem, which emphasized the termination of any relationship that kept the attention from the relationship with God.

Furthermore, the individual *Anseh* followed the framework set by the Qubaisyate movement for the study circles, but also had her own set of rules to ensure conformity within her own circle. This set of rules, depending on the character of the specific teacher, could create internal pressures within the circle for girls to compete to please the teacher, as well as prevent dissent and critical thinking among the students.

In addition, young girls were stripped from their personal identity when they joined the movement by encouraging them to put in writing every unethical deed that they had committed in the past, such as lying, stealing or a past relationships, and give it to their mentors; signaling a departure from their previous immoral self and the start of a new path in life. The girls and women were also to keep a daily diary of their daily devotion schedule, detailing every act of worship they had done that day and to share it with the teacher once a week for approval, which put the mentor in control even when absent.

This ‘submission to authority’ culture of Qubaisyate continued to prevail for more than thirty years without objection from members due to the fact that it was the norm in Syrian society at large. People were in the traditional mindset, whether practicing Muslims or other, that there was an ultimate source of power. The almighty God, the authoritarian government, the boss at work, the teacher at school and the father at home, were all the figures of authority in society and demanded respect and obedience. This relationship of authority/subordinate, where the person with authority had the ultimate power and the subordinates must obey, was the model for relationships within Syrian society for years.

This equation started to shift recently with the rapid changes in global culture and the infiltration of different ideologies, cultures and modern technology into Syria, where the norms began to change and the Qubaisyate had to adapt to keep alive.

e. The new generation

For more than thirty years since their formation, the Qubaisyate had taught and advocated a rigid Sufi ideology to balance and please the religious hard-liners, the patriarchal societal elites as well as the insecure ruling regime. Regardless, they had sown the seeds of women's human rights, societal liberation and freedom of expression through encouraging generations of Syrian women to pursue their education and become financially independent by working outside their homes.

The new generations of Qubaisyate women, having lived in different circumstances than their mothers, are characterized by being highly educated and are usually graduates of modern universities. They often share progressive values such as human rights and equality and value the rule of law. They align themselves with modernity by advocating the use of the latest technology in science and medicine and keep up to date with modern innovations and literature. They seek an Islamic revival that utilizes all aspects of useful and positive modernity, which, in their view, should not only be limited to Western culture, but also should be adopted because it stems from the work of great historical Muslim and Arab personalities. The new generations refuse the long established conformity by the Qubaisyate and value individualism and self-expression, while keeping their religious identity.

As a result, the movement recognized the need to revisit its strict ideology, reconstruct its value system and adapt a more flexible approach to Islamic revival than in the past to

ensure the loyalty of its young members, as well as to keep attracting young women, who might find the movement too outdated to represent them in the modern world of the internet and fast-based social networking.

The Qubaisyate's teachers became less authoritarian and more of a mother figure for the older members, a mentor for the middle-aged ones and a friend for the younger girls. The emphasis shifted from the *Anseh* to the *mureedeh* (student), where every girl was shown plenty of care as an individual and given enough attention to feel very important.

Questioning and personal preference became the norm in the study circles where girls voiced their opinions and questioned the logic behind every duty they were assigned within their study circles. Furthermore, girls are exercising personal choice and self-judgment when following the teachings of their *Anseh*. They are doing what they see right and fit for their individual situation and personal preference, and not follow blindly the case of the previous generations. Previous generations of Qubaisyate grew up in a different context than the present generation, they were told what to do and how to do it without asking questions. The present generation is taught to use reason when approaching religious education, they have texts written and interpreted from a female point of view and they have their basic rights ensured by the labor of the previous Qubaisyate women so they can fight for their rights on a different playing field. They are not asking what to wear and how to behave, they are asking deeper questions, such as, is it allowed in Islam for a woman to run for president? Do women have the right to study in a foreign country without a male relative? Why do women inherit half of what their brothers do? Does God really care about the way I dress? Why would I be bad if I didn't wear a *hijab*? Would a hat do in place of a scarf?

This reasoning is the turning point for the new generation of Qubaisyate that sets them apart from previous generations, asserts their individuality within the movement, rather than obliterates it and dilutes it within the greater collective identity as was done before. Although the contexts of secularism vs. Islamism have changed since the previous generation came of age, a new environment of threatening Westernization found its way into the conservative Muslim society of Syria.

The infiltration of the Internet and social networks into every house in Syria raised the concern, yet again, about Muslim identity and values. The new wave of Westernization, accompanied by the war on terror, brought about a new reason to retreat back to Islam in order to assert the Islamic identity and defend the religion from the new Western attack on its values and traditions. Society, yet again, became divided between the Western camp and the religious camp.

The Qubaisyate became more eager to fight and gain ground in the face of the new, but familiar, threat. Western TV reality shows, provocative fashion and offensive music videos have bombarded satellite TV channels throughout the Muslim World. The war on terror, as known in the Muslim world as the war on Islam, was on every news channel, in every Western action movie and on multiple Muslim lands bombing fellow innocent civilian Muslims.

Syrian society is witnessing a new ideological war between the West at one end and Islam at the other. Women in Damascus and other Syrian cities either dress in provocative Western attire, smoking Shisha (water pipe) at a modern café in public and walking hand in hand with their boyfriends at the university, or wearing the traditional *hijab* with a conservative attire, attending daily religious study circles at the nearby

mosque and studying to become the next president of Syria. A new cycle of Islamic revivalism is in full blast and its advocates are, none other than, the Qubaisyate women; however, with a different attitude.

f. Movement's outcome

The work of Qubaisyate in Syria, and in other countries they have influenced, can be seen clearly in the transformation of the individuals of those societies into an Islamic identity.

There seems to be a linear positive relationship between the degree of Qubaisyate influence in society and the degree of religiosity of that society. The qualitative data of this study implies that the rise of religiosity in Syria and other societies with Qubaisyate presence is likely due to the rising influence of the Qubaisyate Islamic women movement in these communities. In this positive relationship, the degree of the influence of Qubaisyate Islamic social movement in Syria, and other countries, has a direct effect on the degree of growth and rise of religiosity in Syria and other societies.

Qubaisyate's influence in Syria and elsewhere can be viewed as a gradual process turning all of their women members from being a 'conventional Muslim' in society into a '*Mutadayen*' (Islamic) Muslim, and in many cases go above and beyond that level to become a '*Muta'aseb*' (fundamentalist) Muslim.

This process has two folds, the first starts in the private sphere, where the Qubaisyate members work to recruit other women to the movement and convert them into a higher level of religiosity than where they originally started. The second is teaching these women to become an active army of Islamic revivalists in their societies and to persuade their family, friends and relatives (of both genders) to follow the same path and advance up the religiosity ladder. Consequently, generations of Syrian citizens have had greater

involvement within the religion and transformed their religious status from ‘conventional Muslims’ in society into a ‘*Mutadayen*’ (Islamic) Muslims, or gone above and beyond that level to become ‘*Muta’aseb*’ (fundamentalist) Muslims.

The majority of individuals who defined themselves as ‘conventional Muslims’ in social settings, and were rarely or occasionally active in the religion, have been transformed in the last fifty years into a ‘*Mutadayen*’ or ‘Islamic’, and became characterized by being faithful Muslims who are very active in the religion, observe all of the duties proscribed by Islam, as well as the additional non obligatory duties set in the teachings of the Prophet. Syrian citizens of both genders became vigorously involved in the religion, praying at least five times a day as an obligatory pillar from God, and many performed the additional, optional prayers as per choice following the example of the Prophet; fasting for the holy month of Ramadan as an obligatory pillar from God, and many are observing additional, optional fasting days throughout the year as per choice following the example of the Prophet; holding a specific percentage of income and assets to be given to charity at the end of the holy month of Ramadan as an obligatory pillar from God and many give additional, optional charitable amounts throughout the year as per choice; carrying out pilgrimage to the holy temple in the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in a lifetime as an obligatory pillar from God and conducting additional optional trips called “*Omrah*” throughout the year.

In addition regular religious meditation using prayer beads “*Tasbeeh*”, and reading of the Qur’an and other religious materials and Islamic literature became the norm among individual Syrians who became adherents to the Islamic code of conduct based on the concepts of *Halal* (permissible) and *Haram* (prohibited) outlined by the Qur’an and the

prophet's teachings; mainly abstaining from gambling, drinking alcohol, eating pork and pre-marital sex.

Furthermore, more citizens are adhering to an Islamic dress code; men are usually growing full beard as a sign of devotion and piety while women are wearing loose and long garments over their outfits and covering their hair with a *hijab* (Islamic headscarf). Women are robustly attending religious study circles where they are committed to Quran memorization, and the correct way of *tajweed* (recitation), which generally requires several years of commitment and dedication. Along the way they are taught the basic rights of women in Islam and participate in religious charitable activities, which provide money, food and clothes to needy families. Men, on the other hand, are attending organized religious services held within the mosque on Fridays and major Islamic holidays, performing daily prayers in the mosque on a regular basis, and organizing charitable fundraising with other men in the community to provide various social services to the poor. Moreover, Syrian families are sending their children to Islamic schools rather than public schools to receive an Islamic-based education as an additional subject to the already-set curriculum by the state, transforming their children and generations of Syrian children into pious citizen with an Islamic, rather than a national, identity.

In general, Syrian citizens were witnessing by personal account, and were affected by, the same wave of Islamic revival that was overcoming the whole region and battling the same issues as other Islamic and Arab states being overwhelmed with the phenomenon of religious revivalism. This major shift in the return to Islam and the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism was driven in Syria specifically by the Qubaisyate women's grassroots social movement. In a way, the work of the Qubaisyate in Syria helped to turn

conventional Muslims in the Syrian community into robustly active members in the religion and become vigorous agents of reviving Islam.

This transformation of society did not come without notice or consequence. The controversy over the Qubaisyate started within the very homes that the movement originated from. While majority of men in the community praised the Qubaisyate for playing a distinguished part in the Islamic revival call, whilst emphasizing education and good morals, and achieving concrete results that even men could not establish in the community, other men, whom their relatives belonged to the movement, accused the Qubaisyate of being a serious secret organization, with an aim to destroy their family unit. Traditional Damascene men detested the movement for empowering their women and loosening the grip of the men over the control of their wives and daughters. Many men divorced their wives for their blind submission to the teacher rather than obeying their own husbands on multiple occasions, which is considered an unwanted defiance of the male role model in the family. In addition, other conventional Muslim men eventually left their wives for becoming too “Mutadayen” (Islamic/religious) and wanted to change their husbands and children to follow suit, which the husband considered to be wandering from the original path intended for the family unit when they first got married. Many fathers have prohibited their daughters from attending the movement’s study circles because they were not happy with the way the movement was controlling the minds of their daughters and deciding what choices in life she should or should not take, which violated the family’s role in advising their daughters of what was appropriate for her within the family unit. Even religious men had a problem with their wives becoming too

rigid and following the Sufi tradition that promoted, what is considered to be, superstitious details by the established tradition in Islam.

In a few countries, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Lebanon, a number of religious authorities or even the highest council of *Ifta'a* (religious consultants for the state) issued numerous *fatwas* (Islamic decree) against joining the Qubaisyate in these countries on the grounds that the movement was poisoning the brains of female youths and women of the state with Sufi teachings based on submission to the mentor (*Anseh*) rather than the traditional main stream Islamic teaching and morals (Zoeopf 2006).

Conservative women, who advocated segregation in their societies, were also accusing the Qubaisyate of corrupting the women by encouraging them to establish businesses and join the work force, which lead to prohibited interactions between men and women in the society and aided the spread of immorality and major sins as prohibited by the religion.

On the other hand, women's right activists are being extremely wary of this fundamentalist trend in their societies. The growth of Qubaisyate and their army of conservative women have been alarming to secular and non-Muslim women in many countries with Qubaisyate influence. While these women believe in the freedom of every woman to express herself in any way or form she wishes, they also believe that the Qubaisyate, with their emphasis on the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf) and other religious attire, are becoming a fundamental force that can strip women of their other rights, not only by dictating the way they dress, but also their rights and responsibilities within an Islamic frame rather than legal one, which brings about gender inequality. Furthermore, activists argue that when a woman decides to wear the Qubaisyate uniform, she is willingly giving up her individual identity and emphasizing the religious identity of the

movement instead, which brings women to a position they have struggled and fought very hard against to gain freedom from centuries ago and earn the limited equality with men they enjoy today.

In addition, secular and non-Muslim minorities are arguing that the Qubaisyate is changing the national identity that has prevailed for decades and ensured the safety, equality and freedoms for such groups, especially in a multi-ethnic country such as Syria. They claim that Syria is, indeed, becoming more religious and in the process is losing its national identity.

The pan-Arab national identity has served for years as an umbrella to unite the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class distinction. If an Islamic identity prevails instead, it will certainly dishearten the harmony of a society that has been governed for more than forty years by the Alawite minority sect, which incorporates in its state apparatus an array of representatives of many religious and ethnic groups (Zoepf 2006).

Furthermore, secular movements are concerned with the role Qubaisyate and other 'Muta'aseb" (fundamentalist) groups, although peaceful revivalists, are playing in changing the nature of the "Mutadayen" (Islamic) Syrians into the 'Mutataref' (violent Islamist) camp, which provide a fertile base for the growth of violent extremism and radicalism in the country. Their concerns are related to the change of the tolerant nature of their society and the lack of a balancing trend for the actively religious sector in Syria, where Islamic groups mobilize and recruit at the expense of the initially more active and influential secular groups.

Consequently, new dynamics in Syria have emerged and a fertile soil for the promoting of Islamic radicalism and extremism are on the rise in a country ravaged by civil war. Hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens who flooded the streets in 2011, longing for a society based on an Arab identity and deep-rooted in indigenous Arab Islamic traditions and principles, were derailed and recruited to become armed forces of God, calling for an Islamic state in secular Syria.

Analysis

This chapter explored the third hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on collective identity and cultural framing theory of social movement, which emphasizes the role of frames used by the Qubaisyate movement as interpretive designs that propose a language and cognitive tools for understanding the issues and events in Syria, as well as the role of ‘collective agency’ that inspired and legitimized the movement’s existence and longevity.

In light of the data collected from interviews and literature on the topic, we need to assess the relevancy of the identities and cultural framing approach for the growth and outcomes of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria given the fact that it had to survive within the context of multifaceted cultural, political and social environment.

Relying on the major and frequently cited literature on identities and cultural framing, this analysis will examine the role of identities and cultural framing in the four phases of the movement; movement emergence, recruitment, strategic and tactical decision making and movement outcomes (Polleta and Jasper 2001).

This analysis, will concentrate particularly on the role of framing “Islam is the solution,” while creating a sense of solidarity around the idea of the “Muslim cause” and collective identity around the idea of unification under religion, in promoting and legitimizing the Qubaisyate movement as a religious movement, enabling it to gain support from the influential families of Damascus and becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria for more than five decades, as well as expanding beyond the borders to other Arab and Muslim countries; a feat other religious groups who were also concerned with Islamic revivalism have been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

a. Movement emergence: the creation of collective claims

New social movement theorists have noticed a strikingly altered social formation in the wake of the recent modes of collective action, variously named “post-industrial” (Touraine 1981) or “network” (Castelle 1997) societies. Modernization, as well as the materialization of a new cognitive paradigm, drove collective actors to change normative and cultural codes by seeking recognition for new identities and lifestyle rather than to seek a redistribution of political power (Melucci 1996).

Recent work on identities has revealed that collective actors usually rely on the historical construction of what appear as “natural” identities such as “middle class,” “white” and “female” while advancing better developed models of how societal, economical, and political interactions within which individuals take part producing mobilizing identities. Moreover, recent studies have acknowledged the autonomous role of culture in determining the collective identities that individuals emphasize, and have recognized the political environment in which identities emerge and become more distinguished in social movements (Polleta and Jasper 2001).

The Qubaisyate movement is a case in point. The movement’s leader relied on the historical construction of the “natural” identity of a “woman”, while advancing the successful model of Islamic revivalist networks within which members interacted with the social, economic and political environment. The Qubaisyate’s message itself was a product of many different factors that played a major role in shaping this message, such as the international context at the time of its establishment, the ruling Ba’ath regime and the influence it had on the movement early on and the social experiences and culture in which the movement’s entrepreneur and her first followers were active in.

At the time of initial mobilization, Munira and her disciples were active within the context of two opposite ideological influences pulling the region apart, secularism and Islamism. The original founders of Qubaisyate built on the idea that the “natural” identity of a “woman” was hijacked by the secular ideology movement through the message of women’s empowerment, while her “religious identity” was being distorted, and left out of the religious realm of Islamic revival due to the control of the rigid patriarchal Islamist movement. The Qubaisyate successfully presented a third alternative; a movement that main objectives were to capture the true “natural” identity of a “Muslim woman” by reviving historical texts to teach the right form of Islam, as well as empowering women and informing them about their rights in religion and correcting decades of patriarchal interpretations of the holy texts.

Munira and her disciples approached the women in their own social circles who shared the same “natural” identities and introduced the Qubaisyate message, a message of Islamic feminism and piety, which reinforced the existing traditional identity of these women. The traditional Damascene families were proud holders of an Islamic identity that connected through generations of scholars to the Prophet Mohammed himself. Many families keep family trees at the houses of their elders to prove that they are proud descendants of the Prophet’s blood. This religious identity started to lose momentum in the face of nationalism, secularism and pan-Arabism identities. Revival of this precious inheritance was a welcomed deed among the proud Damascene families. The idea of reviving religion, social status, as well as enforcing the role of the women in their homes and society, reinforced the “natural” identity of the first women approached by Munira and her disciples early on in the movement’s inception.

As a result, the materialization of this new cognitive paradigm drove Damascene women to join the Qubaisyate movement and launch a peaceful revolution from below through the ‘re-Islamization’ of their community, one woman at a time. Each woman, in turn, influenced her household and social circle to change the normative and cultural codes by seeking recognition for new identities and lifestyle as a “Mutadayen” (Islamic) member of the society rather than to seek a redistribution of political power like other Islamic revivalist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The end product would be a society that ran on a model based on Islamic ethics and teachings of the Quran and Prophet Mohammed.

The Qubaisyate were very successful in attracting Damascene women with their Islamic message and the introduction of the new “Islamic feminist” identity which enticed women to choose piety via the Qubaisyate rather than any other path. In addition, women were changing their behavior and lifestyle and conceding to a movement that commanded the way they dressed, acted and lived their daily lives in a hope to redefine the public space to accept and accommodate them through carving out a legitimate space for themselves in the male-dominated public sphere at the grass-roots level.

Once the Qubaisyate movement was up and running and complete with an organizational structure, cadre and recruitment tactics, strategic plans to fashion mobilizing identities became essential. The extended membership to women of different social classes, various ages and educational backgrounds was forcing the leadership to reconfigure the collective identity shared within the movement’s actors. Even identities that were customary, venerable and recognized by society and religion were required to be refashioned by the movement’s leader or, at least, be incorporated with the movement’s identity.

b. Recruitment into the movement: Identity and commitment

Several scholars have pointed out that collective identity is a product of an existing bond between collective actors that triggers solidarity and loyalty. They suggest that a movement's success is contingent upon the existing social relationships, family ties, friendships and informal networks that tie members to the greater society (Fireman and Gamson 1979). In addition to this loyalty model, researchers have suggested a rational-actor model that is driven by self-interest. This self-interest model is based on reputation in culture and society and the concern about the opinion of others in the community, which, in a way, connects collective identity to self-interest driven rational action (Friedman and McAdam 1992).

The Qubaisyate combined these two models to recruit women into the movement. The loyalty model was implemented through the recruitment of trusted members of the same social circle as the recruiter. Recruitment had a certain pattern within every circle of the movement; members of the movement approached their friends, neighbors and close female relatives during social events, celebrations or funerals and invited them to attend their study circles as guests. Teenage girls who demonstrated unmistakable intelligence and leadership skills in their schools were usually approached by relatives or classmates belonging to the movement and were invited to one of the study circles run by the Qubaisyate in her neighborhood.

The self-interest model was implemented through the emphasis of the movement to single out the wives, daughters and close female relatives of well-known senior politicians and the most wealthy and influential Sunni families in Syria or girls that demonstrated unmistakable intelligence and leadership skills.

These recruitment tactics drove the success of the Qubaisyate in the capital and other cities in Syria to the point that becoming a member of Qubaisyate became not only a religious, but social status as well. This success took the movement into a different level, where women from different religious, social and educational classes started to join the movement. The issue of a “natural” collective identity was challenged and a need for overall movement collective identity was stressing to be examined.

Scholars of social movement suggest that when there is a lack of pre-existing collective identity or if this identity becomes challenged along the mobilization process, a need to “frame” a new identity is critical to the expansion of the movement (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1993; Tarrow 1998). In this context, “frames” are important to establish solidarity around a cause (injustice) and highlight the need of an overarching collective identity (agency) to fight and undo the damage.

The Qubaisyate used the message “peaceful Islamic revival” to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the damage that secularism and rigid Islamic ideology brought upon Syrian society, especially the women. The movement argued that there was a problem that needed to be addressed (secularism is destroying the women’s Islamic identity, while rigid Islam is destroying their feminist identity) and only a return to the true teachings of the religion was the solution. It suggested tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the societal damage produced by secularism and patriarchal interpretation of Islam, by implementing an individual Islamic revival based on the teaching of Sufi Islam, as well as promoting women’s rights within religion.

In addition, the Qubaisyate offered rationale for solidarity and active participation in the movement based on the idea that all women have a duty and must unite together to fight

the infringement of secularism and wrong religious interpretation on their lives, while promoting the right form of Islam within their families and societies.

This overarching message created an overall “Islamic feminist” collective identity for the movement to encompass not only the rich and privileged women of the religious class in Syria, but also to represent the multitude of women who found the Qubaisyate as a movement that voices their societal concern.

The movement was also wary of the ramification of this new generic identity on the upper classes and influential women in the movement. They managed to avoid an exodus of the privileged women, who may have felt that the movement did not represent their social class anymore, by acknowledging this problem before it started. Recruited women were treated differently depending on their education and social status; poor women were invited to simple study circles that taught basic religious education and were only concerned with day to day religious issues, such as their role as mothers and wives, while rich and educated women were placed in more sophisticated study circles that taught religion from an intellectual and scientific approach, where they could dive more into the faith using reason and learn about the right way to approach equality in religion and their rights as women and wives in Islam. This targeted specialization of recruitment and the prestigious treatment of the educated and wealthy kept attracting the middle, upper-middle and upper class women in the capital Damascus and other metropolitan cities, while having a mass recruitment for women throughout the heavily populated lower classes and rural areas in Syria. In summation, the Qubaisyate were successful in asserting and managing the overall collective identity of the movement, without overpowering and suppressing individual differences among its recruits.

c. Strategic and tactical decision making: Identity and strategy

The recent literature on collective action has viewed identity as the logic behind a particular movement's strategic decisions, tactics and organizational form. Few scholars have highlighted that rational activists make tactical choices that confirms with identity rather than separating identity as expression from strategy as an instrument (Polleta and Jasper 2001). The tactical choice within movements was emphasized as a natural product of the functioning and interplaying of numerous identities with various degrees of visibility, which means that collective identities in a particular movement could stem from pre-existing identities of its members, the particular style of action chosen by the movement, the loyalty to a single organization or from tactics chosen by the organization for collective action (Jasper 1997). Furthermore, defining identities can be a tactical choice depending on the strategic situation and the kind of opposition the movement is confronting. How successful a movement's leader in framing its identity for the public, strongly influences its ability to attract and recruit new members, gain influential allies and supporters, offset opposition and avoid Government repression (Polleta and Jasper 2001).

The Qubaisyate movement has relied on three major identities as a strategic instrument for mobilization, recruitment and growth. The movement leader had framed AL-Qubaisyate identity as an "Islamic revivalist" to draw public support from the traditional and religious classes, as an "Islamic feminist" to attract women to join the cause without being associated with detested Western feminism and as "apolitical" to distinguish itself from violent Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and to avoid the Government's ferocity and oppression.

The Islamic revivalist identity was crucial for the movement to gain allies within the traditional and religious classes in Syria, as well as to draw support from major funders abroad. The Qubaisyate framed their Islamic revivalist identity through emphasizing the need to a return to Islam in order to face the wave of Western influence that swept the region using social, economic, political and even military vehicles. The movement argued that this wave of secularization and Westernization was to blame for undermining the culture of Muslim societies and for challenging the Islamic identity and traditions. In a way, the movement used the growing sense of cultural imperialism and the belief that Islam was under attack to gain the support it needed to infiltrate Syrian and other Muslim societies. Furthermore, the movement asserted this Islamic identity throughout networks of Islamic study circles, the conservative styles of dress adopted by Qubaisyate members, the charity work that was being done under their name in the Muslim neighborhoods, the hundreds of Islamic schools throughout the country they ran and the various Islamic public events and activities they organized.

The movement's main objective was to promote traditional Islamic values followed by women's empowerment through religion, which was an extension of their Islamic revivalist identity and a frame that was specifically targeting women in the society. Their Islamic feminist identity was emphasized through the promotion of women's rights through Islamic discourse. The idea was to challenge the patriarchal notion of women's rights in Islam with the argument that Islam, at its core, calls for the advancement of women and equality between genders. By grounding their argument within an Islamic framework, the Qubaisyate ensured their legitimacy and acceptance by the religious community and society at large, while using their Islamic identity to differentiate them

from Western feminism which granted women an unprecedented opening to organize in a socially and religiously approved, although very conservative, way.

Additionally, the movement framed their non-political identity within the particular style of action chosen by the movement by embracing from the onset the Nakshbandi approach to Islam, a style of Sufism based on temperance and abstinence from worldly affairs.

Al-Qubaisyat's apolitical stance and the passive ideology of relying on the Nakshbandi tradition, as well as concentrating on basic religious education without promoting critical thinking about religion, presented them as a non-threatening movement to a government that was in full scale war with the radical Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, Qubaisyate women were known to be non-violent and to have no association with membership of the Muslim Brotherhood so therefore did not comprise a target of the Government's aggressive campaign.

In summation, the Qubaisyate movement went beyond using pre-existing and movement collective identities as an expression and framed it as a strategic instrument to further the objectives of the movement. The use of the 'natural' identity of 'woman' and 'Muslim' was intertwined with the cultural and political context of the deterioration of Islamic culture and women's right to produce a collective identity of "feminist Islamic revivalism." Furthermore, the doctrine of the Sufi Nakshbandi order followed by the movement was utilized to help distinguish the movement from the Muslim Brotherhood radical ideology and avoid the oppression of the Government by framing the ideology as a "peaceful apolitical" identity. The product was an overarching collective identity of "apolitical feminist Islamic revivalist" movement, which helped the Qubaisyate to uphold, grow and expand within shifting societal and political factors.

d. Movement outcomes: Identity as an outcome

Probably the most important aspect of identity in the study of social movement is identity as an outcome. Determining the success of a particular movement is highly contingent upon the movement's degree of effect on individuals and societies brushing with that movement. Theorists of social movement have calculated the success of a particular movement by the cultural impact and the change in identities of individuals within a given society that a particular movement functions within (Polleta and Jasper 2001). Religious movements in particular have been known to carry on the major goal of changing identities of their members and the society through advocacy of good morals, solidarity around a higher cause and charity to uplift societal problems (McAdam 1988). No one in Syria was better at this task than the Qubaisyate movement. Not only had they changed the identity of their own members, they were very influential and effective in transforming Syrian society at large.

The work of Qubaisyate within Syria, and other countries they have influenced, can be seen clearly in the transformation of the identity of individuals living in these societies. In Syria for example, they were successful in transforming individuals from a national Syrian identity into an Islamic identity through a gradual process of Islamization. They started with transforming their members from being a Syrian citizen and a 'conventional Muslim' in the society, into a '*Mutadayen*' (Islamic) woman, and for many cases the transformation went beyond that level to produce a '*Muta'aseb*' (fundamentalist) woman. Syrian and Arab nationality was downplayed while the Islamic and gender identity prevailed. This process transformed the identity of women in the society and turned them to a higher degree of religiosity than where they were before joining the movement.

Furthermore, these women, in turn, become agents of change by pursuing their family, friends and relatives to follow the same path and advance up the religiosity ladder.

Consequently, generations of Syrian citizens became more involved in the religion and had transformed their identities from a Syrian ‘conventional Muslim’ into a ‘*Mutadayen*’ (Islamic) citizen, or gone above and beyond that level to become a ‘*Muta’aseb*’ (fundamentalist) citizen.

The work of Qubaisyate became evident within Syrian society when the majority of Syrian men and women who defined themselves as ‘conventional Muslims’ had been transformed, gradually in the last fifty years, into a ‘*Mutadayen*’ or ‘Islamic’, and became very active in the religion after attending study circles offered by the Qubaisyate, or after their mothers, wives and other family members joined the movement. Syrians became more dedicated to religion, praying at least five times a day, fasting the holy month of Ramadan, giving regularly to charity at the end of the holy month and going on a numerous trips to Mecca to perform “*Omrah*”. More and more Syrian families were sending their children to Islamic schools rather than public schools to receive an Islamic-based education as an additional subject to the already-set curriculum by the state, transforming their children and generations of Syrian children into pious citizen with an Islamic, rather than a national, identity. Qubaisyate schools became active centers for disseminating Islamic revival ideology to generations of young Syrian students.

In addition, the work of Qubaisyate also became visible in the increase in Islamization of public spaces, in a society where public spaces have long been religiously neutral. The city of Damascus was witnessing the fall of its women under the conservative trend that was sweeping the region. The most apparent indication of this trend was the phenomenon

of wearing the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf), which was an identifying feature of the members of the movement due to the peculiar way of wearing it that was exclusively their own invention. It was evident from the number of Syrian women wearing the *hijab* in public that the Qubaisyate were successful in Islamizing secular Syria through its women. Though government officials strongly deny the increasing Islamization of the country, the reality is that Syria is indeed becoming more and more religious and in the process is losing its national identity. The pan-Arab national identity that has served for years as an umbrella to unite the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class distinction is being replaced by an Islamic identity driven by the constant efforts of Qubaisyate to revive Islam in the country. As a result, Islamic revivalism has been impacting directly the daily lives of the minority population in Syria, such as Syrian secularists, moderate Muslims, Christians of all factions, non-Muslim minorities and sects. Minorities, who identified themselves as Syrian citizens, have felt excluded from the new Islamic identity and have been seeing their own freedoms being impacted by the phenomenon of Qubaisyate. Their concerns are related to the change of the tolerant nature of their society and the lack of a balancing trend for the actively religious sector. The change was clear in the active closing of pubs in the vicinity of mosques, and of restaurant owners being hassled for serving alcohol to their customers or playing loud music during the call to prayer, as well as the increased reporting of incidents of women being verbally, or even physically, harassed for wearing short skirts or revealing clothing (AKI 2005). Overall, if we measure the success of Qubaisyate through the outcome of changing the identity of Syrian individuals and their society, then the movement has surely triumphed.

Conclusion

Several main conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, it supplies evidence for the application of cultural framing and collective identity framework in explaining the growth and outcomes of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in secular Syria.

Framing successful mobilizing messages, as well as producing a strong collective identity for the movement has indeed affected mobilization and outcomes as predicted by the cultural framing and identities framework, and extension of the theory to account for the formation and mobilization of the Qubaisyate highlights the applicability of this approach to Islamic social movement studies.

Second, this analysis demonstrates that Islamic revivalism in the Middle East has established a master frame, “Islam is the solution”, as well as a sense of solidarity around the idea of the “Muslim cause”, which the Qubaisyate movement has used as a tool to rise in Syria by gaining religious and cultural legitimacy in the Syrian society. The movement had used the message of “Islam is the solution” to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society; argue that there was a problem that needed to be addressed and only a return to the original teachings of the religion was the solution; suggest tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the damage; and offer rationale for solidarity and active participation in the movement.

As a result, the movement enjoyed great legitimacy and support among the elite houses of the capital city of Damascus, became a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria for more than five decades and infiltrated the community

through a message of religion and piety; a feat other religious groups who were also concerned with Islamic revivalism had been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

Furthermore, this analysis also confirms that adaptation of a collective identity model based on the notion of transforming existing identities as factors in social movement outcome can explain the success of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. The influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival movement has indeed influenced the collective identity the Qubaisyate movement created, which, in turn, influenced the movement's outcomes. The Qubaisyate's use of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism's existing collective identity, which revolves around the idea of unification under religion, has influenced the outcomes of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria and changed the pre-existing national identity in the country.

A third conclusion can be deducted from this analysis, the application of rationality of actors of the cultural framing and identities theory to the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. Whilst the overall use of cultural framing and identities framework have served as a key factor to facilitate the Qubaisyate's growth, the utilization of Islamic message and identities by the movement's leader and cadre played a major role in determining how these factors impacted the movement. The assumption of rationality of actors, when actors chose to use their message and collective identity as a strategic mobilization tactic, proves to be the case in the example of the Qubaisyate in Syria.

In conclusion, the cultural framing and identities approach has successfully addressed the success and outcomes of the Qubaisyate in Syria, and focusing on the message and collective identity, can shed light from a different angle to serve as a revised and improved approach to previous attempts in the study of Islamic social movements.

Chapter Seven: Discussion, Reflections, and Conclusions

Discussion

This study examined the emergence and growth of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria and beyond from the early 1960s until the outbreak of the uprising in 2011. It has embarked on major theoretical approaches to evaluate and answer the growth of the Islamic revivalist movement in secular Ba'athist Syria and other Muslim communities. Numerous primary data collected from interviews, as well as secondary data obtained from related literature have reinforced the primary hypothesis through proving the validity of the three intermediate hypotheses argued by this study, each individually. This discussion, therefore, will concentrate on linking the three intermediate hypotheses together to paint an overall picture for the rise and growth of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria and beyond, by combining the concept of political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, as well as the concept of cultural framing and identities in order to bring ideas, meanings and cultural elements into the study. In combining these three general areas, this discussion will attempt to answer how the Qubaisyate movement was successful in finding the perfect combination to create a balanced mobilization model through utilizing these different elements, resources and opportunities successfully to prosper as a significant socio-religious player in Syria despite the totalitarian and secular environment of Syrian politics. This discussion hopes to make use of the findings to shed light on the implications of the growth of the Qubaisyate movement on its members, the community

and the state, as well as examine the ramifications on global policy implications and future research endeavors.

a. Theory testing

Traditionally, the study of Islamic activism depended either on the social strains approach or the political opportunity approach to answer the mobilization and growth of Islamic social movements. Many scholars in this field have opted to use the logic of structural strains to interpret the emergence of Islamic social movements based on the structural crisis generated by the malfunction of secular modernization policies in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries. (Waltz 1986; Hoffman 1995; Dekmejian 1995; and Faksh 1997). While several scholars contend that socioeconomic factors and the grievances they entail can serve as the main explanation as to why individuals are attracted to join Islamic movements, other scholars view the political nature of the ruling governments in Arab and Muslim countries to be the main origin of Islamic contention. The crackdown on civil society as a whole, the outlawing of opposition parties, and the criminalization of political dissidents has made Islamic activism the only vehicle by which individuals can use as an effective political option (Wiktorowicz 2004).

In summation, decades of authoritarian regime rule and political oppression, as well as a deterioration of economic quality of life with no appropriate political channel to voice grievances, created a sense of political impotence and alienation and made Islamic activism an appealing idea to citizens of the greater Middle East and Muslim world. Regardless of the infiltration of these approaches in the study of Islamic social movements, structural strains and the political environment provide an overly simplistic

explanation of collective action. There is a dire need for a deeper look into the causes of Islamic activism and the rise of Islamic social movements.

Therefore, this study suggested expanding the scope of Islamic studies to include other approaches available in the body of social movement theory. By doing so, we can add the elements used by other approaches and test their applicability and limitations to Islamic activism studies.

Accordingly, after applying several approaches to the subject under study, the Qubaisyate movement, this study found that, although each approach was applicable and helped to further our understanding on how and why the Qubaisyate movement was rising in Syria, nevertheless, concentrating on one aspect without the other brought back a fragmented explanation of the phenomenon.

Political Process theory, for example, failed to address the cultural elements of the Qubaisyate movement and the international environment that it operated within. The international context and its influence on the movement, from inception to expansion, and culture and its consequences on the movement's mobilization and outcomes, were severely underplayed in the political process approach. Culture and the International environment, indeed, generated political opportunities and restraints that enabled or hindered the Qubaisyate's mobilization. As a result there was a dire need to integrate culture and politics in this study to further our understanding of the Qubaisyate and its outcomes.

Furthermore, although the political opportunity model with its four dimensions: low government repression, easier political access, having strong allies and the division between the country's elites, was present during the mobilization of the Qubaisyate in

Syria, and is applicable to the movement's rise and expansion, nevertheless, it was not a strong factor at the time of the movement's inception.

The policy of co-opting Islamic movement by the Ba'ath regime in Syria started almost twenty years after the initial work of the movement had started, in a way, defeating the idea of a political opportunity at the initiation phase of the movement advocated by the political opportunity approach. The main drivers behind the inception of the Qubaisyate seem to be, not a political opportunity, but rather the international environment, which created and advanced the influence of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism into Syria, and the ideology and identity of the movement's entrepreneur Munira Al-Qubaisy. Neither of these aspects is covered by the political opportunity approach, thus, making the approach, although applicable to the expansion of the movement, insufficient to explain the formation of the Qubaisyate movement.

On the other hand, unlike its political opportunity predecessor, applying Resource Mobilization theory was found applicable to explain the inception and rise of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria and beyond. This study, however, found the theory to be limited and indifferent to the ideological content of the movement. This approach is usually applied in an almost mechanistic way to organizations of widely different political and ideological scope, without incorporating these factors within the working of the model. In the case of the Qubaisyate, implementing the same message with different application to study circles with different social, political and educational backgrounds into the organizational structure has played a major role in recruitment and expansion. Furthermore, despite the fact that the role of informal networks, which the Qubaisyate utilized fully to operate, has been elucidated in the body of resource mobilization theory

at the level of recruitment, the ideology and dynamics by which those networks influenced the movement in the phases to follow was lacking and needed more exploration.

The lens, by which informal social networks are seen in the resource mobilization approach, only as a recruiting device, comes short of explaining how these networks can be reshaped and utilized beyond this role of recruiting members to support the movement's objectives. Hence, this study, found that expanding the theory to study social networks beyond the initialization phase, could be used as a tool to shed the light on how formal social movement organizations can manipulate informal networks to further the mission of the movement beyond the recruitment phase.

In addition, this study has employed the identity and cultural framing approach to examine the role by which constructing swaying and articulate frames, as well as establishing solidarity and strong collective identity had influenced the Qubaisyate inception and growth. The utilization of the concepts of framing and collective identity in this study shed light on the cultural and ideational aspect of Qubaisyate's mobilization. Although this approach seems to be of a great influence on the movement's inception, rise and longevity, the impact of frames is hard to assess and framing alone can fall short of explaining all dimensions of collective action. Moreover, this approach on its own fails to answer why the Qubaisyate, in particular, used the master frame "Islam is the solution," which was advanced by Middle Eastern Islamic revival at large, to launch, mobilize and succeed in Syria and beyond, rather than any other movement at that time. This discussion, therefore, suggests that our understanding of the role of each theoretical approach in the study of Islamic social movement in particular, must be extended to

reflect on the ways in which mobilization relies on the connections between ideas and identities, resources and organizational structure and the international and political context, not simply on one or other of these three dimensions.

b. Qubaisyate interconnected model

Taken individually, political opportunity structure, resource mobilization approach and frames tell only part of the story of the Qubaisyate Islamic movement. In order to get a full picture of the movement inception, mobilization and expansion, we need to combine multiple approaches offered within the body of social movement theory. The role of ideology and identity, for example, cannot easily be compartmentalized into a single theory; rather, they are an important part of the analysis of the Qubaisyate movement at various interconnected levels.

The Qubaisyate's lifecycle was marked by two important periods: Initiation and mobilization (from mid-1960s to mid-1980s) and expansion and growth (from mid-1980s to mid-2000s). The demarcation aspects of these two periods are the role of the state and its attitude towards Islamic activism, whether suppression or toleration, and the reaction of the Qubaisyate movement to government's attitude, whether working secretly to avoid state repression or piggybacking on the state's co-optation policy.

The initiation and mobilization period can be seen in the light of a Resource Mobilization approach as well as a Frames and Identities approach, while political opportunity was absent at the time of the launch of the movement. This period was marked by severe state repression as the government targeted every religious gathering and activity to eliminate the Islamist opposition Muslim Brotherhoods in the country. However, while Muslim Brotherhood members were repeatedly questioned, detained and eliminated, the

Qubaisyate movement carried on their work, although with extreme caution, into the houses of Sunni Syrian families. The movement did not face the same fate as its radical counterpart for reasons that concur with the theoretical frameworks of social movements. Consistent with the Resource Mobilization approach and the Cultural Framing and Identities approach, the leader of the Qubaisyate movement, Munira Al-Qubaisy, a Muslim woman, played a major role in the rise and success of the movement in Syria by designing a successful organizational structure based on allocating essential resources to maximize impact and efficaciousness, which immensely influenced the movement's tactics and strategic decision making process, attracted great numbers of women to join and determined the movement's longevity and durability in a hostile political environment.

From the initiation phase, the movement's leader and cadre advanced the message of "Islam is the Solution" to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society and to argue that there was a problem that needed to be addressed and only a return to the original teaching of the religion was the solution. By using an Islamic frame, the movement tapped into the moral resource aspect of Collective Behavior theory and enjoyed great legitimacy and support among the elite houses of the capital city of Damascus by infiltrating the communities through a message of religion and piety. This message of Islamic revivalism not only gained the movement the legitimacy and moral resources needed to launch, it also facilitated the material, cultural and human resources highly needed for the initiation phase.

Furthermore, the leader's exposure to the Islamic revivalism message and influence in the greater Middle East, had supplied Ms. Al-Qubaisy with the necessary resources and tools

to design a successful mobilizing structure capable of withstanding numerous fluctuating political and cultural pressures.

The pre-existing organizational message of “Islam is the solution,” as well as the model and tactics used by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria to mobilize support, collect resources, and deal with the government, served as a pilot case for Ms. Al-Qubaisy to build on its success and failure, perfect its weaknesses and utilize its strengths, while building a brand new vision for her movement. As a result, a better, more successful organizational model was created and the Qubaisyate movement flourished in Syria, even in times of great political repression.

The movement followed a successful combination of a formal overall structure for the movement, as well as a system of informal, independent social study circles. This system of independent study circles ensured the survival of the movement at the micro level, the loyalty of members throughout the country to their own study circle and the movement as a whole, as well as the control of a wider pool of financial resources and recruits.

Furthermore, ideology and identity played a major role in designing the study circles system, as well as in recruitment strategies; with recruited women advancing through the tiers of the movement based on their social status, seniority and leadership skills.

The movement was active in singling out the wives, daughters and close female relatives of well-known senior politicians and the most wealthy and influential Sunni families in Syria, or girls that demonstrated unmistakable intelligence and leadership skills. This policy turned membership or association with the Qubaisyate into a social status and a very prestigious position that every woman and girl in Syria wanted to be privileged with.

Recruited women were treated differently depending on their education and social status; poor women were invited to simple study circles that taught basic religious education and were only concerned with day to day religious issues, such as their role as mothers and wives, while rich and educated women were placed in more sophisticated study circles that taught religion from an intellectual and scientific approach, where they could dive more into the faith using reason and learn about the right way to approach equality in religion and their rights as women and wives in Islam.

By building the organizational structure based on ideology and identity, the movement's leader and cadre reinforced the historical "natural" identity of a "woman", while advancing the successful model of Islamic revivalist networks within which, members interacted with the social, economic and political environment. The Qubaisyate successfully presented a movement that's main objectives were capturing the true "natural" identity of a "Muslim woman" by reviving historical texts to teach the right form of Islam as well as empowering women and informing them about their rights in religion and to correct decades of patriarchal interpretations of the holy texts.

The idea of reviving religion and social status, as well as enforcing the role of the women in their homes and society, reinforced the "natural" identity of the first women approached by Munira and her disciples early on in the movement's inception. Munira and her disciples approached women in their own social circles who shared the same "natural" identities and introduced the Qubaisyate message, a message of Islamic feminism and piety, which reinforced the existing traditional identity of these women. As a result, the Qubaisyate study circles were very successful in attracting Damascene women with their Islamic message and the introduction of the new "Islamic feminist"

identity while ensuring their social status, which enticed women to choose piety via the Qubaisyate rather than any other path.

The expansion and growth period in the lifecycle of the Qubaisyate can be seen in the light of the Political Opportunity approach as well as the Resource Mobilization approach and Frames and Identities approach. This period was marked by the state co-optation policy of Islamic movements as the government tried to offset the pressure of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East, based on the growth of social religious movements in Syria and to prevent it from transforming into militant religious opposition.

In this period, like its predecessor, the ideology of the movement continued to play a role and affect the status of the movement in Syria and its relationship with the ruling regime.

The Qubaisyate movement utilized an apolitical ideology by adapting from the onset a strain of Sufism approach to Islam that promoted withdrawal from worldly affairs, in order to avoid government repression. They emphasized Islamic revivalism through religious, moral and cultural reforms rather than political reforms, a fact that granted them semi-immunity from state repression for the early years of inception, and gave them a leadership position among state co-opted Islamic movements at the stage of growth and expansion. The Qubaisyate's apparent popularity among the Sunni families in Syria, paired with their apolitical ideology, made it a great contender for government blessing and a grand candidate for Islamic co-optation policy. Accordingly, the Qubaisyate women were given a green light to resume their activities in public while the Muslim Brotherhood was being erased entirely. This unprecedented political opportunity transformed the movement from a secretive underground movement into a legitimate

power for Islamic revivalism in the country and demonstrated how state repression could in fact determine the survival and longevity of social movements.

Furthermore, the division among the Sunni elite and state elites in the country, the increase of the number of influential allies backing the movement within Syria and abroad as well as the declining degree of state repression combined, have affected mobilization and outcomes of the Qubaisyate and highlights the applicability of the political opportunity framework to the growth and expansion period of the lifecycle of the Qubaisyate movement.

In addition to the application of the Political Opportunity approach during this period, the Resource Mobilization approach, as well as the Frames and Identities approach have been found valid and applicable to the growth and expansion of the Qubaisyate. The organizational structure of the movement and its Islamic message has continued to play an important role, even after the decline in state repression. The successful model of Islamic social study circles was expanded to encompass a multitude of social and educational backgrounds and extended to cover every part of the Syrian state as well as other Arab countries and expat communities in the West.

Furthermore, the activities of the Qubaisyate, which were always linked to the political situation in the country and the degree of the regime's tolerance of religious activities, became openly held in this period at their schools and mosques unlike the first couple of decades, when they were mostly conducted in secret at private homes. These activities advanced the movement's message, as well as giving the movement greater legitimacy by linking the movement's ideology to its actions. The ideology, hence, was not just a mere set of theoretical thoughts or abstract ideas; nevertheless, it was put in practice and

presented as a successful Islamic solution to society's problems and a religious path to development and progress. This interaction and link between ideology and activities goes beyond the Cultural Framing approach, which concentrates on the message as an abstract idea only.

The Qubaisyate, also, have linked their ideology to everyday life by creating a full ideological conversion and dictating the manner by which their members conducted day-to-day actions outside the movement's study circles. By doing so, the movement created a bridge between the actions of the individual member to the improvement, advancement and Islamization of the larger society and reinforced the individual and societal Islamic identity. The strong influence of ideology in both phases of the lifecycle of the Qubaisyate, and the role it plays in every theoretical approach, prompts a need for a closer examination of this aspect in the study of social movements at large.

The Qubaisyate movement has utilized the ideology factor for its organizational structure, in its recruitment strategy, in dealing with the ruling regime, in constructing identities of its members and in its message and cultural frames. Ideology was intertwined in every level of the movement, every activity and at every period of the movement's lifecycle.

In summation, we can answer the question 'how and why did the Qubaisyate movement mobilize' by linking the greater influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revivalist movement and its ideological message directly to the multiple factors that have influenced the birth and growth of the movement. Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism has influenced and affected directly the entrepreneur, message, organizational structure and identity of the Qubaisyate movement and continued to influence and shape these factors

throughout the lifecycle of the movement, including the change in government's behavior and opening an unprecedented political opportunity.

Therefore, the mobilization of the Qubaisyate movement was successful because (1) the movement had an influential entrepreneur who took advantage of the social, cultural and political context to (2) advance an Islamic revivalist message, rooted in the traditional Sunni culture in Syria, which (3) reinforced the "natural" identity of the members and potential recruits, while creating a (4) successful organizational structure that tied the (5) ideology of the movement to its day-to-day activities (6) and withstood the Ba'ath regime's efforts to suppress all Islamic activities during secularization policy, as well as ensured the movement's acceptance during the Islamic co-optation policy, (7) all within the context of proliferating Middle Eastern Islamic revivalist influence.

This result brings about a very important question, why did the Qubaisyate, in particular, rather than any other Islamic movement flourish in Syria?

It is not simply that Munira Al-Qubaisy was exposed to the Middle Eastern Islamic revivalist message and decided to introduce an idea that would resonate within the Sunni community in Syria; after all, many influential religious figures in Syria were exposed to the same influences during the same time frame. In addition, the successful organizational structure that tied the ideology of the movement to its day-to-day activities already existed and was practiced by the Muslim Brotherhood movement, so it was not a unique factor to the Qubaisyate. Moreover, the social, cultural and political resources and opportunities were similarly available to other religious groups, especially ones following the same apolitical stance of the Sufi Nakshbandi path and that had taken advantage of the Islamic co-optation policy later on. Although these factors combined played a major

role in the mobilization and growth of the Qubaisyate, there must have been a distinctive feature to the movement that made it a tremendous success in Syria and beyond.

This study argue that the Qubaisyate Islamic revivalist movement's distinctiveness lay in its ability to erect paths into the houses of the prominent middle and upper classes of the Syrian state through its women, a feat other religious groups who were also concerned with Islamic revivalism had been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

C. Gender Jihad

Driven by their strong faith, the Qubaisyate initially were successful in evading the government's crackdown on religious activities of any kind and avoided government infiltration, through operating in member's private homes and by banking on the knowledge that the government would exercise social limits when it came to dealing with women. While Muslim Brotherhood members and Islamist Jihadists were repeatedly questioned and detained, the Qubaisyate women carried on their work, although with extreme caution, into the houses of Sunni Syrian families.

The Qubaisyate's work, which tied daily living to traditional Islam, was greatly welcomed by the prominent Sunni houses in the old city of Damascus because they were preaching in the realm of girls and women, where no man can enter, thus, these women were left out of religious education other than what their mothers had taught them.

Fathers and husbands of these women, who attributed their economic success and wealth to God's blessings and their devotion to their religion, felt that by allowing these lessons to be carried at their houses, they were thanking God for his blessings and ensuring that the wealth and good fortune continued in their lives, as well as protecting the family

honor when their women took a religious and modest path in life rather than a modern and disgraceful one that could bring shame and humiliation to these traditional families. As for the women and girls in Syria, who were already living as second-class citizens in a gender-biased patriarchal society, where a social custom of son-partiality reigned and women were perceived as only daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, found that the recent wave of fundamentalism and the re-Islamization of Middle Eastern societies, carried by the patriarchal *Wahhabi* ideology, reinforced many cultural stereotypes about the role of women in Islam, the inherent belief that women were “different” and “inferior” to men, and the long inherited patriarchal cultures and traditions in areas such as the law, the criminal justice system, the economy and education, which erected many societal blockades to women’s advancement in the country. Driven to become a somehow powerless entity caught between an authoritarian government, who gave up women’s rights in order to hold on to power, and the inherent stereotypes of the patriarchal traditions, society and religion, women in Syria found no other power stronger than feminist Islam to help pull them from the extreme injustices they faced in everyday life. As a result, the Qubaisyate movement became an appealing idea because it appeared to be the only possible vehicle that could bring back women’s rights, while keeping their Islamic identity and giving them the space to organize and be heard.

The movement has successfully used the ‘natural’ identity of ‘woman’ and ‘Muslim,’ which was intertwined with the cultural and political context of the deterioration of Islamic culture and women’s right, to produce a collective identity of “feminist Islamic revivalism.” Accordingly, the success of the movement was dependent on the factor of “gender exclusivity” to promote women to mobilize around the idea of Islamic revival to

teach the right form of Islam; the one that empowers women, highlights their rights in the religion and correct decades of patriarchal interpretations of the holy texts.

The Qubaisyate women affirmed their identity and independence through challenging the historical traditions throughout the Muslim world, which depended on male scholars to interpret the holy texts, lead congregations and publish Islamic materials, by revisiting the religious texts and using their feminist lens to review and interpret the Holy Scriptures with known patriarchal interpretations. Nowadays, the Qubaisyate have their own curriculum of textbooks written by their own members to teach in their study circles instead of depending on the traditional religious books written from a male point of view. Moreover, bearing in mind that Syrian society is rooted in the idea of honor, where the way mothers, sisters, wives and daughters act, dress and carry themselves in the public domain is the measurement of their families' honor and reputation, the Qubaisyate has manipulated the traditional Islamic dress to reserve this idea of honor while using religion to cross from the private into the public sphere through an Islamic point of entry, a move that legitimized their presence within it. The Islamic uniform adopted by the Qubaisyate members, as well as their devotion to religious deeds and charity have affirmed and improved their family's reputation while affirming their own autonomy and equality as women by choosing their own style away from the mandatory attire prescribed by male scholars of religion. The Qubaisyate, in a way, are redefining the public space to accept and accommodate their women through carving out a legitimate space for themselves in the male-dominated public sphere at the grass-roots level and signaling the determination to continue occupying more space as they grow.

In addition, the Qubaisyate's vigorousness in educating and teaching women about their rights in Islam by highlighting texts which promote gender equality within the religion have attracted a multitude of women who were imprisoned in an invisible family and societal prison, preventing them from fully reaching their full potential in areas such as work and education. The movement's emphasis on independence through education and work has transformed generations of girls in Syria into extremely productive, highly educated and exceptionally disciplined generations of women. Qubaisyate women became known in Syrian society for their strong will, determination and leadership personalities, excelling at their jobs and careers, as well as being admirable sisters, wives, and mothers.

For all of these reasons, the Qubaisyate movement was successful in advancing Islamic revivalism one woman at a time, not only among Syrian women but also among other Muslim women living in countries plagued with similar circumstances and traditions. Furthermore, the Qubaisyate were also successful in Western countries among Muslim women living within the exported traditional society of Muslim expats and families. These women, although existed in an open public sphere with more freedom and gender equality, endured the same conditions at home as the women in their native countries, and were even more limited by their families' traditions to keep the honor of the family in a non-Muslim country that endorses what Islam prohibits. Other women who belonged to second generation Muslim immigrants in the West found the movement to be a great source of solidarity with their parents' mother country's, which reinforced their Muslim identity in a culture that is committed to misunderstanding their faith. The movement was a medium that reflected their stance as women born into a culture enforcing women's

rights, which was downgraded by Islam, and reflected their Islamic identity, which was downgraded by the West. In sum, the Qubaisyate was successful in driving the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism in Syria and beyond through playing the gender card and motivating women to join in order to gain greater freedom within their families, society and the public sphere.

Reflections

The emergence of the Qubaisyate in Syria had a major impact on the individual women members of the movement, the societies they lived in and the global community at large. The movement was unbeaten by ingeniously and pragmatically bringing into play a comprehensible and meaningful idiom capable of founding an Islamic point of entry for the individual women members into social, educational, professional and economic autonomy, as well as turn over their traditional role in the family, society and religion to have a more positive value and gain stronger hold beyond the private sphere, a move that was unprecedented for Syrian women. The movement's emphasis on independence through education and work, although within an Islamic framework, transformed generations of girls in Syria into extremely productive, highly educated and exceptionally disciplined generations of women.

Yet, without purposely aiming to, they have impacted the lives of non-Muslim women, as well as other conventional Muslim women in Syria who did not belong to the movement. The precise "set" of rules that the movement proposed for the actions and characteristics of a "pious" woman, by default, would exclude and discredit women who were "different," and chose a different path to piety.

Although the Qubaisyate does not directly impose judgment on women who refuse to join them or choose to follow a different course to righteousness, their distinctive uniform, the emphasis on the wearing of the *hijab*, the exclusivity of their study circles and following a specific model of worship dictated by Sufi Nakshbandi order, automatically label women who are non-members, belong to other religious sects, or follow different ways in life, as “the others.”

In turn, these “other” women were not acting or dressing according to the true Islamic code of conduct and therefore were leading the youth, other women, men and the whole Islamic society astray. It became a duty of the Qubaisyate, not only to convert these women to the right path, but also to protect the entire Muslim society from the wrongdoing of the wanderers from the correct path of righteousness.

There was countless evidence in the interviews by members who left the movement after being extremely pressured to wear the headscarf, to change their way of life to suit the *Anseh* and the way of the movement, and to influence the “conventional Muslim” members of their family and friends to follow their footsteps to the right path. Also, non-members or non-Muslims interviewed, asserted that they had witnessed the pressure of the Qubaisyate women either to join the movement or by getting harassed multiple times by members for wearing modern clothes in the case of a Muslim woman, or a cross in public in the case of a Christian Syrian woman. This constant pressure to follow a certain way to piety, as well as their exclusiveness and influence in Syrian society, cancelled out all other contradictory beliefs and ideologies, which created a chasm within a society already abundant with a muddle of religions, sects and ideologies.

This absolute monopoly over the truth was not only affecting the daily lives of conventional Muslims, non-Muslim minorities and other religious sects, but also creating artificial boundaries in the community, supporting a monolithic culture based on fundamental Islamic values and promoting religious intolerance in the Syrian society and beyond, where a balancing trend was clearly absent. Islamic revivalism via Qubaisyate was clearly impacting directly the daily lives of the minority population in Syria; Syrian secularists, moderate Muslims, Christians of all factions, non-Muslim minorities and sects, had all been seeing their own freedoms being impacted by the phenomenon. The Sunni majority in Syria had also witnessed an ideological transformation in the last thirty years carried by the Qubaisyate women, and lost their tolerant nature slowly to become judgmental and intolerant of “the others.” The change was clear in the active closing of pubs in the vicinity of mosques, and of restaurant owners being hassled for serving alcohol to their customers or playing loud music during the call to prayer, as well as the increased reporting of incidents of women being verbally or even physically harassed due to wearing short skirts or revealing clothing (AKI 2005).

There was also another concern related to the change of the tolerant nature of the society, which was the Qubaisyate and other ‘*Muta’aseb*’ (fundamentalist) groups, although peaceful revivalist, were playing a major role in changing the nature of the “*Mutadayen*” (Islamic) Syrians into the ‘*Mutataref*’ (violent Islamist) camp, which provided a fertile base for the growth of violent extremism and radicalism in the country. The Qubaisyate’s association with a cultural and ethical Islamic revivalism provided a base of support and strengthened the message and influence of Islamist political extremists, whom, if victorious in attaining their goals, would introduce strict and rigid authoritarian Islamic

state that, not only, would influence the lives of non-Muslim minorities and conventional Muslims, but would also impact the lives of Syrian women at large, including the Qubaisyate themselves.

Clear evidence of the change in the tolerant nature of Syrians and the new dynamics of Islamic radicalism and extremism is the country's ongoing struggle with a three year, and continuing, civil war. Hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens who flooded the streets in 2011, longing for a society based on an Islamic identity, and deep-rooted in indigenous Arab Islamic traditions and principles, were derailed and recruited to become armed forces of God, calling for an Islamic state in secular Syria. Sectarian conflicts, hate crimes, assassinations and systematic ethnic cleansing became the daily bread of Syrians throughout the country. Indeed, the uprising that had taken place in every part of the country, including the heart of the capital city Damascus, proved that Islamic revivalism carried on by the Qubaisyate and other fundamental Islamists groups, although apolitical and non-violent in nature, may have provided a base for the evolution of radical religious movements in the country and created an army of willing and able Muslim youth to be recruited into the Islamic Jihad camp.

It is no secret that the Qubaisyate's followers were growing in number long before the bloody events in Syria took place, but, in addition, the mass exodus of Syrian immigrants and refugees to other Arab, Muslim and Western countries, including the very enthusiastic preachers of the Qubaisyate, might have posed similar circumstances and repeated the fate of the failing Syrian state by promoting religious intolerance elsewhere and creating a fertile soil for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism.

Assessing the long-term effects of the growth and expansion of the Qubaisyate beyond Syrian borders and reaching as far as Europe and the United States is a huge task that this study will not be able to address. Results of this magnitude will become possible only when there is a critical mass of exploratory studies examining the movement in every country its influence has reached. The sum of such studies will enable the understanding of how variations in the political, social and international context can influence the growth of the movement across the range of Arab, Muslim and Western countries.

A critical mass of exploratory studies of the Qubaisyate movement in its expansion zones will also help enrich the research community's knowledge of the topic and bridge the gap between theoretical approaches to social movements that are too general and non-generalizable studies of social movements by country or movement specialists.

This study did not aim to make generalizations about the Qubaisyate movement, but to explore the movement in depth to present patterns that surfaced during the research to gain insight into the phenomenon. This study and the analysis it generated tried to steer away from generalization due to the critical subject under study, which is ideological conversion. It was extremely difficult to assess the continuous impact of the movement and the ideological changes it required from the individual women members of the movement. Each woman member will have a different journey with the Qubaisyate depending on her own personality and character, the environment she lives in, and the array of people and ideas she is exposed to during her life time. These are just a few factors that will encourage or discourage the individual member from following the path of the movement and holding on to its tenets.

Furthermore, the movement itself, as is apparent from its history in Syria, is very adaptable to the opportunities and environment of its host country and the community that it dwells in. Further studies are needed to bring about similar patterns across these countries and communities and examine the differences and the causes behind it. The Qubaisyate movement is no longer limited to Syria and the Middle East and its influence is far reaching to impact Muslims all over the world. If the patterns connecting the movement's adherents around the world come back confirming the spread of conservatism, extremism and religious intolerance as a negative externality of the movement, then the global community has a definite reason to be worried.

Given the fast and constant shifting in the socio-political scene in the Middle East and Muslim countries, the global community cannot afford the luxury of debating the impact of fundamentalism and religious intolerance generated by groups such as the Qubaisyate. Groups that claim to be the custodian of the ultimate truth have been known to translate their theoretical perspective and ideology into violent collective action, which poses a challenge for the global community.

Armed by the knowledge of the growing feeling of Muslims around the world to be persecuted and targeted by the global war on terror, as well as the feeling of a constant attack on Islam and its teachings and symbols, the global community should take into consideration the role of Islamic revivalist movements in mobilizing the Muslim communities around the world and the sources of fundamentalism and extremism that have been feeding violence and turmoil in the entire world. The source that individual Muslims around the world have access to, and seek to gain knowledge about their religion from, dictates the course of actions these individuals hold in life and the lens by

which they interpret events affecting their faith, countries, and the world, and consequently, their reactions to these event; whether peaceful or violent. The combination of these actions, in turn, will contribute and dictate the course of Islamic resurgence around the world. What happens in Syria or the Middle East, does not stays within the borders anymore, it could grow and expand with tremendous effect on the global community.

Indeed, international politics have constantly played a role in shaping and reshaping the local environment in Syria and the Middle East and, in turn, local politics and events are growing and impacting the world on different scales. A deep examination of these events and factors would provide in-depth insights about global politics at large.

The lessons that come from examining the Qubaisyate Islamic revivalist movement are that generations in Syria, and a few other countries, have grown into a religious environment and remain deeply rooted in traditional Islamic views about the world around them. These generations have grown up, been educated, and have assumed positions of powers within their respective countries and financial and economic positions in countries that hosted them as new immigrants, a fact that may pose barriers to assimilation and finding a common ground on important global issues.

In addition, there is a great need to understand the local and regional movements that have been transforming and impacting the lives of Muslims around the world. In order to develop an understanding of the key elements at the core of Islamic revivalism in Syria and the Middle East, we must examine the substantial social and political authority that dominant Islamic movements in the region have attained in the last few decades. This study is a just a piece in the greater puzzle, with a hope that an in-depth work that can

help with the significant shortage of published literatures that examines Islamic revival and social movements in Syria, can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and encourage other students of Islamic social movement studies to take advantage of their special knowledge of Muslim countries to enrich the research community, which will advance our knowledge of contentious politics at large. Examining the resurgence of Islamic movements and the internal factors that are de-stabilizing Syria would shed light on the forces that are causing turmoil and factionalism in the region and around the world and help predict future ideological trends within the regional political context.

Conclusion

The present study has investigated the on-going chronological relationship between two key variables in the Syrian state: Islamic revivalism in the greater Middle East and its effect on the rise of the local Islamic revivalism message advocated by the Qubaisyate Islamic women's movement.

The study attained its aim by concentrating on a single central question, that is, 'how and why the Qubaisyate movement is rising as a significant socio-religious player in Syria despite the totalitarian and secular environment of Syrian politics', as well as addressing numerous other contributory empirical questions to advance the research community's knowledge of the topic under study.

In order to answer the stated research questions, this study has embarked on the major theoretical approaches to studying social movements; by combining the concept of political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource

Mobilization theory, as well as the concept of cultural framing and identities in order to bring ideas, meanings and cultural elements into the study.

In addressing these three general areas, this research hoped to answer key issues in the major literature on Islamic social movements and how they related to the subject under study; the Qubaisyate movement.

This study introduced an overarching primary hypothesis arguing that the rise of the Qubaisyate Islamic women's movement in Syria was likely due to the rising influence of the Islamic revival movement in the greater Middle East on the country.

In this positive relationship, the degree of the influence of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism on Syria was viewed as the independent variable, and its effect; the degree of growth and rise of the Qubaisyate Islamic social movement in Syria was, in turn, viewed as the dependent variable. In addition, this study proposed three explanatory/intermediate hypotheses to the primary hypothesis. The study argued that the rising influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival in Syria helped the rise of the Qubaisyate through effecting three different dimensions of the movement: political opportunities, entrepreneurial-organizational, as well as identities and cultural framing.

The first intermediate hypothesis, based on political opportunities that reflect the state-centered approach of Political Process theory, emphasized the role of the state and the political environment it generated on the Qubaisyate materialization and longevity. The focus was on the degree of openness, or closeness, that the Syrian political system enjoyed and to what extent it allowed access to its institutions and substantive entities.

The present study argued that the Ba'ath regime, in an attempt to offset the pressure of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East based on the growth of social religious movements

in Syria, and to prevent it from transforming into militant religious opposition, had relied on a policy of co-optation and state-sponsored Islam to limit popular unrest whilst ensuring its popularity among the majority urban Sunni Muslims in the country. The state chose to modify its behavior from being a strong advocate of secularism and attempting to grind down its Islamist rivals, to promoting Islamic revivalism through the religious bourgeoisie, such as Munira Al-Qubaisy, and ex-communicating their loyal left wing associates. This behavior modification came in the form of numerous attempts to reposition the state's image from a secular, socialist and minority-run government to a god-fearing, religiosity promoting and Shari'a based popular governing apparatus. As a result of the constant efforts of the ruling command to reach a state of equilibrium in Syria by ensuring its survival while controlling the growing threat of Islamic movements within the country, new state-Islamic dynamics were born in Syria to enable the state to hold a monopoly over the fastest growing sector in Syrian society, which is the Islamic movement, including the topic under study; the Qubaisyate.

This study supplied evidence for the application of the political opportunity framework in explaining the mobilization and outcomes of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in secular Syria. Elite divisions, influential allies, degree of state repression and openness in the polity, indeed, have affected mobilization and outcomes as predicted by the political opportunity framework and extension of the theory to account for the formation and mobilization of Qubaisyate highlights the applicability of this approach to Islamic social movement studies.

Furthermore, this study exemplified the significance of the international context of political opportunities, which political opportunity literature has under-utilized or even

ignored. No matter how influential its allies, how open the polity in the country is or what degree of repression it has had to endure, the reality is that Qubaisyate movement did not emerge in a vacuum; it is part of the greater Islamic revival movement, and is both empowered and limited by external factors, sometimes indirectly, beyond its country of origin. The international environment, which the Qubaisyate movement was launched in, was full of opportunities that permitted the formation and growth of this Islamic revivalism movement.

This study confirmed that the adaptation of a political process model based on the notion of the influence of external opportunities and international contexts as factors in social movement mobilization, could explain the growth of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. The influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival movement has indeed changed the role that the Syrian government played and the political environment it generated, which, in turn influenced the movement's materialization and longevity.

The Syrian regime's response to Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and the adoption of a "state-sponsored" Islam policy has influenced the livelihood of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. In an attempt to ensure survival in the face of Islamic growth in the country, the Syrian regime has promoted Islamic movements and empowered the religious sector of the society to a point where it cannot be controlled anymore. At the same time, the Qubaisyate Islamic movement in Syria has seized the political opportunity given by the state and grew rapidly to fill the religious vacuum left in the country after the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982.

Furthermore, this study has reinforced the application of rationality of actors of the political opportunity theory to the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. Whilst the core

dimensions of political opportunity framework served as a key factor to facilitate the Qubaisyate's mobilization, the interpretation of opportunities and threats by the movement's leader and members played a major role in determining how these factors impacted the movement. The assumption of rationality of actors, when actors perceive opportunities or threats and accordingly weigh their options and reply rationally to exploit openings or bound adversities, proves to be the case in the example of the Qubaisyate in Syria.

In conclusion, the political opportunity approach has successfully addressed the mobilization of the Qubaisyate and gone beyond that initial phase to analyze not only factors that influence their emergence, but also, the structural conditions that altered their strategies and outcomes along the road. Consequently, focusing on structural factors can shed light on analyzing Islamic social movements beyond its initiation phase and adds to the understanding of collective action from a different angle to serve as a revised and improved approach to the previous attempts in the study of Islamic social movements.

The second intermediate hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on the entrepreneurial-organizational version of Resource Mobilization theory, emphasized the role of Munira Al-Qubaisy, the movement's entrepreneur, as a designer of a successful movement-business model, as well as the role of the effective organizational structure of the Qubaisyate in maximizing the impact and efficaciousness of the movement.

The present study argued that the leader of the Qubaisyate movement, Munira Al-Qubaisy, had played a major role in the rise and success of the movement in Syria. The leader's exposure to Islamic revivalism's influence in the greater Middle East supplied Ms. Al-Qubaisy with the necessary resources and tools to design a successful mobilizing

structure capable of withstanding numerous fluctuating political and cultural pressures.

The pre-existing organizational model of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt and Syria, and the tactics they used for mobilizing support, collecting resources and dealing with the government, served as a pilot case for Ms. Al-Qubaisy to build on its successes and failures, perfect its weaknesses and utilize its strengths, while building a brand new vision for her movement.

As a result, a better, more successful organizational model was created and the Qubaisyate movement flourished in Syria even in times of great political repression. This hypothesis, therefore, concentrated on the role of the leader of the movement Ms. Al-Qubaisy, in designing a successful organizational structure based on allocating essential resources to maximize impact and efficaciousness, which immensely influenced the movement's tactics and strategic decision making processes, attracted great numbers of women to join and determined the movement's longevity and durability in a hostile political environment.

This study supplied evidence for the application of resource mobilization framework in explaining the growth and outcomes of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in secular Syria. Numerous available resources, effective leadership and well-planned organizational structure, have indeed affected mobilization and outcomes as predicted by the resource mobilization framework, and extension of the theory to account for the formation and mobilization of the Qubaisyate highlights the applicability of this approach to Islamic social movement studies.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that the leader of the Qubaisyate movement, Munira Al-Qubaisy, played a major role in the rise and success of the movement in Syria.

The leader's exposure to Islamic revivalism influence in the greater Middle East early on had supplied Ms. Al-Qubaisy with the necessary resources and tools to design a successful mobilizing structure capable of withstanding numerous fluctuating political and cultural pressures. The pre-existing organizational model of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and the tactics they used for mobilizing support, collecting resources and dealing with the government, served as a pilot case for Ms. Al-Qubaisy to build on its successes and failures, perfect its weaknesses and utilize its strengths, while building a brand new vision for her movement. As a result, a better, more successful organizational model was created and the Qubaisyate movement flourished in Syria even in times of great political repression.

This study also confirms that adaptation of a resource mobilization model based on the notion of the effective entrepreneurs and successful organizational model as factors in social movement mobilization can explain the formation of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. The influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival movement had indeed changed the role that the leadership of the Qubaisyate played and the organizational structure it created, which, in turn, influenced the movement's materialization and longevity. The Qubaisyate's leadership response to Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and the adoption of the existent organizational structure of the Muslim Brotherhood influenced the livelihood of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria.

In addition, this study has reinforced the application of rationality of actors of the resource mobilization theory to the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. Whilst the core dimensions of resource mobilization framework served as a key factor to facilitate the Qubaisyate's growth, the utilization of these resources by the movement's leader and

cadre played a major role in determining how these factors impacted the movement. The assumption of rationality of actors, when actors perceive opportunities and chose to exploit certain resources, was proven to be the case in the example of the Qubaisyate in Syria.

In conclusion, the resource mobilization approach has successfully addressed the growth of the Qubaisyate in Syria and, focusing on resource mobilization, can shed light on analyzing Islamic social movements beyond its initiation phase and adds to the understanding of collective action from a different angle to serve as a revised and improved approach to the previous attempts in the study of Islamic social movements.

The third intermediate hypothesis, based on mobilizing structures that draw on collective identity and cultural framing theory of social movement, emphasized the role of frames used by the Qubaisyate movement as interpretive designs that proposed a language and cognitive tools for understanding the issues and events in Syria, as well as the role of ‘collective agency’ that inspired and legitimized the movement’s existence and longevity.

The present study argued that Islamic revivalism in the Middle East established a master frame, “Islam is the solution”, as well as a sense of solidarity around the idea of the “Muslim cause”, which the Qubaisyate movement had used as a tool to rise in Syria by gaining religious and cultural legitimacy in the Syrian society. The movement had used the message of “Islam is the solution” to frame issues in a meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society; argue that there is a problem that needs to be addressed and only a return to the original teaching of the religion is the solution; suggest tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the damage; and offer rationale for solidarity and active participation in the movement. As a result, the

movement enjoyed great legitimacy and support among the elite houses of the capital city of Damascus, and infiltrated the community through a message of religion and piety; a feat other religious groups who were also concerned with Islamic revivalism had been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

This aspect of this study, therefore, concentrated on the role of framing Islam as a solution and the collective identity created around the idea of unification under religion, in promoting and legitimizing the Qubaisyate movement as a religious movement, enabling it to gain support from the influential families of Damascus, and becoming a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria for more than five decades, as well as expanding beyond the borders to other Arab and Muslim countries to reach as far as Europe and the United States.

This study supplied evidence for the application of cultural framing and the collective identity framework in explaining the growth and outcomes of the Qubaisyate Islamic revival movement in secular Syria. Framing successful mobilizing messages, as well as producing a strong collective identity for the movement, indeed, affected mobilization and outcomes as predicted by the cultural framing and identities framework, and extension of the theory to account for the formation and mobilization of the Qubaisyate, highlights the applicability of this approach to Islamic social movement studies.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that Islamic revivalism in the Middle East had established a master frame, “Islam is the solution”, as well as a sense of solidarity around the idea of the “Muslim cause”, which the Qubaisyate movement had used as a tool to rise in Syria by gaining religious and cultural legitimacy in the Syrian society. The movement had used the message of “Islam is the solution” to frame issues in a

meticulous manner in order to highlight the ills of modern society; argue that there is a problem that needs to be addressed and only a return to the original teaching of the religion is the solution; suggest tactics and strategies to serve as remedies and solutions to undo the damage; and offer rationale for solidarity and active participation in the movement.

As a result, the movement enjoyed great legitimacy and support among the elite houses of the capital city of Damascus, became a substantial driving force behind the rise toward religious conservatism in Syria for more than five decades and infiltrated the community through a message of religion and piety; a feat other religious groups who were also concerned with Islamic revivalism had been unsuccessful at accomplishing.

Furthermore, this study also confirmed that adaptation of a collective identity model based on the notion of transforming existing identities as factors in social movement outcome could explain the success of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria. The influence of the Middle Eastern Islamic revival movement had indeed influenced the collective identity the Qubaisyate movement created, which in turn influenced the movement's outcomes. The Qubaisyate's use of Middle Eastern Islamic revivalism's existing collective identity, which revolved around the idea of unification under religion, influenced the outcomes of the Qubaisyate movement in Syria and changed the preexisting national identity in the country.

In addition, this study reinforced the application of rationality of actors of the cultural framing and identities theory to the case of Qubaisyate in Syria. Whilst the overall use of cultural framing and identities framework have served as a key factor to facilitate the Qubaisyate's growth, the utilization of the Islamic message and identities by the

movement's leader and cadre played a major role in determining how these factors impacted the movement. The assumption of rationality of actors, when actors chose to use their message and collective identity as a strategic mobilization tactic, proved to be the case in the example of the Qubaisyate in Syria. In summation, a cultural framing and identities approach has successfully addressed the success and outcomes of the Qubaisyate in Syria and, focusing on the message and collective identity, can shed light on analyzing Islamic social movements beyond the initiation phase and adds to the understanding of collective action from a different angle to serve as a revised and improved approach to the previous attempts in the study of Islamic social movements. In conclusion, this study fulfilled its three different objectives: personal goals, intellectual goals and practical goals.

On a personal level, my own intellectual curiosity, as a native anthropologist, was fulfilled by understanding and answering the question of why so many women, of the same socio-economic class I belonged to, were changing their behavior and lifestyle in the ways they were and joining a movement that commanded the way they dressed, acted and lived their daily lives. I have interviewed the women, heard their personal stories and shared their experiences in order to comprehend why they decided to choose piety via the Qubaisyate rather than any other path. The goal of this research is to gain insight into the rationale and motivation for women's engagement with religion via the Qubaisyate movement, and subsequently understand why the Qubaisyate movement was successful in gaining foot in Syrian society, via its all-exclusive female members, was achieved through patterns that have emerged out of this research.

In addition to personal goals, this study fulfilled its intellectual goals. This study is an in-depth work that can help with the significant shortage of published literature that examines Islamic revival and social movements in Syria. Indeed, there was, and still is, an immense need for research to study the substantial social and political authority that Islamic movements in Syria have attained during the reign of Bashar al-Asad given the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class contrasts. This research can help to shed light on the turmoil that is taking Syria by force and add to the solution of the problem that Syria is in a state of crisis and its ruling command is slowly losing control over the multifaceted variables lurking in the country, mainly, in the Islamic sector. In addition, this research has embarked on a topic that has not been studied before; the case of the Qubaisyate movements has been in the shadow for over five decades without a single study that can explain the causes of their emergence, expansion and longevity.

Furthermore, studying the Qubaisyate in the light of the major theories of social movements can further our knowledge of Islamic social movements and how these theories can be applied to Islamic activism. This research will not only encourage other students of Islamic social movement studies to take advantage of their special knowledge of Muslim countries to enrich the research community, it will advance our knowledge of contentious politics at large. Moreover, close analysis and major theory application can contribute to the solution of problems that Western specialists have not resolved; under what conditions, how and why governmental behavior could weaken, or empower, grassroots non-violent Islamic social movements.

Finally, this study has fulfilled more practical goals concerned with policy on a global level. The rapid spread of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East, and its implications for global terrorism, is a subject worthy of a focused examination. The 2011 revolution in Syria, and the polarization of its Islamic movements, proved to be a bigger challenge than the ruling regime in Syria and the global community could handle. For years, Syrian Government officials strongly denied the rising influence of Islamic activism in the country while, in fact, the country was indeed becoming more and more religious and in the process was losing its national secular identity, which served for decades as an umbrella to unite the country's mosaic of ethics, religious, regional, ideological and class distinctions. Ba'athist ideology and its political centrality, which has been an upholder of secular Pan-Arabism, makes it a good basis on which to examine the resurgence of its Islamic movements as a way to shed light on future ideological trends within the regional political context.

On the other hand, some observers are concerned that the Qubaisyate, and other more traditional Islamic forces who are challenging the country's overarching national identity and replacing it by an Islamic one, are providing a base for the evolution of radical religious movements in Syria and the region (AKI 2005). No one is more knowledgeable about this matter than the Syrian regime, which for many years had front-row seats as Hezbollah drew Lebanon to war with Israel, Islamic jihadists poured death into Iraq and the Muslim Brotherhood, temporarily at least, undermined the powerful military junta in Egypt. Although Syria's Government supports these groups away from home, it had been always careful to keep the trend outside its borders (Zoepf 2006).

This strategy proved a success until 2011, given that, after thirty decades of domestic peace in the country, an uprising has taken place in every part of the Syrian state including the heart of the capital city Damascus. The uprising that started in March 2011 in Syria warns of possible broader and regional implications, in that a need to understand the internal factors that are de-stabilizing Syria will also help shed light on the forces that are causing turmoil and factionalism in the region. The predicament lies in the fact that any forces that affect the country's long standing secular identity and environment, will not only destabilize the country, but will also have an aftershock, spreading the forces of destruction and instability throughout the whole region.

Syria plays an essential role in the Middle East where outcomes of domestic politics often spill over to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq and have wide regional implications. As a result, examining the resurgence of its Islamic movements can help enlighten on future ideological trends within the regional political context.

Looking at the topic through the wider lens of political science and sociology, this study helps to shed light on how the system's strains can explain the emergence of collective movements and how regimes in their effort to ensure survival, change the balance of the socio-economic and political environment in the country. More particularly, it enables us to examine the options and the limitations faced by the Syrian regime so as to restrain the growing threat of a viable Islamist option, including its co-optation of a political Islamic alternative.

Furthermore, given the struggle of the international community to understand global terrorism, the roots of fundamentalism and the growing influence of Islamist parties in

the Middle East and on the Muslim world's Governments, a study that can take a first look at a movement that has established a foothold in countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and had gone as far as Europe and the United States, would prove vital.

For these reasons, the present study has successfully argued that in order to develop an understanding of the key elements at the core of Islamic revivalism in Syria and the Middle East, there is a need to examine one of the dominant Islamic movements in Syrian society today; the Qubaisyate.

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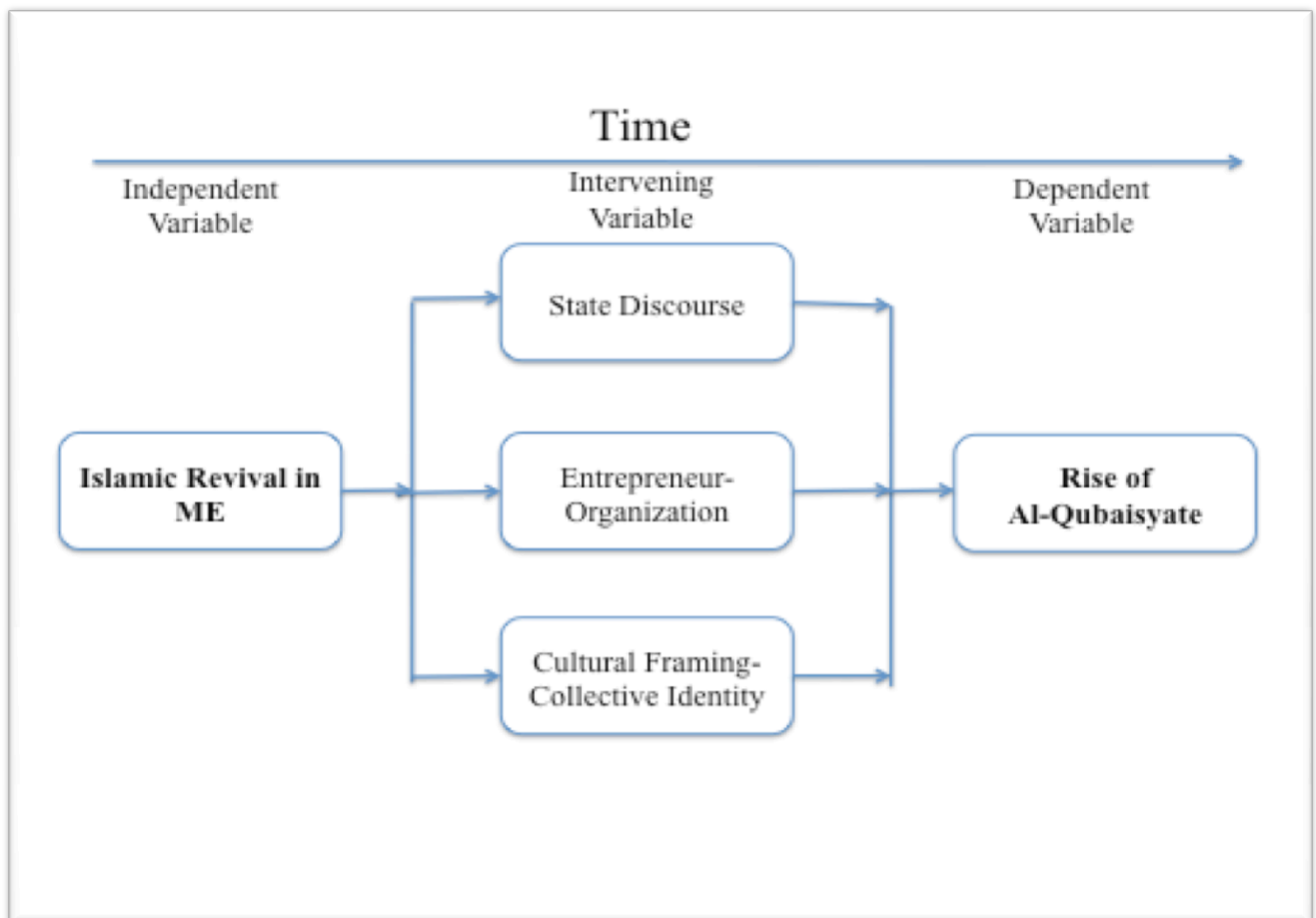
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Appendix

Appendix A:



Appendix B:



Curriculum Vitae

Sana Mahmandar

Date/Place of Birth: Lattakia, Syria 1976

Education

PhD, Global Affairs Honor Student, Sigma Lota Rho Rutgers University, Newark, NJ	January 2011-October 2014
Masters of Science, Global Affairs Honor Student, Sigma Lota Rho Rutgers University, Newark, NJ	September 2009- January 2011
Bachelor of Science, Management & Marketing summa cum laude, Dean's List Rutgers University, Newark, NJ	September 2005-May 2009
Karamah Secondary School	September 2000-May 2004

Work Experience

General Manager M & K Investments Group, Jersey City, NJ	2005-2013
Resettlement Case Worker Multicultural Health Evaluation Delivery System, Erie, PA	2003-2005
Resettlement Case Worker International Institute of Erie, Erie, PA	2000-2003