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**Organisationally Secular: Damascene Islamist Movements and
the Syrian Uprising**

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In the pages that follow, two Islamist movements, predominantly active in Damascus, are analysed: The *Kaftariyya*, and the *Qubaysiyyat*.¹ The analysis focuses on the distinct organisational features of these movements and how they have, over time, shaped the way in which they interacted with the Syrian Uprising. To further elucidate the findings, the analysis makes use of interviews with the late Muhammad Bashir al-Bani (1911-2008), Kaftaru's right hand and spiritual successor, that are here shared for the first time. The conceptual framework for this analysis is grounded in several scholarly contributions, including Niklas Luhmann's idea of organisations as constituting systems of communication, the distinction first made by Gordon and Babchuck between expressive and instrumental organisations; and elements of organisational typologies from various disciplines.

After identifying the theoretical contributions that are employed by this analysis, an overview is provided of the 'organisational history' of Islamist movements, which is followed by an analytic narrative of the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat*. The narrative explicates how these movements evolved organisationally, and focuses on the linkage between their organisational features and the way in which they interacted with state and society.

The essential idea advanced here is that the *Kaftariyya*, and the *Qubaysiyyat* are organisationally secular, irrespective of the religious discourse articulated by their leaders and adhered to by their followers. It is this organisational quality that explains why these movements chose not to confront the Asad regime, despite the heavy costs which they incurred as a result of this position, both with members of the opposition, who often brand them as traitors, as well as with loyalists, who regard them as providing disingenuous support.

I. Conceptual Framework

Popular classifications of Islamist movements, e.g. Sufi, Salafi, Jihadi, not only fail to capture the significant intellectual nuances within these movements, but, far more importantly, they provide very little, in terms of empirical understanding, of how these movements are organised. A Salafi movement may refer to a movement that actually has a political party that represents it (e.g. Egypt's Hizb al-Nur) or to a movement that is entirely hostile to the idea of political parties (e.g. Salafi religious figures in Saudi Arabia). Even intellectually, Salafism may refer to either reformist approaches (e.g. Rashid Rida) or to very conservative thinkers (e.g. Ibn Baz). The same is true of the term Sufi (unless it is identifying a specific order) since it also encompasses a spectrum far too wide to be empirically meaningful. Sufi movements can be apolitical on principle, and can also be organised into armed battalions (e.g. Iraq's *Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya* (the Army of the Men of the Naqishbandiyya). Nor is Jihadi helpful since it is being used to denote people who may act in a certain way (i.e. the willingness to use indiscriminate violence) rather than people who are organised in a certain way. Hence, the conceptual framework employed here is specifically tailored for this study, and is one that is primarily based on the following scholarly contributions.²

¹ A simplified transliteration system for Arabic words is used that is self explanatory.

² I am indebted to Professor Alan Watson who first sparked my interest in organisational history during his lectures on the Western Legal Tradition, Professor Frederick Frey, who introduced me to organisational analysis, and to the late Dr. George Makdisi, my professor and advisor at the University of Pennsylvania, for my understanding of traditional organisations.

Niklas Luhmann was a German sociologist and an important organisational theorist (Bechmann and Stehr, 2002). Elements of his understanding of the relationship between communication and organisations have significant implications on how movements, in particular those that may be described as popular, are identified. In essence, Luhmann regarded organisations as social systems, which differentiate themselves within society on the basis of ‘decision communications’, which communicate a set of rejected alternatives, e.g. we will do this rather than this or this (Seidl and Becker, 2006; Mykkänen and Tampere, 2014). This initial ‘decision communication’ mutates as it were and moves on to permeate the organisation as a whole. The end result is a group of people who have been differentiated organisationally from others by the fact that they not only identify with a specific ‘decision communication’ but also, by the fact that they are all attempting, organisationally, to fulfil it.

This important contribution allows us to understand how popular informal movements are defined on the basis of ‘decision communications’. In the context of a large movement, for example, in which followers are more akin to supporters rather than formal members, how does one determine the size of such a movement and who actually belongs to it? Employing Luhmann’s theory helps us understand that when it comes to such movements, followers are determined by the extent to which they communicate the initial ‘decision communication’. The decision to protest (rather than not to protest) at a specific place (rather than at a different place) will be recomunicated by supporters of a popular movement and will in turn differentiate this specific movement from another, which initiated a different type of ‘decision communication’. In short, communication is not merely about conveying ideas, it also plays a critical role in differentiating an organisation from its external environment.

The distinction between expressive and instrumental organisations was first introduced by Gordon and Babchuk (Gordon and Babchuk, 1959; Lu, 2008; Hopkins, 2015). Expressive organisations “express or satisfy the interests of their members in relation to themselves - i.e. they have no public service function outside the immediate sphere of their members' interest” (Robinson and White, 1997, p. 5.). Instrumental organisations, on the other hand, “seek to achieve a condition or change in a limited segment of society.” (Ibid.). This seemingly simple distinction has profound implications on how an organisation interacts with its socio-political environment. ‘Pure’ expressive organisations, such as fraternal societies, professional associations, and book and health clubs are concerned with issues and activities that are for the most part entirely unrelated to the external environment within which they operate. ‘Pure’ instrumental organisations, on the other hand, such as advocacy groups, lobbies and political parties are almost entirely consumed with issues and activities related to their external environment. Members of expressive organisations obtain satisfaction from the very fact of belonging, while members of instrumental organisations obtain satisfaction from the extent to which the objectives of their organisation are realised. In actual reality, the majority of organisations encompass both expressive and instrumental qualities. Proponents of the ‘natural system paradigm’ (now dominant in the literature) correctly assert that members of an organisation “... pursue multiple interests, both disparate and common, instrumental and expressive ...” (Stern and Modi, 2010, p. 257). Nevertheless, organisations are founded on a core component, an inner mobilising principle, that continues to define an organisation, irrespective of the additional organisational layers that it subsequently accumulates. The challenge is to identify what constitutes the core set of qualities of an organisation, or what might be termed its default state. A Masonic lodge, for example, is essentially an expressive organisation which seeks to play, nevertheless, an important instrumental role in its socio-political environment (Mason, 2013). The Tea Party on the other hand, is essentially an

instrumental organisation, which plays, nevertheless, an expressive role in the form of the gratification its members obtain from belonging to a group with a very distinct political sensibility (Roscoe and Jenkins, 2015).

On a more macro level, organisations, those with an Islamist orientation in particular, may be classified into secular and theocratic. Though this distinction is peculiar to this study, various works have made indirect references to it (Ramadan, 2009; Salvatore, 2005; Sahgal, 2013). Secular Islamist organisations have no aspiration to create an ‘Islamic state’, do not call for the implementation of shari‘ah (Islamic Law, though commonly used to denote laws on punishments that are based on early sources), and show organisational consistency with the logic and rules of civil society. Theocratic organisations on the other hand, call for the creation of an Islamic state that implements shari‘ah, and exhibit organisational difficulty when attempting to reconcile with the rules of civil society.

As will be illustrated below, these insights into how organisations can be examined allow us to not only accurately classify a movement, in lieu of more common popular classifications, but, more important, they also provide an empirical understanding for why movements act, or fail to act, in certain ways.

II. Context: Organisational History

The context for the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* movements is an organisational history, yet to be written in full and documented. In providing a sketch for this history, we focus here on the most critical elements needed to understand the historical background from which these movements emerged.

In early and classical history, the most important point to emphasise here is that the idea that Muslims did not separate between religion and state is largely a modern mythology, which was significantly alien to traditional Sunni scholars (Lapidus, 1975; Roy, 1994; Mavelli, 2013). Indeed, political leadership was assumed, from the Omayyad’s onwards to be inherently flawed, but a necessary evil that maintained order and security. The ulama (or religious scholars) were willing to tolerate just about anything short of outright hostility to Islam, and consistently emphasised in their works that regardless how unjust rulers were, anarchy was far worse (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2014). At best, the ulama desired to influence political leadership and to ensure that their organisations, from the *madrassa* (or religious college) and the *waqf* (or charitable trust) to the *tariqa* (or Sufi order) were allowed to operate and expand freely and on their own legal terms (Imady, 2005B). As several scholars have observed, and documented, “Islamic tradition has long developed endogenous forms of separation between religion and politics.” (Mavelli, 2013, p. 162).

The Ottoman empire, often inaccurately portrayed as a theocracy, was in fact a very complex socio-political setting in which the interplay between politics and religion was significantly distant from the vision of a state in which political leaders loyally fulfilled a traditional understanding of Islamic law (Karpas, 2002). A realm within which the positions of the ulama was largely neglected can be identified even in early Ottoman history. With the beginning of the *tanzimat* (reorganisation or reforms) in the mid-nineteenth century, this realm was institutionalised in a series of legal reforms (Ibid.). The ulama, in short, accepted that in matters pertaining to the state, their role was to influence rather than to govern. The traditional organisations that they had created were successful precisely because they were not antagonist

to political authority; indeed, they were very easily reconciled with various forms of Muslim states.

The second point to emphasise here is that by the time the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* emerged in Syria, the traditional organisational setup of the ulama had been largely undermined by the rise of the modern nation state. (Imady, 2005B). The confiscation of *awqaf* (plural of *waqf* or charitable trust), the lifeline of the *madaris* (plural of *madrashah* or religious college) was first initiated by Muhammad Ali in the early nineteenth century and later repeated in various forms and degrees throughout the Muslim world (Ibid.). Positions, like government appointed *muftis* (though of course this was first initiated by the Ottomans) and even the grand master of all Sufi orders, were further created by political leaders to ensure that the organisational structure of the ulama was no longer in a position to apply important influence on them. In response, the ulama turned to a different form of organisation (Ibid.). After experiments with secret political societies and Masonic lodges, al-jam‘iyyah al-khairiyyah or the ‘benevolent association’ was identified as the ideal new organisational type that is capable of advancing the ulama’s objectives in society in a manner that is both autonomous as well as non-threatening to political authority (Ibid.). Hundreds of associations were founded in the early twentieth century that sponsored schools, religious colleges, mosques and many other forms of charitable work. In many cases, these benevolent associations were founded by masters of Sufi orders and in this sense constituted a fusion of both a traditional and a modern organisation (Ibid.).

In Damascus, despite the stronger grip of Ottoman authority as compared to Egypt, the ulama’s experimentation with modern organisations was surprisingly assertive. Even figures as prominent as Abdelkader El Djezairi joined Freemasonry (Commins, 1990) and, immediately after 1909, when the Ottoman law of associations was issued, the ulama began to experiment with benevolent associations (al-Rifa'i, 2008). This momentum continued under the French Mandate, and by the 1950s, Damascus was home to a large number of benevolent associations in which the ulama and masters of Sufi orders were very active (al-Humsi, 1991). The state’s attempt to organisationally marginalise the ulama had clearly failed.

III. Analytic Narrative: The *Kaftariyya*, and the *Qubaysiyyat*

The story of the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* first begins with the Naqshbandi Sufi order, in particular the *Khalidi* branch of this order. This branch was named after Khalid al-Baghdadi (1779-1827); an Iraqi Kurdish Sufi, who spread a reformist version of the Naqshbandi order in areas under Ottoman control (Weismann, 2003). From al-Baghdadi several sub-branches emerged and in Damascus the *Khalidi Naqshbandiyya* was destined to play a highly significant role in Syria’s recent religious and political history. Sufi orders are headed at any given point in time by a master who was entrusted with this position, explicitly or implicitly, by the previous master of the order. From the information available to us, the first master of the Naqshbandi order in Damascus who approved adopting the new organisational form of the jam‘iyyah or the association was Isa al-Kurdi (1831-1910) (Ibid.). When some of his disciples decided to create an association to support the Ottoman war effort in the Balkans, al-Kurdi not only supported this action, but also rewrote the articles of this association in a manner that reflected his own vision, which emphasised that the primary objective of this association is neither leadership nor material gain (Ibid.). After his death, one of his primary disciples, Abu al-Khair al-Midani (1876-1961), was one of the founders of the *Rabitat al-‘Ulama* (the League of Religious Scholars), which was in essence a religious association formalised in 1949, that

sought to articulate the position of religious scholars regarding important social and political issues (al-Humsi, 1991). In addition to al-Midani, the board of administrators of this association included Ahmad Kaftaru (1915-2004) (Böttcher, 2004).

From 1936 onwards, Ahmad Kaftaru had become one of the prominent masters of the *Khalidi Naqshbandi* order in Damascus succeeding his father Amin Kaftaru, who had designated him as his spiritual heir (al-Humsi, 1991). Gathered around him were a number of figures who were previously disciples of his father, but who would now form his inner circle, including Muhammad Bashir al-Bani (1911-2008); Kaftaru's principle deputy and heir (Ibid.). In 1949, Kaftaru established *Ma'had al-Ansar*, a religious institute for secondary education, which in 1952 became part of the larger framework of *Jam'iyyat al-Ansar al-Khairiyyah* (the benevolent association of al-Ansar) (Ibid.). There was nothing innovative at this point regarding what Kaftaru was organisationally pursuing. Indeed, by the late 1940s, Damascene religious scholars had fully internalised the model of the association and had created a large number of them, which despite their various orientations and intellectual inclinations, were secular organisations through which the ulama sought to advance their educational and social objectives in a manner that was autonomous from the government.

It may strike surprising to describe these organisations as secular since they were established by religious scholars and were meant to advance religious objectives. However, with the exception of *Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood) none of the objectives of the associations created in Syria during this period were theocratic (Ramadan, 2009); that is, they had no aspiration to take over the state and apply their vision of Islam on society as a whole. Organisationally speaking, their secular nature is grounded in the fact that the 'association' was an organisational type that in contrast to traditional organisations, was created under the rules of civil society, rather than the precepts of religious traditions (on which see more below). Putting aside whatever restrictions or even manipulations, which the government applied on associations, this organisation, even when created for the sole purpose of advancing religious principles, was an organisation operating in 'secular space' and under 'secular rules' (Berger, 2003; Salvatore, 2005; Sahgal, 2013).

Ironically, it is precisely this secular aspect of the association which attracted religious scholars the most. They had by now fully understood that in the modern nation state not only are their traditional organisations not reliable, since their lifeline (or the *awqaf*) is no longer safe from government tampering, but also that the government will systematically seek to assert its authority over everything that is formally religious (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2004; Imady, 2005B; Qahf, 2006). In contrast to the realm of the 'formally religious', which fell under the authority of the Ministry of Awqaf, benevolent associations, irrespective of their orientation, fell under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and hence enjoyed far more freedom, albeit in a relative sense.

Long before the Baath arrived on the scene, the process of taking over formal religious activity by the government was initiated. The Awqaf Administration, the administrative prelude to the Ministry of Awqaf, was established in 1947 during the reign of Shukri al-Quwatli (Pierret, 2013). Along with it, laws were decreed that effectively transformed the '*alim*' into a government employee, and placed all local muftis under the authority of a grand mufti, a measure which may be described as the culmination of what the Ottomans initiated centuries earlier with their creation of the position of the grand mufti (Makdisi, 1981). Even mosques were not spared since they all became formally owned by the government irrespective of the

source of funds used to build them (Badawi, 2011). All of this, along with the measures that would follow served to heighten the awareness of the ulama that the only way around this trap, as it were, was to actively make use of the secular dimension of the nation state; i.e. the realm of civil society. Thus it is not surprising that the ulama would emphasise in the articles of the associations they created their apolitical nature and respect of political authority and existing laws (al-Humsi, 1991). Even those with the strongest political views were very clear about the fact that their objective was only to convince politicians that it was in their interest to adopt policies that were consistent with the religious sensibility of Syrian Muslims (Ibid.).

As noted earlier Kaftaru was not unique in his attempt to make use of the association. There was something distinct however about what he was pursuing. It was initially subtle, but it would systematically become clearer, though it remained difficult to capture in a term. As Muhammad Bashir al-Bani would reminisce decades later, Kaftaru's closest disciples were acutely aware that they stood for something different:

We came from different backgrounds. It was not easy to classify us on the basis of our families. My teacher [i.e. Amin Kaftaru] was a Kurd who had made Damascus his home and others, like me came from old Damascene families [al-Bani was a family of religious scholars which claimed decent from the prophet. His uncle, Sa'id, was the mufti of the army under King Faisal and Badr Eddin al-Hassani was the maternal cousin of his father]. Nor was it easy to classify us on the basis of our professions. Some of us were even doctors, like Midhat Shaikh al-Ard. Some had been informally educated, like Shaikh Ahmad [Kaftaru] and others like me were formally educated under the French. We belonged to a tariqa [Sufi order] and practised regular *zikr*, but Shaikh Ahmad did not like to use the word Sufi or Naqshbandi, and so unlike other Sufis, we avoided bringing this up in public. We came from different *madhahib* [schools of law]. Shaikh Amin and Shaikh Ahmad were Shafi'i, but I and many others were Hanafi. We learned traditional sciences, like Quran, *usul* and *hadith*, but Shaikh Amin also taught us *Bidayat al-Mujtahid*, which was written by Ibn Rushd [Averroes]. Shaikh Ahmad loved to read, and he highly cherished his collection of *Majalat al-Manar* [published by Muhammad Rashid Rida], which was of course all about Islamic reform (al-Bani, 2005).

The discomfort of traditional Damascene ulama with Kaftaru and his disciples became far more intense when Kaftaru began to adopt political positions which were not consistent with their views. In 1957, during the Parliamentary election of the Damascus District, Kaftaru publicly backed Riyad al-Maliki, the Baathist candidate, against Mustafa al-Siba'i from the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Humsi, 1991; Naddaf, 1998).

Shaikh Ahmad was always searching for a strong man he could have an alliance with. He had the fortitude to realise that things were only going to get worse, that no matter how much the *mashaykh* [religious figures] screamed in their Friday sermons, they simply did not have enough popular support. Most of their supporters came from the cities and even in the cities and towns there were many who did not support them. The rural areas were like a wilderness. You could travel for hours back then without seeing a mosque. When he said we should support al-Maliki, we understood that he was trying to forge an alliance, and of course we all went along with his decision (al-Bani, 2005).

Kaftaru's decision to support al-Maliki can be described as the first of a series of 'decision communications' that served to organisationally differentiate the nascent *Kaftariyya* movement. Those who identified themselves with this 'decision communication' and voted for al-Maliki were the first recognisable members of this movement. In 1964, one year after the Baath coup, elections of a new grand mufti took place. While, Hasan Habannaka received 17 votes, Kaftaru received 18. Undoubtedly, the alliance Kaftaru had forged in 1957 played an important role in the strong government support he received, which in turn must have translated into convincing at least some of the ulama to support him (Böttcher, 2004).

Another important 'decision communication' which was initiated in the late 1950s was Kaftaru's decision to initiate into the Naqshbandi order al-Shaikha Munira al-Qubaysi, a woman who clearly intended to propagate a specific vision of Islam with Syrian Muslim women (HamidiA, 2006; Nayyounf, 2007; Islam, 2008; Kalmbach, 2008; Khatib, 2011; Manea, 2012; Buergener, 2013).³ Her initiation into the order was a 'decision communication' that in essence endorsed the creation of an autonomous female branch of the Naqshbandi order. In the rich, and often fluid, history of Sufism, it isn't easy to find precedents for a Sufi order that is entirely female (Green, 2012).

Al-Shaikha Shams [as al-Bani would refer to Munira al-Qubaysi for reasons he did not explain] would attend Shaikh Ahmad's lessons in Abu al-Nur [a mosque in Rukn Eddin] with her uncle. She had a degree in natural sciences, but was very well educated in Islamic sciences. Her brilliance lies in the fact that she did not make Shaikh Ahmad responsible for her actions. She took what she needed from him, and then moved on to create her own jama'ah [group or movement]. Neither Shaikh Ahmad nor Shaikha Shams would speak about their relationship in public, but privately, Shaikh Ahmad would refer to her as al-batala [the heroine] (al-Bani, 2005).

It was in 1958, during the unity with Egypt that the current Law No 93 of Associations was decreed. It was in essence a far more restrictive version of Law No. 47 of 1953, which had replaced the earlier Ottoman law (HRW, 2007). Since 1958 there have been many additions and modifications to this law, but in its essential components it remained largely the same (Abd Allah, 2011). The law placed the associations under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and gave the minister the right to terminate any association by decree with no recourse to any appeal process. While the formal monitoring of associations was delegated to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the task of ensuring that these associations did not at any point constitute a political threat was of course the responsibility of the security apparatus, which had the right to terminate an association, suspend a specific activity or of course arrest actual members; and none of this had to be pre-approved by the ministry (HRW, 2007). Nevertheless, associations continued to be active and even grew in number, reaching approximately 1200 on the eve of the Syrian Uprising (SANA, 2010).

The decade of the 1960s was a transitional phase as far as the evolution of the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* movements. Yes, the Baath was in power but it was a leftist, almost

³ Elements of the biography of Munira al-Qubaysi and her movement were enriched by conversations with a female relative of Bashir al-Bani who became a follower of this movement in 1974, and who chose to remain anonymous.

Marxist version of the Baath that was hostile to everything religious regardless of how it was organisationally manifested (Khatib, 2011). When al-Asad seized power in 1970, and became Syria's president in March 1971, the patron that Kaftaru had long sought was finally found.

It was clear to Shaikh Ahmad and to me that Asad [i.e. Hafez al-Asad] was on his way to becoming the president of Syria. Shaikh Ahmad would confide his opinion with other ulama and he would say to them: "... we can either choose to surround him, and become his trusted advisors or we can lose him to those who are hostile to Islam. It doesn't matter what we choose to do, he is going to become the president no matter what." (al-Bani, 2005).

Kaftaru's decision to support Syria's first Alawite president and to speak of him as a Muslim who should be respected as such constituted another major 'decision communication', which served to further identify his movement. Indeed, in the 1970s, both the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* would significantly expand organisationally. The Abu al-Nur complex, which was built on the spot of the old mosque of Abu al-Nur where Shaikh Amin would give his lessons, was initiated in 1971 and completed in 1974. It housed the headquarters of the Ansar Association, as well as a mosque comprised of seven floors (six thousand square feet), which would eventually be utilised for several religious colleges (Böttcher, 2004). During the 1970s, the *Qubaysiyyat* were granted their first permission to establish an elementary/preschool in Damascus. Dar al-Farah constituted the first religious alternative to modern missionary schools such as the Franciscan and Freres schools (Hamidi, 2006A; Salam, 2015; Habash, 2014A).

Kaftaru's third 'decision communication' that was destined to define his movement, like no other decision prior or after it, was the position, which he proclaimed and publically repeated, regarding the insurgency of the Muslim Brotherhood (1979-1982) against the Asad regime (Böttcher, 2004).

Many would say that Shaikh Ahmad had to support the government because of his position. The truth of the matter is that he would have made this decision even if he were not the Mufti. He regarded what the Ikhwan [the Muslim Brotherhood] was advocating as endangering everything that the ulama have been trying to achieve since independence. True, the Ikhwan was provoked, but we were all being provoked. Even Shaikh Ahmad was constantly provoked. The *mukhabarat* [security] even went as far as to kill his son Zaher [the official account is that he was killed by peasants over a land dispute in 1979]. And when some of his followers attacked the government in front of him, he became very angry and said that this is a personal matter and no one is allowed to interfere in this (al-Bani, 2005).

Kaftaru in essence was making it clear that when it comes to protecting the organisational setup of the movement, there are no limits for how tolerant the ulama must be. Confrontation with the government would not only risk their associations, it would also mean that they would be barred in the future from engaging in civil society. Since their traditional organisations were already largely under government control, to be barred from civil society was synonymous with the total marginalisation of the ulama; an outcome Kaftaru was adamant at avoiding at all costs.

It was during the 1980s that the Abu al-Nur complex would begin to host its various educational components, all overseen by the Ansar Association. By the 1990s, the complex

hosted a secondary shar'i school for both males and females; an institute to teach Arabic to foreigners; the College for Islamic Da'wah; the College of Usul al-Din; the College of Shari'a and Law; and the College of al-Imam al-Awza'i. Undergraduate and postgraduate degrees would eventually be granted. Concurrently, the *Qubaysiyyat* would establish elementary schools in Damascus and other major cities (Böttcher, 2004). In 1999, a large complex that included a school, an event hall and a catering service was completed in the neighbourhood of Kafr Susih (Hamidi, 2006A; Salam, 2015; Habash, 2014A). The first association established by students of al-Qubaysi, *Jam'iyyat al-Nada al-Tanmawiyyah* (the Nada association for development), was formalised in 2005 (Azurni, 2015; Facebook, 2015). Students of al-Qubaysi succeeded in spreading her vision to Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait and other countries (Hamidi, 2006A). The same organisational pattern of schools and associations and an event hall for women was replicated in various cities, and in recent years was also spread to some European countries and America (Abdullah, 2012; Grewal, 2013). During this period, sources estimated the number of those women who identify themselves as *Qubaysiyyat* to be over seventy thousand (Schleifer, 2014).

After the death of Hafez al-Asad in June 2000, the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* largely continued their activities in the same manner. What had been established and firmly planted was an organisational approach that was adopted by groups that were even hostile to Kaftaru. In a strictly organisational sense, they had all eventually identified with the 'decision communication' of Kaftaru regarding interacting with the Asad regime as a grand patron of their organisational activity. The very ulama who regarded Kaftaru's decision to align himself with Hafez al-Asad as blasphemous, were now equally accommodating of his son and doing everything they could to protect their associations (Pierret and Selvik, 2009; Habash, 2013).

Prior to moving on to the final phase of this narrative, i.e. the one related to the Syrian Uprising, we pause here to provide an organisational typology of the *Kaftariyya* and *Qubaysiyyat* movements. The typology touches upon the most important elements that should be kept in mind when analysing not only the *Kaftariyya* and *Qubaysiyyat*, but other Islamist movements as well.

At the core of the *Kaftariyya* and *Qubaysiyyat* is the Naqshbandi Sufi order (Stenberg, 1999; Ibrahim, 2012; Takao, 2010). Those who identify with these movements are invited to attend regular religious lessons and participate in 'worship events' that comprise of prayer and *zikr* sessions; a meditative activity that is entirely silent. The gratification derived from such identification is purely expressive because these activities have no instrumental quality to them. They are no different from the gratification members of a book club obtain from reading assigned books and attending sessions to discuss them. This is the default organisational quality of both movements. In a hypothetical scenario when everything else is outlawed, such activities continue because, in the final analysis, they can be enacted upon by individuals in their own homes. During the 1980s, for example, when government tolerance was very low even of religious lessons that addressed individual morality, the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* would often resort to long *zikr* sessions; producing, in the process, humorous anecdotes about how members of the security who were attending these sessions felt after three hours of silence in a room with the lights off (al-Bani, 2005). This strong expressive quality explains, to a certain extent, why it is that for those who identify with these movements, what takes place in society (and what does not take place) is not the basis of their self-identification.

The schools, religious colleges and charity services, which these two movements embrace, operate within the framework of associations that may be described as both expressive and instrumental. They are expressive, because once again, those who are involved in these activities obtain gratification from the very fact that they are involved in benevolent work. Because these organisations have a specific societal objective, e.g. education, moral upbringing and charity, they may be also described as instrumental. When the instrumental quality is not actualised, however, e.g. a teacher fails to teach his student, a charity project fails to alleviate poverty, those who advanced these activities fall back on the expressive qualities of the organisations, i.e. the mere involvement in such benevolent work.

In terms of membership, organisations can be classified as formal or informal. Members of formal organisations (i) fill out applications to join, which may or may not be accepted; (ii) may be expected to perform certain duties or be required to pay regular contributions; and (iii) can, under certain conditions, be dismissed. Members of popular organisations, on the other hand, are more akin to ‘supporters’. They neither formally join nor can they be dismissed, since there is no formal process for such a measure. Some formal organisations may have in addition to their members, ‘supporters’ who are not formal members, but who play, nevertheless, an important role in advancing an organisation’s objectives.

In the context of Islamist organisations, the failure to capture this distinction often leads to erroneous evaluations. ‘Supporters’ of a popular organisation, for example, may carry out activities that are not consistent with the organisation’s objective but are nevertheless used by some scholars to evaluate the organisation as a whole. What is lost in translation, as it were, is the fact that there are no organisational mechanisms that are available to this informal movement that can either prevent ‘supporters’ from acting in a manner inconsistent with its objectives, nor are disciplinary or dismissal measures applicable since ‘supporters’ are not formal members to begin with. Followers ‘choose’ to identify with a ‘decision communication’ or not; and there are no organisational mechanisms to reward those who do or to discipline those who do not. In attacking the *Qubaysiyyat*, for example, opposition members often refer to the fact that women who identify themselves with this movement express positions that are in support of the Asad regime (Baladi, 2012). The implication here, though this is not actually stated, is that these women are formal members who are in effect articulating a statement on behalf of Munira al-Qubaysi. What is blurred here, again, is the distinction between a supporter and an actual member. Not only are statements by al-Qubaysi never used to back up this argument (since no such statements exist), but even statements in support of the regime by the very small group of anisat (or female teachers) known to be part of her inner circle, are not invoked (again because they do not exist). In addition, even statements by supporters may have, as some reports have suggested, been issued under duress. Nevertheless, the conditions under which statements are made, are indeed far less important than the organisational context from which they emerge. This very error can even take place in reverse. After the Uprising, Facebook pages and YouTubes began to appear that spoke of young women ‘defecting’ from the *Qubaysiyyat* because the movement failed to take on a clear anti regime position (Facebook, 2011). This is subsequently shared by scholars, without anyone stopping to examine the organisational implications of this event. How does one ‘defect’ from a movement that has no formal membership? Defection implies a previous state of ‘organisational’ belonging; which simply does not apply here. These women, more accurately, decided to stop identifying with a movement they once supported. Many members of the Baath, on the other hand, did proclaim their ‘defection’ after March 2011 (Al-Jazeera, 2012), and here the term is organisationally sensible and applicable.

Neither the *Kaftariyya* nor the *Qubaysiyyat* have what can be described as formal membership. The teachers at the Qubaysi schools dress in the style distinctive of the *Qubaysiyyat*, but are in the final analysis employees. Women who dress in this manner are found in many other institutions and a significant number are government bureaucrats. Indeed, this style of dress, with difficult to detect differences, was adopted by many religious women in Damascus who do not identify themselves as *Qubaysiyyat*, including female followers of the *Kaftariyya* (Chagas, 2013). Likewise, teachers at the Kaftari schools and religious colleges may or may not have not been disciples of Kaftaru, and the same applies on the students of these institutes. In either case, the only individuals that can be termed formal members are those who held positions in either the Ansar Association or the much later Nada Association. Initiation into the Naqshbandi order by either Kaftaru or al-Qubaysi transformed the individual into a 'disciple', but not into a 'formal member'. Hence, the vast majority of those who identified with either movement are more accurately described as supporters rather than members.

Leadership of an organisation is grounded in either the charismatic nature of a specific leader or in the organisational authority embedded in a specific administrative position (Bryman, 1992; Chagas, 2013). Charismatic leadership appears far more capable of controlling the behaviour of 'supporters' (though clearly not all), whereas administrative leadership appears more likely to control formal members. Charismatic leadership generally produces a centralised organisational structure. More horizontal forms of structure are associated with administrative leadership.

Islamist organisations often provide fascinating examples of the tension between these two forms of structure. Masters of Sufi orders, who became involved in political parties, had significant difficulty with the idea that they simply cannot expect members of a political party to act like disciples of a Sufi order (Imady, 2005B). Both Kaftaru and al-Qubaysi, charismatic leaders in the purest sense, avoided this trap by distancing themselves from instrumental organisations. At most, they may choose to support a candidate to the parliament, or a specific official or even an administrator of a school, but these individuals, in the end, do not act on behalf of Kaftaru or al-Qubaysi, nor do they receive direct instructions from them. If they become influential, they can help advance the objectives of the movement, but if they fall, they fall alone.

Finally, organisations can be further classified on the basis of whether or not they operate within the formal legal structure of civil society. Secular organisations are (i) created in accordance with established laws, regardless of how restrictive they may be, and are thus formally registered; (ii) provide regular disclosures of finances; and (iii) pursue objectives which may seek to influence (but never to overtake or substitute) the government (Sider and Unruh, 2004).

Islamist movements that fulfil these qualifications are found throughout the Muslim world (Schneier, 2015). The critical test lies in what happens when such organisations are faced with laws that effectively curb most, if not all of their activities. Are they willing to respect such laws, regardless of how unfair they seem? Do they wait for a time when such laws change, or perhaps find innovative ways to go around them? Or, do they, under such circumstances, choose to work outside the realm of what is legally permissible? These are the questions that differentiate between organisations that are genuinely secular and those that are willing, under certain circumstances, to operate in a manner that is contrary to these principles. Indeed, the

Kaftariyya and the *Qubaysiyyat* have unequivocally demonstrated that when it comes to their organisational nature, they are thoroughly secular.

Even before Kaftaru died in 2004, important events took place that started to undermine the intricate balance between state and religion in Syria. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was an event that not only had a catastrophic impact on Iraq, but it also had very serious consequences on the region as well. The ulama of Damascus were not unaware of how serious what was going on was, and how easily it could jeopardise the balance they had strived so hard to reach. In the words of Bashir al-Bani:

They [members of the Asad regime] were not this scared in a very long time. That wasn't good. They do not act rationally when they are scared (al-Bani, 2005).

Rational or not, the Asad regime's response to the American invasion was to encourage and facilitate the creation of Islamist organisations in Iraq that were adamant at undermining everything the US was trying to achieve. These were extreme instrumental organisations that were not only willing to use indiscriminate violence, indeed, indiscriminate violence was at the core of their strategy. Suddenly, and in mosques across Syria, Imams delivered sermons that encouraged fighting the American invaders (Habash, 2014B). How ironic it must have been to witness the very type of Islamist organisations that were crushed by the regime in the 1980s, now being allowed to resurface that they may be utilised not to liberate Iraq, but rather to persuade the US to not even contemplate trying this in Syria. So strong was the pressure on the ulama to support the government's stand on events in Iraq, that Kaftaru was made to issue a *fatwa* supporting suicide bombing in Iraq in 2003 (Terzieff, 2003). Privately, Bashir al-Bani would elaborate:

They come to us with exactly what they want us to say written down. Sometimes it is even in poor Arabic. They do not even like it when we attempt to correct the style out of fear that we may be trying to water down the message they want us to convey. Shaikh Ahmad would never condone the idea of suicide bombings, even those that take place in Palestine, let alone those that take place in Iraq. And those who do not understand how political *fatwas* are issued in Syria should come here and visit and see for themselves (al-Bani, 2003).

Though al-Bani's words were said in private, the supporters of the *Kaftariyya* fully understood that Kaftaru is not asking them to partake in such activity. Indeed, there is no documentation of supporters of the *Kaftariyya* participating in what was termed the *jihad* in Iraq. Years later, his son Salah would even vehemently deny that members of his father's movement were involved in what was taking place in Iraq (Mardini, 2009).

Concurrently, Bashar al-Asad, made the decision to allow the rehabilitation of what is known as Jama'at Zayd, which was founded by Abd al-Karim al-Rifai (1901-1973) in the early twentieth century (Al-Khatib, 2014). In the 1980s, the Zayd movement did not identify with the 'decision communication' of Kaftaru to not join the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency, and in fact, many of its members fought with the Muslim Brotherhood. Osama al-Rifai, the eldest son of Abd Karim al-Rifai and his successor, left the country and settled in Saudi Arabia. He was allowed back in the mid-1990s, seemingly as a calculated move by Hafez al-Asad to harness popular support for the future presidency of his son (Ibid.). In 2002, Bashar al-Asad

paid an unprecedented visit to Osama al-Rifai, which in turn reactivated the organisational activity of the movement in the realms of religious education, charity and social services (Ibid.). The irony here is that no such visit was paid to the Grand Mufti of Syria who had forged an alliance with the Asad regime since 1970. Clearly, Kaftaru was regarded in the same manner as many of the old pillars of the regime were regarded by the president, i.e. as officials who had fulfilled their functions, and were no longer relevant. They are tolerated out of respect for what they had undertaken in the past, but in so far as the Syria that the new president had in mind, they not only have no role to serve, they may even prove to be an obstacle.

In September 2004, Kaftaru died and the two functions he once carried out pertaining to the *Kaftariyya* movement were now separated. The administration of the Abu al-Nur complex, which entails supervision over al-Ansar Association as well as all the other religious institutes hosted in the Abu al-Nur complex, was delegated to his son Salah Kaftaru (NoSawot, 2004). The successorship of the Sufi order on the other hand, went to his right hand (and only surviving disciple of Amin Kaftaru) Bashir al-Bani (Imady, 2005A). Salah was infamous for his harsh temperament and for the use of inappropriate language during his fits of anger, a sensibility which alienated many of the ulama who taught at the institutes of Abu al-Nur, as well as the administrators who worked with him (Elamata, 2006). At this point of time, Salah was fortunate because the Minister of Awqaf, Muhammad Ziyad al-Ayyubi, who regarded himself as a disciple of Ahmad Kaftaru, would do everything he could to maintain a cordial relationship with Salah. Indeed, al-Ayyubi was friendly to both the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* and is credited with convincing the authorities to allow the *Qubaysiyyat* to give their lessons in mosques rather than in homes (Hamidi, 2006A). Holding religious lessons at homes was in fact frowned upon by the security, however, the Qubaysi teachers would disguise their events as celebrations of various types and social gatherings

None of this, however, not the American invasion of Iraq and the Islamist instrumental organisations it unleashed, not the reactivation of the Zayd movement and the formalisation of the *Qubaysiyyat*, not even Salah's obtrusive style were as significant as the government's decision to allow the Ministry of Awqaf to undermine an equation between the state and the ulama that had been in place for nearly a century (since the 1909 Ottoman law of associations).

In July 2002, Law no. 32 was enacted obligating all Syrian children to undergo a mandatory Basic Educational Cycle (a synthesis of the primary and preparatory previous cycles into a unified nine-year cycle) (al-Ayyubi, 2006; IISS, 2008; Mansur, 2012). Much of this can be seen as an attempt to rationalize the educational system. However, the direct implications of this law on religious education was that shar'i or religious schools were no longer permitted to accept pupils who had not completed this mandatory cycle. What this amounted to in the eyes of religious scholars was the systematic 'drying up' of potential new students that guaranteed the sustainability of these religious schools. Since most, if not all of these schools, were administered by associations in which the ulama were active, this move was further seen as infringing on a realm of civil society that the state had so far respected. Though the law was issued in 2002, its actual implementation in a systematic manner did not begin until a few years later when, concurrently, the activity of many new hawzat, or Shi'i religious schools, began to be noticed. This lethal combination, reducing the authority of Sunni religious schools while allowing more authority to Shi'i equivalents, was too much for the ulama of Damascus to accept (Ibid.). On 30 June 2006, thirty-nine religious scholars, including al-Buti, Osama al-Rifai, Salah Kaftaru, Mouaz al-Khatib and Hisham al-Burhani signed a petition addressed to the president (Ibid.). The petition clearly articulated the sense of anger that the ulama felt. Not only

because of the implications of this new law on their schools, but also because of the different treatment which the Shi'i *hawzat* were receiving (Salem, 2006). The petition went on to propose a compromise solution of teaching religious subjects alongside the mandatory curriculum at the *shar'i* schools (Ibid.). Asad met with a delegation of the signatories and it was agreed to postpone the implementation of the decree (Ayyubi, 2006). What was not addressed, however, during this meeting was the far more significant tampering with the autonomy of associations, which the Ministry of Awqaf was undertaking.

Less than a month later, the Minister of Awqaf dismissed Osama al-Khani, one of the signatories and the Director of the Department of Religious Education, from his position, and only five months later al-Ayyubi himself would be dismissed because of alleged embezzlement charges (IISS, 2008). His deputy, Muhammad Abd al-Sattar al-Sayyid, became the new Minister of Awqaf. Al-Sayyid was the son of a previous Minister of Awqaf who held his position in the 1970s and who was known for his antagonistic relationship with Ahmad Kaftaru. Al-Bani who was not one of the signatories to the petition, was very anxious about what all of this would entail. Only seven months before he died, he shared this private comment:

None of this was wise. This regime cannot tolerate such a move. It is far too arrogant to accept to be challenged in this way. It may look like they [the ulama] got what they wanted, but in fact what they have done is unleash something much worse (al-Bani, 2008).

In October 2008, the heads of several associations were summoned to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour to be notified of a decision that had to be implemented immediately (al-Najjar, 2008). In essence, all religious figures, had to resign from the administrative boards of associations. The very associations which were created by religious figures in the late twentieth century now had to be 'cleansed' from even those who simply had a degree in religious sciences. The event used to justify this move, a car bombing in Damascus, allegedly carried out by a group that included a graduate from one of the religious colleges in Damascus, al-Fath (Thawara, 2008), was clearly nothing more than an excuse since the government was well aware that none of these religious figures were in any way involved in this act. Nor was this related to the organisations, which the government had encouraged to fight in Iraq and subsequently turned against, since the activities of these benevolent associations was, again, entirely unrelated. From the administrative board of the Ansar Association the following were ousted: Salah Kaftaru, Bassam Ajak, Abd al-Salam Rajeh and Rajb Deeb (the current master of the order) (Ibid.). Qubaysi female teachers were summoned to the Ministry and were informed that they must all renew their security clearances to continue to give lessons (Ibid.).

In June 2009, Salah Kaftaru was arrested on charges of embezzlement, and only two months earlier his brother, Mahmud, was detained for thirteen days (U.S. Department of State, 2010). Though he was replaced by a young disciple of Ahmad Kaftaru, Sharif al-Sawaf, and his removal was clearly a relief to the administrators who objected to his style of management, the void he left at the complex was instantly filled by the heavy handed control imposed by the Ministry of Awqaf. The culmination of these measures was no doubt Decree No. 48, issued only 19 days after the beginning of the Syrian Uprising, April 4, 2011 (Marasim wa-Qawanin, 2011). The Decree proclaimed the establishment of al-Sham Higher Institute for Religious Sciences (*Ma'had al-Sham al-'Ali li-l-'Ulum al-Shar'iyya*). The Decree effectively nationalised three religious colleges, once funded and administrated by associations presided

over by religious scholars. Ironically, news of this decree was first announced by al-Buti as though it were a significant achievement, even a compromise by the regime (Pierret, 2013).

As the ruthless tactics of the regime in dealing with protestors became apparent, many notable religious scholars were quick to condemn the regime and, in time, eventually sided outright with the opposition. Those who did not follow this path chose to be silent even as the government demanded from them outright condemnation of the protests. Very few, notably, al-Buti, were willing to adopt the government's line, and even as al-Buti condemned the protestors he repeatedly made reference to the errors of those in positions of authority, which had led the country to this tragic fate. Unlike Kaftaru, however, whose 'decision communication' in 1979 rallied thousands of his supporters to identify with his position, al-Buti had no *jama'ah* or movement of his own, though of course he did have many who respected him as a scholarly authority. Once he sided with the government, however, many of those who looked up to him felt confused and alienated by his position. Perhaps al-Buti regarded himself as re-enacting what Kaftaru had done with the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency, but not only did he not have the popular organised support that Kaftaru had, but he was also dealing with an event, and a Syria, that was very different than that of 1979.

In a sense, the ulama of Damascus were at their weakest point organisationally since the modern nation state had undermined their traditional organisations a century earlier. Not only did they lack a charismatic figure who they regarded as their leader or even their representative, they were evicted from the administrative boards of their associations and informed that the religious schools and colleges that they had worked for decades to establish were now under the authority of their nemesis, the Ministry of Awqaf. With all his severe intolerance for political descent, Hafez al-Asad proved far more tolerant of the organisational activity of religious scholars than his son. His tolerance was not grounded in a genuine appreciation of civil society, but rather, it was seen by him as a necessary compromise. To provide his regime with real support, religious scholars had to be organisationally empowered. Attacking their organisational setup is not only to make them deeply resentful and uncooperative, but more important, is to leave them unable to support the government even if they choose to do so since their primary medium of mobilisation (their autonomous organisations) has been undermined.

Over the last four years, the influence and organisational activity of the *Kaftariyya* and *Qubaysiyyat* have receded to Damascus. Most of the schools that were founded by their members outside of Damascus have either been closed down or destroyed. In Damascus, the complex of Abu al-Nur is now home to a branch of al-Sham Higher Institute, which is managed and supervised by the Ministry of Awqaf. The Sufi order component of the *Kaftariyya* is headed by Rajab Deeb, who is among those scholars who chose silence in regard to his position from the Syrian Uprising, as did many of the elder disciples of Kaftaru who are still alive. Though Deeb is at times presented as explicitly pro regime, none of his public lessons, which are published on YouTube, make any statements in favour of the regime or condemn the Uprising (Deeb, 2012). Kaftaru's son in law and prominent disciple, Muhammad Habash (Heck, 2004), who was a member of parliament when the Syrian Uprising began, tried in vain (along with Vice President Farouk al-Shara') to mediate some type of national dialogue and to convince those officials he had contact with of the futility of the 'security option'. Convinced that the regime had no intention to change its course, Habash left Syria with his wife and resides now in the UAE (Owais, 2012).

The *Qubaysiyyat* on the other hand, continue to manage their schools in Damascus, none of which are *shar'i* schools. They are simply schools in which women who identify themselves as followers of this movement serve as teachers. Nevertheless, control and supervision by the Ministry of Education on these schools is reported to be at its highest since they were established in the late 1970s. Like Rajab Deeb, al-Qubaysi opted for public silence; a path which all members of her inner circle adopted as well (Abu Rumman, 2013). Government harassment, which the *Qubaysiyyat* have known since the 1970s became far more intrusive and systematic. On a regular basis, and especially during the early phase of the Uprising, busses would arrive at the schools of the *Qubaysiyyat* with instructions for the teachers to be transported to various events in Damascus. Pictures of these events (showing the *Qubaysiyyat* in their distinctive style of dress) would be deliberately posted by media outlets loyal to the regime, and then, as though by mutual agreement, reposted by opposition outlets so as to attack the *Qubaysiyyat* for their alleged loyalist stand. In December 2012, one of these teachers described how she found herself suddenly in the presidential palace. The President arrived, gave the women a lecture on current events in the presence of the Minister of Awqaf and then left the room. As usual, many pictures were taken and later posted of the event (Baladi, 2012).

In May 2013, one of the members of Qubaysi's inner circle of teachers, Fatima al-Khabaz, was shot dead at a government check point, allegedly because the car failed to stop fast enough (Sweid, 2013). Another member of the inner circle, Amira Jibril, is often invoked by the opposition to make the point that the *Qubaysiyyat* are pro-regime because she is the sister of the notorious Ahmad Jibril who is closely aligned with the regime (Hamidi, 2006B; Zain, 2014). As noted earlier, however, neither Amira Jibril nor any other member of the inner circle had made any public (or private but documented) position that can be described in any manner as pro-regime, or pro-opposition for that matter. In March 2014, Salma Ayyash, a woman who dresses in the style of the *Qubaysiyyat*, was appointed as a Deputy Minister of Awqaf (Ibid.) A move which supporters and opposition alike used as evidence to the fact that the *Qubaysiyyat* are with the regime. Ayyash was neither a member of Qubaysi's inner circle or even a minor teacher in the movement. Like many other women who identify themselves with the movement, she happened to hold a position at the Ministry and was subsequently promoted. Doubtless, the regime did this deliberately as part of its adamant attempt to present itself as being supported by large segments of Damascene society; and, doubtless, al-Qubaysi fully understands this and deliberately chooses not to publically contradict it. In many ways, all the basic elements, i.e. silence, excessive government control and the retreat to the Sufi order characterise the *Qubaysiyyat* since 2011 as much as they characterise the *Kaftariyya*.

IV. Conclusion

The story of the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* is essentially the story of the rise and fall of an organisational setup in which the ulama utilised the benevolent association to advance their objectives, and to become organisationally empowered. By 2011, as the regime placed the final touches that were meant to undermine the existing setup of how the state interacted with the ulama, the Syrian Uprising cascaded, and in a manner of four months became an event that would henceforth redefine everything Syrians had so far taken for granted. In these critical four months, from March until 31st of July 2011, when the Syrian army marched into Hama, the event was still possibly reversible. The regime, however, opted for the now infamous 'security solution', not only because it felt that any other path would make it seem weak, and thus vulnerable, but also because there was no one within the realm of civil society, religious scholar or otherwise, who had the charismatic authority and a large popular movement that could

effectively influence the thousands of young Syrians who flooded out of the mosques on Fridays to protest. After all, who was there to forge an alliance with? Through its own measures, the regime had ensured that no such person or movement existed. Ahmad Hassun, the Grand Mufti, was not only from Aleppo (the first non-Damascene to ever hold this office), but he had no popular following of any significance (Habash, 2013). Unlike his predecessors, he was appointed by decree rather than by election by his peers, precisely because he had no chance of being elected (Pierret, 2013). Nor was the Zayd movement in which the regime had invested so much energy, of any help either. The instrumental aspect of this movement was far too strong to tolerate what the regime was doing, and once again, they chose exile rather than finding a way, however subdued, to tolerate the government's actions (Al-Khatib, 2014).

The regime turned to al-Buti, marginalised for years after Bashar al-Asad first took office (IISS, 2008), who was unable to even restrain the young men who attended his Friday sermon at the Omayyad mosque (Al-Buti, 2011). They not only interrupted him, but they stormed out of the mosque to protest. Furthermore, the most the regime was able to obtain from those with various levels of charismatic authority and popular movements, e.g. the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* was silence, and how different was the silence of Rajab Deeb and Munira al-Qubaysi from the 'decision communication' repeatedly proclaimed by Kaftaru during the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency. On this level, all of this can be explained by an exaggerated sense of self confidence on part of the regime. What Hafez al-Asad tolerated, at times encouraged, his son would undermine and marginalise, until in 2010, even the Ramadan banquet Syrian presidents had held for the ulama since independence was cancelled (Abu Zaid, 2010).

The significance of what remained in Damascus, the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* in particular, lies not in what these movements are still capable of achieving, given the numerous restrictions they operate under, but rather in just how committed they have proven themselves to the expressive and in turn to the secular nature of their organisational type. In a sense, the following principle summarises their approach: what cannot be legally done, will not be pursued; and when the government becomes overly repressive, we will withdraw into the realm of the Sufi order. In the rebuilding of Syria, which is bound to take place, the presence of Islamist movements that are this committed to what is termed here 'organisational secularism' will not only serve to balance those movements that are indifferent to this type of approach, but will also constitute the foundation through which a new civil society is established (Mamouri, 2015; Moubayed, 2015). Until some form of resolution is reached, however, the primary challenge faced by both the *Kaftariyya* and the *Qubaysiyyat* is not to survive, since this art has long been mastered, but rather, their primary challenge is to stay relevant.

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