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Political Islam as a network phenomenon

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To Mum who was the determination behind my every page.

To Katharina who was my confidence and stamina.

To Lamiz who was my inspiration.

To Victor who was my comfort and set my head straight
when it was spinning.

To my grandparents – just because.

The question of Islam as a political force is a vital question of our times, and will be for several years to come. The precondition for its treatment with a minimum of intelligence is probably not to start from a platform of hatred.

Michel Foucault

I. Abstract

"Political Islam" in political sciences and sociological study is mainly treated through prisms of normative and sociological institutionalism. The connection of politics and norms is an important field that tends to be viewed first and foremost from a vantage point of cultural relativism based on anthropological work. The network as an analytical tool for understanding this nexus is a novel approach. The network here is defined as any cluster of social ties. Viewing Muslim societies through the network prism is enriching to sociology and political sciences, since it awards the necessary importance to the networked characteristics of these societies: they are alive, grow and evolve; just like a network constantly evolves and grows by forging new ties between actors. By taking into account the insights of social network theory and social capital theory as well as empirical data on the networked characteristics of the Saudi Arabian society and the particularities of the political apparatus in Saudi Arabia, this research will contribute to the understanding of political institutions in Muslim-majority countries by approaching the existence and influence of Islamic norms from a network theoretical perspective. Drawing on social capital theory and social network theory with empirical observations obtained from the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set as well as various secondary anthropological sources, the research seeks to explore the explanatory merits of social network theory for the understanding of the prevalence of Islamic norms in the public spheres of Muslim majority countries.

Key words: political Islam, Saudi Arabia, social capital, social network theory, tribes, networked politics

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1. Introduction

Politics, unlike religion, is a realm not of eternal truths, but of rational calculations.
To govern effectively, one must build alliances and coalitions,
including with secular and liberal parties.
Shlomo Ben-Ami

One of the major assumptions in the field of public administration and especially institutional analysis is that it is institutions that govern and steer the behaviours of individual and organisational actors. Institutional analysis has not yet shed any light, however, on how this process works (Lin, 2001). Normative institutionalism claims that actors conform to a logic of appropriateness, but this says little about where those standards of appropriateness come from or how they might change. One central question in normative institutionalism is how norms affect state behaviour. To answer this question, it is necessary to separate norms from the actual state behaviour. For example, advocating the implementation of *shari'a* law is not a norm, but a behaviour resulting from a norm. Advocating the structuring of the financial system in accordance to Islamic finance is not a norm, but a behaviour resulting from a norm. How do individuals learn the rules, and why should they subscribe to them? How are organizations matched with individual actors to improve their institutional resources and thus their chances for survival? In other words, what are the social mechanisms that credit and enforce the compliance of individual actors and organisations with institutional rituals and behaviours? (Lin 2001: 185).

One of the most common arguments for the existence and prevalence of political Islam relate to the nature of the authoritarian political systems as a path-dependent result of colonial history and the development of rentierism through oil wealth. For example, Ayoob (2008) analyses that

> *"the repressive and unrepresentative nature of many regimes in the Muslim world has both provided the political space for and augmented the popularity of Islamist political formations. […] The nature of the political system and of regimes in many Muslim countries have had and continue to have major impact on the growth of political Islam and the strategies adopted by Islamists in these countries. This variable is likely to influence the future trajectory of Islamism in substantial measure." (2008: 155)*

Ayoob finds a positive correlation between the authoritarian nature of regimes and the appeal of political Islam, thus stipulating that the continuous existence of authoritarian and repressive rule in Muslim-majority countries is the main explanation for the continuous existence of political Islam (Ayoob, 2008).

Extending this logic further, Fawcett suggests that Islamic groups have been particularly successful in building a broad array of associational groups with the intention of filling vacuums of services that are not fulfilled by the governments or the private sectors of most Muslim-majority countries (Fawcett, 2005). Islamic groups – especially those with political aspiration – sweep in to fill the welfare-gap and provide various services and financial relief to fellow Muslims, where the state fails to do so (Harrigan and El-Said, 2009). Fawcett draws attention to the underestimation of the persistence of Islam as a value system in Middle Eastern societies and the integration of helping the needy as a pillar of Islam itself. She claims further that it cannot be expected to witness secular values in associational life, since those values are often perceived as contradictory to Islamic values (Fawcett, 2005). As we will develop later, associational groups serve to confirm (Islamic) values and norms via the promotion of certain behaviours, in this case providing services to those in need.

Where, however, does this prevalence of Islamic norms originate from? This research aims at taking another step back, in order to establish an understanding of the continuous prevalence of Islamic norms in Muslim countries' public life that nurture political Islam. Why do Islamic norms continue to prevail as the governing social and moral construct in Muslim-majority countries that are situated in and connected to a largely secularised international community? Why are the Quran and Islamic beliefs considered to command what politics should be, when historically most governments have emancipated themselves from religious doctrine concerning state and governance? The theories that have so far been applied to comprehend and explain this empirical phenomenon have left these questions unanswered.

In his work on the interplay of Islam and politics in Saudi society, Madawi Al Rasheed offers quite a charming opening that illustrates the continued prominence of Islamic values in Saudi society:

> *"Nothing exemplifies the enchantment of Saudi society like a local television programme called Fatwa on Air, a special performance normally hosting a religious scholar who responds to questions posed by the public. The programme started in the*

> *1660s and continues to the present day. A scholar issues religious opinions regarding the questions asked. Callers usually ask very specific questions. A woman wants to know whether menstruating for three weeks qualifies as menstruation, thus preventing her from performing prayers. A man asks whether it is permissible to borrow money to allow his mother to perform pilgrimage. A third person asks whether high heels are permissible for women and whether diamond rings are legitimate accessory for men. The repetitiveness and regularity of these television programmes confirm Saudi society as obsessively concerned with the ritualistic aspect of Islam."* (Al-Rasheed, 2007: 60)

One part of the puzzle is the relationship between civil society and the state; how certain forms of governance influence the participation of civil society in policymaking and thereby the transmission of political and social ideologies, norms and values in the public sphere. The scientific community, mainly in the debate on social capital, has produced quite some insight on this part of the puzzle, underpinned with empirical evidence from the US (see for example Putnam, 1966, Coleman, 1998 and 1990), post-Soviet Russia (Rose, 1995), Tanzania (Narayan and Pritchett, 1996), Brazil (Tendler, 1997), East Asia (Stiglitz, 1996) etc. However, there exists a gap in the literature on social capital applying the theory to Saudi Arabia and the role of social capital in governance and the involvement of civil society in particular. A second part of the puzzle is the anthropological component of the regional specificities of the Middle East and Saudi Arabia in particular. Many local anthropologists (notably Saad Sowayan in his several works) have conducted structural analyses of tribal networks and networks of kinship, family and associational life in Saudi Arabia. However, most of his work that offers insights into the interplay of these networks and governance are published in Arabic and are blind to the connection between the institutionalist approach, the analysis of social capital and social network theory.

Explaining the prevalence of political Islam by analysing the political voids that Islamic norms fill must be considered a circular argument, as any ideology could perform with the same effect. There would be no ideology of political Islam, if Islamic norms weren't widely accepted as an ideological alternative to the incumbent regimes of Muslim-majority countries. In other words, instead of explaining the prevalence of political Islam by analysing the political voids that Islamic norms fill, this research seeks to find a way to explain the prevalence of political Islam by exploring why Islamic norms still work so effectively to mobilise people, to rally support and to unite civil society. For this, I set out to explore the explanatory merits of a theoretical

angle that has so far not been applied to the situation, namely social network theory. In summary, this research seeks to answer the following research question:

Given that Muslim-majority countries show an apparent lack of secularisation in politics and given that Islamic norms are kept alive and relevant in the public spheres of Muslim-majority, to what extent does social network theory inform our understanding of the continuously unsecularised politics of Muslim-majority countries and the continued prevalence of Islamic norms in the political sphere as the basis for policy-making and the mobilisation of support for political decisions?

In this research, I aim to integrate findings from anthropological research as well as political science research with insights only available in Arabic language on particular regional and historical contexts to fill the aforementioned gap in the literature and to provide an empirical contribution to the debate on norm prevalence and social capital. In order to achieve this, I will draw on social capital theory and social network theory. As I will develop in the theory section of this research, social capital theory is closely entangled with the structural analysis of social networks, but insights from social network theory may serve better to shed light on some aspects of the puzzle that would otherwise be left in the dark. The two theories should thus not be synthesised but should complement each other where one theory alone would leave gaps in the comprehensive understanding of the puzzle at hand. It is important here to notice that there is an analytical difference in the systems theory of networks and the theory of social networks. The former engages in the structural analysis of networks whereas the latter – which will be used here – simply considers networks as a kind of social order and engages in the exploration of the construction and destruction of social ties (Karafillidis, 2012).

The theoretical foundation for this research is thus built on two theories that tackle the issue of social order by calling on social networks and identity-based collective action and thus offer a suitable starting point for explaining a topic that is in itself easy to describe, yet inconclusively embedded in and analysed by theory (Leonard, 2004). Social capital theory will allow us to gain an understanding about how norms and values embedded as social capital in social ties based on trust and good sentiment govern behaviour. Having established that political Islam is a social phenomenon whose values provide the basis for political bargaining, social capital theory as hitherto developed falls short, however, to actually clarify how Islamic networks contribute to identity formation. In order to solidify political Islam as a networked phenomenon that embeds citizens of Muslim countries in certain political trajectories, social capital theory

needs to be complemented with ideas from social network theory. Harrison White's social network theory allows us to build a framework of social organisation through which we can understand political Islam as a product of a society whose functioning is based largely on networks of kinship and tribal affiliation. Said framework of social organisation, or social structure, is defined here as consisting of "(1) a set of social units (positions) that possess differential amounts of one or more types of valued resources and that (2) are hierarchically related relative to authority (control of and access to resources), (3) share certain rules and procedures in the use of the resources, and (4) are entrusted to occupants (agents) who act on these rules and procedures" (Lin, 2001: 33)[1]. Within these social constructs, networks develop that defend and pass on Islamic values, linked closely to political prestige, social standing and normative appropriateness.

The empirical data for this research has been found in existing scholarly literature, a broad array of secondary sources and the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set. Drawing on Saudi Arabia as a case study is crucial for the exploration of social network theory's explanatory merit for the empirical phenomenon at hand. As such, the case of Saudi Arabia is reflective of a highly networked society whose functioning is based on kinship and tribal affiliation. Furthermore, the political apparatus is structured around the Al Saud royal family and clearly orients itself on the Quran and Sharia law. The empirical analysis of data on Saudi Arabia's social structure and the social capital embedded therein serves as an indicator of whether the relationship between social capital embedded in social ties and the continuous prevalence or Islamic norms as a basis for policymaking – as proposed by the theories drawn on for this research - would hold in the most likely case. The difficulty of using Saudi Arabia as a case study quite obviously lies in the data unavailability and the uncertainty about the validity of data that has been collected from government sources. Nonetheless, since I am able to access Arabic sources that have produced empirical data on the anthropological component of the prevalence of political Islam to an extent that has so far not been achieved in the English-speaking scientific community, this research explores novel theoretical angles and territory to apply existing theories to.

The first part of the research builds the theoretical foundation of the research that is essential to grasp the subsequent analysis. After introducing social capital theory and social network theory, an ontological conceptualisation of networked social capital, based on the propositions

[1] Lin 2001: "For related discussion, see Sewell 1992"

the theories forward, deduced. The second part of the research begins by introducing the case study of Saudi Arabia. We will then continue to lay out the empirical observations obtained from the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set and various anthropological accounts that pertain to the propositions deduced from the theory. We will touch on the role of trust between the government and the Saudi society in producing social capital among citizens, the importance of family and tribal networks for the transmission and confirmation and thus the keeping-alive of Islamic norms, the influence that people in powerful positions of the Saudi society have over the maintenance of social order in conformity to Islamic norm, the importance of Islam as a source of Saudi identity in the place of nationalism which never functioned to unify Saudi in loyalty to the government and the importance of overlapping network membership for the formation of a Saudi Islamic identity. The final section will then draw conclusions about the appropriateness and fruitfulness of using social network theory to explain the prevalence of Islamic norms in the public spheres of Muslim–majority countries.

2. Theory

2.1. Social capital theory

Since the 1966 publication of Putnam's work "Political Attitudes and the Local Community" on the interplay of social capital and the more efficient functioning of governance and democracy, both social capital and especially the concept of trust have been studied as potential determinants of democracy and effective governance (Alexander, 2007). The concept of trust in the social capital debate serves as a "form of lubrication in the political system" (Aberg, 2000) that is thought to "[smoothen] the interactive process by which the elected government responds to the demands of the citizens" (Aberg, 2000). According to Putnam's definition, social capital then is defined as "features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, as quoted in Aberg, 2000). The takeaway from this definition is that social capital should be understood as the quality of reciprocal connections between people that undergo exchanges. Considering this interpretation of social capital, it becomes very clear why the study of social capital has always been closely connected to the study of networks: if society is understood in terms of its relational property, networks of civic engagement form, including interest groups and political parties. These networks foster trust in institutions represented by the state (Aberg, 2000).

The conceptual frameworks of social capital stretch from early definitions such as Hanifan's view of social capital as referring to "those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit" (Woolcock as quoted in Feldman and Assaf, 1999), over to the most prominent views of social capital as "a set of horizontal associations [and hierarchical power structures] between people which foster cooperation for the mutual benefit of the community" (Feldman and Assaf, 1999) forwarded by Putnam and Coleman, all the way to more recent views as promoted by Douglas North, who extends the concept of social capital to "formalised institutional relationships and structures such as government, the political regime, rule of law, and the court system" (Feldman and Assaf, 1999).

The element of trust as the essential ingredient to the transmission of social capital has been widely discussed in the social capital debate. Scholars contend that constructive interactions between the micro and macro levels of a community, i.e. between civil society and government, are the carrying pillar of trust and thus the good relationship between the governed and the

government (Feldman and Assaf, 1999). For example, in his study of Russian society, Richard Rose finds that the high degree of distrust in the Russian government and its arm's length civil society institutions resulted in Russians relying solely on family and social networks (Rose, 1995). Rose stipulates, and Fukuyama in his work "Trust: The Social Values and the Creation of Prosperity" (1995) agrees, that trust arises out of a set of moral values shared by a community that makes possible the predictable expectation of regular and honest behaviour (see Rose, 1995 and Fukuyama, 1995).

Mark Granovetter in his work "Economic Action and Social Structure" (1985) adds an economic angle to the idea of trust as the underlying element to all social transactions. In his conceptualisation of social capital, Granovetter argues that economic transactions are embedded in social structure. This idea of embeddedness focuses on how networks of economic transactions, and therefrom resulting personal relationships, generate trust and ensure good faith in economic life (Granovetter, 1985).

Pioneered by Granovetter, social capital has come to be understood as the investment in social relations with expected returns in a forum of exchange, i.e. the market place. The market here is not limited to an economic sphere, but it can refer to politics, the work place, the community, etc. In any of these forums of exchange, individuals engage in interactions and networking in order to generate some kind of gain by investing personal resources. Social capital then has to be considered as a social asset that derives its entire face value from the actor's connections and access to resources in the network of the forum of exchange they take part in (Feldman and Assaf, 1999).

Developing on this idea, Lin defines social capital as "resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilised in purposive actions" (Lin, 1999). In his conceptualisation, social capital is made up of three components that intersect structure and action: the structural component of resources embedded in a social structure, the opportunity component of such resources being accessible by actors in the social structure and the action-oriented component of the use or mobilisation of said resources in purposive action (Lin, 1999).

Lin argues that resources in different locations in the network yield different kinds of benefits. What type of network location leads to what type of resource that generates returns, depends on the type of return the actor expects (Lin, 1999). He develops further that the value assignment of resources is dictated by its availability relative to the expectations for it and adds that the value is also determined by the unique historical, geographical and collective context

of the network the resource is embedded in (Lin, 2001). It can be deduced, then, that social capital transcends the mere study of social relations and networks and necessitates the identification of network characteristics and relations such as bridges (Granovetter, 1973), structural holes (Burt, 1992) or betweennes, density, cohesion or closeness of social networks in order to capture the embeddedness of social capital resources in networks (Lin, 1999).

To recap, the current scholarly debate on social capital understands the concept - simply put - as the results of investment in social relations with expected returns. But why does social capital work? Or in other words, why does the use of resources embedded in social networks enhance the outcome of actions? Lin (1999) offers a three-fold explanation for the phenomenon. According to him, the first explanatory component behind the functioning of social capital is the facilitation of the flow of information. As such, in a situation of imperfect distribution of information, social ties that are located in a strategic location can provide an actor with information about opportunities and choices that he could otherwise not access.

The second component explaining the workings of social capital according to Lin is the social ties' exercise of influence over actors who play crucial roles in decision-making effecting other actors. This can be the case for example when a recruiter makes a decision about hiring or promoting an employee. Adding to this, the strategic location of a social tie (e.g. a structural hole in a horizontal network or a position of power in a hierarchical network) can add more value to the resource located in said tie. Thus, if an actor with such a valuable social tie "puts in a good word" for someone, this may carry weight in the decision-making concerning another actor in the network.

Lin's third and final explanatory component is the reaffirmation of an individual's social credentials through social tie resources and their acknowledged relationships to individuals. Social ties may thus reflect the actor's access to resources through his social network, i.e. his social capital. An actor gains more value and becomes an asset to an organisation or group, since resources can be accessed and mobilised via this actor. This reaffirmation also reinforces identity and recognition, according to Lin (1999). He claims that being assured and recognised of one's worthiness as an individual and valuable member of a group can provide emotional support and public acknowledgement of the actor's claim over certain resources. Such reinforcements are crucial for securing an actor's mental health and his entitlement to resources in the social network. In summary, Lin identifies three elements that explain the functioning of

social capital: information, influence and the attaining and reinforcement of social credentials (Lin, 1999).

We have hitherto developed an understanding of social capital that emphasises the crucial role of ties build on trust, resources embedded in networks and norms that are shared among the members of this network. In a literature review on social capital, Crossley (2008) concludes that "all writers agree that social capital refers to the manner in which networks and their emergent properties (e.g. trust and norms) can constitute a resource for their members" (Crossley as quoted in Bunn and Wood, 2012).

However, I agree with Bunn and Wood (2012) that it is important to make an analytical distinction between networks and norms, as the chicken-and-the-egg-type question of which existed first and strengthened the other should undoubtedly arise. Putnam (2000) views social capital as a commodity; something that is held by individuals or groups that is given at any time and quantifiable since in his view social capital is a relatively impersonal good. Drawing on Coleman's (1988) and later Crossley's (2008) view of social capital, however, social capital is understood as a property of social relations, accessed or mobilised through the facilitating or catalysing function of the social network it is embedded in (Bunn and Wood, 2012). For example, Crossley's 2008 study of the network of a private health club finds that social capital exists to the extent that it facilitates identity-development, information gathering, collective action, self-recognition and service-exchange among the members of the network (Crossley, 2008).

Crossley's findings prove that, contrary to Putnam's belief, social capital is always in the process of being used and mobilised while social relations are exercised. It is not a constant commodity inherently deposited in the social ties of a network. Social capital then should not be understood so much in the Putnamian light of considering how quantities of social capital create social integration, but rather as the quality of social relations in practice (Bunn and Wood, 2012). Understanding social capital in such a way has to implications: First, social capital should not be considered as an isolated or quantifiable commodity, but rather as something that is always already "practically enmeshed in constellations of diverse forms of capital" (Bunn and Wood, 2012). This implies, in other words, that social capital is linked to the contextual contingencies of the environment that it is embedded in.

Secondly, this view of social capital implies that the analysis of social capital only ever makes sense if the analyst considers the inequalities and distinctions between actors within the

network (Bunn and Wood, 2012). According to Svendsen (2006), social capital must be seen as unequally distributed among social groups in specific power contexts" (Svendsen as quoted in Bunn and Wood, 2012), thus emphasising again the importance of focusing on social relations rather than social integration when analysing social capital. This perspective reinforces the second implication outlined earlier:

"the concept of social capital only makes sense when it is seen as a dimension of everyday relationships which also rely on shared cultural referents and practices [Silverman, 2001: 243], the availability of certain levels of economic resources and, ultimately, symbolic recognition" (Bunn and Wood, 2012).

These propositions deduced from social capital theory can be expected to shed quite some light on the question this research seeks to answer. However, as has been developed earlier, social capital should be considered to always be in the process of being used and mobilised while social relations are exercised and not as a constant commodity inherently deposited in the social ties of a network. We established that the quality of social relations in practice as opposed to the quantities of social capital create social integration. As such, the merely structural analysis of social networks, i.e. the structural network theory of structural holes, bridges, network density etc. that is inherently intertwined with social capital theory, does not suffice to analyse the transmission of social capital. Rather, the questions of how social networks are made and remade and what they consist of should be considered. For this reason, we will also draw on Harrison White's network theory (as opposed to the structural analysis of networks as forwarded for example by Granovetter, Burt, Putnam, Provan and Kenis, or Wasserman and Faust) to approach the research question.

2.2. Social network theory

What are networks, how do they develop, how do they maintain themselves and how do networks deal with their environment? Originating from the question about social order, these are central questions that social network theory deals with. Semantically, Harrison White's social network theory distances itself from the general use of the term. White sees a problem in using the network simultaneously as an empirical phenomenon and a tool for measurement as well as the narrow meaning of the term "network" that emerged out of the structural analysis of social networks (Karaflidis, 2012). To White, the order of any social space does not equal the network and he limits the term to the following two meanings: networks on the one hand are structural equivalences (see Lorrain and White, 1971; White, Boorman and Breiger, 1976)

and on the other hand a pattern that consists of ties that vary in type and intensity (see Granovetter, 1973). Networks to White are ultimately nothing more and nothing less than one of many forms of structural developments (Karaflidis, 2012).

In order to illustrate the complexity of this theoretical approach, Harrison White uses a children's playground as a metaphor in his main work "*Identity and Control"* (1992) to describe social order in simple terms. White describes that, if observed over a longer period of time, visible and simultaneously highly temporal and instable clusters develop out of the presence and organisation of playground elements, children running around and parents watching them. The raging chaos on the playground needs to be controlled in order to define one's own position or identity in relation to all other identities present on the playground (White, 1992). In other words, each member of such a cluster is playing a game that relies on the ability of each actor to control the attraction of his identity to an extent that it remains attractive in the eyes of other actors. As soon as an identity loses its attraction, the respective actor is likely to be excluded from the social order. As such, for example, a child may participate in a football match for as long as he proves that he is able to perform well in the game (see White, 1992: 6ff).

Being ascribed an attractive identity is a reciprocal process between all present identities: other players on the playground must also constantly convince an individual that their identity is still interesting. Referring again to the example of the football match, the competent player may leave the game if his team members are too weak in the game of football. As such, identity develops out of the quest to maintain a specific social order, during which reciprocal acts of control of various identities (children, parents, games, context of the playground, time, language, ethnic origin of the children, etc.) are constantly functioning to re-negotiate identities (White, 1992). It is important here to understand control not as a monopolistic claim of power, but as the result of reciprocal aids to orientation in the social order. As such, control creates not only reasonable expectations about the actions of other actors, but also an orientation for one's own behaviour (Baecker, 2006).

According to Baecker, a successful attempt to gain control produces situations and relations that render it attractive for both parties to continue to engage in said attempts to gain control and that make it attractive to external third parties to participate (Baecker, 2005). However, control is only possible if individuals also agree to being controlled. White provides the following summary of the relationship between control and identity:

> *"Each identity continues discovering and reshaping itself in action. Identity is produced by contingency to which it responds as intervention in possible processes to come. The rush and jars of daily living are contingences, as are ill health and contentions of other identities. Control is both anticipation of and response to eruptions in environing process. Seeking control is not some option of choice, it comes out of the way identities get triggered and keep going. An identity is as likely to target itself as another for a control effort"* (White, 1992: 9).

In this passage, White emphasises that identities form as a response to environmental contingencies, i.e. building aids to orientation in and continuous re-evaluation of the environment. This in turn becomes possible only under the condition that there exists a mechanism of control that can anticipate environmental contingencies and has to react to them. As such, control places identity in a reality that identities have to deal with via the re-evaluation and re-positioning (White, 1992). An individual cannot consciously steer control or plan to have a controlling influence over its environment. This means that control can only be understood in relation to one's own identity and that of all other identities. The ties between identities are then not of static, mechanic nature, but at best highly fluctuating and instable appearances that are constantly exposed to changes based on their intensity and concreteness (Azarian, 2006).

Accordingly, the world is actually defined by continuous chaos or lack of order, which can produce temporary instable patterns of organisation at best. Social order cannot be understood as fully developed assemblage of fixed network relations, but rather as a polymer goo that is about to harden into a more structured matter: "[…] there is no tidy atom and no embracing world, only complex striations, long strings reptating as in a polymer goo, or in a mineral before it hardens" (White, 1992, p. 4).

Tangible relations, in the same way as networks, are merely socially constructed abstractions that become visible only as there is an observer for them or someone who can make sense of them (White, 1992). It follows from this that networks as units of social order cannot be constructed or made, but only discovered. They cannot be changed, but only supported, disturbed or weakened and one cannot simply join or leave a network. At best, one can execute one's own identity work that can function as an origin or target for new attempts to gain control (Baecker, 2005). The theory here underpins what has been repeatedly mentioned throughout previous chapters of this research: the unstable character of network-ties illustrates how

networks are constantly changing and evolving. This may become more comprehensible when considering the semantics of the terms network not only as a noun, but also as a verb "to network".

Once that network ties have been observed, stories develop. Azarian defines these stories as including "history, what is going on and how the relationship is expected by the actors to unfold in the future". (2006: 52). On the basis of individual expectations and memories about the circumstances and the conditions of a relationship, each side of a tie builds its own story as well as a collective story in interaction with other network participants (Schmitt, 2009). As such, stories are descriptions of relationships in networks and serve the perception of individual ties and reciprocities of ties (White, 1992). Bundles of stories can be summarised in a domain. According to White, when these domains are extended by the construction of a network, i.e. observable relational ties, so called "netdoms" (network + domain) develop that provide the social context of ties and that each side of the tie directly or indirectly refers to. Netdoms consequently create certain reciprocal expectations (White, 1992).

It now needs to be understood that an individual does not only roam within a single netdom. On the contrary, an individual is embedded in a myriad of more or less stable, lasting and intensive netdoms. Only with the help of what White coined switching (switching from being conscious of one's identity and role in one netdom to being conscious of one's identity and role in another netdom) can individuals navigate between netdoms. This has four essential implications: First, only switching allows for the development of identity. The possibility to find oneself not in this, but another social context, paired with the awareness that it is possible to change between various contexts creates the very contingency that is essential to identity formation (White, 1992). It follows secondly, that an individual person or organisation will not have a single identity, but – depending on the context – may have multiple identities. This can result in mutually exclusive, complementary or contradictory expectations. Thirdly, as Baecker suggests, networks demand from their members a certain degree of consciousness for the perception of and catering to the respective expectations that networks pose (2006). Potential attempts to gain control or re-interpretations of one's identity require the anticipation of others' reactions. Due to the embeddedness in multiple context with differing expectations, this easily becomes a task impossible to complete. Azarian summarises: "In short, any direct tie of an actor is contingently dependent on his indirect relations" (Azarian, 2006: 42). Finally, even a single tie between participants may be embedded in various contexts. Depending on the

context, an individual needs to make decisions about his behavioural patterns, which oftentimes can lead to reciprocal misunderstanding and disappointment. These kinds of ties are called multiplex ties and require a high degree of flexibility and compatibility of each network participant.

According to what we have developed this far, the focus in the theorisation of social networks does not lie on the network itself but rather on the borders between certain networks and identities. This conclusion draws attention to the reciprocal making, perception and reproduction of a border. This means that a border is a social act and is not unilaterally decided upon, but rather continuously checked, updated, given up and rebuilt (White, 2012). In order to explain this finding further, White introduces the disciplines of interface, arena and council (1992). Disciplines to White are simply social formations or "social molecules" (Fuhse and Muetzel, 2010); the smallest unit of analysis. Disciplines are observable orientation aids to navigate through actions within and without a discipline. They are seen as "self-reproducing structural contexts, which sustain identities" (Fuhse and Muetzel, 2010: 261), as according to White, identities form out of the interaction of social molecules (White, 1992). Disciplines don't stand alone; they are always embedded in other networks. Single identities and control patterns arrange themselves within disciplines in a way that ties, communication, decisions, actions and behaviours are disciplined accordingly. This in turn attributes a distinct identity to the pattern itself (Karafillidis, 2012) and we have no come full-circle to White's thesis that identities only ever make sense if they are considered in relation to other identities contingent on their environmental context.

The existence of disciplines suggests that different possibilities to observe the development and distinguishing of boundaries exist. These observations are what White calls interfaces. According to White, interfaces are observations of borders that create identities, i.e. an interface has a mediating effect on its current as well as potential future members. What White calls arenas, on the other hand, are concerned with selection processes. Going back to the example of the playground, the selection of a child into a team simultaneously results in the exclusion of other children from the team. The observance of decision-making through selection and voting in its relation to the environment lead to a continuous re-evaluation of identity. White's discipline of council ensures that identities are conserved internally and externally. Here, actors are mobilised, commonalities crystallise and certain behaviours are manifested calling on the actors' commitment to the network (White, 1992).

Baecker suggests that the three disciplines cannot be analysed separately. Only on the basis of observations on the arena-level and the council-level, i.e. "observations of being observed by other observers" (Baecker, 1997: 2) can the interface make certain selection-decisions in relation to its mediating actions (Baecker, 1997). This means that it is essential for the analysis of networks to take into account all these observational perspectives, in order to grasp all defining characteristics of a network.

2.3. Unpacking the essential features of networked social capital: an ontological conceptualisation

The integration of social capital theory and social network theory leaves us with an idea of social capital that is complemented by the mechanisms and propositions forwarded in social network theory. For the purpose of this research, I will henceforth refer to this extended concept of social capital as "networked social capital". Based on the propositions of both theories, a conceptualisation of networked social capital will be derived.

The review of existing contributions to the scholarly debate on the workings of social capital has shown that social interaction is based primarily on shared emotions of affection, respect and sympathy while being facilitated by mutual and reciprocal trust. This means that there is a positive relationship between sentiment and interaction (Homans as quoted in Lin, 2001). The existence of mutual trust between actors in a network is a necessary condition for constructive social ties and the transmission of social capital. Trust is an essential feature of networked social capital that has a facilitating effect on norm diffusion and a strengthening effect on social ties.

The previously developed theorisation of social capital has shown that trust arises out of a set of moral values shared by a community. This is because sharing norms and values with members of one's community or group makes it possible to predict and expect certain behaviours of other group members. This in turn fosters trust among members of a group. It can be expected, then, that norms are actively upheld and transmitted to all members of the group in order to keep behaviours predictable and maintain trust. As White's theory proposes, an actor's identity is formed in relation to all other identities present in the social network. As such, identity is formed by gaining control over one's environment and making behaviours and reactions predictable. The identity further serves as a selection criterion for an actor to become or remain a member of a social network based on how attractive this actor's identity seems to his fellows. Identity develops out of the quest to maintain a specific social order in the search

for control over one's environment. Shared customs and behaviours lead reflexive agents in the network to develop mutual recognition based on the norms and values embedded in the network. Shared customs and behaviours are a second essential feature of networked social capital that has a positive effect on mutual recognition and the building of a common identity among members of a network.

Social ties in the form of network ties increase the amount of information available to an actor. Being a member of a network makes the information embedded in this network accessible to an actor. Being a member of a network increases the access to information and thus fosters social integration in conformity to the norms and values of said network. Having access to and sharing information via one's social network is another essential feature of networked social capital. The network here has a facilitating effect on information exchange by serving as a "junction box" (Crossley, 2008) between different streams of information. Information exchange has a positive effect on norm reinforcement.

Deriving from the theories that social capital is embedded in the strategic network location of an actor, it makes sense that actors in similar locations in the network have a higher amount of social interaction. In other words, interactions can be expected to be more frequent between actors that have similar types and amounts of resources. If we unpack these expectations, it becomes clear that in addition to trust and shared positive sentiment, the similarity in resources and strategic location in the network influence social interactions and thus the transmission of information. The capture of and access to information is shown to have an important structural character and thus to be contingent on the opportunity structure that arises from interactions in the social network. Herein lies yet another essential feature of networked social capital that is closely linked to the previously mentioned feature of access to information. An actor's fortunate network location has a facilitative effect on the actor's access to information and norm diffusion, whereas an unfortunate network location has an impeding effect on the actor's access to information and norm diffusion.

The theories propose further that the quality of social ties influences the transmission of social capital and in turn social integration in a way that is contingent on the context of the network in which social capital resources are embedded. The mechanisms behind gaining access to and distributing social capital information depend on the network's historical, geographical and collective context, which makes the context of network formation another essential feature of networked social capital. The network context is a contingency that influences rituals and

physical constructions that mobilise the mechanisms, which encourage social interaction and the building of network ties.

The theorisation of social capital has brought to light that having access to higher quantities of social capital or more valued social capital reaffirms an actor's social credentials and leads to the acknowledgement of his social status. The theory therefore proposes that network members with a recognised prestige or social status enjoy a higher level of de jure trustworthiness in them and the social capital they transmit. Service exchange and collective action are facilitative functions arising from networked connections. They are encouraged by the network's group ethos and serve to maintain the agents' reputation and prestige. As such, service exchange and collective action are essential features of networked social capital that are conducive to, i.e. have a positive effect on, an actor's reputation and identity in the network.

Another finding of White's social network theory is that networks necessitate their members' awareness for the perception of and catering to the respective expectations that networks pose. The theory established that only the consciousness of finding oneself in "another" social context in combination with the awareness that it is possible to change between different social contexts creates the very contextual contingency that is necessary to forge an identity. Identity development and thus social capital development is only possible if there exists an overlap of the networks an actor belongs to. Any direct relation of an actor is contingently dependent on his indirect relations. White's conceptualisation of disciplines stipulates that these disciplines (interfaces, councils and arenas) are distinguishable entities within one network that are at the same time always embedded in other networks. The exercise of social ties in the form of communication, decision-making, acting and behaving, are determined by the discipline they are located in and identities and control patterns are thus arranged within disciplines. The theory thus proposes that identities are forged and come into existence as the result of overlaps among identities from separate network populations. Network overlaps and the temporal and/or geographical overlap of agents is the final essential feature of networked social capital that has a positive effect on norm diffusion and identity building in accordance to these norms.

To summarise, the essential features of networked social capital are

1) Trust with a facilitating effect on norm diffusion and a strengthening effect on social ties
2) Shared customs and behaviours with a positive effect on mutual recognition and the building of a common identity among members of a network

3) The exchange of and access to information with a positive effect on norm reinforcement
4) An actor's network location with a facilitative effect on the actor's access to information and norm diffusion
5) The network context as a contingency that influences rituals and physical constructions that mobilise the mechanisms, which encourage social interaction and the building of network ties
6) Service exchange and collective action with a positive effect on an actor's reputation and identity in the network
7) Network overlaps and the temporal and/or geographical overlap of agents with a positive effect on norm diffusion and identity building

This research hypothesises that social network theory introduces ontological features to the concept of social capital that succeed at bridging important empiricist gaps in the analysis of norm diffusion and norm prevalence that features forwarded by social capital theory alone do not achieve. Should this research find indications that the relations between the essential features of networked social capital proposed by the theories hold up, the research can conclude that social network theory has important explanatory merits that enrich the debate on norm prevalence and offers important empiricist contributions to bridge the gap between theory and real world.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research motivation and case selection

This research aims at contributing to the theoretical debate on political Islam via the case study of Saudi Arabia. The theories drawn on for this research are considered to build the anchor points for structuring the scientific discourse and their paradigms and axioms are thus

recognised to have important functions in the knowledge generation on the puzzle at hand (Blatter and Haverland, 2012). Following from this recognition, this research sets out to look at the descriptive and explanatory merits of the theories at hand.

As developed in the previous theory section, understandings of social capital as located in the facilitative functions of network ties define social capital as a resource, which is the property of social relations; not of individual agents. The importance in studying social capital is thus the analysis of its use value (Crossley, 2008). In order to accommodate this definition of social capital empirically, my methodological approach focuses on analysing the mechanisms that allow for social capital captured in social network ties to build collective societal identities, rather than trying to establish correlations between measures of social capital, such as network membership or trust, and norm prevalence. My analytical focus is thus on the use value of social networks for norm diffusion and norm prevalence as proposed by the theories drawn on for this research.

Furthermore, with my methodological approach I intend to address an empiricist problem that several scholars refer to as "variable analysis" (see Abbott 2001; Blumer 1986; Pawson 1989; Hedström and Swedberg 1998): More often than not, research in the social sciences is concerned with the behaviour of and relations between agents theoretically, but the behaviour of and relationships between variables empirically. I agree with Abbott (2001), who criticises that the relationships between variables do not necessarily translate to relationships between agents and could even cause researchers to establish spurious associations and correlations. Methodological attention needs to be paid increasingly to mechanisms and agents.

While previous empirical work on social capital has already brought to light valuable statistical links between proxy variables for social capital (Crossley, 2008) and its effects on members of a social network, little has so far been done to establish social connections, networks and mechanisms that constitute social capital. This research aims first and foremost at exploring what could create greater congruence or a more accurate bridging between theory and empirical work. The abstract question that this research treats could be stated as "does theory x provide sufficient explanatory insights into the empirical phenomenon at hand?" This question is then made concrete for the chosen empirical phenomenon and case study, resulting in the research question stated above:

> *To what extent does social network theory inform our understanding of the continuously unsecularised politics of Muslim-majority countries and the continued prevalence of*

Islamic norms in the political sphere as the basis for policy-making and the mobilisation of support for political decisions?

The question ultimately explores whether social network theory has any explanatory value to the prevalence of Islamic norms in the politics of Muslim-majority countries and could thus provide a basis for more comprehensive explanations as well as conceptual and practical innovations (Blatter and Haverland, 2012) regarding the prevalence of Islamic norms in the public sphere of Muslim-majority countries.

The analysis of social networks is a straightforward way to focus on said mechanisms conducive to social capital. However, as scholars such as Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994), Smilde (2005) or Gould (2003) argue, classical network analysis can tend to neglect the role of agency and the dynamics of social interaction between network members (Crossley, 2008), which could result in still too obscure accounts of network effects and network mechanisms specifically. For this reason, I choose to ground my analysis methodologically in the qualitative research methods of ethnography, while using the principles of social network theory as forwarded mainly by Harrison White.

My aspiration for this research is to explore to what extent social networks can inform our understanding of the prevalence of Islamic norms in the public sphere of Muslim-majority countries. The underlying question is thus what effects norm prevalence, or rather, do social networks effect norm prevalence and how? Social capital theory and social network theory give possible explanations for norm prevalence and the empirical data collected for this research will serve as a test whether the theoretical integration of the two theories makes sense and whether it looks like the propositions the theories bring forward hold. My interest, as such, is in exploring research assumptions in order to establish the basis for future research seeking to establish causations for norm prevalence. For this purpose, I draw on secondary data, i.e. existing data.

Based on reflections about the hypotheses of the underlying theories, a case is selected that should reflect a most-likely situation, i.e. the empirical findings from the case are expected to be in line with the hypotheses derived from the theories. The case selection thus requires some prior knowledge on the position of the theories in the current scientific debate on the topic as well as knowledge about the specificities of the chosen case. Drawing on Saudi Arabia as a case study is crucial for the goal that this research sets out to achieve. As such, the case of Saudi Arabia is reflective of a highly networked society whose functioning is based on kinship

and tribal affiliation. Furthermore, the political apparatus is structured around the Al Saud royal family and clearly orients itself on the Quran and Sharia law.

The analysis of empirical data on Saudi Arabia serves as an indicator of whether the propositions forwarded by the theories drawn on for this research would hold in the most likely case. The difficulty of using Saudi Arabia as a case study quite obviously lies in the data unavailability and the uncertainty about the validity of data that has been collected from government sources. Nonetheless, since I am able to access Arabic sources that have produced empirical data on the ethnographic component of the prevalence of political Islam to an extent that has so far not been achieved in the English-speaking scientific community, this research explores novel theoretical angles and territory to apply existing theories to.

No claim is made in this research that the findings of the Saudi Arabian case study can be generalised to other similar cases. Rather, the generalizable conclusions are drawn from the discourse on the theory in order to justify the adequacy and usefulness of novel theoretical angles to understand the empirical phenomenon. This novel theoretical angle lies in the consideration of the explanatory merits of social network theory.

3.2. Data collection

For this research, I primarily use the existing scholarly literature, in order to investigate whether there still exist gaps between the propositions of social capital theory and the empirical observations "in the real world". The data is also used to identify the merit of social network theory and its specific analytical methods to ensure more valid data collection in the establishment of causations related to norm prevalence in future research projects.

I draw on a broad array of secondary sources for the detailed outlook on the role of Islam as social capital in the Muslim world throughout history as well as the importance of religious authority and networks of tribes, family and civil society in Muslim societies that provide insight into the accuracy of social network theory's propositions. As outlined above, I ground my research in ethnography and as such, I will draw on secondary data that the respective researchers collected through ethnographic data collection methods. These methods include, but are not limited to, participant observation, face-to-face interviews and genealogy. Data collected for existing research projects can have originated from various sources such as

- archival and statistical data found in various administrative sources at the national, state and local levels
- other archival documents, such as maps, atlases, abstracts of titles, and title deeds
- records and data collected by businesses, educational, health, social services, labour and professional associations
- data collected in various types of directories (e.g. telephone, local business directories, special ethnic publications)
- personal and individual data, such as diaries, family histories, biographies and autobiographies, tombstones, etc.

Typically, ethnographic data will take the form of kinship terms, customs, rituals, texts of a native culture, and descriptions of material and non-material culture, or in other words, in the form of words.

Furthermore, I use the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set generated by Mark Tessler of the University of Michigan to underpin the ethnographic evidence with survey data. Both individual-level and country-level variables are included in the data set. The data on individual-level variables was generated from 56 surveys conducted in 15 Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. A total of 82,480 respondents were surveyed; the great majority in face-to-face interviews (Tessler, 2014). The individual surveys were part of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd waves of the Arab Barometer and the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th wave of the World Value survey. For this research, I use the individual-level data for Saudi Arabia, which stems from the 4th and 5th wave of the World Value Survey conducted in 2003 and includes 1502 Saudi Arabian respondents, as well as the 2nd wave of the Arab Barometer conducted in 2011 which surveyed 1405 Saudi Arabian respondents.

The entire Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set is a compilation of 56 individual data files. Questions on governance and political life, Islam and its political role as well as a number of policy issues have been included from all data sets, though it does not include some other questions asked in the individual surveys (Tessler, 2014). In addition to various individual-level variables concerning personal attributes of respondents, the entire data set contains more than 200 individual-level variables concerning political attitudes, values and behaviours. Some of these variables are a collection of various sub-factors pertaining to the overall concept or issue the variable concerns. In these cases, respondents were asked about

the multiple differing parts making up an item and each part appears as a separate variable in the data set.

Finally, the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set also includes variables that are based on 34 time-specific country-level characteristics. Said variables include for example the government regulation of religion index, freedom of religion indices developed by the U.S. State Department or the government funding of religion index. Generally, this country-level data was collected in the same year in which a respective survey was conducted. However, in some few cases, there is a time-difference of 1 or 2 years before or after the conduct of the survey (Tessler, 2014).

In order to maximise the validity, credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, generalisability of the data, I chose to triangulate the several mentioned sources of data that all bear on the points hypothesised in this research. The trustworthiness of the data is thus enhanced and I demonstrate that my analysis is conducted in a way that ensures accurate subject definitions and descriptions. By triangulating data, I also attempt to ensure that the data is reflective of the empirical phenomenon itself, rather than my own biases. In the triangulation of various ethnographic data sources collected from English and Arabic sources as well as the survey data from the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam data set lies the empirical contribution of this research to the scholarly debate.

3.3. Data analysis

3.3.1. Operationalisation of the essential features

The essential features of networked social capital deduced from social capital and social network theory serve as a tool for the data analysis. As such, I will be looking at data that corresponds to the features forwarded by the theory and discuss in a descriptive way, whether they indicate that the hypothesis holds for the case of Saudi Arabia. Networked social capital has been conceptualised to include the essential features of trust, shared customs and behaviours, the exchange of and access to information, an actor's network location, the network context, service exchange and collective action and network overlaps. In order to analyse the data, it is necessary to operationalise these concepts via observable indicators for the presence or absence of the features and their proposed effects.

For the analysis of data in the form of texts, the following indicators serve to operationalise each of the features:

a) Trust: reciprocal expectations among agents, reliability of agents, nature of reliability, expressions of risk in specific social relations, origin of a social relation to be perceived as risky, expressions of confidence in the competence of certain actors, expressions of the credibility of certain actors, expressions of the benevolence and integrity of certain actors
b) Shared customs and behaviours: expressions of behaviours that are typical for a certain group and distinguish it from others, expressions about a "Saudi way" of doing things, an "Islamic way" of doing things or a "tribal way" of doing things, expressions of expectations about the behaviour of others, expressions of negative consequences for deviant behaviour
c) Exchange of and access to information: the effect of having certain knowledge, distributors of knowledge, ways to gain access to knowledge, ways to make use of the knowledge, freedom of information, expressions of censored information
d) An actor's network location: an actor's connections, conditions to forge social ties, expressions of privileges resulting from specific social ties
e) The network context: geographical specificities, cultural specificities or historical specificities that lead to a particular development of the network environment, political specificities that accord particular meaning to the networks in this context
f) Service exchange and collective action: acting collectively, providing services, selfless intentions, benevolence, group ethos, bargaining, economic dependencies, other kinds of dependencies
g) Network overlaps: the temporal or geographical coincidence of actors or entire groups, multiplicity

For the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam data set, the following variables are of interest for this research:

a) Concerning trust: interpersonal trust, government satisfaction, confidence in the major political institutions (government, parties, parliament, and the civil service)
b) Concerning shared customs and behaviours: mosque attendance, the importance attributed to certain things in respondents' lives, indicators of religiosity and indicators of respondents' sense of identity and belonging.

Social trust was measured in the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam data set by the standard question: *"Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted?"* This measure has several limitations: It offers a simple dichotomy, instead of a more subtle continuous scale. No social context is presented to respondents, nor can they distinguish between different categories, such as relative levels of trust in friends, colleagues, family, strangers, or compatriots. Nevertheless this item has become accepted as the standard indicator of social or interpersonal trust, having been used in the Civic Culture surveys and the American General Social Survey since the early 1970s, so it will be used here to facilitate replication with previous studies (Norris and Ingelhart, 2012). All other measures used for this research are measured on a 3 to 5 item continuum (e.g. very satisfied, rather satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, not very satisfied) and thus leave respondent the opportunity for nuanced enough answers.

As is typical for a survey, the answers respondents give to the survey questions may be subject to social desirability bias or construct validity issues as concepts that are asked for in the survey questions may be interpreted differently by respondents than they were intended to be understood by the survey designers. However, keeping in mind the reservedness of the Saudi society, it needs to be considered that this is the best data we can get in this context. As described above, the survey data is complemented by other data sources to balance out the limitations of the survey data.

3.3.2. Method of data analysis

I chose content analysis as the method to analyse the ethnographic data. In this process, a coding scheme is developed that corresponds to the operationalisation of the researched concept's essential features forwarded by the theory. These codes are systematically applied to the texts (all the secondary data I collected), in order to identify indications to prove or disprove the assumptions or hypothesis. Based on the ontological conceptualisation of networked social capital, the following coding scheme has been developed for the content analysis:

Basic Themes (indicators)	Organising themes (features)	Global themes
Reciprocal expectations among agents	Trust	Identity formation through network ties
Reliability of agents		
Nature of reliability		
Expressions of risk in specific social relations		
Origin of a social relation to be perceived as risky		
Expressions of confidence in the competence of certain actors		
Expressions of the credibility of certain actors		
Expressions of the benevolence and integrity of certain actors		
Expressions of behaviours that are typical for a certain group and distinguish it from others	Shared customs and behaviours	
Expressions about a "Saudi way" of doing things, an "Islamic way" of doing things or a "tribal way" of doing things		
Expressions of expectations about the behaviour of others		
Expressions of negative consequences for deviant behaviour		
Geographical specificities, cultural specificities or historical specificities that lead to a particular development of the network environment	The network context	
Political specificities that accord particular meaning to the networks in this context		
The effect of having certain knowledge	Exchange of and access to information	The network as a resource
Distributors of knowledge		
Ways to gain access to knowledge		
Ways to make use of the knowledge		
Freedom of information		
Expressions of censored information		
An actor's connections	An actor's network location	
Conditions to forge social ties		
Expressions of privileges resulting from specific social ties		
Acting collectively	Service exchange and collective action	
Providing services		
Selfless intentions		
Benevolence		
Group ethos		
Bargaining		
Economic dependencies		
Other kinds of dependencies		
The temporal or geographical coincidence of actors or entire groups	Network overlaps	

n this classification of basic themes, organizing themes and global themes, each of the codes finds its place in a relationship, influence or maybe a hierarchy. Basic themes have something in common. Organizing themes link the basic themes together, i.e. they describe what the basic themes have in common. Finally, the global theme summarizes organising themes together under an overarching theme. By deriving from the group-codes how different features may relate to one another or influence each other, maybe create hierarchies and orders etc., the coding serves as an analytical commentary on the topic of my research. The description of the connection between the features is the main result of the research, leading to conclusions about the explanatory merit of social network theory's propositions.

For the data gathered from the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam data set, I use descriptive statistics as an analytical method. Beside the fact that I want to stick to qualitative data analysis methods for the purpose of this research, it is not really possible to conduct more elaborate statistical analysis with the data set. The data available to us describes only a fraction of the entire empirical phenomenon; the context is very fuzzy. I do not intend to establish causations between variables, nor is it possible to, since I can't control for all necessary conditions in order to establish causality, nor can I analyse reversed causalities (e.g. does the absence of trust result in the absence of social ties and social capital transmission). The survey

data is however important to underpin and support the ethnographic data and give more reliable indications about the proposition forwarded by the theory.

4. The case of Saudi Arabia – an introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as we know it today, was established by King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud in 1932. Rallying for support of tribal and religious leaders was crucial for securing the independence of his Kingdom (al-Seflan, 1980). Long before the founding of the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia, political power had been shared between rulers of the Arabian peninsula and religious scholars. Until today, this remains the case in Saudi Arabia. As such, while the incumbent Saudi monarch is on paper the country's supreme religious leader and custodian of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, in practice he shares this power with the '*ulama*, a group of influential spiritual contemporaries that hold positions as judges, lawyers and prayer leaders (Obeid, 1999).

While political power lay in the family of the Al Saud, religious power lay in the family of Ibn Abd Al Wahhab; founder of the strict interpretation of Islam known as Wahhabism that carries the Saudi state. Intermarriages between the two families secured the Kingdom's stable social basis that has spared the country the havoc of civil uprisings and revolutions that plagued many neighbouring countries (Obeid, 1999).

While largely avoiding civil unrest, the kingdom nonetheless underwent a phase of liberal experimentation and openness to the West throughout the 1960s and 70s. With an attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca executed by critics of the royal establishment and the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, a conservative revival was ignited. The attack on the Grand Mosque was interpreted as a call for less ostentation on the part of the royal family and a call for putting an end to "polluting" Islamic culture by forging closer ties to the West (Global Security[2]).

4.1. The functioning of the Saudi political apparatus

The Saudi state structure was created swiftly and by only a few royals in a top-down approach. The state apparatus grew and drew oil-funded clients into it. This served as a means to control the society. The royal family had the complete budgetary power and could expand the state institutions as they wished, resulting in a foggy existence of institutions with overlapping responsibilities. In general, a hierarchical, vertically organized hub-and-spoke system with the Al Saud patrons as a common denominator developed. The rentier system made society divided into congeries of clienteles, leaving them with no weight to outbalance the regime (Hertog, 2011).

Hertog describes this form of Saudi Clientelism as segmented Clientelism: "a heterogeneous system of formal and informal, rent-based Clientelism in which vertical links dominate" (2011:

[2] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/sa-ulama.htm

24). The state structures are characterized by mistrust and personal intermediation. The Saudi state in the 50s witnessed "the co-optation of social forces characteristic of rentier states […] on a small scale, tilting the balance of power as rentier theory posits" (Hertog, 2011: 44). The Saudis knew no public space to negotiate over abruptly augmenting state budgets. Few Saudis were knowledgeable enough to develop state administration coherently. Social mobilization was low. As compared to existing theories on the of rentier-state craft, the Saudi case shows a great propensity for path dependency (Hertog, 2011).

The institutions and administration were characterized by accommodation to personal needs and conflicts on all levels of government. The institutions became "fiefdomized" and the ministers their patrons. Institutional change was often a result of personal luck of princes and the decisions of the ruling family greatly influenced the composition of the bureaucracy and social mobility. Oil riches only expanded the choice of institutions and it became problematic to treat all institutions as an aggregate state body. The more oil money there was, the more institutions were endowed with funds, the more clients clustered around the royals and ultimately the more brokerage increased (Hertog, 2011).

The oil boom in the 70s solidified the bureaucracy and meritocracy as well as Clientelism were boosted. A new strata of middle men emerged and the whole of the society were quasi-stake holders in the state's affairs. The outcome of developments until the mid-80s was "a large and […] immobile conglomerate of huge clienteles […] Full control over society had created full immobility of the state" (Hertog, 2011: 83). Brokerage of state resources pervaded all of society, always organized around the soft authority and redistributive role of the state. Informal brokerage with the bureaucrats that held the keys to social benefits became unavoidable. The uncircumventable bureaucracy and sponsorship system made it very difficult for foreign investors and entrepreneurs to establish themselves on the ground; the system clearly favoured local businesses (Hertog, 2011).

Oil wealth also made social stratification and gender separation in all domains of life possible. A production state could never have afforded excluding 50 percent of its workforce from the labour market. The petrodollars helped fund the religious educational and judicial system to uphold this social segmentation. It was only in the mid-80s that these establishments posed a cost that was too huge to bare in comparison to the benefits it yielded. For example, the Islamic court, which had been constructed for the whole state to depend on it, declared mortgages

questionable in Islamic terms and Saudis were increasingly dependent on government funding, which grew scarce (Hertog, 2011).

The power of the '*ulama* and the preservation of religious force has also greatly complicated the work of the private sector, for example through the religious dominated school curricula, producing no suitable successors to businesses. Reforms throughout the 80s aimed at increasing the private sector's role in development and job creation, but the leadership's unwillingness to reform and the private sector's lack of higher managerial capacities hampered this idea. "In the 1980s and 1990s, [the government] mostly busied itself with putting out fires from crisis to crisis" by throwing money at the problems, "while little substantial change was initiated" (Hertog, 2011: 129).

The 1990/1 Gulf War necessitated a decrease of utility prices, as well as unreasonable promotions in the civil service sector, in order to meet civil unrest after the war. In the 90s, the fog of institutions was characterized by "parallel administrative structures and duplication of jurisdiction […], poor inter-ministry coordination and conflicting personal ambitions" (Hertog, 2011: 67). After the oil crash, strong leadership was necessary, but instead the regime chose to hide the state's problems under welfare showers. The state structures that once seemed beneficial to the royal family now inhibited business regulations that could have lifted the country out of the slump (Hertog, 2011).

The 1990s economic crisis gave the impetus for reform under King Abdallah. The Foreign Investment Act, the Saudization of labour markets, and the WTO adoption, as well as the Supreme Economic Council and the Majlis al-Shura were introduced. Both of these institutions allow businesses to look for influence in more institutionalized ways, as Hertog explains. He also asks the question if there is any room for fundamental change and finds the answer that the debate on economic policies is more institutionalized thanks to Abdallah's political modernization (2011). Nonetheless, the incoherent, unpredictable state is a problem for the private sector's development and while the state had become so neatly centralized, "the record of reforms […] [continues to] look so decidedly patchy" (Hertog, 2011: 246).

A more nuanced evaluation of Clientelism in the Saudi case solves the puzzle. Hertog's distinction between macro, meso and micro level analysis pays off. The Saudi state's main challenge was to "shift from efficiency in distribution to efficiency in regulation" (Hertog, 2011: 247) and the authorities tried to tackle this through the three reforms mentioned above

(the Foreign Investment Act, the Saudisation of labour markets, and the WTO adoption). How did the segmented Clientelism affect the reform-making? On a macro-level it was "paternal centralization around the Al Saud" (Hertog, 2011: 248), on a meso-level it lead to a fragmented bureaucracy and on the micro level to bureaucratic Clientelism (Hertog, 2011).

Compared to countries with state apparatuses of equal size, the Saudi state stands out in the degree to which it is present in peoples' everyday life and to which its resources curtail social mobilization. Political activation remains low, authority is based on patronage and the state acts as a "patron of patrons" (Hertog, 2011: 259). "The particular Saudi constellation, combining macro- and meso-dominance of the state with micro-penetration of society" (Hertog, 2011: 260) is what explains the peculiarities of Saudi Arabia's political system. Different types of states encounter different social constraints. Saudi Arabia as a fragmented rentier state experiences this only on the micro-level. Features of developing countries are present, but in a unique constellation. It is important to distinguish the levels in order to understand the Saudi conundrum; why it appears on the one hand penetrated and constrained, and on the other isolated in terms of political reform (Hertog, 2011).

5. Data analysis

The following pages will lay out the empirical observations gathered from ethnographic sources and the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set. I will present the empirical evidence gathered and coded that indicates whether the relationships between the features of networked social capital observed are as theorised in social network theory and social capital theory. Based on the level of congruence between the empirical observations and the theoretical propositions, conclusions about the explanatory merits of social network theory as a complement to social capital theory in the case of the prevalence of Islamic norms in the public sphere of Saudi Arabia will be drawn.

5.1. Trust's facilitating effect on norm diffusion and its strengthening effect on social ties

In their account of Muslim politics, Eickelmann and Piscatori (2004) argue that "dynamic civil society can exist without formal political organisations because pervasive informal organisational structures often serve as the framework for effective political, social and economic action" (Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004: 160). Professional, religious, political or economic ties form networks that spread information about and interpretations of Islam. The collective existence of such networks works to constrain the arbitrariness of the state and the degree of control exercised by it, even without centralised action or formal leadership. These findings indicate that the government is seen as controlling and inconsistent or subjective by its citizens, which in turn may be interpreted as untrustworthy. Networks on the basis of professional, religious, political or economic ties are ways through which citizens can keep the government's whims at bay. As Bill describes, these informal networks are shaped and re-shaped according to the interests of their members and the stability of networks is never guaranteed; especially as many individual members often belong to various networks simultaneously (Bill as quoted in Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004)[3].

The authors find that authority is located in informal networks as direct ties of trust and responsibility. Their studies found that this understanding of authority grounded in ties of trust is crucial for the understanding of Muslim politics in Saudi Arabia. So far, the findings suggest that trust is an important basis for social interaction, but the theorised positive effect of trust on norm diffusion and its strengthening effect on social ties cannot be confirmed.

[3] The implications of overlapping membership in various networks will be further developed later in this chapter.

In politics, trust and mutual cooperation and obligation make a sense of civic competence possible via which individuals of the civil society participate in politics (Rose, 1995). When the surveys collected for the Carnegie Middle East governance and Islam Data Set asked how much respondents trust various institutions, just over half the respondents would rank their level of trust in the prime minister between "quite a lot of trust" and "a great deal of trust". The same goes for trust in parliament and the police. When it comes to the level of trust that respondents express in political parties and civil services, however, trust levels seem to be rather low with the majority of respondents ranking their trust levels between "very little trust" and "no trust at all",

Institutions representing the state	Level of trust in %
Prime Minister	19.2 – a great deal of trust 33.4 – quite a lot of trust 32.7 – very little trust 6.1 – none at all
Parliament	17,6 - a great deal of trust 31,2 - quite a lot of trust 34,9 - very little trust 6,8 - None at all
The police	18,4 - a great deal of trust 34,2 - quite a lot of trust 31,0 - very little trust 7,1 - None at all
Political parties	8,3 - a great deal of trust 13,5 - Quite a lot of trust 46,1 - Very little trust 14,4 - None at all
Civil services	8,1 - A great deal of trust 24,0 - Quite a lot of trust 45,7 - Very little trust 10,3 - None at all

Source: Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set

When asked about the level of trust in mosques and churches, respondents report levels of trust that seem to be much higher than the trust in state institutions. 80,4% of respondents have a great deal of trust or quite a lot of trust in mosques and churches. The good majority (66.4%) of respondents further indicates that they believe most people cannot be trusted. 94.2% of respondents also indicate that family and friends are very important to them, whereas the majority ascribes low levels of importance to politics. These findings support the findings of previously mentioned studies that found that Saudis have more trust in their private networks of economic, professional or religious ties than they have in their government.

	Level of importance in %
Family	94.2 – very important 4.9 – rather important 0.8 – not very important 0.2 – not important at all
Friends	29.6 – very important 51.2 – rather important 16.4 – not very important 2.7 – not important at all
Politics	19.2 – very important 28.0 – rather important 31.4 – not very important 21.4 – not important at all

Source: Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set

While the majority of Saudis has a good level of trust in the Prime Minister, the parliament and the police, the reported distrust in political parties and civil services mirrors a distrust in the government's responsiveness and its capacity to adequately represent citizens and provide services to them. Only 37.6% of respondents indicate that they are satisfied (10.4% say very satisfied and 27.2% say rather satisfied) with the performance of the current government. In combination with the distrust in the wider society and the level of importance ascribed to friends and family, the findings suggest that the majority of Saudis does not rely on formal state institutions to tackle societal issues, but rather draw on their personal ties in whom they trust. In this data, we find indications for the proposed strengthening effect of trust on social ties: As citizens have little trust in the government's ability to provide services, Saudis have to strengthen their private networks in whom they trust in order to have reliable support to tackle societal issues.

In conjunction, the empirical observations from historical sources and the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set indicate that trust is indeed an important basis for social interaction and has a strengthening effect on social ties. It was expected that the existence of mutual trust between actors in a network is a necessary condition for constructive social ties and the transmission of social capital. Levels of trust in the government's ability to provide social services to Saudi citizens and represent the citizens politically have been found to be low. A lack of trust in the government and its provision of services to Saudi citizens leads Saudis to strengthen social ties to individuals in whom they trust to fill the gaps left by the state. No concrete data has been found to support the claim that trust has a positive effect on norm diffusion

5.2. The positive effect of shared customs and behaviours on mutual recognition and the building of a common identity

As Thornton (2015) finds in his study on tribal mentalities, among the tribes of Arabia, there is almost no notion of a universal humanity that transcends ethnic origin and cultural specificity. Common principles that all of human kind could adhere to don't exist and it is only in the customs and norms of the tribe – the 'tribal way of doing things'- that identity is forged. "Loyalty is not to principle, but to blood" (Thornton, 2015) and members of a tribe were usually exhorted to conquer and destroy outsiders who do not conform to the tribe's understanding of justice and morality (Thornton, 2015).

This principle of honour is one of the most important principles of Arab Tribalism. Transgressions against honour are to be avenged by the entire tribe and the entire group or tribe that the transgressor belongs to can be held accountable for the wrongdoing. The behaviours resulting from these tribal norms are still visible today in contexts that have long broken out of the boundaries of the tribe and infiltrated the entire society (Durkhan, 2015). As Shkolnik (2012) finds in his account on tribal cultures and the Islamic awakening, the greatly emphasised importance of honour rests on a tribe's member's reputation as loyal to his tribe and fulfilling the social norms of the tribe by contributing to the tribal community. An individual's integrity and autonomy are thus the main pillars his honour and respect rests upon. Thornton (2015) argues that this spread of tribal norms into the whole of Saudi Arabian society is the effect of Islam "theologising" the tribal mentality and redefining the tribe as the entire *Umma* of Muslims, "creating in effect a 'super tribe' that transcends mere blood as the bonding agent" (Thornton, 2015). Having been socialised in conformity to the tribal norms and values has led to a widespread conformity to its norms and according behaviour among Saudis:

> "*The privileging of men in polygamy, honour killings, social restrictions on women, the disdain for the infidel 'other' in the Koranic [sic] belief that Muslims are the 'best of nations', the betrayal of alliances in the religious sanction of lying to infidels (taqiyya), and the obsession with 'honour' that today we find in violent Muslim reactions to "blasphemy" against Mohammed or the Koran [sic]"* (Thornton, 2015)

Cooke and Lawrence (2005) in their study of Muslim networks find that the image of a networked Islamic community characterised by the shared customs of pilgrimage, Islamic practice, a genealogical connection to the Prophet Mohamed and moral solidarity continued to

have public significance in the new age of publication and print. The consideration of the Muslim community as a collection of earnest individuals righteously guided by networks of '*ulama* and acts of sacrifice and devotion were distributed by the press and the defining characteristics of Muslim society were now both locally rooted and universally lived. As such, the symbolic centre of this never completed network of actions lay in the shared symbols representing Muslim devotion and faith, no matter how far away these symbols were situated (Cooke and Lawrence, 2005).

The findings indicate that shared customs and practices indeed lead the reflexive agents in a network (in this case the tribe and the extended idea of the tribe in the *Umma*) to recognise each other's honour and extend respect to those that act in accordance with the tribe's customs and norms. It is proposed by social network theory that identity develops out of the quest to gain control over one's environment and making behaviours and reactions predictable. Actively upholding and transmitting shared norms and customs serve to meet this end. The findings indicate that shared customs and behaviours not only have a positive effect on mutual recognition, but also on the building of a common identity among members of a tribe and the wider *Umma*. As Thornton observes in his study, the tribe or the Muslim *Umma* as a group exists in-itself and for-others that can observe it. Common practices make the group an entity for-itself and a collective identity begins to shape based on shared rituals. Once the group began to exist for-itself, members of the tribe and the Umma are able to demand loyalty to the group's norms, values, customs, rituals and behaviours from each other. Crossley refers to this as a "vocabulary of motive" (Crossley, 2008), which network members use in an attempt to steer the conduct of themselves and others. Researchers from Kind Saud University in Riyadh conclude in their study on social stratification in Saudi Arabia that the tribal system is indeed a system in-itself and for-itself. They equate the concept of tribe with the concept of class in Western societies that are the basis of a distinct identity that makes a collective out of its members and distinguishes them from others[4].

When respondents to the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set were asked to name their most important social and geographical affiliation, the most frequent answers (45.6% of respondents for most important and 31.4% of respondents for second most

[4] *"أنه نظام في ذاته ولذاته: القبيلة في الخليج العربي مثل الطبقة في الغرب هي أساس لهوية خاصة تجمع بين أعضائها وتميزهم عن الغير"*, الطبقية الاجتماعية في دول الخليج العربي: الأشكال ـ المظاهر ـ الأسباب ـ النتائج (http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/hujailan/in/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AC.doc)

important) were that the Islamic world is the respondents' most important affiliation and the locality they currently live in is their second most important affiliation. When asked to name what best describes their identity, 62.4% of respondents say that they are first and foremost Muslim and their allegiance is to the Islamic '*Umma*. 88.9% of respondents consider themselves religious independently of whether they go to religious services or not. 87.5% of respondents report that they practice their religion by praying daily, even though 81.6% of respondents indicate that they rarely (one or two times a month or only on religious holidays) attend the mosque.

These finding don't allow us to draw concrete conclusions on the positive effect of shared customs and behaviours on mutual recognition or a common identity. However, the fact that most Saudis identify themselves first and foremost with the Islamic *Umma* and Islam as a religion, supports the findings from the previously mentioned studies that a collective identity exists among the members of the *Umma*. The survey data provides no conclusive insights into whether this identity originates in shared customs and behaviours, though. The data shows that most Saudis do not attend mosque regularly and while the act of prayer is shared among all practicing Muslims, it is conducted at home and in private. We can only draw the conclusion that the act of prayer is recognised as a custom that is shared among practicing Muslims, but we can't say for sure based on this data that the act of prayer is a necessary part of the 'vocabulary of motive' of the Islamic *Umma*.

5.3. The positive effect of the exchange of and access to information of norm diffusion and the facilitative effect of an actor's network location on the actor's access to information and norm diffusion

In her contribution to the American Federal Research Division's country study on Saudi Arabia, Eleanor Abdella Doumato (1993) provides her insights into the structural definition and make-up of Saudi tribal groups. She finds that tribal groups are structurally defined by their common patrilineal descent, the lineage, which she calls the nexus between the individual and the tribe and the pivotal element of an individual's social identity. Over time, she observes, lineage and tribal membership have come to reflect economic and ecological conditions. As such, a male individual from a rather poor lineage (financially speaking) may marry a woman from a richer lineage and henceforth refer to her kin as his own and that of his children.

Doumato observes this as a remarkable adjustment in the Saudi view of genealogical relationships, as it contradicts the formerly very strict rules of purely patrilineal descent (Doumato, 1993). Tribal leaders sought to secure their political influence and access to government leaders, which according to a 1981 study among the Al Saar Bedouins cited by Doumato was ensured through the encouragement of intermarriages between the tribes and the Al Saud royal family. The ruling royals, especially King Abdalaziz, on their part also followed a deliberate policy to marry tribal leaders to members of his family in order to secure the goodwill of tribal leaders via access to their concerns (Doumato, 1993).

Genealogical and kinship links are manifold due to marriages and divorces and such "genealogical fudging" (Doumato, 1993: 69) creates a congruence between socio-political relationships and the structure of kinship and genealogical descent patterns (Doumato, 1993). In other words, Doumato's findings indicate that the socio-economic positions of individuals in the Saudi society are mirrored by their position in the tribal and kinship network.

Eric Hooglund (1993) conducted a very comprehensive genealogical account of the Al Saud royal family in his contribution to the American Federal Research Division's country study on Saudi Arabia. He finds that the Al Saud family consists of about 20,000 people, all claiming patrilineal descent of Mohamed Ibn Saud, who founded the Al Saud dynasty in the 18th century. Hooglund explains that the most influential branch of the Al Saud family are the Al Faisal, descendants of Faisal Ibn Turki, who was the grandfather to Saudi Arabia's first King, King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud. Abdulaziz's multiple marriages bore the kingdom several male heirs. Those sons that shared a mother, Hooglund claims, inevitably grew closer together and as such political power depended on a prince's position in matrilineal descent. \

With the Abdulaziz's son Fahd's ascension to the throne, the clan around Fahd's mother and his seven brothers, the Al-Sudairi (after Fahd's mother) became the most influential clan of the Al Saud family. Stemming from their fortunate positions in the network of the Al Saud family, Fahd's brothers and their sons filled influential political positions in the Kingdom. Most notably, Fahd's brother Sultan was appointed Minister of Defence, Nayif was appointed Minister of Interior and Salman became governor of Riyadh. Sultan's first son Bandar was appointed Saudi ambassador to the US and his second son Khalid became commander of the Saudi military in the Persian Gulf War (Hooglund, 1993).

The very intricate details of the relationships between the thousands of members of the Al Saud family go beyond the scope of this research. Hooglund genealogical account shows that influence stems from intermarriages between clans and families, positions in matrilineal descent of the many wives to the respective incumbent kings, and marriages between members of the Al Saud and families of influential religious clergy or affluent tribal leaders. Hooglund's data serves to illustrate that access political power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does indeed result from network locations. It is noted, however, that especially in a monarchical state system where political concerns cannot be voiced in elections or plebiscites, it can be expected that the royal family and connections to them are the only access point to decision-making. The findings therefore show no conclusive insights about the promotion of networked social capital via network positions, but only about the access-dependent structure of Saudi society.

As will be laid out in more detail in the analysis of data on the context of network formation in Saudi Arabia, the legitimacy of the Saudi royal family rested upon living life according to Islam and their custodianship of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. This required a very symbiotic relationship between the religious establishment and the royal family, cemented first and foremost in the marriage between the Al Saud and the Al Sheikh that provided the firmament for the Saudi state[5]. An understanding of this symbiosis provides us with some insight into the connection between Islamic norms and values and the aforementioned access-dependent structure of Saudi society. In order to understand the idea fully, I will provide a brief excursus into Saudi law-making.

5.3.1. Excursus: Islamic law-making

Islamic law is considered as an "'open text', the very 'internal discursive construction' of which requires constant interpretation and commentary" (Zaman, 2002: 38). As such, the community of Saudi '*ulama* uses commentary and the issuance of fatwas, in order to elaborate, expand and modify the Islamic law in order for it to fit the contemporary circumstances of our time (Zaman, 2002).

Islamic legal thought and constitutionalism is a sort of guiding principle of how Allah foresaw correct and righteous moral standards and behaviour in social realms. The sources from which

[5] More on this in the part on the context of network formation

scholars extract this legal information are the Qur'an for one and secondly the Sunna or Hadith. These are the roots of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) which have to be interpreted by eligible scholars (the '*ulama*) in a process called *ijtihad*, in order to derive the Islamic law (*fiqh*) (Quraishi, 2008). Islam links prosperity in worldly affairs to prosperity in religious affairs. Thus, the development and progress of both are linked to one another. As the worldly affairs change over time, so should the understanding of religious affairs. *Ijtihad* therefore has to be conducted in light of the contemporary circumstances of the scholar's environment in order to derive a *fiqh* that is compatible with current worldly affairs (Al-jabri, 2009).

The Islamic civilization always experienced the practice of politics under the legitimizing umbrella of religion. When it comes to Islamist movements, in the past they were conducted in the name of creed ('*aqida*), but today they are conducted in the name of the *shari'a*. Islamists structure their political campaigns around their vision of applying the s*hari'a*. The root of this shift in the nature of extremist movements lies in politics, not in religion: Disagreement in creed came about in one single social realm that hosted several political and ideological environments, disagreeing first on the succession of the prophet Mohamed after his death and second on the consolidation and standardization of Islam. Now, as social systems started varying not only in degree but also in kind (capitalism, communism, secularism, Islamic system etc.), the survival of the Islamic system was threatened and the application of *shari'a* became the focus of political schisms (Al-Jabri, 2009).

In the post-colonial Arab world, although most states reached independence, the stencil for state craft still is the Western one, an ideology that never enjoyed much legitimacy and recognition among Saudis. Significant numbers of citizens demanded the "recognition and re-introduction of Islamic law" (Quraishi, 2008). The original judicial system laid out for states of an Islamic civilization advocates a split between the so called *fiqh*, which consists of non-binding fatwas, and *siyasa*, which are the *fiqh* rulings adopted as binding legislation by a *Qadi*, an Islamic judge, for the sake of creating mandatory rules in order to ensure the public good (*maslaha*). This model is not compatible with the Western state model (Quraishi, 2008).

During colonial periods, a certain amount of *fiqh* rulings, mainly concerning family law, remained in the legislations of Saudi Arabia, but after gaining independence, many people asked for the official adoption of Islamic law. This is either feasible by stating in a country's constitutions that the *shari'a* is the sole or at least the main source for legislation, as is the case for Saudi Arabia, or by adopting non-binding fatwas as binding laws. Evidently this raises

ambiguities, because interpretations of the *usul al-fiqh* will not always yield congruent results, congruent *fiqh*. Also, the concept of *shari'a* is a much larger one than just a set of doctrinal rules (Quraishi, 2008).

The most important principle of *shari'a* is serving and preserving the public good. *Shari'a* is supposed to free man from his whims and fancies in order for him to be a servant to God (Chaudhry, 1998). Of course the divine text does not foresee every single situation in a man's life, which is why the '*ulama* as the religious deputies of the ruling authority of a state have the important responsibility to "keep civil society running, safe and orderly" (Quraishi, 2008). Due to this need for public order, law making lays in the hands of this sovereign power. To give an example: If a married couple decides to seek divorce, they shall go to see a mufti, who can help resolve their conflict. If both, husband and wife, agree to the mufti's non-binding fatwa, there are no further problems. If, however, either of the two cannot come to terms with the mufti's ruling, or there are disagreements arising from *ijtihad* on the *fiqh*, there needs to be an authority to turn to, which has the power to force the disputing parties to follow legal obligations

In their search for *fiqh*, the scholars do a lot of guess work. They try to guess what the legislator (i.e. God) meant by his judgement or ruling and they look at him as though he were a human judge. But this guess work leaves too narrow a scope to define a preference for one or another guess that the scholar came up with. Another issue with interpretation is that the guess work depends heavily on language and the connection between a word and its meaning that the scholar creates. Decision here depend on "surmise, not certainty. Hence, all jurisprudence based on this method is entirely presumptive" (Al-Jabri, 2009: 83).

It is important to understand that *fiqh* and *shari'a* are not one and the same thing. *Fiqh* is actually what we should refer to when we talk about the actual legislation on the ground, whereas *shari'a* is indeed the divine legislation, the Islamic Law with a capital L. There also needs to be a profound understanding and recognition that the scholars producing *fiqh* through *ijtihad* are but fallible humans and might not be able to articulate God's exact law (Quraishi, 2008).

Correct methods to reach *fiqh* are highly important. Mere analogy puts the public good as a cause for the legislations, but fails to explain why, for example, four witnesses need to be present in an adultery charge or why a thief's hand should be cut off. The rationality of rulings

and especially punishments gets lost. He who conducts analogy would come up with the explanation that a thief's hand must be cut off, because it is the instrument with which he committed the deed, but would fail to explain why an adulterer's genital is not amputated as that was the instrument he committed his crime with.

If the occasion of the Qur'anic revelation (*asab al-nuzul*) and the intention (*maqasid*) of legislation are considered in the process of *ijtihad*, a more comprehensive understanding of *shari'a* and hence a more just *fiqh* can be derived. That way one would realize that it is the lack of walls in the desert back in the times of the prophet that made adultery visible to four witnesses and didn't allow for thieves to be imprisoned, hence their hands needed to be chopped off in order to mark these people as criminals (Al-Jabri, 2009). Evidently, this kind of correct interpretation requires a vast amount of knowledge about the chronology of the revelation of the Qur'an, an intricate understanding of the Arabic language and a comprehensive grasp of all relevant contextual and contemporary features of Arab society at the time of the revelation, in order to position and interpret a judicial provision correctly. This incredible knowledge and experience is what ascribes the '*ulama* its extraordinary position as the religious authority of Saudi Arabia and its high social standing.

What often irritates people studying or trying to understand Islamic law is that fact that what Islamic law actually says is to be found in an amalgam of scholarly articles drafted by the '*ulama*. This is where the *fiqh* is located, which is about comparable to a law professor from a university in a Western state being able to legislate the law of a country (Quraishi, 2008). However, this relativity of *shari'a* and the need for its interpretation is at its essence and at the essence of Islamic life for if life were perfect on earth already, "neither life nor laws would have any meaning" (Al-Jabri, 2009: 94). Regarding the *shari'a* as an extension of God's will and his provisions for good life on earth (a discussion about the appropriateness of regarding the *shari'a* as such would go far beyond the scope of this research), the religious interpretations of the '*ulama* in form of legal commentary and the issuance of fatwas are the moral yardstick and juridical compass for social order in Saudi Arabia.

Hooglund's (1993) genealogical data confirms that the royal family maintained close relations with the '*ulama*, especially via intermarriages with the Al Sheikh. The founder of the Saudi dynasty, Mohamed Ibn Saud, for example, married a daughter of the religious reformer Ibn Al

Wahhab, who was the founder of the Wahabbi branch of Islam that is the basis for Saudi politics. More intermarriages followed suit to reinforce the political alliance between the families (Hooglund, 1993). This influence and responsibility derived partly from their position in the network of the ruling elite allows the '*ulama* to preserve the identity of the Saudi society, while simultaneously giving them the authority and means to make adjustments to it via the de jure legitimacy their religious interpretations have. Adding to this, the monopoly of the '*ulama* on filtering what religious information is spread to the Saudi society reinforces this power.

The findings indicate that in a system where political influence can only be wielded through access to the ruling elite, strategic network positions are pivotal and indeed have a facilitating effect on norm diffusion and access to information. Keeping in mind that this research does not claim generalisability of the data beyond the scope of Saudi Arabia, it is noted, however, the data does not give conclusive insights into whether network positions would have the same effect in a less access-dependent setting.

5.4. The network's context as a contingency

Over the course of the 20th century, many Saudis travelled to Europe for academic purposes and intended to bring back with them ideas about development and modernisation for their country. The import of Western concepts such as nationalism and secularisation has been of interest for numerous scholars concerned with the Middle East (see e.g. Hourani, 1991, Said, 1978). Many of them observe that the implantation of nationalism and Western modernity in the guise of Arab socialism, championed by the Ba'athist regimes of Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Hafez al-Assad's Syria, failed. The renewed trial of bringing nationalism and Western modernity to the Arab world in form of Gamal Abd El Nasser's pan-Arabism was also brought to its knees after the humiliating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war as well as the Lebanese civil war (Shkolnik, 2012). Shkolnik (2012) finds that Saudis therefore regarded the Western modernity and its secularist, nationalist principles as "foreign transplants that contradicted Middle Eastern tribal culture" (Shkolnik, 2012).

In the global struggle over supremacy, the Middle East has long felt inferior to the West after the decline of the "golden age of Islam". Shkolnik (2012) argues that Islam had always been defining and central to identity in the Middle East. Believing that most secular movements in the Arab world had failed to put the region at par with the West, the return to Islam as a political ideology that had brought an era of scientific advance and high culture to the region seemed

attractive to Arabs. Viewing themselves as the "true followers of God" (Shkolnik, 2012), Arabs began to once again see themselves superior to the West in at least one aspect of social and political life.

Historically, identification with a territorially bounded state has always been weak in most of the Middle East. Characterised by an arid climate, punctuated with trading oases and inhabited by nomadic tribes, the region always focused more on sub-state level units of social organisation such as religious groups, the tribe and the city or the worldwide community of Muslims, the Umma (Fawcett, 2005). When colonial powers imposed borders on the Middle East in the beginning of the 20th century, loyalties did not shift away from sub-state identities and loyalties often transcended the artificial state boundaries. Moreover, a sentiment of lost cultural unity resulting from the newly imposed boarders gave rise to what is known as "pan-Islam". Fawcett (2005) finds that both, the enduring loyalties to supra-state identities and the loyalty to sub-state social units, challenged the political, social and cultural boundaries of the nation state.

Cooke and Lawrence (2005), too, argue that the weak integration of Islamic states and societies gives relevance to the use of the network as "a metaphor for understanding the dynamics of Islamic history and Islamic civilisation" (Cooke and Lawrence, 2005: 52). They find that mechanisms that encourage social interaction are rooted in networks of tribal, religious or local affiliation much more than in Saudi nationality. Religious establishments wielded considerable moral influence over politics in Muslim-majority countries and such establishments are for the most part geographically extensive and independent of the state. Rooted in the hitherto described border-transcending relationship between state and society – prime characteristics of pre-modern Islamic history -, Cooke and Lawrence (2005) argue that the network metaphor captures the coalitions, alliances and social operations based on the common belief in and interest for life according to Islamic norms.

Cooke and Lawrence, quoting Lapidus, further claim that the state in Muslim societies should best be understood as "one of the dense knots where many network lines crossed" (2005: 53), as opposed to an image of Muslim society as a hierarchical structure. Islamic thinkers themselves use the network metaphor as a prism though which to view the world: instead of a world with an overall pattern, orthodox Islam views the universe as a product of God's continual creation and recreation (Lapidus as quoted in Cooke and Lawrence, 2005). Islamic history and its social order consequently are not to be viewed as an Islamic order, but in terms

of "movements and actions correctly performed at each given moment in accord with God's will; in the same way society is an ever-living, never completed network of actions" (Lapidus as quoted in Cooke and Lawrence, 2005: 53). As such, the network metaphor is not only a useful tool for researchers to understand Muslim society, but in fact is an integral part of Muslim self-perception (Cooke and Lawrence, 2005).

Cooke and Lawrence suggest that the network metaphor gained more importance throughout the colonial period that defined the Middle East in the 19th and 20th centuries. As the drawing of artificial boundaries tore ethnic groups apart, the cultural schism between the political apparatus and society was reinforced. Islamic values continued to be adhered to and practiced across state boundaries and the network metaphor is able to provide coherence to this image of Islam as a unifying bond in modern times as well: Muslim elites did not identify with a position in the imperial hierarchy, but rather with family prestige, family connections and the like (Cooke and Lawrence, 2005).

Much like politics elsewhere, Muslim politics in Saudi Arabia, too, are characterised by a competition over the degree of control exercised by the state. This dichotomy is commonly referred to as the "public" and the "private" or in other words the boundaries of legitimate state and non-state actors (Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004). Unlike politics elsewhere, however, the setting of said boundaries in Muslim politics is also mediated between religious scholars and tribal leaders, resulting in fluid boundaries between the public and the private. Data from the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set can illustrate the degree to which religion and politics are closely entangled and the boundary between public and private is blurred with respect to religion in Saudi Arabia:

Indicator	Degree
Government Regulation of religion Index	**7.78** (10 = High government regulation, 0 = low government regulation)

How is freedom of religion described?	**2** (0 = Law provides and government generally respects, 1 = law provides and government respects but problems exist, 2 = limited and/or rights not protected, 3 = does not exist)
Does the government generally respect the right to freedom of religion in practice?	**2** (0 = yes, 1 = Yes, but exceptions or restrictions are mentioned, 2 = the phrase generally respects is not used)
Government funding of religion Index	**8** (0 = low funding, 12 – high funding)

Source: Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set

Saudi Arabia continues to maintain distinctive features of its traditional tribal society. Seflan (1980) finds that altouthough having opened up to modern life within the boundaries of Islamic law and cultural tradition, the rather archaic characteristics of tribalism continue to be of crucial importance in the Kingdom. This encourages Saudis to proudly attach the name of their tribe to their surnames, kinship group or clan and identifying mainly via their tribe in administrative, social or economic activities (Al-Seflan, 1980). As Eickelmann and Piscatori remark further, "the religious and moral meanings invested in the family also provide a standard by which individuals may assess whether their governments and other social groups fit into the larger moral and Islamic order" (2004: 7).

Maisel (2015) remarks that, for centuries, Saudi Arabian tribes struggled to integrate into the national hierarchy, even though they remain the most important traditional form of social organisation. Forging alliances with tribal leaders only became relevant again during periods of consolidating political and economic power in the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This integration represented a rather forceful process during which tribes were subjugated to adapting to the newly founded kingdom's political, economic and social realities and were forced to accept the new authority over the territory of Saudi Arabia in the hands of the Al Saud. At first, the tribal groups fought the subjugation to the Saudi government, but in the years of rapid development and state building, the tribes lost their positions of significant influence (Maisel, 2015).

Researchers from the King Saud University in Riyadh found that the tribe in Saudi Arabia is the basis for stability of social order. They argue that the dismantling of the tribal system and an evolution towards the Western-type of an individualist society would cause the dissolution

of social unity in the country. The tribe is a form of representation for the interests of Saudi citizens and any social or nation-wide cultural homogeneity is owed to the tribes. The researchers argue that the government's ability to take on many of the service-provision tasks traditionally in the responsibility of the tribes tempted tribal leaders to enter into contracts and agreements with the government to share power and influence, but the historical heritage of the tribal system was never completely given up[6].

The researchers argue that from the point of view of the Saudi government, the tribes were considered as a cause for instability and disruption that keeps Saudi citizens aware of their local loyalties instead of allowing for a nationalistic sentiment to grow and thus stripping the government off its sovereignty to represent and also control the Saudi citizens collectively. The researchers find that the government considered the co-existence with tribes as a sign of weakness and surrender. Before a government existed, tribal order in a way was a solution to a political problem in the sense that the tribes replaced the state where it was absent in its duties of service provision, mediation and law-making. Some scholars argue that the tribes no longer need to replace the state and they therefore lost their importance and influence in Saudi politics[7].

The only sector where tribal groups really found recognition was the Saudi Arabian military. The Saudi Arabian National Guard, commanded by the Saudi King, organised its units according to tribal affiliation and generally drew a lot of personnel from the tribes. As Maisel (2015) states, while the Saudi Arabian National Guard's first and foremost mission is one of securitising the Kingdom and especially the protection of the royal family and the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, the National Guard also transformed into "a large-scale umbrella organisation with hospitals, factories, and other facilities, which first serve the enlisted tribal members and their families" (Maisel, 2015). Researchers from King Saud University in Riyadh argue in line with Maisel's findings that the Saudi state did not deliberately abolish tribal affiliation and tribal culture, but instead built on these social entities and used them for their own benefit in roles whose reach was limited[8].

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[6] الطبقية الاجتماعية في دول الخليج العربي: الأشكال ـ المظاهر ـ الأسباب ـ النتائج
(http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/hujailan/in/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AC.doc)

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

Other scholars argue, however, that the role of the tribe is as important as ever, as the Saudi government still hasn't achieved cultural homogeneity in the country and a nationwide sense of belonging. The researchers argue that the reason for this failure is rooted in the very origins of the Saudi state, i.e. military expansion, a highly diverse cultural and regional nature of the society as well as the primitive view of power as belonging to the conquerors of territory[9]. The researchers found that tribes continued to view nationalism as a threat to their power, which they argue, is the underlying reason for keeping leadership decentralised and strengthening those regional power bases that could weaken those who hold political decision-making power.

About one hundred tribes with numerous sub-tribes of "different size, origin and influence" (Maisel, 2015) make up the Saudi Arabian tribal landscape today. Having originated from sedentary nomadic lifestyles, most tribes today live in urbanised or rural areas. Areas with a high concentration of tribal settlers were referred to as tribal homelands until the 1960s. Even though the concept as such was abolished, tribal settlers until today are especially highly concentrated in these former homelands, thus dividing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into tribal governorates of sorts. For example, the regions around Afif and Dawadimi used to be the homeland of the Utayba tribe, where Utaybis until this day form the commercial, administrative and social elite. Likewise, the Dawasir dominate the region around Sulayil, the Shammar dominate Hail, and the Bani Ghamid and Zahran dominate al-Baha (Maisel, 2015). In larger urbanised settings, tribal domination over certain city districts exist as well.

As such, the modernisation and urbanisation of the kingdom did not result in a disintegration of territorial and cultural tribalism; on the contrary, it is as alive as ever (Maisel, 2015) and as Saudi anthropologist Saad Sawoyan argues, the separation between nomads and settlers has lost its meaning (Sawoyan as quoted in Maisel, 2015). Instead, he argues, tribes distinguish themselves into more superior and inferior groups based on origin, genealogy and pedigree as well as the tribe's original pastoral occupation, for example as camel or sheep herders or farmers. The royal house of Al Saud has their place in this hierarchy that is considered as controversial and thus gladly avoided by considering the Al Saud as the apex of Saudi society and granting it the status of "super tribe" (Sawoyan, 1977). In summary, Maisel depicts contemporary tribalism in Saudi Arabia as follows:

[9] *" ويعود جذور هذا الافتقار إلى طبيعة نشأة الدولة التي كانت قائمة على التوسع العسكري، وطبيعة المجتمع الخليجي شديد التنوّع ثقافيا ومناطقياً، إضافة إلى مشكلة النظرة البدائية لموضوع الحكم والسلطة، باعتبارها امتيازاً فريداً ومغلقاً بالمنتصرين، كل هذا جعل النظرة"* (Ibid.)

"*Tribalism is no longer an economic form of sustenance; instead it represents a type of behaviour that is based on shared values and customs as well as a common belief in the hierarchical patronage system. Primarily, tribal members look for support within their own families or kin groups. There has been a surge in different forms of tribal affirmations, self-representations, and accounts*" (Maisel, 2015).

On a smaller scale, the family is the most important social unit for "ritual observance" and acts as an "influential site of religious and worldly knowledge" (Hardacre as quoted in Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004: 83) between generations. The centrality and meaning of the social ties within the family are thus and integral part of understanding Muslim politics. Some scholars suggest that the role that family networks play in Muslim politics depend on the political system and the degree of control that a Muslim state exercises over social and economic life (see for example Carr and Hardacre). Eickelmann and Piscatori, on the other hand, defend the view that the political relevance of family networks depend on contingencies such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and nationalism (Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004). Carr calls attention to the necessity of a given firm institutional structure for individual family members to succeed on their own. Carr finds, that as society is in itself prone to frequent changes and the political institutions of the Middle East tended to be unstable, the support of the family network has to be considered as crucial for successful individual enterprise of any nature (Carr as quoted in Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004).

Eickelmann and Piscatori (2004) conclude from their studies that the relationship between family and state has to be considered as reciprocal in the aim for a comprehensive understanding of Muslim politics as a networked affair. In Saudi Arabia, not only does the relevance of family networks result out of the particularities of the political apparatus, but the state was itself built on family ties and its very survival rests on the social ties in form of a marital alliance between the house of Saud and the Al Sheikhs. They find that families are nodes in a broader social network that represent the meaning and values ascribed to them by the religious norms and customs that family members and those external to the family adhere to. In the Saudi case, the legitimacy of the Al Saud regime rests on the picture of the Al Saud family as the guardians of the holy sanctuaries Mecca and Medina. As such custodians, the Al Saud are expected to represent an "exemplary Muslim family, standing at the apex of aggregations of families that collectively comprise Saudi society" (Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004: 88). Alleged improprieties, such as corruption or illicit sexual activities, hence are targets

for regime-critics that seek to undermine the legitimacy of the Saudi political apparatus (Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004).

Fawcett (2005) observed that where the state failed to accommodate to the calls for more Islamic political identity, informal networks in forms of schools, health clinics and welfare institutions formed to build Islamic counter-societies to contest the legitimacy of the non-Islamic state. While it could have been a matter of generations to get used to the artificial borders imposed by the colonial powers and accept the political organisation around the concept of the nation state, Arab rulers continuously failed to accommodate to their people's Islamic political identity and networks of counter elites continued to successfully deploy sub- and supra-state identities.

Fawcett explains that this mobilisation of opposition forces "pushed state builders into authoritarian strategies in which tightly knit ruling cores are constituted through extensive use of sub-state loyalties (kin, tribe, sect), while supra-state identities – Arabism and Islam – are deployed as official legitimating ideologies" (Fawcett, 2005: 157). Given the continuous popularity of Islam and pan-Islam as sources of identity, a state identity never developed as a basis of legitimacy for the Middle Eastern states. Strategic political goals and the incongruence of state borders and ethnic groups hinder rulers from establishing themselves as champions of Islamic ideas. At the same time, state identities still have not come to rival the supra-state identification with pan-Islam (Anderson as quoted in Fawcett, 2005). Saudi Arabia answered to this dilemma by "statising" the supra-state ideas of pan-Islam and made political Islam the official state ideology in response (Fawcett, 2005). Ayoob finds that the success of such "transplanted forms of Islamism" (Ayoob, 2008: 131) turned out to be dependent on the degree to which regimes managed to contextualise it in light of domestic contingencies. As such, most movements and networks of political Islam, whether in the opposition or in power, are mainstream ideological movements and nationally bounded. The integration of local tribal leaders, merchant elites and the religious clergy into policy-making was thus the only way to secure reasonable support for implementation of political Islam in Saudi Arabia (Ayoob, 2008).

Scholars from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, in line with Ayoob and Fawcett, note that the political system in Saudi Arabia integrates the 'Saudi way of doing things' and the general approach to the way of life. As such, the Saudi basic law of governance is drafted based on the social dimensions that have traditionally been govern Saudi society: ascribing little no importance to the role of the individual, but making the family the nucleus of the society and

recognising the importance of family in Islam[10]. As such, Article 9 of the Saudi basic law of governance states precisely that the family is the nucleus of society and its members based on the Islamic faith[11] and article 10 of the law stipulates that the state vows to strengthen the bonds of the family and preserve its Arab and Islamic values[12].

The different accounts of the role of tribalism and families in Saudi politics and the place of both in the national political order presented by various scholars show clear indications for the influence of historical developments and geographical and political specificities on the rituals and physical constructions that mobilise the mechanisms which encourage social interaction and relationship building in Saudi Arabia. European colonialism, the failure of alternative ideologies to Islamism, the urbanisation of Saudi Arabia, the geographical locations of tribal homelands, the founding of the Saudi state on the marital alliance between the Al Saud and the Al Sheikh, the particularities of the Saudi political apparatus, etc. – all these contextual factors are a contingency for the formation and maintenance of tribal, religious and family networks in Saudi Arabia today. The findings thus give clear indications for the theorised importance of the specific context in which networks form for the outcome of network formations and the role of the networks themselves.

5.5. The positive effect of service exchange and collective action on an actor's reputation and identity

Individuals gain access to Islamic symbols via their network ties and are able to transcend geographical boundaries and thus spread Islamic social capital within the worldwide '*Umma*. As Fawcett (2005) as well as Eickelmann and Piscatori (2004) find in their respective studies, Islamic behaviours of taking part in pilgrimage, praying, studying the Qur'an and living by the prophets conduct not only brings this Islamic social capital to life, but also reinforces it. Part

[10] لمجتمع السعودي بوربوينت النسق السياسي (http://www.kau.edu.sa/Files/0002329/Subjects/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%20%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%82%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A.ppt)

[11] النظام الأساسي للحكم, المادة التاسعة,"الاسرة نواة المجتمع السعودي، ويربى افرادها على اساس العقيدة الاسلامية..."

[12] " تحرص الدولة على توثيق أواصر الأسرة والحفاظ على قيمها العربية والإسلامية ورعاية جميع أفرادها وتوفير الظروف المناسبة لتنمية ملكاتهم وقدراتهم", المادة العاشرة, النظام الأساسي للحكم

of the Islamic social capital is the moral solidarity to fellow Muslims that leads Muslim networks to be a reliable alternative to the provision of social services that the state fails to provide (see Fawcett, 2005 and Cooke and Lawrence, 2005 for reference). 94.4% of respondents to the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set indicate that the service to others is very important (62.1%) or rather important (32.3%) to them. These findings indicate the existence of a group ethos inherent in Islamic networks that encourages service exchange.

Volpi (2011) in his study on Islamic social institutions refers to Mancur Olsen's argument on selective incentives as an important impetus to get collective action going. Such positive incentives in the form of rewards or negative incentives in the form of punishment are the only way to stimulate a rational individual to take part in collective action, according to Olsen (Olsen as quoted in Volpi, 2011). Social movements, such as Islamic social institutions, and the horizontal social networks in which they are embedded, offer well-paying jobs, flexible work schedules and access to private schools for members' children as benefits (Volpi, 2011). As such, the purpose of service exchange motivated by Islamic values is enforced by shifting the balance between costs and rewards for helping others in favour of rewards.

However, Volpi finds that the resource mobilisation theory forwarded by Olsen is not entirely applicable to Islamic social institutions (ISIs). His study of ISIs shows that, in fact, "the very provision of benefits is creating a tension between the stated aims or goals of the ISI and the needs of the Islamist movement" (2011: 151). For example, if an ISI sets out to provide free of charge medical assistance to those in need, the ISI will require a pool of educated doctors that are incentivised to work on a voluntary basis and the overall Islamic movement seeks to expand its outreach. Providing benefits to the middle class in order to meet the demand for doctors and to expand its membership base, the ISI cannot prioritise the needy over the middle class (Volpi, 2011). In the quest of catering to the needs of the middle class members of ISIs and the Islamist movement in which they are embedded, strong middle class networks are forged and reinforced. As a result, ISIs are de facto embedded in middle class social networks. As Volpi concludes from his analysis:

"*As participants engage in ISI activities, a strong sense of teamwork, trust and solidarity develops and new social networks are created. By bringing social networks, Islamist and non-Islamist, together in the provision of charity, ISIs facilitate the introduction of an activist or Islamist worldview to new social circles*" (2011: 153).

Volpi's findings raise doubts on whether it is purely the Islamic group ethos that encourages service exchange and collective action, or in other words whether service exchange and collective action are a feature of Islamic networked social capital or simply of networks. The findings give no conclusive insight into what really encourages service exchange and collective action – even if it is in the name of Islam.

Service exchange in networks such as tribes, i.e. networks that don't exist with the purpose to help the needy, has been a longstanding tradition. In her research on Saudi Arabian society as a contribution to the American Federal Research Division's country study on Saudi Arabia, Eleanor Abdella Doumato (1993) observes that the tribal leader secures and maintains his influence through his ability to mediate disputes among members of his tribe and to govern the tribe's members' coexistence under the banner of consensus. She finds that these tasks require the tribal leaders to have "a detailed grasp of tribal affairs, a reputation for giving good advice, and generosity" (Doumato, 1993: 69). Doumato concludes that the process of arbitration that is central to the tribes existence and a precondition for taking action as a tribe, reflects the "tribe's egalitarian ethos" (Doumato, 1993: 69). She observes further that the neglect of building consensus and ascertaining every tribe's member's opinion on a matter in fact undermines the tribe's leader's influence and his leadership is effective only as long as it conforms to the tribes expectations of arbitration (Doumato, 1993).

The egalitarian ethos extends beyond the limits of a single tribe. It is as much the task of the leaders to mediate disputes among their own as it is their task to broker relationships among competing kinship groups, clans and tribes. Raiding the bounty of other tribes was the most common way to secure one's own survival and the mechanism behind continuous economic redistribution that is conducive to a tribe's status as strong and successful. Doumato observes that tribes sometimes refrain from raiding other tribes and instead seek the protection of their property and lives from other tribes in exchange for money. The tribal leader who accepted money from another tribe had to ensure that those who paid for protection would be safeguarded or compensated in the case of losses and damages. In line with the egalitarian group ethos, Doumato observes that the tribal leader's continued influence could only be secured if he shared the soils of raids and the protection racket with the members of his tribe. As such, tribal dynamics are very much a client-patron relationship stemming from an group ethos that encourages equality (Doumato, 1993).

Of course, tribal leaders in modern times don't conduct raids anymore to secure their status and economic survival. Nowadays, they themselves turn to the patrons of the royal family as clients and the relationship between the monarchy and the tribal leaders can be seen in quite the same framework as the traditional relationship between tribal leaders and members of the tribe[13]. Doumato draws the following parallels between the two kinds of relationships:

> *"Just as the tribal shaykh was expected to mediate disputes and assure the welfare of his group by receiving tribute and dispensing largess, governors in the provinces and the king himself continue the custom of holding an open audience (majlis) at which any tribesman or other male citizen could gain a hearing."* (Doumato, 1993: 70)

The institutions of state bureaucracy, a welfare system, housing grants, government contracts and the like replaced the direct handouts of food and clothing that used to be redistributed among members of a tribe. Doumato finds that the Saudi tribes have come to terms with the political authority of the royal family and there superior place in the societal hierarchy. As such, loyalty to the state was never a matter of nationalism (as has been thoroughly discussed above), but a matter of loyalty to the Al Saud as a family at the apex of Saudi society and as the focus of the Islamic nation (Doumato, 1993).

These findings indicate that in the case of tribes and their extended idea of the Islamic Umma and the Al Saud royals as a super-tribe, service exchange really does stem from a group ethos and indeed has a positive effect on an agent's reputation (in this case on the tribal leader's or royal's reputation as a good and legitimate patron). By themselves, the findings don't give conclusive evidence about whether the egalitarian group ethos stems from Islamic norms and values and serves to make Islamic networked social capital a resource for the group members. However, seeing the findings in light of the previously presented data, tribal norms and values can almost be equated to Islamic norms and values.

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[13] We remember at this point the findings from Thornton's (2015), Maisel's (2015) and Sawoyan's (1977) studies: A spread of tribal norms into the whole of Saudi Arabian society has taken place as the effect of Islam "theologising" the tribal mentality and redefining the tribe as the entire *Umma* of Muslims, "creating in effect a 'super tribe' that transcends mere blood as the bonding agent" (Thornton, 2015). At the same time, the royal house of Al Saud has their place in this hierarchy that is considered as the apex of Saudi society and granting the family the status of "super tribe" (Sawoyan, 1977). Maisel (2015) concludes that the tribe is no longer a form of economic survival, but rather a representation of a kind of behaviour that is rooted in shared customs and behaviours, as well as the belief in the hierarchical patronage system.

5.6. The positive effect of network overlaps on norm diffusion and identity building

The previous data analysis has shown that networks forge collective identities via shared norms and values that is specific to the Saudi Arabian context. In the overlap between networks of family and tribe, which socialise individuals in accordance to Islamic norms, and being a member of a society at the apex of which the religious clergy (i.e. the '*ulama*) governs all political, social and judicial life, lies a significant confirmation and reinforcement of the prevalence of Islamic social capital. Assuming for a second that Islamic social capital were transmitted in the social ties to the family and the tribe, but that public life were governed according to, let's say, the social capital stemming from the zeitgeist of the European enlightenment, individuals would be navigating through social ties that host very diverse social capital. The "switching", as White calls it, between family networks transmitting Islamic social capital and the network of the entire Saudi society in which an intellectual elite governs law making and correct moral conduct (hypothetically) according to the spirit of the European enlightenment – thus passing on non-Islamic social capital – would lead to an individual's identity being the outcome of a constant navigation process between the two different networks and their social capitals. As the analysis has shown, both, networks of family and tribe and the network of Saudi society, morally governed by '*ulama*, host, transmit and confirm Islamic social capital.

The data confirms that an overlap in networks exists, but does not explicitly show that these overlaps in network membership reinforce an actor's identity in continuously reaffirmed conformity to Islamic norms and values. It is likely that it is the case, but the data does not conclusively indicate the proposition's validity.

In addition to the overlap in family networks and the society network, another important overlap exists: Membership in the networks of the family and the tribe, that socialise an individual in accordance to Islamic norms, reinforced by the Islamic social capital transmitted to the network of Saudi society by its most senior members, the '*ulama*, are likely to lead to the desire to help the poor. As Eickelman and Piscatori show in their analysis, overlaps in professional, religious, political or economic ties form networks that spread information about and interpretations of Islam. The collective existence of such informal networks works to constrain the arbitrariness of the state and the degree of control exercised by it, even without

centralised action or formal leadership. As Bill describes, these informal networks are shaped and re-shaped according to the interests of their members and the stability of networks is never guaranteed; especially as many individual members often belong to various networks simultaneously (Bill as quoted in Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004).

Joining a collective action network that provides such services, may enforce, develop and stabilise the social capital attained through networks of family and tribe and the network of the Saudi society. However, as has been found in the data analysis on collective action and service exchange, it cannot be proven that the desire to help others stems from networked Islamic social capital or whether it may actually result from the network structure itself. As such, in the case of family and tribal networks that overlap with collective action networks, the desire to help may be encouraged through the overlap, but the findings do not provide conclusive insight into whether said overlaps strengthen Islamic norms and values per se.

Whereas quite some research has been conducted on associational life and civil society in Yemen and Egypt, Saudi scholars only recently started publishing about Saudi civil society. Out of the lack of information and academic material on the topic resulted the belief among Western academia that a civil society comparable to its Western understanding does not exist in Saudi Arabia. Contrary to this belief, however, "NGOs, [the] charitable sector, and associations have been major agents for socio-political dialogue and social reform, and provide an essential arena for discussion and dissent between the governing Al Sa'ud [sic] family and the people" (Montagu, 2010), in addition to their respective social and charitable missions. Montagu (2010) finds that despite a lack of formalised pluralism, there exists an integrative exchange between the government, the Al Saud family and the networks of civil society. She claims that this is made possible, because contrary to most authoritarian regimes, where power lies outside the state, power in Saudi Arabia lies within the state, as the ruling royals of the Al Saud family effectively are the state. As such, there are relations of interchange between the civil society and the state and the civil society functions within the state, with their activity crossing the boundaries of public and private (Montagu, 2010). Fandy describes the phenomenon as follows:

> "*The [Al Saud] may be hated as bureaucrats, regional governors, or heads of particular government agencies, yet they are loved as a magnanimous family at the level of civil society. It is that liminal nature of the royal family that makes it inside government and civil society at the same time*." (Fandy as quoted in Montagu, 2010)

Various scholars (see Kazziha, 1997 or Carapico, 1998) call for an understanding of civil society "not as a binominal element, either there or not, but a variable that assumes different forms under different circumstances" (Carapico as quoted in Montagu, 2010). Viewing Saudi civil society as such, they are everywhere; transmitting Islamic social capital through the social and political discussion about Islam and its traditions and about what makes liberal, conservative or fundamentalist Islam, that takes place not in political parties, but in these broad and informal networks of civic action (Montagu, 2010).

The analysis of data in previous sections has shown that Saudis first and foremost feel loyalty to the Islamic '*Umma* and not the Saudi state. Islam is thus reinforced as the main reference for allegiance and belonging, which reinforces norms of Islam instead of norms of nationalism. Adding membership in local Islamic networks of civil society to the membership in the worldwide Islamic '*Umma,* Montagu finds that the identity schism between the Saudi state and the Saudi society can be overcome, as networks of civic action build bridges "where there is no merging of state and society as common expressions of shared values" (Clapham as quoted in Montagu, 2010) and the only common denominator is Islam.

It has been stated multiple times now, that such networks of civic engagement form cross-cutting bonds among regions with different tribal, ethnic, and cultural origins that often have barely any knowledge about each other. Being members of these networks only, could cause the identities of Saudis to be defined primarily by the Islamic social capital they get transmitted from their families and the Saudi society under the '*ulama,* paired with identities that spring out of tribal rivalries and competition for ethnic, cultural or economic dominance and supremacy. The shared issues that networks of civic action bring to light, allow Saudis to unite as Saudi Arabians (not nationalistically speaking, but socially speaking) and to overcome their primary tribal allegiances. The data thus gives strong indications that it is indeed the overlap between networks of family, tribe, the Saudi society as a whole and various networks of civic action that lead to the specific identity of a Saudi Islamic community.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

> "*The distinctiveness of Muslim politics may be said to lie rather in the specific, if evolving, values, symbols, ideas and traditions that constitute "Islam". […] They may also include a sense of obligation to authority that has been informed as much by social practice as by Quranic injunction, the practices of mystical orders and the established schools of Islamic law*."
>
> - Eickelmann and Piscatori

When looking at the literature presented on the Saudi Arabian political system, we find accounts that approach the particularities of the Kingdom via its monarchical structure, contrasting it to Western monarchies based on questions about religion, tribalism and the nature of power in the hands of the Al Saud royals. Then we find scholars that concentrate on the political economy of the rentier state and its effect of leaving service gaps that societies need to fill somehow else, thus being increasingly disenchanted and distrustful with the regime. Further, we find accounts cantered on the analysis of the oligarchy based on the politics of the house of Saud, the '*ulama* and the members of the council. Finally, there are those scholars that approach Saudi Arabia as a theocracy based on the alliance of Al Saud and Ibn Wahhab as the spiritual-ideological foundation of the regime.

All these accounts give importance to the same things, but from different angles: The importance of Islamic values, the importance of religious authority, the importance of family and tribe and the search for a Saudi identity. Yet all these accounts leave important questions unanswered: How do individuals learn the rules, and why should they subscribe to them? How are organizations matched with individual actors to improve their institutional resources and thus their chances for survival? In other words, what are the social mechanisms that credit and enforce the compliance of individual actors and organisations with institutional rituals and behaviours in the name of Islam?

This research aimed at taking another step back, in order to establish an understanding of the continuous prevalence of Islamic norms in Muslim countries' public life that nurture political Islam. Where do the commonalities of the previously listed theoretical angles, that have been applied to Saudi Arabia so far, leave us? With the prevalence of a certain social capital, i.e. Islamic norms and values, as well as with important network structures that Saudi Arabia seems

to rely upon. For this reason, I set out in this research to explore the explanatory merits of social network theory for the understanding of the prevalence of political Islam in Saudi Arabia.

Having deduced an ontological conceptualisation of networked social capital from social capital theory and social network theory, I continued to present empirical observations relevant to these propositions based on the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set and various secondary anthropological sources. We explored the positive effect of trust on norm diffusion and tie strength. We looked at the positive effect of shared customs and behaviours on mutual recognition and the building of a common identity. We discussed effects of network positions on having access to information and the effect of having information of norm reinforcement. We looked at the importance of the network's context as a contingency for network formation and the importance of the networks in a wider context. We explored the origins of service exchange and collective action in a certain group ethos and the positive effects of both on an actor's reputation management. Finally, we discussed the importance of network overlaps for norm diffusion and identity building.

This research set out to answer the following question:

Given that Muslim-majority countries show an apparent lack of secularisation in politics and given that Islamic norms are kept alive and relevant in the public spheres of Muslim-majority, to what extent does social network theory inform our understanding of the continuously unsecularised politics of Muslim-majority countries and the continued prevalence of Islamic norms in the political sphere as the basis for policy-making and the mobilisation of support for political decisions?

Social network theory does indeed provide crucial explanatory angles for understanding the prevalence of Islamic norms in the public sphere of Saudi Arabia that lie outside the scope of social capital theory alone and also outside the scope of previously applied theories of institutionalism and political economy. The state's role in setting boundaries for social life is the centre focus of most political scientists exploring Muslim politics. However, a reduction to this top-down perspective on policy-making and the negligence of religious authorities, Islamist protest movements and kin groups, for example, distorts the examination of Muslim politics (Eickelmann and Piscatori, 2004). Consequently, redistribution and the division of public and private arenas are "only part of a larger equation. They make sense only when the dichotomisations common to political analysis […] are qualified by a recognition of the

interpenetrating networks that evolve in the social and political life of Muslims" (Eickelmann and Piscator, 2004: 7).

In other words, what defines the Middle East political systems is the mismatch or schism between the state and identity. The region's unique combination of strong sub-state associational identities and pan-Islamic supra-state loyalties limit the sense of patriotism and loyalty to the state where it appeals to its uniqueness and notion of being distinct form other neighbouring nations (Fawcett, 2005). The decline of the military prestige of the Arab world in the 1970s forced Arab nationalism to the background and political Islam swept in at its place as a response to the identity gap. The Saudi Islamic identity is forged and comes into existence as the result of overlaps among Islamic and non-Islamic identities from separate network populations. The mere existence of or access to Islamic networked social capital is not enough for identities to evolve in their full capacity. This insight brings us to the very heart and most valuable and crucial complemntary contribution of White's social network theory to social capital theory: Ties and identities emerge together and these ties make up the social network. Ties and identities are thus inseparable, keeping in mind that ties can be direct, the social tie is essential and constitutive to the identity.

Many theories are designed to explain processes and they require specific content before they can make valid inferences. Great importance must be given to the internal interactions and very context-specific contingencies of a political system, in order to understand its workings. The value for us of a networked metaphor for Islamic civilisation lies not in its descriptive power to capture the essence of Muslim politics and Muslim societies, but rather in its ability to direct us toward an understanding of the interaction between moral images and shifting historical forces that the imagining of Islamic civilization has entailed. The public protection of symbols as acts of political devotion is played off against the conflict and debates that mark the public sphere. As Cooke and Lawrence put it, "[i]ndeed, the analysis of the network as a metaphor for understanding Muslim civilisation cannot be separated from the larger conflicts and debates that have long shaped the imagining of civilisation itself" (Cooke and Lawrence, 2005: 66).

Having established that social network theory has explanatory merits to inform our understanding of the continuously unsecularised politics of Muslim-majority countries and the continued prevalence of Islamic norms in the political sphere as the basis for policy-making and the mobilisation of support for political decisions, further research should be conducted,

using social network theory to establish actual causalities between the networked characteristic of Muslim-majority societies and the prevalence of Islamic norms in their public spheres.

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