Foreign Fighter Recruitment as the Continuation of a War

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ABSTRACT

Recruitment of foreign fighters has become essential to the study of Islamist terrorism, especially following the rise of the Islamic State (IS). There is a widely accepted assumption in the literature on European jihadists that the pathways into Islamist militancy are identical across different cases. In an attempt to find universal answers to what motivates recruitment, researchers often de-contextualize the phenomenon of foreign fighters. Consequently, there is a gap left by previous studies on European jihadists that have not paid much attention to indigenous Muslim communities with recent experiences in conflict and with a high contribution of foreign fighters. The thesis focuses on post-war radical milieus in Europe to understand the specific context of foreign fighter recruitment. The research question that guides the dissertation is: "How do post-war radical milieus in Europe shape the recruitment of foreign fighters?" By stressing the significance of local influencers in the recruitment of Bosnian and Albanian foreign fighters, the dissertation investigates the evolution of post-war radical actors, their activities, and their contribution to radical socialization.

The dissertation asserts that the radical milieu of foreign fighters is highly influenced by authority figures, and their availability in a local context determines the trajectory of recruitment. Post-war radical milieus shape foreign fighter recruitment by providing influencers with the authority to manage structures and narratives that seek to encourage radical action. According to the framework of the dissertation, unlike radical milieus in Western Europe, post-war radical milieus, still in the European context, emerge as a byproduct of a domestically experienced conflict. Therefore, radical influencers were able to build authority and capitalize on it for the sake of recruitment facilitated by the external conditions of the radical milieu's emergence. The impact of influencers in post-war radical milieus is possible due to the conducive environment of post-war fragility.

The theoretical problem that this dissertation aims to address is whether the recruitment of foreign fighters is leader-led or leaderless. Thus, the dissertation focuses on radical actors and activities to stress the importance of locally managed networks as a venue of socialization. To analyze the role of radical influencers in recruitment, the dissertation employs Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS) (Koopmans and Statham 1999), which is a framework situated in social movement theory. This framework allows the combined effects of a context, radical structures, and narratives to be analyzed in relation to foreign fighters. To get insights into the role of radical influencers in managing post-war radical milieus, the dissertation relies on four theoretical propositions concerned with the origin, structures, narratives, and followers of a radical milieu. The dissertation uses case studies and employed a two-stage data collection process, which included extensive desk research of open sources and semi-structured interviews. The dissertation contributes to the literature on foreign fighters by providing insights into social relations, authority, and decision-making processes that concern the departures of foreign fighters to the battlefield.

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"From his house [my son] left for Syria, not from mine"(Spaic 2015). These are the words of a Bosnian father, who testified in 2015 at the trial of a Salafi leader accused of and sentenced for the recruitment of Bosnian IS foreign fighters. This testimony points to the crucial role of local radical influencers in the pre-departure phase of recruitment.

1.1. Research topic

Recruitment of foreign fighters has become essential to the study of Islamist terrorism, especially following the rise of the Islamic State (IS) (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh). Questions such as who gets recruited, how, and why, have been topics of inquiry in research on the anti-Soviet jihadist resistance in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the Mujahedeen units in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Chechnya in the 1990s, and the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Previous research on foreign fighters has testified to similar recruitment patterns across cases in history, from locating potential recruits to framing a conflict (Malet 2010, 97). Foreign fighters are not only jihadists; they are also communists, far-right nationalists, fascists, and anti-fascists (See Table 1). Foreign fighters took part in at least ninety conflicts since the Congress of Vienna in 1814, or more than a quarter of all modern civil wars (Malet 2018, 7). Although European citizens are known to have supported various causes other than jihad in foreign conflicts, this is the cause that has attracted the highest number of martial volunteers across modern history (Malet 2018, 7).

Table 1 European foreign fighters across history.

Conflict	**Foreign Fighters**	**Approx. Total**	**Approx. Europeans**
American Revolution (1770s-1780s)	Various Private Volunteers	500	400
Bolivarian Revolutions (1810-1820s)	Albion Legion, Irish Legion	7000	7000
Greek War of Independence (1820s)	Filiki Eteria	1500	1200

Italian Risorgimento (1860s)	International Legion	2500	2500
Russian Revolution and Civil War (1910s-1920s)	International Brigades	50000	30000
Spanish Civil War (1930s)	International Brigades, Leftists, Fascists	60000	55000
Afghanistan (1970s-2000s)	Jihadis	25000	1500
Bosnian War (1990s)	Jihadis	5000	500
Chechnya (1990s - 2010s)	Jihadis	700	20
Somalia (1990s-2010s)	Jihadis, Al Shabaab	2000	200
Iraqi Occupation (2000s)	AQI	5000	100
Yemen (2010s)	AQAP	4000	200
Ukraine (2010s)	Azov Battalion, Donbass International Brigade	3000	3000
Syria-Iraq (2010s)	ISIS, Jihadis, Peshmerga	40000	5000

Source: Malet, David. 2018. "The European Experience with Foreign Fighters and Returnees", *Egmont Papers*, (6-16), 11. * The author notes that figures provided in this table are estimates based on the best information available. Thus, figures should be regarded and used with extreme caution.

The large-scale manifestation of the phenomenon in the Syrian War has increased the interest of scholars in both individual paths to radicalization and recruitment patterns. Unlike previous conflicts, the involvement of European jihadi combatants in Syria has been unprecedentedly high in numbers. About 5000 foreign fighters were recruited from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, while some 1000 from the Western Balkans also traveled to the battlefield at the height of the conflict (Rudic 2017). This latest trend in jihadist recruitment has been the focus of studies concerned with radicalization in the West.

1.2. Research problem

The problem that remains unresolved in the literature is whether the recruitment of foreign fighters is leader-led or leaderless in the framework of the global jihadist movement. On the one hand, IS propaganda, accelerated by social media, allowed for global recruitment without knowing the recruits. Thus, individuals, who want to support the cause of jihad through action, could find their way to the battlefield without participating in any radical structure. On the other hand, the

decentralization of foreign fighter recruitment and the clustered departures speak for pre-existing leader-led radical structures embedded in a local context. This means that various combinations of top-down and bottom-up factors may incentivize foreign fighter recruitment in different contexts.

1.3. Literature Review

There are four major theories that researchers employ to explain what motivates recruitment of foreign fighters: ideology, marginalization in the West, social network mobilization, and online radicalization. The debate between Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy presents the first two as alternative arguments to recruitment, pointing to if and how ideology matters. The second two offer opposing claims in favor of either in-person or online socialization.

Researchers have sought to answer whether top-down recruitment by international networks or bottom-up self-recruitment were the main avenue by which individuals were drawn into terrorism (Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Coolsaet and Heinke 2018; Neumann 2007; 2010; 2012; 2016; Nesser 2016). The literature on terrorism offers two alternative approaches. The debate between Hoffman and Sageman, which dominates the academic discussions after 9/11, points to centralized versus decentralized strategic choices. Bruce Hoffman explains terrorism from the top-down standpoint, or "leader-led jihad" (Hoffman 2006). He asserts that the Al Qaida-led threat to the West has been coordinated by a central leadership, and therefore, is a product of the group's strategic goals.

By contrast, Marc Sageman's "leaderless jihad" portrays the threat as a bottom-up outcome of socialization among like-minded individuals (Sageman 2004; 2008; 2016). He explains an individual's decision to become involved with terrorism by the individual's needs for identification and belonging, social grievances, and personal frustrations. He puts less emphasis on a group's ideology and strategy. Both approaches comprise elements useful to comprehend the way IS

foreign fighter recruitment is organized. However, they do not entirely explain structures and dynamics set in a context, and therefore, they do not provide a framework to analyze the radical milieu of recruitment.

1.3.1. Ideology

The role of ideology in the recruitment of jihadists in the West has been particularly present in the post-9/11 scholarship, which explains radicalization as an ideologically driven process (Coolsaet 2016b). The debate between two prominent French scholars, Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy, is central to theorizing the role of ideology in the recruitment of European foreign fighters. Kepel argues that the turn towards religious extremism cannot be understood separately from the religious doctrines being promoted globally, and especially the brand of Salafism exported out of Saudi Arabia. Kepel stresses the role of radical Islam as essential to understanding radicalization in the West (Kepel 1997; 2005; Kepel and Jardin 2017). Contrary to Kepel's view, Olivier Roy asserts that the turn of many young Europeans to jihadism can be explained not as radicalization of Islam but "Islamisation of radicalism" (Roy 2004; 2010; 2017).

1.3.2. Marginalization in the West

Previous research on European jihadists points to integration failures of second and third generations Muslims (Neumann 2007; 2012; 2016; Roy 2008; 2010; 2017; Nesser 2016). Neumann asserts that European Muslims often feel that Western societies have not offered them the respect and equality that they believe they deserve (Neumann 2007, 40). Thus, radical Islam is understood as an alternative offering a community, a sense of belonging and acceptance. These explanation has been dominant in research on European jihadists in the West placing the discussion

on foreign fighter recruitment in the broader debate on multiculturalism and religion in modern society (Coolsaet 2016b).

1.3.3. Social networks

Studies on European jihadists strongly emphasize the role of social networks in recruitment (Sageman 2004; 2008; 2016; Nesser 2016; Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Neumann 2012; 2016; Holman 2016; Reynolds and Hafez 2019; Roy 2004; 2008; 2017). Most studies on IS agree that recruitment happens within the framework of loose social networks and is the outcome of a relational process. This argument stresses the role of kinship and friendship bonds, as exposure to ideological content often happens through informal socialization. Previous studies on jihadi recruitment, have shown that people join the cause of jihad in small groups of friends and relatives and are often part of social networks with other prospective foreign fighters (Sageman 2004; Hafez 2012b, 193; Malet, Daymon, and de Roy van Zuijdewijn 2020).

1.3.4. Online radicalization

Research on Islamist militant recruitment has stressed the increasingly important role of the internet (Clarke 2019; Klausen 2015; Behr et al. 2013). Social media have played an essential role in the jihadists' operational and recruitment strategies (Klausen 2015). Social media enabled peer-to-peer radical socialization through evolving networks that remove the geographical constraints on recruitment. Nonetheless, previous research does not find that the internet is a substitute for in-person meetings but rather complements in-person communication (Behr et al. 2013). This argument appears in earlier studies on IS and Al-Qaeda and emphasizes the need for further exploration of the relationship between in-person and online radical socialization that serve recruitment purposes (Behr et al. 2013; Neumann 2012; 2016; Nesser 2016).

1.4. Gaps

The theories of recruitment discussed above make two gaps in the literature on foreign fighters particularly evident. First, in searching for universal answers to the recruitment process, scholars de-contextualize the phenomenon of foreign fighters. There is a widely accepted assumption in the literature on jihadi recruitment that the pathways into Islamist militancy are identical across the world.

However, radicalization and recruitment into the Islamist militant movement in Europe differ from similar processes in the Middle East or South Asia (Neumann 2010). There are significant differences between Muslim communities within Europe. For instance, Neumann shows in his research that Muslim communities across Western Europe differ in their histories of immigration, countries of origin, and language, and these differences have implications to the kinds of Islamist militant structures that have emerged in European countries (Neumann 2007; 2010). Previous studies on European jihadists have failed to pay enough attention to indigenous Muslim communities with recent experiences in conflict and with high contributions of foreign fighters. References to European Muslim communities "as if they represent one unified group with similar ethnic, cultural and socio-economic characteristics" (Neumann 2012, 12-13) limit our understanding of mobilization in a context.

Although the networks of Islamist militants often cross boundaries and create similar recruitment patterns, there are distinctions that result from the diverse nature of European Muslim communities. The histories of the local "radical milieus" (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014) are important when analyzing how individuals are recruited from European Muslim populations (Neumann 2007). For instance, the histories of the radical milieus across Belgium or Sweden differ from those in BiH or Kosovo. The first two have been shaped by immigration processes, while the latter by wars. One could argue that jihadi fighters from post-violent societies in a European

context do not differ significantly from their Western counterparts in recruitment patterns or individual profiles. Nonetheless, by not exploring the link between recruitment and the post-violent legacy of some fighters' radical milieus limits our knowledge about the logic of mobilization at the local level.

Second, the four theories discussed above show that the literature on foreign fighters is recruit-centric (Hegghammer 2013a). While scholars have focused on recruits, the broader pool of actors and activities that precede and facilitate recruitment is largely unstudied. Studies on Islamist networks in Europe more often seek to profile those who get involved in terrorism. Hence, research on foreign fighters does not study the radical milieu of foreign fighters in-depth. One cannot ignore that for an individual to decide to become involved in political violence, a decision is shaped by both personal and communal vulnerabilities, as well as by the tactical choices of recruiters. These choices may include where recruiters look for candidates, how they screen them, and who they are inclined to admit (Hegghammer 2013). To sum up, sources of authority and impact with possible contribution to the foreign fighter phenomenon remain undertheorized.

1.5. Purpose

The research question that guides the dissertation is: "How do post-war radical milieus shape the recruitment of foreign fighters in the European context?" The dissertation examines the evolution of post-war radical milieus to understand their influence on the recruitment of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters. This entails finding out how the origins and dynamics of radical miliues are related to the legacy of war and post-war fragility. By looking at the pre-departure socialization of foreign fighters into radical milieus, the dissertation seeks to provide insights about social relations, structures, and decision-making processes that result in the eventual departures to the battlefield. The dissertation studies post-violent societies in the European context with an empirical

focus on the Western Balkans. It does not search for a direct link between the 1990s conflicts in the region and the high number of individuals who traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016. Instead, it seeks to connect the war and the post-war spread of radical values, by a variety of actors, e.g. religious charities and radical preachers, to the gradual consolidation of a radical milieu and the consequent recruitment of foreign fighters.

The dissertation looks at typical cases to maximize learning opportunities for studying radical structures and authority in post-war radical miliues. Typical cases show the phenomenon in detail and allow us to analyze the mechanisms and processes justified by previously formulated theoretical expectations. The dissertation's overall objective is to identify actors and activities related to recruitment through a systematic empirical investigation of radical milieus that were established in a post-war context. By doing so, the dissertation aims to generate useful theoretical additions for future research on this topic.

1.6. Argument

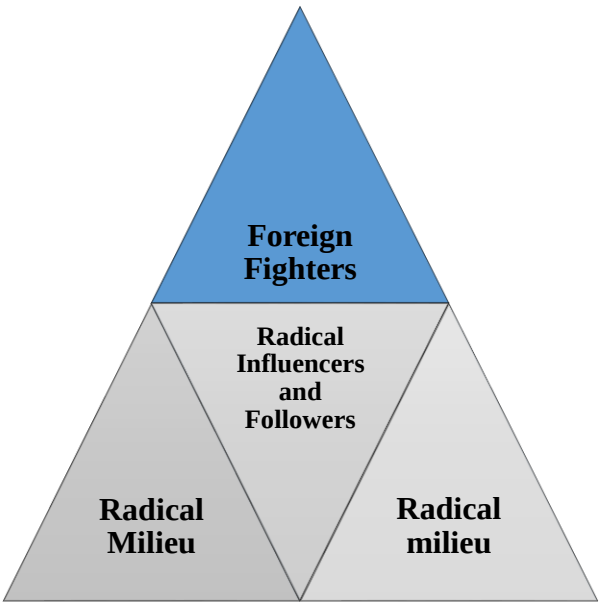
Post-war radical milieus play the unique role of constructors as well as exploiters of radical norms in the period between the end of a domestic conflict and the recruitment of foreign fighters for the Syrian War. Post-war radical milieus shape foreign fighter recruitment by empowering radical influencers and enabling their authority to be recognized by a large pool of followers due to post-war fragility. Consequently, foreign fighter recruitment in post-war radical milieus does not follow the locations of domestic war atrocities but instead the locations of radical influencers, who capitalize on the void left by the war and provide life guidance and values.

Post-war fragility, understood in this research as the outcome of a domestic conflict, is the key factor to the appearance of post-war radical milieus. Fragility here is not only an issue of state capacity after a war but also of relationships in a society (Marc et al. 2012). While some elements

of fragility concern the state, others are deeply rooted in societal dynamics, meaning, specifically, the *way* that individuals and groups interact and, consequently, the relationships that form. As a result, post-war radical milieus enable the appearance of radical authority figures and socialization between radical influencers and their followers.

Foreign fighters are only the visible part of a post-war radical milieu, whereas the presence of radical influencers speak for the persistence of such micro-societies. In the Balkan context, radical influencers' pathways have been largely determined by local conflicts, as they could and can benefit from the ideological and material resources that supported the intervention of radical Islam during the war and post-war periods. It was in the hands of influencers whether or not to take advantage of the opportunity for radical action offered by the Syrian War and to encourage the recruitment of foreign fighters (See Figure 1). Thus, recruitment is driven by the strategic targeting of local radical influencers, not only by the personal motivations or intentions of their followers.

Figure 1 A structure of a foreign fighter radical milieu.



1.7. Contribution

The dissertation contributes to the literature on foreign fighters within the broader scholarship on terrorism and recruitment into radical movements by developing a theoretical model that shows how actors and activities, born out of war and post-war fragility, have shaped a distinctive radical milieu. The dissertation shifts the analytical focus of foreign fighter mobilization from recruits to recruiters. It establishes a theoretical link between the foreign fighter phenomenon and the emergence of radical communities as a side effect of war. Additionally, the dissertation makes a rich empirical contribution with data on the recruitment of Bosnian and Albanian foreign fighters.

1.8. Theory

The dissertation uses social media terms *influencers* and *followers* to describe roles in radical socialization. This vocabulary reflects the understanding that the recruitment of foreign fighters is not situated within a strictly hierarchical, extremist network but a radical milieu with the features of a multilayered, loose movement.

The dissertation employs the Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS) framework (Koopmans and Statham 1999) to investigate the role of post-war radical milieus in foreign fighter recruitment. The justification for this choice derives from the way that foreign fighter recruitment is mostly understood in the literature: as a type of violent transnational activism of networks embedded in the global jihadi movement (Malet 2010; 2018; Moore and Tumelty 2008; Hegghammer 2010; Bakke 2014; Moore 2015; Crenshaw 2017). Therefore, social network and social movement theories have been widely preferred by scholars in exploring jihadists' pathways.

The DOS combines effects of framing with discursive opportunities provided by cultural and structural contexts. The cultural context in which framing takes place determines the success of the movement in framing to achieve certain goals. To understand why a frame succeeds, one

must consider not only the content of the frame but also the broader circumstances in which the framing takes place (McCammon et al. 2007). Movement frames take into account pre-existing political and cultural environments, and therefore, the frame can possibly produce the movement's desired political outcome. While DOS are apparent on a larger, cultural level, in the end, the movement actors are the agents who make decisions about how to respond to such opportunities (Ferree 2003; Gamson and Meyer 1996).

How does the DOS apply to foreign fighter recruitment? The way DOS are understood in this dissertation is as a macro-structure that shapes individual level processes and actions. The combination of context, the movement, and the narratives have a role in triggering specific moments and affecting individual decision-making. The macro-factors that shape the DOS in the case of post-war radical milieus concern different aspects of post-war fragility, including political, socio-economic, religious, and societal fragility, which are explained at length later in this chapter.

The role of radical influencers is the micro-level of analysis. The dissertation asserts that the presence and persistence of radical influencers largely determine the survival of a post-war radical milieu where foreign fighter recruitment takes place. Radical influencers have the freedom to choose whether and when to take advantage of their influence over targeted communities. Influencers can, therefore, choose to encourage participation in violence. Thus, recruitment is neither entirely dependent on individual motivations of prospective foreign fighters, nor on the trigger moment, which happened to be the Syrian War.

There are a few theoretical premises that derive from the literature on foreign fighters in the West and find application in the framework employed here. First, recruitment occurs via social networks set within larger, often marginalized, communities. Such social structures are both a source of and a venue for collective action. They enable the dissemination of recruitment messages

and facilitate community members identifying themselves with the cause of a distant conflict (Malet 2013). A key finding in the literature on jihadi fighters is that recruitment is not done through a central unit, but it is more often performed at the grassroots level (Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Nesser 2016; Sageman 2016). Therefore, influencers and followers are not "atomized individuals" but participants of small groups connected to each other (Sageman 2004, 137). They have a variety of roles and often belong simultaneously to various organizational layers of the recruitment process (Nesser 2016; Neumann 2016).

Second, the pre-departure socialization between followers and influencers is an essential phase of radicalization and an individual's decision to get involved in violence. Radical influencers orient their frames towards action, and fashion them at the intersection between a target population's inherited culture and their own values and goals (Tarrow 2011, 144–45). The way an issue is framed corresponds with the ability of a movement to mobilize supporters (Snow and Benford 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam 1996). Whether the process of framing succeeds in fostering collective action depends on how a frame resonates with the population it seeks to mobilize (Bakke 2014). This resonance does not occur automatically; someone needs to foster it.

Nonetheless, followers may differ in their exposure to radical socialization, commitment, and individual motivations. It is not the conversion of a single individual but more frequently a conversion of small groups from the same villages, the mosque, gym, and/or youth center (Della Porta 2009). On the one hand, they may have taken part in activities that led them to decide to engage with violence and travel to the "caliphate". On the other hand, they may have a positive, passive relationship with a radical milieu, which is the case of most women and children, and thus, have exposure to radical socialization and narratives without necessarily being the decision-makers concerning their departure to the warzone. Therefore, the radical milieu of foreign fighters

is heterogeneous and multilayered; it has a core and a periphery where a range of radical influencers and followers are situated. Followers may have either a positive active or passive relationship with a radical milieu. Social interaction within the framework of a radical milieu provides the survival and reinforcement of radical norms and narratives.

To apply the discursive opportunity structure to the empirical research, the dissertation introduces a set of theoretical propositions concerned with origin, structure, narratives, and followers of post-war radical milieus:

Origin:

Radical milieus emerge as a byproduct of war and post-war fragility. As fragility has been present in its political, religious, and societal aspects, the appearance of radical actors and activities have been highly incentivized.

Structure:

The geographical distribution of recruitment follows the trajectory of radical influencers. If targeted activities of influencers are present, clusters of foreign fighters are more likely.

Narratives:

Radical influencers in post-war societies are likely to combine global jihadi narratives (macro level) with local jihadi narratives (micro level). Thus, radical influencers utilize war memories and legacies of local conflicts to make their recruitment messages appealing to local followers.

Followers:

Only if followers have an active positive relationship with radical influencers and the respective radical milieu could they participate in a decision-making process that results in a departure to a foreign battlefield.

1.9. Research Design

Empirical context. The Balkans' recent history is marked by the dissolution of Yugoslavia through wars (BiH 1992-1995 and Kosovo 1998-1999). One of the byproducts of these processes was the appearance of radical networks turning the region into a key spot for extremists in the late 1990s.

This legacy makes the Balkan region unique in the European context and arguably had implications for the recent recruitment of foreign fighters from this part of the continent. The appearance of jihadi-Salafism in the Balkans is a post-conflict phenomenon. The emergence of what is understood here as radical milieus followed the two major conflicts in BiH (1992-1995) and Kosovo (1998-1999). The influx of Islamic charitable organizations encouraged the growth of Salafism, with jihadi Salafism being its most extreme form.

Foreign fighters from all parts of the region traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016. The biggest contribution in numbers were jihadi combatants from Kosovo, followed by BiH, N. Macedonia and Albania. Many of them initially joined the Al-Qaeda affiliate, Al-Nusra Front, or various rebel groups fighting the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and only later moved to the ranks of IS. Overall, up to 1070 individuals from the region reportedly traveled to the battlefields by the end of 2017 (Azinović and Bećirević 2017). Approximately 300 have returned, more than 200 have been killed, while some 400 remained there by the end of 2018. The data includes women, minors, and the elderly – most of whom were noncombatants and account for one-third of the entire Balkan contingent (See Table 2).

Table 2 Number of individuals from the Western Balkans in Syria/Iraq, 2012-2016.

	Men	**Women**	**Minors**
Albania	79	27	38
BiH	172	58	57
N. Macedonia	140	14	No data
Kosovo	255	48	96
Montenegro	18	5	4
Serbia	37	12	10
Total	701	164	205

Source: Azinović and Bećirević 2017.

The communities of interest in this research, Bosnian and Albanian Muslims, are understood as vulnerable due to their collective experience of post-war fragility. The literature on Islamist recruitment in the West shows that radical influencers take advantage of places in which individuals are likely to be vulnerable, lack orientation, or experience personal crises – factors that are widely believed to make people more receptive to the appeal of militant Islam (Neumann 2007). Dysfunctional welfare and educational systems, endemic corruption, and economic inequality draw the contours of today's socio-political reality of these societies. Thus, various aspects of post-war fragility have arguably played a permissive role, allowing for the evolution of Salafi narratives and the continued generosity of Islamic charities.

War is a condition in this dissertation that limits the scope of the research to Muslim communities in Europe with a comparatively high contribution of foreign fighters and recent war experience. The research population of the dissertation is narrowed to Salafi communities whose origins in war and post-war settings likely determines their agential role in foreign fighter recruitment. This situates the empirical analysis of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighter contingents within the conceptual scope of jihadi Salafism.

Although radical milieus are understood as the outcome of the war and post-war fragility, radical milieus are not seen here as militarized structures. Moreover, not all parts of a radical milieu tolerate or promote religiously justified violence. Yet, post-war radical milieus have their own value system that rejects the one of the larger society in terms of religion, civil liberties, equality, and justice. Thus, the socialization of influencers and followers into a radical milieu is understood as a radical step from the point of view of the mainstream European society. The unit of analysis refers to radical influencers and their followers who share linguistic, ethnic, and geographical ties.

The two regional contingents are distinguished from each other based on ethnicity, not the country of origin (See Table 3).

Table 3 Foreign Fighter contingents from the Western Balkans in Syria.

Foreign Fighter contingents	**Albanian Foreign Fighters** (Albania, Kosovo, N. Macedonia, Montenegro)
	Bosnian Foreign Fighters (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo)

The dissertation is the outcome of a three-stage methodological process: 1) data collection through extensive desk research of open sources; 2) fieldwork including interviews, research meetings, and research on judicial documents; and 3) data analysis. The key outcome of this empirical investigation is systematized data on radical influencers and foreign fighters. Overall, I have collected data on the pathways of more than 500 individuals from the Balkans, known to have been directly or indirectly involved in foreign fighter recruitment. The list of radical influencers contains data on influential Salafi leaders active in the region between the 1990s Yugoslav Wars and the outbreak of the Syrian War. While most of them were involved in the grassroots recruitment, a small number of radical influencers traveled to the battlefields to also become foreign fighters. Building original datasets has allowed me to identify recruitment patterns and locations, and to establish a logic of connectivity between involved actors.

1.10. Terminology

The terminology of the dissertation derives credibility from previous research on foreign fighters, jihadi terrorism, Islamist movements, Al-Qaeda, and IS. Its theoretical grounding is in social movement theories, and this allows it to explain social interaction between actors in post-war radical milieus. Conceptually, the dissertation situates the empirical analysis of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters within the scope of violent extremism in a sense of "advocating, engaging

in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic, and political objectives" (USAID 2011).

Foreign fighter: The dissertation employs David Malet's definition of a foreign fighter that is "a non-citizen of a state experiencing civil conflict who arrives from an external state to join an insurgency" (Malet 2013). Despite some conceptual ambiguities, *foreign fighter* is widely recognized as a usable term among researchers and security experts, and its definition fits the research goals of the dissertation for several reasons. First, it does not limit the concept to a specific set of motivations, ideological, and socio-economic triggers. Second, it does not put an equal sign between foreign fighter and terrorist, two notions often used synonymously in public discussions. The concept of a foreign fighter is employed with an emphasis on pre-departure socialization, rather than the later violent activities, in which individuals might take part. A foreign fighter is further limited to the theoretical perspective of jihad. It reflects the fundamental ideological tenet of groups like Al-Qaeda and IS that "violent jihad is the only path to defending the Islamic world (Clarke 2019, 15)."

A *foreign fighter* contingent is a heterogeneous group of people, who share geographical/linguistic/ethnic characteristics and have traveled individually or in small groups to the conflict zones in Iraq and Syria. Members of a foreign fighter continent are motivated by the intention to contribute to the establishment of the IS caliphate, participate in fights and/or support other radical factions on the ground.

A *radical milieu* of foreign fighters describes the larger community from which violent actors emerge (Winterbotham and Pearson 2020). It is the "social setting" of radicalization (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014). A radical milieu is a community highly influenced by authority figures

whose engagement with either Salafism or jihadi Salafism define the core and the periphery of the radical milieu.

A *radical influencers* is a self-proclaimed imam, a hate preacher, or a charismatic jihadi militant who is recognized as an authority figure in the radical milieu. Although radical influencer are not given any authority from a central leadership organization, they gain prominence in the grassroots socialization process. This dissertation distinguishes between radical influencers who openly engage with violent propaganda and those who do not.

A *follower* is the local target of jihadi propaganda who is exposed to it via online and in-person socialization with peers and radical influencers. Followers may be individuals who have acted upon their radical views and became foreign fighters. Followers may choose not to join the battlefield for various reasons or may be prevented from travelling by local authorities. Followers may have positive active or positive passive relationship with the radical milieu depending on the types of activities they take part in.

1.11. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. ***Chapter Two*** reviews previous research on foreign fighters to gather knowledge on recruitment. The dissertation examines studies on Islamist movements, recruitment into IS and Al-Qaeda, militant activism, radicalization, and root causes of terrorism. It further looks at the participation of jihadi fighters in the two Chechen Wars, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the most recent in Syria. This literature points to four distinct approaches to the study of European foreign fighters: ideology, marginalization in the West, online radicalization and social network mobilization.

Chapter Three presents the dissertation's theoretical framework and research design. The theory is built around four theoretical propositions concerned with origin, structure, narratives, and

followers of post-war radical milieus. These propositions, inspired by DOS, are tailored to explore the relationship between radical influencers and their followers to understand who is targeted to go and fight in a distant conflict and how. At the macro level, the dissertation examines the environment in which foreign fighter recruitment takes place, which is the radical milieu. At the micro level, it studies at the role of radical influencers in recruitment. This chapter argues that the interdependence between origin, structure, narratives, and followers of a radical milieu is defined by the discursive opportunities provided by domestic wars and that such contexts condition the influence of ideological actors.

Chapters Four and Five: In the empirical portions of Chapters Four and Five, the Bosnian and the Albanian radical milieus are studied separately and the foundation for a comparative analysis in Chapter Five is laid. The order of the two case studies follows the chronological order of the wars (BiH 1992-95 and Kosovo 1998-99) and the logic that the Bosnian radical milieu has deeper roots, and therefore, has been more evidently manifested compared to the Albanian one.

Chapter Four is devoted to the evolution of the Bosnian foreign fighters' radical milieu. Around 400 people of Bosnian descent traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016 with the intention to join groups such as Al-Nusra Front or IS. The analysis indicates that ideological actors and activities during the Bosnian War and in its aftermath had a formative role in shaping the Bosnian radical milieu. The power centers of foreign fighter recruitment identified in this chapter show that radical influencers could build their authority on the legacy and resources inherited by war and post-war humanitarian activities. Consequently, foreign fighter recruitment followed the trajectory of radical influencers, both internal and external to the region. The research testifies to strong leadership ties between local radical influencers and Bosnian diaspora communities across Europe.

Chapter Five studies the Albanian radical milieu with approximately 600 people from Albania, Kosovo, and N. Macedonia. The Albanian radical milieu relied on strong domestic power centers, however, lacked a particularly influential power center linked to Albanian diaspora communities. The research has identified pre-departure leadership ties that overcome national borders and have been established along geographical proximity, pre-existing social networks, ethno-linguistic ties, and similarities in ideological backgrounds. The data shows that the recruitment in Albania was slightly detached from the same process in Kosovo and N. Macedonia. The analysis points to pre-war, war and post-war formation of the radical milieu in relation to the Kosovo War. Unlike Bosnians, Albanian jihadist networks are "younger" in their organization and ideological commitment.

Chapter Six derives insights from comparing the two cases. This chapter points to several important differences between the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus. The analysis distinguishes between a cause of a conflict driven by religion, as in the case of BiH, and by nationalism, as in the case of Kosovo. This distinction aims to show that a cause of a conflict may either restrict or encourage the growth of a post-war radical milieu. While both radical milieus are seen as the outcome of post-war fragility, there are ideological and organizational variations that make the spread of radical influence follow different trajectories over time. Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters differ in demographic characteristics and their previous exposure to combat. The older the radical milieu, the better established its leadership and structures are.

Chapter Seven is the conclusion, with the research findings pointing toward the need to recognize that European jihadists are not identical in terms of history, motivation, and resources, as they come from different radical milieus. Most often, foreign fighters from post-war radical milieus are not individuals with a past experience of domestic wars. However, they were

overwhelmingly socialized into radical milieus that appeared after domestic conflicts. Radical influencers from post-war radical milieus rely on political opportunities, organizing structures, and cultural frames different from the ones in Western Europe. Post-war radical miliues provide radical influencers with the resources to institutionalize their radical authority due to the post-war fragility of the context. The dissertation finds that the recruitment of Bosnian and Albanian foreign fighters is largely leader-led in the context of a radical milieu, and thus, concludes that relationships that emerged from post-war fragility were essential to foreign fighter recruitment.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORIES OF FOREIGN FIGHTER RECRUITMENT

This dissertation explores what motivates foreign fighter recruitment in a specific context, and in this chapter, there is a review of previous studies in an attempt to comprehend how terrorism scholars explain the path to radicalization and recruitment. According to a substantial part of research on European jihadists, recruitment is based on push factors, i.e. that is the individual motivations of potential recruits. However, studying pull factors and actors, who may impact recruitment, in a certain context, has largely been neglected in the literature.

The key objective of this chapter is to engage critically with four major theories that explain what motivates the recruitment of foreign fighters in the European context: 1) ideology, 2) marginalization in the West, 3) social network mobilization, and 4) online radicalization. These four theories are grouped around the existing framework on push and pull factors of radicalization, and, from a theoretical perspective, ideology and online radicalization seem to offer more pull elements, while social network mobilization and marginalization in the West represent push factors that play a role in radicalization. Here, the dissertation draws on knowledge from previous research on recruitment into Al-Qaeda and IS, as they have been the most established actors in the global jihadist movement. The dissertation further draws insights from the debate on the root causes of terrorism.

Alternative explanations of IS's recruitment success derive credibility from studies on previous generations of jihadists (Hegghammer 2008; 2010; 2013b; Hafez 2009; 2012a). Although the concept of foreign fighter does not apply exclusively to jihadism, Muslim foreign fighters stand out due to their persistence and increasing prevalence over time (Malet 2013; Hegghammer 2010). Before the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011, more than 30 000 Muslim fighters participated in eighteen different conflicts: from BiH to Kashmir, Chechnya, the Philippines, and beyond (Schmid

2015). In five cases, there were more than 1000 fighters, and two cases (1980s Afghanistan and Iraq) included more than 4000 fighters (Hegghammer 2010, 60). Thus, the theories of recruitment discussed in this chapter draw on previous research on Islamist militancy.

Following the rise of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the academic interest in the topic has largely shifted from civil wars to the field of terrorism, and consequently, to the perspective of jihad (Moore and Tumelty 2008). Hafez (2012) distinguishes between three recruitment patterns in his research on suicide attackers in Iraq: experienced jihadists who sought to extend their militant careers in Iraq and newcomers, who either volunteered or were selected for recruitment via a top-down process (193). The mobilization of jihadists in Iraq and Syria draws on similar phenomena that helped define conflicts in Afghanistan, Algeria, BiH, and Chechnya. The link between case studies on all these wars is particularly important as foreign fighter networks formed during those conflicts went on to form the core of Al-Qaeda (Clarke 2019). Al-Qaeda's legacy and organization worldwide has set the ground for the later mobilization of IS foreign fighters.

What is unique to the case of IS is the unprecedented number of foreign recruits who joined the Syrian War. What makes IS's approach different are two strategic choices it has made that has expanded its pool of volunteers. First, it has utilized new means of communications. IS deliberately "advertised" their Western volunteers in their propaganda in a way that few foreign fighter groups had managed before. Second, it has adopted an approach of recruiting and promoting non-warriors as contributors to its nation-building project (Malet 2018, 17). Petter Nesser, among others, puts European IS fighters in a historical perspective, with an emphasis on their paths to radicalization in the framework of terrorist cell formation (Nesser 2016). He stresses the entrepreneurial role of former Arab-Afghan veterans and their associated organizations and ideological agendas. Neumann also pays close attention to the radical cells built in the West and the role of transnational

networks over time (Neumann 2016). He shows how groups like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State should be seen as manifestations of a wider, revolutionarily political and religious movement. Malet (2018) argues that there is little difference between IS foreign fighters and the previous waves of European jihadists or other historical examples, but they share similarities with respect to recruitment, motivation, and/or conduct (Malet 2018, 16; 2010; 2013). A few key arguments applicable to IS derive from this analytical framework: 1) The Jihadist movement is highly decentralized; 2) European jihadist networks matter to recruitment; and 3) Different generations within these networks demonstrate the various roles for involved actors.

As mentioned above, a substantial part of the research on European jihadists emphasizes that recruitment is based on individual motivations. This focus marks a theoretical shift in the literature on terrorism from looking at the contextual causes of terrorism to the decontextualization of the causes and an emphasis on ideology and individual pathways. In the early 1970s, terrorism scholars were more concerned with the context of terrorism. Martha Crenshaw's 1981 article "The causes of terrorism" points to the context as being essential to understanding terrorism. She has argued that the context of radicalization and terrorism does not only account for the instigating circumstances that permit the emergence of terrorism, but it also provides situational factors that motivate and direct groups and individuals to use violence (Crenshaw 1981). A more recent study by Winterbotham and Pearson (2020) re-emphasizes the importance of the context in which cases of radicalization take place. They offer a methodological approach for conducting research on violent extremism, while stressing the significance of shared grievances, shared experiences, and the context in which specific cases of radicalization take place (Winterbotham and Pearson 2020).

This shift from context to ideology and individual motivations can be explained with the attempt of scholars to find universal answers to radicalization, and lately, the recruitment of

jihadist foreign fighters. Therefore, the phenomenon of foreign fighters has often been studied without paying attention to essential contextual variables, such as the legacy of war in a European context, which is the focus of this dissertation. With a few exceptions, studies on IS recruitment have been largely decontextualized. Researchers who have studied the pathways and motivations of European jihadi fighters have conducted mostly case studies (Weggemans, Bakker, and Grol 2014; Heinke 2017; Klausen 2015; Reynolds and Hafez 2019; Dawson and Amarasingam 2017; Marone 2016; Bakker and Bont 2016; Gustafsson and Ranstorp 2017). While descriptions of European foreign fighters might be useful in explaining the characteristics of fighters from a particular European country, these findings cannot be extrapolated to other geographical regions. Questions regarding who are foreign fighters from countries in North Africa and the Middle East or former Soviet Republics, or why they joined the fight, provide answers that are distinct from those concerning their European counterparts (Malet, Daymon, and de Roy van Zuijdewijn 2020, 4).

The literature on recruitment and radicalization generally distinguishes between push and pull factors in attempt to categorize the root causes of terrorism. Push factors refer to social, political, and economic grievances, as well as to feelings of frustration, alienation, and a sense of injustice. It also encompasses searching for a purpose of living, an identity crisis, social exclusion, and marginalization. Pull factors include: a personal quest, a sense of belonging to a cause, ideology, or a social network; power and control; a sense of loyalty and commitment; a sense of adventure; a romanticized view of ideology and cause; and the possibility of heroism (Ranstorp and Hyllengren 2013).

Many authors have focused on push and pull factors, or the root causes of terrorism, hoping that it will be possible to formulate a single answer to the question why people get involved in

terrorism and clandestine organizations. Arguments range from the role of poverty, political leanings, perceptions of grievance and threat, to a search for identity, personality factors, and religion (See Table 4). Root causes, or the factors and circumstances that radicalize and drive people to join violence, may exist in various combinations, as some of them are more important than others. They are not only the causes of terrorism but also of rebellion, guerrilla warfare, riots, and other forms of political violence (Bjørgo 2005). Parker (2019), while accepting that all motives are individual, points to five core themes of radicalization – empathy, self-actualization, poverty, government aggression, and social networks.

Table 4 A summary of the root causes discussed in the terrorism literature.

Individual socio-psychological factors	Grievances and emotions, such as: alienation and exclusion; anger and frustration; a strong sense of injustice; feelings of humiliation; rigid binary thinking; a tendency to misinterpret situations; conspiracy theories; a sense of victimhood; personal vulnerabilities; and counter-cultural elements.
Social factors	Social exclusion; marginalization and discrimination (real or perceived); limited education or employment; an element of displacement; criminality; lack of social cohesion; and self-exclusion.
Political factors	Grievances framed around victimhood against Western foreign policy and military interventions. The central claim of this narrative is that the West is at war with Islam, which creates a narrative of "them versus us". Conflicts are filtered through this core narrative: BiH; Chechnya; Iraq; Syria; Somalia; Palestine, etc. There is a strong sense of alienation and injustice reinforced by Islamophobia, xenophobia, and discrimination.
Ideological/religious factors	A sacred historical mission and belief in apocalyptic prophesy; a Salafi-jihadi interpretation of Islam; a violent jihadi mission; a sense that Islam is under siege and a desire to protect ummah under assault. These beliefs also include the view that Western society embodies immoral secularism.
Culture and identity crisis	Cultural marginalization, which produces alienation and a lack of belonging to either home or the parents' society (Raffie 2013). This reinforces religious solidarity with Muslims around the world.
Trauma and other trigger mechanisms	Psychological trauma experienced via parents with post-traumatic stress disorder or other complex psychological problems.

Group dynamics	Charismatic leadership; pre-existing friendship and kinship ties; socialization; groupthink; self-isolation; polarizing behavior; and counter-cultural elements.
Radicalizers/groomers	Hate preachers and those that prey on vulnerabilities and grievances and channel recruits into violent extremism through persuasion, pressure, and manipulation. This underscores the importance of extremist milieus existing in so-called underground study circles or in prison.
Social media	Provides connectivity, virtual participation, and an echo-chamber for likeminded extremist views. The internet "reaches otherwise unreachable individuals"; it accelerates the process of radicalization; and it increases opportunities for self-radicalization.

Source: The table is summarized from "The Root Causes of Violent Extremism" 2016. See: Ranstorp and Hyllengren 2013; Bjørgo 2005.

The influence of each of these ingredients differs at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, and various combinations may or may not lead to participation in terrorism. More importantly, this debate on the root causes of terrorism has informed research on IS, and consequently, made it largely recruit-centric, which can be seen as another analytical shortcoming, in addition to the tendency to decontextualize the process.

This overemphasis on recruits through the lenses of individual motivations and actions belittles the role of authority and impactful figures at the grassroots level of radical socialization. Studies on the structure and dynamics of jihadi recruitment in Europe have failed to stress the significance of the organizational layer that is situated between the top leadership and the grassroots targets. The analytical approach to recruitment based solely on individual motivations does not allow for digging into the pool of the non-militant forms of activism related to the foreign fighter phenomenon, such as authority, recruitment and facilitation, fundraising, and the provision of material resources. Therefore, it limits our knowledge about the evolution and the role of radical authority and structures that are embedded into a specific context.

To understand why some people join militant groups, it is not enough to study the individual motivations of recruits; one must look at recruitment in context. A key finding in the

literature on European jihadists is that processes of radicalization are not directly linked to the strategies of jihadi "centers". This is evident by the remarkable continuity of the forms of action used by terrorist cells in the West (Roy 2017, 58). For Hegghammer (2013a), the recruitment process is a trust game between the recruiter and recruit. A group's membership is also shaped by the tactical choices of recruiters, such as where they look for candidates, how they screen them, and who they are inclined to admit (Hegghammer 2013a). Thus, it is safe to argue that recruitment, as well as the organizational and ideological survival of radical cells over time, depend on the behavior and strategic choices of the radical influencers.

From the reviewed literature it is evident that existing research emphasizes the idea that recruitment is based on individual motivations, which play the role of push factors. This dissertation, however, addresses pull factors, with specific attention being paid to actors and context, which have been neglected in the literature on jihadist foreign fighters. The framework of push and pull factors in terrorism helps to systematize major theories that explain what motivates the recruitment of foreign fighters in the European context: 1) ideology, 2) marginalization in the West, 3) social network mobilization, and 4) online radicalization. Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy's debate presents the first two factors as alternative arguments, asking whether and how ideology matters to recruitment and involvement in jihadist terrorism. The second two factors offer opposing claims in favor of either in person or online radical socialization of foreign fighters. This dissertation asserts that, from a theoretical perspective, ideology and online radicalization showcase more pull elements, while social network mobilization and marginalization in the West represent push factors that play a role in radicalization.

2.1. Theories of Recruitment

2.1.1. Ideology

The role of ideology is key to mobilization and recruitment into social movements, clandestine organizations, and terrorist groups. In the case of foreign fighters, previous research has shown that they travel to fight in defense of a transnational community perceived to be under existential threat (Malet 2013, 4; Malet, et. al. 2020). Insurgencies use the same messaging strategies for all types of foreign fighters, regardless of whether they share the same ethnicity or some other affiliation, and regardless of the war's issue of contention (Malet 2010, 112). Recruiters frame distant conflicts as a threat to a transnational group identity with which prospective recruits associate. Thus, they create a sense of duty among the targeted group to get them involved (Malet 2010, 97).

The role of ideology in jihadist terrorism in the West has been particularly present in the post-9/11 research, which explains radicalization as an ideologically driven process. To theorize the impact of ideology in the recruitment of European foreign fighters, it is essential to look at the debate between Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy. Kepel, who is one of the most vocal proponents of the "radical Islam" argument, claims that the role of radical Islam is essential to understanding radicalization in the West (Kepel 1997; 2005; Kepel and Jardin 2017). In his view, the turn of some individuals towards violence and extremism cannot be understood apart from the religious doctrines promoted globally, and especially from the brand of Salafism exported by Saudi Arabia.

However, analyzing recruitment only through the lens of ideology does not allow for understanding the local aspect of the phenomenon and how a local Salafi milieu becomes a venue for foreign fighter recruitment. For instance, Coolsaet (2016b) points out that studying radicalization only through the role of ideology or religious narratives is a reductionist approach

that does not account for the complex interaction between context, individual, and group processes, especially following the rise of IS (Coolsaet 2016b).

2.1.2. Marginalization in the West

Olivier Roy, contrary to Kepel's argument, asserts that the large-scale recruitment of European jihadists cannot be explained through the radicalization of Islam but rather through the "Islamisation of radicalism" (Roy 2004; 2010; 2017). Roy sees the latest development of European jihadism in Europe as a youth movement and the product of fantasy and rebellion, or "the nihilism in search of an alibi" (Roy 2017, 6). Jihadism, in his view, at least in the West, is a youth movement that is not only constructed independently of parents' religious and cultural references but is also inseparable from societies' "youth culture" (Roy 2017, 2).

As Roy (2017) states:

> [The new jihadists] do not have the necessary religious culture – and, above all, care little about having one, they do not become radicals because they have misread the texts or because they have been manipulated. They are radicals because they choose to be, because only radicalism appeals to them (Roy 2017, 35).

This argument in the research on European foreign fighters focuses on the second and third generations European Muslims who have failed to integrate themselves in the Western societies, and therefore, become easy targets of radicalization and are more prone to involvement in violence (Coolsaet 2016b). In the European context, scholars emphasize individual experiences of exclusion and discrimination as one of the most powerful triggers to radicalization. As Neumann points out, European Muslims often feel that Western societies have not provided them with the full respect and equality they believe they deserve (Neumann 2007, 40).

This claim finds application in research on Al-Qaeda, as well as in more recent studies on IS recruitment of foreign fighters. In research on IS, European Muslims are seen as being caught between two cultures, that of their parents, which they reject, and that of their adopted country,

which does not fully accept them (Roy 2017; Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Neumann 2016; Malet 2018). Radical Islam, by contrast, offers them a community, acceptance, and dignity. This explanation has been dominant in research on European jihadists as a part of the debate on Islam, integration, multiculturalism, and the place of religion in public life.

This argument allows scholars to profile IS foreign fighters in the West. Roy (2017) shows that many terrorists, including those who staged the Bataclan attacks in Paris in 2015, have similar backgrounds; they are second-generation European Muslims who have rejected the Islam of their parents. In their early years, they appeared to be westernized: drinking alcohol, smoking weed, dating girls, and watching sports. Later many failed to get employed and instead got involved with petty criminal social networks and had no interest in religion, until they are suddenly "born again" by watching videos of radical imams or being converted in the process of radical socialization (Roy 2017). The emphasis on recruits has enriched our knowledge about individual profiles and drivers of radicalization. Yet, the question of who recruits people and how they do so across various contexts remains understudied in research on the IS. The focus on recruits has limited the emphasis on the evolution and role of radical authority and its impact on the grassroots level.

To understand authority and its impact in recruitment, this dissertation recognizes that variations in the integration of second and third generations Muslims may speak for different recruitment dynamics and structures (Neumann 2007; 2012; 2016; Roy 2008; 2010; 2017; Nesser 2016). For instance, Neumann (2007) finds differences between countries in Southern Europe, where Muslim immigration is recent, and those in which the second and third generations of European Muslims are reaching adolescence. In countries with no second or third generation of European Muslims, neither the language nor the conflict of identity between Western society and traditional culture appear to be pivotal issues (Neumann 2007).

These variations of integration challenge the widely accepted assumption in the literature on jihadist recruitment that the pathways into Islamist militancy are identical across different cases. If there are significant differences between Muslim communities within Europe, this means that marginalization in the West cannot be a universal explanation to recruitment across cases. In his research, Neumann shows that Muslim communities across Western Europe differ in their histories of immigration, countries of origin, and language, and these differences have implications for the kinds of Islamist militant structures that have emerged in European countries (Neumann 2007; 2010). He refers to France as an example in which the origins of the Islamist militant movement can be traced back to the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s. There, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) first used France for logistical support and then declared the country a legitimate target. The structures set up during this period served as the basis for the extensive network established by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which split from the GIA and, subsequently, sought closer links to Al-Qaeda (Neumann 2007, 16).

Thus, structures and dynamics of Islamist militancy may be similar, but not identical, across European Muslim communities. Although the networks of Islamist militants often cross boundaries, there are some important distinctions which result from the diverse nature of European Muslim communities. Indeed, these differences are highly significant when it comes to the question of how individuals are recruited from local European Muslim populations (Neumann 2007). Despite the relevance of the "failed integration in the West" argument, its applicability to foreign fighters from less "Westernized" European contexts is rather limited. Recruitment patterns may be identical across IS fighters in Europe, but contexts defined by recent war experiences may speak for the evolution of the radical milieu's patterns that differ from the ones in the West.

Consequently, local radical milieus may differ in the dynamics and structuring of Islamist militancy.

In an attempt to find universal answers to recruitment patterns, researchers often de-contextualize the phenomenon of foreign fighters. One could argue that jihadist fighters from post-violent societies in the European context do not differ much from their Western counterparts in recruitment patterns or individual profiles. Nonetheless, the radical milieus they originate from have been shaped by different historical contexts. Post-war societies are defined by fragility unlike those in Western Europe. Thus, the theory of recruitment cannot be entirely the same. It is not the failed integration of Muslim immigrants in a new, wealthy society but the successful integration of radical micro-societies after a war that has sowed the seed of a new generation of militant volunteers. Essential contextual variables, such as legacy of war and post-war fragility (in a European context), have not been theorized in relation to foreign fighters who have traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2011 and 2016. Therefore, there is a need to recognize the importance of local context and dynamics over time.

2.1.3. Social networks

Previous research on European jihadist recruitment has overwhelmingly recognized the importance of social networks (Sageman 2004; 2008; 2016; Nesser 2016; Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Neumann 2012; 2016; Holman 2016; Reynolds and Hafez 2019; Roy 2004; 2008; 2017). A key finding across literature in various fields, including civil wars, terrorism and social movements is that social networks matter in recruitment (Holman 2016; Passy 2001; Passy and Monsch 2014; Della Porta 1995; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Della Porta 2009). Relevant questions are how and why exactly social networks matter in the recruitment of foreign fighters. Most studies on IS agree that recruitment happens within the framework of loose social networks and is the outcome of a

relational process. Data across historical cases indicate that recruitment occurs via the social networks of transnational communities, and potential recruits are generally closely connected to these identity subgroups rather than to their wider national society (Malet 2010, 100). Watts (2009) argues that “social familial-religious” networks fuel such recruitment with the assistance and influence of former foreign fighters. Studies on Al-Qaeda has shown that senior figures, grassroots cells, transnational networks, and the chain of command are all rooted in personal bonds forged either in Afghanistan or at the local level in the West (Sageman 2004; 2008; Roy 2004; 2008; 2010).

Proponents of social networks as an explanation of recruitment further emphasize the role of kinship and friendship bonds since exposure to violence-justifying ideological content often happens through social contact with friends and relatives. These social sources are generally regarded as trustworthy and authoritative, and their opinions are taken seriously (Kruglanski, et. al 2019, 51). Contributions on recruitment into Islamist militant movements have shown that individuals join the cause of jihad in small groups of friends and relatives and are often part of social networks with other (prospective) foreign fighters (Sageman 2004; Hafez 2012b, 193; Malet, Daymon, and de Roy van Zuijdewijn 2020).

This finding appears in the earlier research of Della Porta (1995) on clandestine organizations. She concludes that "the decision to join an underground organization was rarely an individual one. For most of the militants, it involved cliques of friends" (Della Porta 1995, 167). The “bunch of guys” type of involvement fuels social interaction between like-minded individuals in small informal groups (Sageman 2004; 2008). Hafez’s research (2012) on foreign fighters in Iraq reveals that the overwhelming majority of those who joined the conflict did so in small groups (Hafez 2012). Looking at the recruitment of Saudi foreign fighters in Iraq, Hegghammer (2008)

observed that a number of recruits were clearly inspired by friends who had gone abroad for jihad before them, others felt a form of peer pressure (7-8). Some wanted to emulate their older brothers, fathers, or uncles. There is an overrepresentation of sets of siblings among the Western jihadists, which indicates the significance of the generational dimension of radicalization: they are among "peers" and share the same "youth" culture, exacerbated by IS propaganda (Roy 2017, 24).

Thus, recruits are not "atomized individuals" but participants of small groups that are more or less connected to each other (Sageman 2004, 137). They have a variety of roles and often belong simultaneously to various organizational layers of the mobilization process (Nesser 2016; Neumann 2016; 2012). The "group effect", in Roy's view, is far more effective in terms of triggering radicalization than reading propaganda books (See Sageman, 2008). Those who follow their Muslim "buddies" decide to get involved in violence usually under the influence of a group leader, seen as a guru (Roy 2008). Related to this argument is the criminal-terror nexus, or the criminal past of some jihadists, as a path leading them to terrorism. Jihadist activities in Europe, including recruitment and attacks, have been facilitated by criminal networks and drug trafficking (Makarenko 2012; Rekawek 2018). Coolsaet points out that "joining IS is merely a shift to another form of deviant behavior, next to membership of street gangs, rioting, drug trafficking and juvenile delinquency" (Coolsaet 2016a, 3).

Stressing the importance of social networks, researchers have sought to understand whether top-down or bottom-up recruitment was the way by which individuals were drawn into terrorist organizations (Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Coolsaet and Heinke 2018; Neumann 2007; 2010; 2012; 2016; Nesser 2016). The literature on terrorism offers two alternative approaches. The debate between Hoffman and Sageman that dominates the academic discussions after 9/11 points to centralized versus decentralized strategic choices. Bruce Hoffman explains terrorism from a top-

down standpoint, or as "leader-led jihad" (Hoffman 2006). He asserts that some form of central leadership coordinated the Al-Qaeda-led threat to the West, and therefore, it is a product of the group's strategic goals. Contrary to Hoffman's "leader-led" argument, Marc Sageman's "leaderless jihad" portrays the threat as a bottom-up outcome, coming from social interaction among like-minded individuals (Sageman 2004; 2008; 2016). He explains an individual's decision to become involved in terrorism owing to the need for identification and belonging, social grievances, and personal frustrations, and he puts less emphasis on a group's ideology and strategy.

Perhaps the most convincing response to the question of whether the recruitment of foreign fighters is leaderless or leader-led is "a bit of both" (Neumann, Evans, and Pantucci 2011, 828). Both approaches comprise elements useful to comprehend the way IS foreign fighter mobilization is organized. Nonetheless, they do not fully explain structures and dynamics set in a context and therefore do not provide a framework to understand the middle layer of recruitment. The concept of social networks in terrorism research is mostly employed in its meaning of a reference group, rather than a membership group (Kruglanski, Belanger, and Gunaratna 2019, 54). These serve as channels through which individuals get acquainted with and embrace the ideological narrative that the network promotes and that leads them in their endeavor to earn or restore their sense of value (Kruglanski, Belanger, and Gunaratna 2019, 51). Many European fighters had links to "nonviolent but extreme organizations or preachers before they embraced violence" (Byman 2019, 218; Malet, Daymon, and de Roy van Zuijdewijn 2020).

However, previous research on jihadist foreign fighters has largely been focused on transnational networks. Thus, scholars have paid less attention to the context of the recruitment process seeking to generalize recruitment patterns. Hence, there is a need to recognize the significance of local radical milieus and the social dynamics they host over time. Despite identical

recruitment patterns on the global level, the evolution of radical milieus is context specific, meaning that their role in the recruitment process depends on the opportunities and strategic choices radical influencers tailor to local targeted communities.

This dissertation applies a social networks framework to analyze foreign fighters and motivated by the idea that recruitment is not only about the recruits. Individuals who choose to join a distant war are only the "tip of an iceberg", while broader communities can experience pre-departure radical socialization. This argument builds on the already existing "pyramid" models of radicalization. These models argue that very few people become terrorist actors, but the terrorist network represents a larger pool of actors (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Winterbotham and Pearson 2020). Networks include people with roles that do not involve carrying out the final attack. These people are drawn from a wider community of people who do not actively support terrorism but might have sympathies for its causes or its actors. Yet, the radical milieu engaged is much broader and should not be understood as supportive, or potentially supportive, of terrorism. The concept of the radical milieu encompasses the community regarded as "vulnerable" to radicalization (Winterbotham and Pearson 2020).

2.1.4. Online radicalization

Variations of the debate on whether recruitment is the outcome of online or offline radical socialization appear in many recent studies on IS. Previous research on Islamist militant recruitment has stressed the increasingly important role of the internet, either in support of "real-world" recruitment, or in entirely new forms of militant activism described as "virtual self-recruitment" (Neumann 2007). Social media have played an essential role in the jihadists' operational strategy in Syria, Iraq, and beyond (Klausen 2015). All actors involved in Islamist militancy are also represented on the internet: from the hard-core leadership and Islamist militant

clerics to the grassroots jihadist movement. Neumann emphasizes that the roles of all these actors may vary and change constantly:

> ...it would therefore be mistaken to view the first three categories as the (active) providers of information and the latter as the (passive) consumers. In fact, one of the main difficulties in combating 'jihadism online' is that the grassroots movement plays an important role in producing and distributing information, and that it is key to maintaining the decentralized structure of 'jihadism online' more generally (Neumann 2007, 49).

Due to the availability of new technologies and social media, those who travel to Syria to engage in local jihad today are more exposed to the doctrine of global jihad than the foreign fighters who fought, for example, in Afghanistan in the 1980s. New technologies and social media have been used as a tool to spread information, facilitate communication, and, ultimately, mobilize potential supporters. Recruiters can use social media to outsource recruitment to hubs of militants located outside the war zone. Broader audiences can be reached directly and through the amplification of messages across jihadi echo chambers, which exist across multiple social media platforms. A handful of hyperactive online activists can quickly and inexpensively distribute massive amounts of material. Recruiters can use the networked platforms to reach new audiences (Klausen 2015, 20).

Previous research has noted that IS has been particularly successful at utilizing new means of communication to expand its pool of volunteers. IS's use of social media and encryption to direct terrorist attacks overseas sets it apart from any other terrorist group in the past (Clarke 2019, 5). Using technology, IS applies a multi-tiered approach to conducting terrorist attacks (inspired or directed) (Clarke 2019, 5). In comparative terms, IS has taken advantage of social media to disseminate its message and ideology far beyond what Al-Qaeda could ever achieve. The core of this explanation is that individuals do not join IS because of Twitter, but social media enabled

peer-to-peer recruitment with a self-perpetuating expansion through networks that removed prior constraints of geography on recruitment.

One criticism of the online radicalization argument is that scholarly literature and policy documents more often focus on online content and messaging, rather than exploring how the internet is used by individuals in the process of their radicalization (Behr et al. 2013). A 2013 study by the Rand Corporation finds that the internet may enhance opportunities to become radicalized as a result of being available to many people and enabling connection with like-minded individuals from across the globe. Furthermore, the internet may act as an "echo chamber" for extremist beliefs.

However, the study does not find evidence that the internet accelerates radicalization. Instead, its authors conclude that the internet appears to facilitate this process, which, in turn, may or may not accelerate it. Most importantly, the research shows that the internet is not a substitute for in-person meetings but rather complements in-person communication (Behr et al. 2013). This argument appears in earlier studies on Al-Qaeda. As Neumann (2007) writes, the real-world relationships are decisive. The internet can support radicalization and recruitment, but it will not be able to completely replace direct human contact, friendship, or kinship ties through which loyalties evolve (Neumann 2007, 53). This claim is theoretically embraced by this dissertation, as the analysis seeks to emphasize the role of human agency and authority in a context.

2.2. Conclusion

The theories on recruitment discussed above make two gaps in the literature on foreign fighters particularly evident. First, in searching for universal answers to recruitment, scholars de-contextualize the phenomenon of foreign fighters. Consequently, previous research on European jihadists did not pay much attention to indigenous Muslim communities with recent experience in

conflict and a high contribution of foreign fighters. Second, research on foreign fighters is largely focused on recruits without looking in-depth at leadership roles, authority, and impact. Research on the structure and dynamics of jihadi recruitment in Europe has failed to stress the significance of an organizational layer that is situated between the top leadership and the grassroots level. Therefore, the knowledge on the role of local radical influencers in recruitment is limited because pull factors and actors in a context, which may have impacted recruitment, have been neglected.

To address the first gap, which is concerned with the context of recruitment, this dissertation will investigate the radical milieus of foreign fighters from post-conflict societies in Europe to find out how the origin and the social dynamics of post-war radical milieus contribute to the recruitment of foreign fighters. This is to fill the gap left by previous research on European jihadists that have studied recruitment among Muslim communities that are comprised of immigrants but are not indigenous, and that have lived in peaceful European societies, not in post-war ones. The dissertation focuses on the Western Balkans without searching for a direct link between the 1990s conflicts in the region and the high number of individuals who traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016. Instead, it seeks to connect the war and post-war spread of radical values through a variety of actors, such as the influx of Islamic charities and the rise of a generation of radical preachers across the region, to the gradual consolidation of a radical milieu and the consequent phase of foreign fighter recruitment.

To address the second gap on leadership and authority in the recruitment of foreign fighters, the dissertation will focus on the role of the local radical influencers and their impact on prospective foreign fighters. To better understand the recruitment of foreign fighters, this dissertation compares the evolution of and the role of local leadership in Albania and BiH. By looking at the pre-departure socialization of foreign fighters into Salafi communities, the

dissertation seeks to provide insights about social relations, structures, and decision-making processes concerning individual and group departures to the battlefield.

The dissertation proposes that foreign fighter recruitment cannot be understood without dissecting the evolution of local group dynamics and radical authority. It is the trajectory of radical influencers and their strategic choices that may explain the clusters of foreign fighter departures. Whether influencers are the pushing part in recruitment, or their followers find their way to charismatic figures and like-minded peers, they are all part of a radical milieu. While foreign fighters are only the visible part of a radical milieu, the presence and persistence of radical influencers speak for the strength of such micro-societies over time.

Radical milieus in post-war societies have been largely inspired and managed by local influencers whose personal histories are rooted in war and post-war Salafi circles. Such radical milieus have played the unique role of constructors as well as exploiters of radical norms. Their impact is only due to the conducive surrounding environment set by war and post-war fragility. Consequently, foreign fighter recruitment can be seen as one of the outcomes of targeted efforts of influencers to build local radical milieus. The geographical distribution of recruitment may be drawn by top-down strategic targeting, not only by the bottom-up aggregation of foreign fighters' individual motivations and intentions.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RADICAL MILIEU AND INFLUENCERS OF FOREIGN FIGHTER RECRUITMENT

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that the literature on European jihadists mistakenly states that recruitment is motivated by the same structures and processes across various contexts. To engage critically with this argument, the dissertation seeks to explain what drives recruitment in indigenous Muslim communities in post-war societies in Europe. Looking at the evolution of actors and activities in a context, the argument put forth here is that previous research has failed to consider these differences.

Balkan jihadi fighters are not the ones who failed to integrate in the West and consequently get radicalized and travel to Syria. They do not come from Muslim immigrant communities but indigenous post-violent ones. Given this, the expectation is that the radical structures and dynamics that appear in post-war societies may differ from those present in the West due to different historical contexts. Although Balkan foreign fighters belong to the same generation and may have been subjects to the same recruitment patterns, their local radical milieus have a unique history, which is a history of war and post-war fragility.

The dissertation asserts that the radical milieu of foreign fighters is highly influenced by authority figures, and their availability in a local context determines the geographical distribution of recruitment. According to the dissertations' framework, unlike radical milieus in Western Europe, post-war radical milieus in Europe emerge as a byproduct of a domestically experienced conflict. Therefore, radical influencers are able to build authority and capitalize on it for the sake of recruitment facilitated by the radical milieu's emergence.

To analyze the influence of post-war radical milieus on recruitment, the dissertation employs Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS) (Koopmans and Statham 1999), which is a

framework situated in the realm of social movement theories. This framework allows for the analysis of the combined effects of a context, radical structures, and narratives in relation to foreign fighters. The Discursive Opportunity Structure will help to answer the research question: "How do post-war radical milieus shape the recruitment of foreign fighters?"

The dissertation theoretically connects the formation of post-war radical milieus with the outcome of radical socialization. The most visible part of this are the individuals who have traveled to Iraq and Syria within the framework of the Islamic State's caliphate. At the macro level, the dissertation examines the environment in which foreign fighter recruitment takes place, which is the *radical milieu*. At the micro level, the dissertation looks at the role of *radical influencers* in recruitment. In short, this is the theoretical approach concerning authority. Both frameworks are combined to create the theoretical approach taken in this dissertation, and it is additionally built on four theoretical propositions concerned with origin, structure, narratives, and followers.

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is presented that links the legacy of a war to the grassroots recruitment of foreign fighters. First, discursive opportunity structure is explained and how it is employed in the dissertation. Special attention is paid to context, structures, and framing, which are used to develop the theory. The dissertation builds on DOS, looking at the origin of post-war radical milieus, structures, and narratives managed by radical influencers to explain who gets targeted to go and fight in the Syrian War. Second, the dissertation conceptualizes a radical milieu and a radical influencer based on knowledge generated from literature on recruitment into Islamist militancy, clandestine organizations, and social movements. Finally, four theoretical propositions are developed separately that reflect the theoretical application of discursive opportunity structure to the recruitment of foreign fighters. The goal of developing these

propositions is to apply them as an analytical framework to the two case studies in this dissertation – the Albanian and Bosnian radical milieus.

3.2. Discursive Opportunity Structure

The research employs Discursive Opportunity Structure (Koopmans and Statham 1999) to develop an analytical model of foreign fighter recruitment in relation to the establishment of post-war radical milieus. Why this framework has been chosen lies in the way foreign fighter recruitment has mostly been understood in the literature: as a type of violent transnational activism of local networks embedded in the global jihadist movement (Malet 2010; 2018; Moore and Tumelty 2008; Hegghammer 2010; Bakke 2014; Moore 2015; Crenshaw 2017). Previous research on European jihadist recruitment has overwhelmingly recognized the importance of social networks (Sageman 2004; 2008; 2016; Nesser 2016; Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Neumann 2012; 2016; Holman 2016; Reynolds and Hafez 2019; Roy 2004; 2008; 2017). A key finding in the literature on jihadist fighters is that recruitment is done not through a central unit but is more often performed at the grassroots level (Coolsaet 2015; 2016b; Nesser 2016; Sageman 2016). Influencers and followers are not "atomized individuals" but participants of small groups connected to each other (Sageman 2004, 137). Thus, the dissertation relies on concepts situated in research that has been done on social mobilization and social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1998; Della Porta and Diani 2006) to look at the recruitment of foreign fighters from post-war radical milieus.

This framework reflects an idea shared in this dissertation: that initiation of a movement requires some combination of political opportunities, organizing structures, and cultural frames (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). While previous research across various disciplinary fields, including social movements and terrorism, has looked at the role of movement formation, social

structures, mobilization frames, and followers, studying them separately does not allow for explaining what motivates recruitment in a given context. For example, if we analyze IS propaganda only, we cannot say why extremist frames resonate with some communities, but not with others. If we assume that identical radical networks are responsible for recruitment across various cases, we would ignore the specificities of the context, such as social grievances or the origin of movement structures. Yet, to understand the evolution and the role of post-war radical milieus in recruitment, there is a need to look at their origin, structure, narratives, and followers altogether.

The DOS focuses on the combined effects of framing, on the one hand, and the discursive opportunities provided by cultural and structural contexts on the other. Koopmans and Statham introduce this term to identify ideas in the larger political culture that are believed to be "sensible", "realistic", and "legitimate" and that facilitate the reception of certain movement frames (In McCammon et al. 2007). The two authors argue that the cultural context in which framing takes place moderates the success of movement framing. The frames of a movement work in combination with the political and cultural environment in which they are expressed to produce a movement's desired political outcome.

In other words, specific discursive elements and structural circumstances in the broader cultural and political context determine the capacity of a collective action frame to mobilize support. Discursive opportunity structures themselves can be highly stable structures, meaning that opportunities for politically effective collective action framing can emerge from discourses that are long-lived and deeply embedded in the surrounding culture (McCammon et al. 2007; Gamson and Meyer 1996). To sum up, to understand fully why certain frames succeed, one must acknowledge not only the content of the frames but also the broader circumstances in which frames

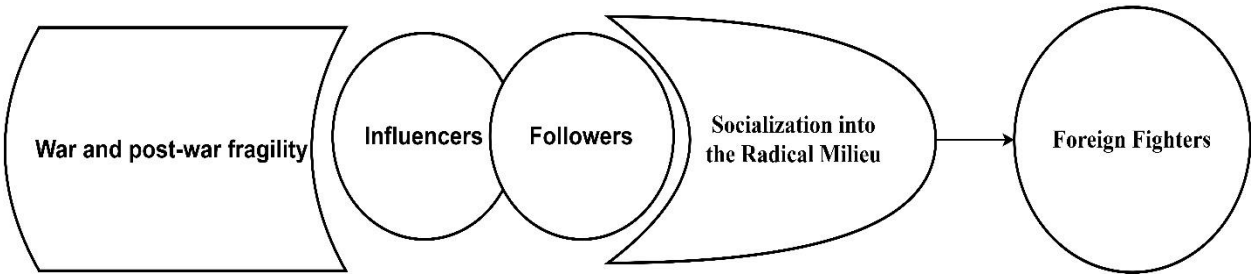
take place (McCammon et al. 2007). For instance, the worldwide propaganda of the Islamic State is seen in the literature as a decisive factor in the global-scale recruitment of foreign fighters. However, previous research did not pay much attention to the "selective relationships between ideological forms and social environment" (Wuthnow 1987, 163). This means that while discursive opportunity structures are apparent in the broader culture, eventually, movement actors are the agents who make decisions about how to respond to such opportunities (McCammon et al. 2007; Ferree 2003; Gamson and Meyer 1996).

DOS is understood here is as the macro structure that shapes individual level processes and actions. The combination of a context, movement, and narratives have a role in triggering moments and affect individual decision making. The macro factors that shape the discursive opportunity structure in the case of post-war radical milieus concern different aspects of post-war fragility including political, socio-economic, religious, and societal fragility, which are explained at length further in this chapter. War and post-war fragility are seen as enabling factors to the growth of radical milieus in societies with a war legacy. They have set the ground for the erosion of societal values, norms, and structures that allow for the spread of radical ideologies and facilitate the path to them for both radical influencers and their followers. Hence, the factors that shape post-war radical milieus enable radical influencers to build their authority.

In relation to foreign fighter recruitment, DOS can operate as the interplay of the global narratives of jihadism and pre-existing local radical milieus managed by radical influencers in a given moment. DOS is applied to the recruitment of foreign fighters to argue that while discursive opportunities exist in the broader context, recruitment depends on influencers to exploit such opportunities (McCammon et al. 2007). The recruitment of jihadists in post-war societies takes place in already established radical milieus. When such radical milieus are in place, influencers

have the freedom to choose whether and when to take advantage of their influence over followers and further encourage participation in violence (See Figure 2). Thus, recruitment depends on the available structures, opportunities, and strategic choices of influencers when a triggering moment is present, which is, in this case, the Syrian War.

Figure 2 Process formation of a post-war radical milieu.



The dissertation employs DOS to argue that while foreign fighters are the only visible part of a radical milieu, the presence and persistence of radical influencers speak for the strength of the community over time. A radical milieu enables the interaction between influencers and their followers by playing the unique role of constructors as well as exploiters of radical values over time. Yet, it is in the hands of influencers whether to take advantage of the opportunity for radical action and to encourage recruitment. Therefore, what drives recruitment cannot be explained solely by personal motivations of foreign fighters, but one should also consider influencers' targeting efforts.

The emphasis on the influencers in this framework seeks to show the evolution of their authority between the domestic wars and the start of recruitment for a distant war. The radical values they could offer to their followers were not present before the domestic conflicts. Therefore, their influence can be seen as contextualized by war and post-war fragility. If their influence is contextually dependent, this means that their strategic choices to engage with violent rhetoric and recruit foreign fighters for Syria are also based on the opportunities in the domestic political,

security, and cultural contexts. Even when influencers recognize opportunities, they may or may not exploit them. If influencers frame their messages without considering dynamics in the broader cultural context, their rhetoric is less likely to be effective with respect to recruitment. On the other hand, if influencers shape their frames not only in line with their own beliefs and goals, but also tailor them to the needs and beliefs of their followers, their claims are more likely to persuade target populations.

Nonetheless, followers here are not passive members of the radical milieu following the messages of influencers blindly. Both influencers and followers have forms of activism that may lead to participation in violence. While in some cases influencers may be the pushing part in radical socialization, in others, bottom-up actions link followers to charismatic leaders and like-minded peers (Nesser 2016). Hence, foreign fighter recruitment is neither fully controlled, nor an entirely spontaneous process. On the one hand, formal mobilization structures are rarely the starting point of social movement activism (Hafez 2012, 195). On the other hand, new forms of activism, either violent or peaceful, do not appear automatically, but they need an infrastructure of actors and activities (Malet 2013, 29; Tarrow 2005, 186–87). Thus, it is safe to argue that recruitment here is a top-down process only to the extent that it is inspired and coordinated by individuals who had a higher "level of initiation" than the prospective foreign fighters (Hegghammer 2006, 52). Thus, the commitment of followers to the radical milieu is maintained and bonds of solidarity are forged through authority, organization, ideologies, and rituals (Downton and Wehr 1998; Hund and Benford 2007; Fominaya 2010, 396).

3.3. Radical Milieu

The emergence and the evolution of a radical milieu is understood here as the macro level of the analysis. The dissertation asserts that the radical milieu of foreign fighters is highly

influenced by authority figures, and their availability in a local context predisposes the geographical distribution of recruitment. The dissertation borrows the concept of "radical milieu" (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014) to conceptualize the broader Salafi community, which is defined as the social environment of jihadi foreign fighters in a post-war context. Malthaner and Waldmann (2014) define a radical milieu as the formative and supportive environment that provide radicals with ideological, moral, and logistical support, while encouraging their views, objectives, and actions.

In this dissertation, the radical milieu of foreign fighters is not a community specifically tailored to produce terrorists. More often, it challenges the legitimacy of established societal and religious norms and policies without necessarily leading to violence. The term "radical milieu" describes the broader community from which violent actors emerge (Winterbotham and Pearson 2020). The radical milieu is the "social setting" of radicalization (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014). It represents a complex blend of agency, structure, and contingency that determines the ideational and social resources radical influencers can mobilize for the purpose of recruitment. What connects actors in the radical milieu are social ties among influencers that further bridge them to their followers. The pre-recruitment networks in which local influencers are embedded determine the nature of the structures they can build when the actual recruitment process begins.

The radical milieu of jihadi fighters is characterized by a lack of central decision-making and institution-building processes. Nonetheless, this does not mean that recruitment is entirely leader-less or tactic-less. Processes of radical socialization controlled by power centers, meaning more than one influencer tied to each other, secure reliable and consistent obedience from followers. The ties between influencers and followers determine the strength of power centers when influencers decide to attempt to mobilize followers to act upon their radical views.

3.4. Radical Influencers

The role of radical influencers represents the micro level of the analysis. The dissertation asserts that the presence and persistence of radical influencers largely determine the survival of a radical milieu in which foreign fighter recruitment takes place. Their influence is a function of their informal authority, and even without being strictly connected to each other, they serve as the administration of local Salafi milieus. The dissertation explains the impact of influencers in post-war societies in Europe through the conducive environment of post-war fragility. In a community socially and institutionally devastated by a war, informal authority figures are easily "institutionalized".

To conceptualize radical influencers, the dissertation relies on previous research on authority in social movements and terrorism. Research on social movements tends to treat leadership as "epiphenomenal" without emphasizing the external conditions of movement emergence, such as network positions, historical circumstances, sudden crises, and available resources (Morris and Staggenborg 2004, 187). Social movement leadership is often understood as a distinction between charismatic and bureaucratic authority. Charismatic authority, according to Max Weber, emerges from enthusiastic interactions among leaders and followers (in Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Bureaucratic authority is tied to legal rationality, legal legitimacy, and bureaucracy. The latter is less applicable to the study of authority in foreign fighter recruitment as this form of radial action is not a product of strictly hierarchical organizations with fixed institutionalized rules. On the contrary, the concept of charismatic authority corresponds with the needs of the Salafi movement for ideological proliferation and mobilization.

Research on authority in terrorism distinguishes between various levels of leadership. Shapiro (2013) asserts that low-level operatives can be difficult to manage. The middle management of a terror group, which is the closest to the profile of influencers employed in this

dissertation, combines several of the characteristics of the top leadership and the grassroots. Similarly to the top leadership, middle managers are experienced, skilled, and maintain contact with members of the leadership (Malet, Daymon, and de Roy van Zuijdewijn 2020). Middle managers in a terrorist organization are the only members of the group who are connected to both grassroots and top leadership. Consequently, they become critical in providing linkages and facilitating the flow of information, resources, and skills between the top and the bottom of the organization (Neumann, Evans, and Pantucci 2011, 829). Their outlook and ideology are global but most of their activities are realized locally (Neumann, Evans, and Pantucci 2011).

The authority situated in grassroots radical milieus is not necessarily part of a hierarchical organization. It may even lack ties to a central leadership of a terror organization. However, its contribution to the overall strategy of a group is set in the ideologically loyal base they establish and administer locally. Thus, looking at radical influencers in the sense of charismatic authority figures will help to unveil their role in the radical milieu. Their influence can be understood as a function of their charisma, described as a "quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 1964, 358). The legitimacy of radical influencers' authority is a product of recognition from their followers. The influencers may provide the basis for a group's strength and cohesion through agenda setting and maintaining successful recruitment policies (Malet, Daymon, and de Roy van Zuijdewijn 2020).

Thus, radical influencers in this dissertation are self-proclaimed imams, hate preachers, or charismatic jihadi militants who have a history in a war and are recognized as authority figures in the radical milieu. They build power centers of influence, which here refers to more than one influencer tied to another and the associated clusters of followers in given geographical spots.

Radical influencers tend to appear as "central nodal points" in grassroots recruitment, but they are not simply recruiters. They may have influence over local followers without necessarily being directed by top level leaders in a transnational terror organization. Although their availability on the local level may predetermine their catalytic-agential role in recruitment, the question remains why influencers have this impact over targeted communities.

Radical influencers have the skills to put together a coherent story that resonates with many people by borrowing selectively from religion, history, and mythology (Gupta 2005, 18–21). Political violence takes place when a leader gives a voice to the various forms of their followers' frustration by formulating a well-defined social construction based on images of "us" and "them" (Gupta 2005b). They are further able to translate causes from a structural level up to a motivational level, thereby moving people to act (Bjørgo 2005). To do so, influencers discourage their followers from being influenced by other factors in their social environment, for example, telling recruits not to reveal their intentions to their families. They further incentivize them to engage with the cause of jihad by becoming a foreign fighter. Unlike other members of the radical milieu, radical influencers are generally eloquent, coherent, and thoughtful in expressing their views (Slootman et al. 2006).

The dissertation looks at several functions that speak for the informal authority of influencers in a radical milieu. Nesser's typology of jihadi terrorists in Europe offers a particularly useful way to approach data on foreign fighter recruitment in a context. He distinguishes between entrepreneurs, protégés, misfits, and drifters (Nesser 2016). While these types differ in the way they radicalize and the functions they have within a cell, entrepreneurs and their protégés contribute far more to the emergence of terrorist "hubs" compared to misfits and drifters. They proactively seek to build and organize extremist circles at the grassroots level by socialization,

manipulation, and recruitment. Entrepreneurs build cells locally and provide them with a rationale and purpose. Together with protégés, entrepreneurs connect misfits and drifters, introduce them to a community that they can identify with, and translate grievances into a violent world view. Entrepreneurs further provide a link between the cell and armed groups in conflict zones (Nesser 2016, 12–18).

Table 5 Functions of radical influencers.

Theoretical concepts of functions	**Empirical manifestations**
Ideological influence	Sermons and lectures
Influence on individual and group socialization	Online and offline discussions with followers, guidance for everyday life concerning marriage, health, family, education, etc.
Logistical and financial support	Issuing "recommendation letters" to foreign fighters
Building the image of a spiritual authority	Performing "spiritual healing"

Building on Nesser's typology, this dissertation distinguishes between four functions that influencers may perform (See Table 5). These functions point to the role of authority figures in recruiting people into Islamist militancy, as discussed in previous research. According to Neumann (2007), radical imams are thought to perform several key functions (36–37). First, they serve as key propagandists, who make the basic narrative of Islamist militancy relevant to their followers. Second, they are seen as religious authorities, who provide rulings (fatwas) and justifications for violent jihad. Third, they are recruitment magnets, who attract followers from various backgrounds and integrate them into a coherent network. Finally, they generate "networks of networks" at national, regional, and international levels by linking different groups and networks (Neumann, 2007, 36-37).

However, influencers in this dissertation are not only radical imams. They may entirely lack religious authority over target communities, but, due to their charisma and ability to build

social networks, they also fit into the influencer profile. Describing such type of activism, Neumann (2007) points to activists who provide leadership and cohesion. Activists, in his words, are usually the ones from whom a radical cell initially emerges and who are in charge of holding it together and expanding it. They are typically the most persuasive and most ideologically driven members of a group. They also have a local network of friends and associates through whom they can "spot" and select new recruits (Neumann 2007, 36–37). They further link domestic and global Islamist militancy by links to war zones or establishing links with branches of organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (Neumann 2007).

Although influencers are not given any authority from a central leadership organization, they gain prominence through the grassroots socialization process. They organize ideological trainings, facilitate travels of foreign fighters to Syria, and oversee extending the pool of potential recruits. They may happen to operate on both sides of the recruitment channel by building influence in the pre-departure phase and then later by joining the battlefield themselves and becoming commanders of the arriving contingents from their home regions.

In analyzing the role of influencers in recruitment, a distinction is made between *local influencers* and *battlefield influencers*, depending on whether they remain active only in grassroots recruitment or if they travel to the war zone. The main difference between these two types is that *local influencers* have "real life" access to their followers through sermons, religious gatherings, or informal discussions in private spaces, while *battlefield influencers* rely entirely on the power of the message supported through action, mostly through videos and photos. In other words, they use different propaganda channels; local influencers combine a more ideologically focused offline and online presence, whereas *battlefield influencers* demonstrate a militant engagement with the ideology through videos and photos but do not have direct access to their followers. Yet, these

categories are neither homogeneous, nor mutually exclusive. *Battlefield influencers* like all other foreign fighters have their pre-departure history. This means that they could also gain influence over targeted segments of the radical milieu in person-to-person socialization. Both types of influencers act as informal authority figures and play a vital role in spreading propaganda and recruiting insurgents.

Influencers in a post-war context refer to a generation of local Salafi preachers, who had the opportunity to study in Middle Eastern Islamic institutions due to war and post-war Islamic NGOs providing scholarships. This characteristic is particularly important because it speaks for the empowerment that they received through being educated and socialized in a particular set of radical values outside the Western Balkans. The knowledge thus obtained allow them to gain prominence among local communities in their home region. In this dissertation, Salafi influencers are defined as radical as they would offer radical values that largely contradict societal and religious traditions. Radical influencers are distinguished from each other depending on whether they promote or do not promote violence. Radical influencers who employ the framework of Salafism to openly advocate for violence are in the focus of this research. It is expected that both violent and non-violent radical influencers have been available in a post-war context before the triggering moment of the Syrian War. Moreover, it is argued, that local conflicts have shaped the individual histories of Salafi authority figures.

3.5. Theoretical Propositions to the Study of Post-War Radical Milieus

Following the tenets of the DOS, the chapter continues by developing four theoretical propositions concerned with origin, structure, narratives, and followers. They are tailored to explore the relationship between influencers and followers and to understand recruitment by explaining who is targeted to go and fight in a distant conflict and how. The DOS puts an emphasis on context.

Building on this aspect of the framework, the dissertation looks at the *origin* of the radical milieu in a post-war context to explain how domestic conflicts help the emergence of post-war radical actors and activities. Furthermore, *narratives* and *structures* that analyze the role of influencers in recruitment in-depth correspond with the other two components of DOS: framing and structures. To sum up, the DOS allows us to understand the origin of a radical milieu, its structures, and its narratives, all of which encourage some followers to become foreign fighters. In applying DOS to this dissertation, post-war fragility, in a political, religious, societal, and socio-economic sense, is considered the origin of radical milieus that has enabled radical authority figures to utilize structures and narratives for the purpose of foreign fighter recruitment.

3.5.1. Origin: War and Post-War Fragility

A radical milieu is explained here as a byproduct of a domestic war. War and post-war fragility in this dissertation is a permissive factor to the emergence of radical actors and activities who capitalize on post-war marginalization and polarization in order to radicalize target populations. Thus, war is a scope condition that limits the research to Muslim communities in Europe with a contribution of foreign fighters and a recent experience of a violent conflict. While war in human experience is related to suffering and destruction, war is also seen here as a catalyst of the emergence of new micro-societies with their values, norms, and actors. Actors that constitute a radical milieu maintain a shared sense of belonging, as they identify with the same values and beliefs. Hence, the legacy of war allows for the integration of individuals into micro-societies that offer rhetoric opposing the mainstream values of the larger society, which polarizes them and can consequently radicalize them.

The dissertation does not seek a direct link between domestic and distant wars to make a claim that foreign fighters from post-war regions go to new wars motivated by previous combat

experience. Instead, it engages with the questions of how wartime actors and activities feed the growth of radical values inspired by jihadist Salafism and how wartime networks in targeted communities increase the likelihood of ideological interventions by specific foreign actors. If post-war phenomena, such as the influx of Islamic charities and the rise of a generation of radical influencers, are seen as formative to the origin of a radical milieu, they are also formative to foreign fighter recruitment by providing the venue for radical socialization.

The concept of war is operationalized here through the group-level experience of fragility understood as an outcome of a domestic conflict. Fragility here is not only a problem of state capacity after a conflict but also of relationships in a society (Marc et al. 2012). This means that, while some aspects of fragility emerge from the state, others are deeply rooted in societal dynamics. In other words, post-war fragility, among other things, concerns the way individuals and groups interact and the subsequent relationships. Fragility does not refer to static conditions nor an "all-or-nothing experience" (Marc et al. 2012). Adopting this concept as a continuum means that societies can experience extreme state failure and violent conflict at one end and varying degrees of fragility at other points in the continuum (Marc et al. 2012). The continuum here does not suggest a linear process because societies can move to different points following rapid or unexpected shifts in societal dynamics. Where a society falls on the fragility continuum largely depends on the degree of societal cohesion, meaning, the overall quality of relationships across groups (Marc et al. 2012). War and post-war fragility in this dissertation is understood as a set of factors that affect relationships in a society after violent conflicts. This set of factors include political, religious, and societal fragility.

First, political fragility in this dissertation is defined as a combination of authority, legitimacy, and service failures. This means that the government cannot deliver core functions to

the majority of its people including service entitlements, justice, and security (Brown and Steward 2018). Authority failure refers to the inability of a state to protect citizens from violence of various kinds. A service failure appears when a state fails to ensure access to basic services to all citizens such as health services, basic education, water and sanitation, transport and energy infrastructure, and reduction in income poverty (Brown and Steward 2018). The characteristics of a legitimacy failure include, among others, an absence of democracy, a strong role of the military, suppression of opposition, and exclusion of groups of the population from power (Brown and Steward 2018). The empirical manifestations of political fragility in societies after war include weak institutional arrangements, poor governance, and political crises that usually lead to corruption, gaps in public security, marginalization of communities, and general distrust in public governance. Political fragility is understood as a factor in weakening the resilience of a local population to forms of political radicalization and extremism.

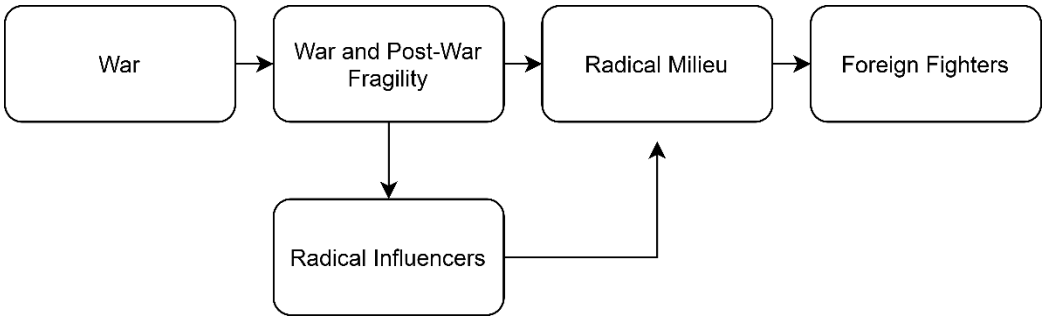
Second, religious fragility is seen in this dissertation as the experience of individual and community identity crises that relate to aspects of religion. The lack of stable religious institutions in a post-war context is a permissive factor in the growth of various religious movements and sects offering alternative religious interpretations, tailored to build influence over local populations. These processes may lead to changes in the socio-cultural belonging of individuals and group actors. Religious fragility allows for unresolved narratives related to identity to magnify the importance of religion

Third, societal fragility is defined as the erosion of socio-cultural values and norms in combination with a high tolerance for violence. The empirical manifestation of societal fragility is the way individuals and groups interact and the subsequent relationships (Marc et al. 2012). The sense of exclusion among certain communities, whether legitimate or perceived, decreases the

"immunity" of individuals against radical worldviews that appear under the conditions of cleavages and lack of cohesion in a society. In such an environment, retrograde ideologies are often perceived as a way for personal development and protection (Selimi and Stojkovski 2017).

To sum up, various aspects of post-war fragility could explain the appearance of radical milieus and radical influencers in societies with a conflict legacy. All these components of post-war fragility could be exploited readily and effectively through radical narratives tailored to build influence over followers. Hence, it is necessary to understand how influencers in fragile societies sustain radical authority and build networks.

Figure 3 Theoretical model linking post-war fragility and recruitment of jihadi foreign fighters (2012-16).



As argued in Chapter Two, knowing the origin of a radical milieu matters, as this may speak for context-specific processes and structures with implications for foreign fighter recruitment. The above presented model (See Figure 3) emphasizes the role of influencers in managing post-war radical milieus. It hypothesizes that the recruitment of foreign fighters follows the trajectory of radical influencers, filling the void for social and religious values left by a war. Thus, the origin of local influencers' authority is seen as a consequence of a specific context that has allowed them to influence the integration of followers into the radical milieu and further engage with agenda setting concerning foreign fighter departures. This model justifies the first

theoretical proposition that the dissertation puts forward, which is regarding the origin of radical milieus in relation to a domestically experienced war.

FIRST THEORETICAL PROPOSITION:

Origin: Radical milieus emerge as a byproduct of war and post-war fragility. As fragility has been present in its political, religious, and societal aspects, the appearance of radical actors and activities have been highly incentivized.

3.5.2. Structure: Core and Periphery of the Radical Milieu

The origin of a radical milieu rooted in war and post-war fragility does not automatically speak for it as a venue for recruitment of foreign fighters. To see a radical milieu as a radicalization venue, it is necessary to consider the micro-dynamics and, more specifically, the way radical influencers "institutionalize" their authority in integrating followers into the radical milieu. Even if radical influencers seek to spread the values of Salafism in a post-war society, this does not immediately hint at their leadership functions in foreign fighter recruitment. To understand how influencers play a role in this process, the dissertation examines their explicit engagement with violent rhetoric and actions following the rise of IS and the outbreak of the Syrian War. Once the origin of a radical influence is explained in relation to the context, the next step is to identify how radical influences shape the core and periphery of a radical milieu.

If there is a structure that could give insights into the highly decentralized recruitment of jihadist fighters, it is the grassroots one. On the grassroots level, radical influences are close enough to the prospective recruit and may affect his/her decision to get involved. As noted before, the radical milieu of foreign fighters is highly influenced by authority figures and their presence in a local context is key to the gepg of recruitment. To analyze how influencers impact the structure of

the radical milieu, the dissertation connects to research on social networks that is well-recognized in the literature on the recruitment of jihadists (See Chapter Two).

A central finding in the literature on political mobilization is that informal network ties are necessary for collective action, insurgency, and terrorism (Gerlach and Hine 1970, McAdam 1986, McAdam and Paulsen 1993, Sageman 2004, Hafez 2012). The concept of networks refers to private and public ties, whether direct or indirect, between individuals, clusters (such as social clubs, or tribes), and organizations. These links can include friendship and family ties, ties with co-workers and neighbors, acquaintances and colleagues in social or religious organizations, along with activist ties across a number of political organizations (Diani 2003).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, organizational approaches to terrorism discuss whether activities related to terrorism are organized with a top-down or bottom-up approach ("leader-led", Hoffman or "leader-less", Sageman). The missing link in this debate are the authority figure(s) able to influence followers at the local level. It is, therefore, expected that the strategic choices of influencers who decide where, when, and how to look for followers draw the geographical map of radical socialization into the radical milieu.

Thus, the dissertation engages with the logic that even if structures are loose and detached from the top leadership of a group, they are characterized by the presence of authority figures, whose role is the focus of this dissertation. According to Shapiro's terrorist dilemma (2013), terrorist groups tend to have a strict hierarchical structure, which is reflective of their need to control the financial flow. On the other hand, ideological groups, particularly if they are part of a larger movement, are inspired by the concept of a common destiny and the images of a shared enemy. In such cases, the organizational structure may have a good deal of flexibility.

The grassroots socialization into the radical milieu secures the existence of clusters of people willing to defend a radical cause through action. From a social movement perspective, such social networks are the "collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action" (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 3). Grassroots socialization allows followers to find links to the cause of jihad and deepen their involvement in the Islamist militant movements (Neumann 2010). While individuals may get involved through pre-existing interactions, they also establish new relationships through their involvement, for example, with local radical influencers or like-minded peers. Both a facilitator and a product of collective action, local radical networks play a major role in shaping foreign fighter recruitment (Della Porta and Diani 2006).

Unpacking the structure of a radical milieu is essential to understanding the relationships between influencers and followers. As noted, the radical milieu of foreign fighters is not a homogeneous network tailored to create terrorists. Instead, it describes the broader community from which violent actors emerge (Winterbotham and Pearson 2020). The socialization between influencers and followers varies. On the one hand, this may affect the ability of influencers to recruit, and on the other hand, the motivation of followers to become foreign fighters.

First, social interaction between influencers and their followers does not necessary involve appeals to violence. As Thomas Hegghammer points out, jihadist militancy "is about more than bombs and doctrines. It is also about rituals, customs, and dress codes. It is about music, films, and storytelling. It is about sports, jokes, and food" (Hegghammer 2017, 1).

Second, not everyone who is considered a follower becomes a foreign fighter. Many who intended to travel to the battlefield did not go eventually for a variety of reasons, including being prevented by police. This means that the impact of radical influencers cannot simply be measured

by the number of foreign fighters who emerged from the radical circles around them. It goes beyond these numbers and concerns the ability and persistence of influencers to maintain structures in the radical milieu.

Third, not everyone who traveled to the warzone sought to become a terrorist or even had the ideological conviction to build the "caliphate". They followed a family member (willingly or forcefully), a friend, or a community leader. Moreover, people may have a complex mixture of incentives, e.g. material, moral, and emotional, as well as a set of commitments to a group and an ideology that are nearly impossible to separate from one another. Therefore, the question to ask is not about individual motivations, but the set of activities and structures that fuel socialization between influencers and their followers.

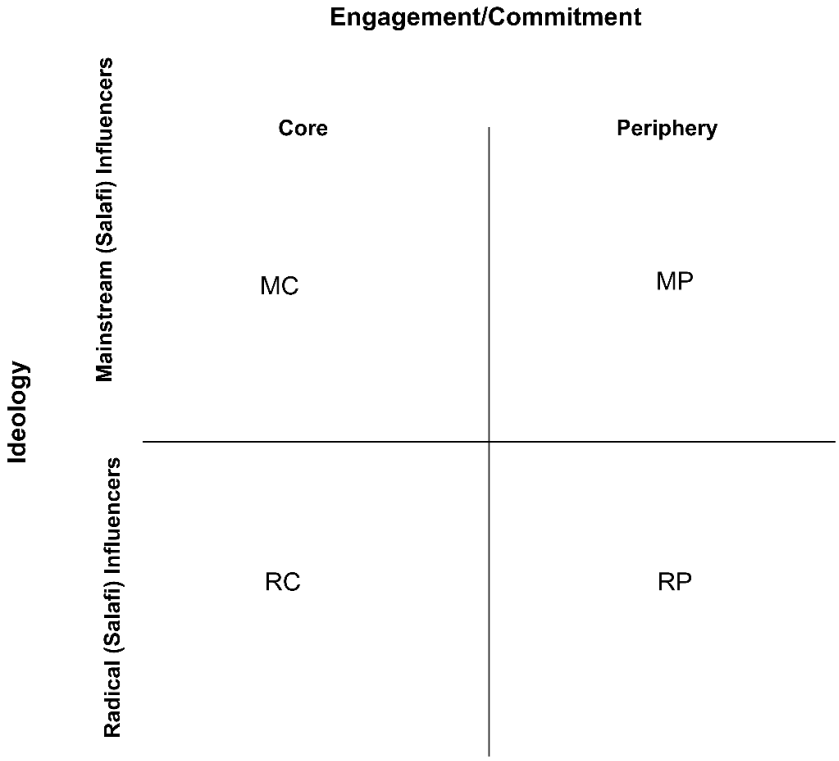
One possible way to approach the structure of the radical milieu is through the existence of ideological cleavages among radical influencers. In an attempt to offer a more detailed analysis of post-war radical milieus, a distinction is made between a *core* and *periphery.* It depends on influencers' and followers' expressed commitments to violent rhetoric and activities or the lack thereof. To distinguish between radical influencers, who openly engage with violent propaganda, and those who do not, these two categories are referred to as *Radical Salafi Influencers* and *Mainstream Salafi Influencers*.

The core of the radical milieu is the part of the local Salafi community where jihadist Salafists belong. This is the space of the radical influencers who largely inspired and administrated the process of foreign fighter recruitment between 2011 and 2016. In the periphery of the radical milieu are the mainstream Salafi influencers, who are ordinary peaceful Salafists. The actors situated here are religiously conservative radical influencers and followers, often seeing themselves as rebels against the mainstream society's norms and values and official religious and

state institutions. Salafi preachers in the periphery do not engage with violent rhetoric; in many cases they even reject it and argue against it. Yet, they promote conservative religious values and influence the manifestation of Salafi circles that largely disagree with the mainstream values of the society.

The core and periphery of a radical milieu are, to a certain extent, fluid and may change their size and scope over time. This means that radical influencers have the freedom to make strategic choices about the way they express their radical views and the activities they undertake. Some of them may decide to soften their rhetoric or make it more explicit, depending on the external political and security factors. The same logic applies to their adherents, who can make a choice to act on their radical views or to stay passive. This fluidity of the radical milieu further creates space for radicals who strategically adjust to external political and security factors and, consequently, may decide to step out of the core, and move to the periphery, when dynamics in the larger population do not allow them to openly advocate for jihad (See Figure 4).

Figure 4 Influencers in the core and periphery of the radical milieu.



Based on this framework, the dissertation argues that influencers may undertake different pathways of engagement with their followers. Four possible pathways (See Table 6) are discussed here, although it is assumed that there might be more in reality.

Table 6 Pathways of Radical and Mainstream (Salafi) Influencers.

From Radical Periphery to Radical Core:	Influencers whose rhetoric had been radical (inclining to violence) before the outbreak of the Syrian War but shifted towards more active social engagement with their adherents, while providing ideological, logistical, and organizational support to foreign fighter departures. Some influencers travelled to the battlefield themselves.
From Radical Core to Mainstream Periphery	Influencers, who in a previous moment were more explicit in their radical rhetoric and activities, soften their voice due to changes in the external political and security environment. For instance, increased attention from local security agencies, the overall decline in the IS propaganda and their large-scale recruitment success, defeating the caliphate, etc.).

From Mainstream Core to Mainstream Periphery	Influencers who have been widely seen as wise figures, and thus, are respected by local communities. They represent the so-called peaceful Salafists, and some among them openly oppose the rhetoric and actions of the jihadi (also known as militant) Salafists.
From Mainstream Periphery to Radical Periphery	Influencers, who used to be softer in expressing their views, but now take the opportunity to engage with radical rhetoric or express support for (RC) leaders without necessarily engaging with actions further than spreading propaganda.

The above presented framework provides the base for the second theoretical assumption that the dissertation employs. It will be used to investigate local leadership networks and power centers that influencers have established to recruit followers. Furthermore, leader-led radical structures, such as radical settlements, religious NGOs, and illegal praying congregations will be examined to understand their role in the radical socialization of foreign fighters.

SECOND THEORETICAL PROPOSITION:

Structure: The geographical distribution of recruitment follows the trajectory of radical influencers. If targeted activities of influencers are present, clusters of foreign fighters are more likely.

3.5.3. Narratives: Global and Local Jihadist Messages

The analysis of the structure and the origin of the radical milieu provides insights into authority embedded in a local context. Nonetheless, to understand the link between a local radical milieu and the global jihadi movement in terms of recruitment, it is necessary to know how local influencers employ global narratives and whether they use their power to "localize" such narratives in order to mobilize followers. Thus, an analytical distinction is made between macro (global jihadi propaganda) and micro-narratives (local jihadi propaganda) based on the "target" of the rhetoric - whether it addresses the far enemy (e.g. the US, the Jews, the Syrian government, the West) or the close enemy (e.g. local governments, local religious and state institutions).

The differentiation between macro and micro levels further refers to the grievances employed in the jihadi rhetoric - whether influencers employ the themes of Islamophobia and Muslim victimhood in general terms (macro level) or refer to past grievances and war memories that are context specific (micro level). This distinction is important because if local influencers shape their frames in line with the global narratives of IS and also tailor them to the grievances and beliefs of local communities, their messages are more likely to persuade followers to engage with violence. In a post-war radical milieu, it is expected that influencers "localize" global narratives by using references to domestically experienced wars, ethnic and religious cleavages in the society, and disappointments with post-war political developments.

Previous research on European jihadists has shown that the dissemination of the jihadi message is an essential part of the recruitment process. Jihadist leaders employ ideology and radical rhetoric to persuade individuals and groups to act (Bjørgo 2005). Research on social movements, political mobilization, and terrorist groups have paid much attention to the process through which messages are conveyed to potential recruits (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Benford and Snow 2000; Ferree 2003; Snow 2004; McCammon et al. 2007; Neumann 2007; 2008; 2016; Roy 2008; Bakke 2013; 2014). Roy (2008) stresses the power of the narrative. He argues that the success of Osama Bin Laden is not to have established a modern and efficient Islamist political organization but to have invented a narrative that could allow rebels without a cause to connect with a cause (Roy 2008).

While the content of such messages matters, it is equally important to look at how "frames" are sequenced and whether the frame "articulator" is credible (Neumann 2007, 6–7). This credibility can only be understood as a function of authority that influencers are able to build in the radical milieu. What influencers say to encourage recruitment is important, but it also matters

how and when they say it (Neumann 2007). In other words, the content of the jihadi messages matters only if we know why jihadi messages are conveyed in a particular moment.

The framing of an issue plays a major role in the ability of a movement to mobilize supporters and incentivize collective action. The importance of framing by authority figures in human decision-making processes is well-recognized in the field of social movements, political violence, and psychology (Bakke 2014; Gupta 2005b; 2005a; Bjørgo 2005; Roy 2008; 2004; 2017). By using particular sets of frames, movement actors construct an "us vs. them" type of rhetoric that shows what the movement stands for and who it is against. These frames aim to create a shared understanding of reality that inspire and legitimize collective action (Bakke 2014; D. Snow and Benford 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Whether the process of framing succeeds in fostering collective action depends on how a frame resonates with the population it seeks to mobilize (Bakke 2014). For a frame to resonate, it needs to be internally consistent and empirically credible, as well as salient to the target population. This means that a frame is relevant to, and corresponds with, their beliefs, experiences, and culture (Benford and Snow 2000). Bakke (2014) points out that resonance does not automatically occur, but someone needs to foster it. Thus, local influencers have the power to "localize" global jihadi frames, if they find this contributes to their overall goals.

While the jihadi ideology is used as a "sense-making tool" (Malet 2013) by influencers, they are further able to legitimize violence in the framework of jihadi Salafism by referring to the past, while manipulating religious and cultural concepts (Della Porta 2009). By mixing history, religion, and mythology, they have the freedom to frame an issue and create a coherent story that resonates with a target audience (Tarrow 2011, 31; Gupta 2005b). Whether radical influencers have opportunistic purposes or really believe in the need to localize global jihadi frames, both

motives contribute to collective action. Therefore, their overall vision defines the boundaries of the group's identity for their followers who are willing to respond with action (Snow 2004; Tarrow 2011, 31). The way an issue is framed speaks for the ability of a movement to mobilize followers (Bakke 2013; Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Consequently, the recruitment of foreign fighters at the local level depends on the successful framing of a distant conflict as one of global concern (Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 2005; Malet 2013; Donnelly, Sanderson, and Fellman 2017). Previous research on jihadi foreign fighters emphasizes that identical narratives across cases of jihadi mobilization seek to frame national struggles in a foreign country as a cause of supranational jihad (Donnelly, Sanderson, and Fellman 2017). Jihadi influencers shift the discourse from nationalist to Islamist framings, as they present recent conflicts as defensive wars on behalf of a local Muslim population.

Framing participation in these conflict as a religious duty enables international supporters (Donnelly, Sanderson, and Fellman 2017; Bakke 2014). According to Malet (2010), recruitment is dependent on "framing distant civil conflicts as threatening a transnational identity group with which the recruit is closely affiliated" (99–100). By reframing the foreign struggle into a broader cause, radical influencers create a story that requires defensive actions. Like in previous wars, the Syrian War and the subsequent humanitarian crisis attracted volunteers from abroad and shifted the struggle from a purely national civil war to a supranational jihadist conflict. A new element was the declaration of the so-called "caliphate" that enabled IS to call on Muslims on a global basis by employing the narrative of statehood (Donnelly, Sanderson, and Fellman 2017).

Islamic fundamentalists claim that their calls for jihad are in defense of the transnational Islamic community, irrespective of state citizenship (Roy 2004). David Malet's recruitment model derives evidence from different empirical cases over time and shows that foreign fighter

recruitment messages and mechanisms follow a similar pattern across conflicts, regardless of their specificities (Malet 2013, 3–4). The structure of the frames employed by radical influencers includes a "threat to the extended community" and a "need to defend it". The effectiveness of such an appeal depends on the influencers' ability to frame the civil conflict as one that affects not some distant population but a broader transnational community to which the local combatants belong (Malet 2013, 26–27). Like transnational influencers, the local ones rely on similar frames of duty and defense. They emphasize obligations to transnational communities with which their audiences define their identities. The strategic framing, therefore, activates a sense of duty to the local followers (Malet 2013, 5).

The presented framework concerns the way local influencers may or may not utilize global narratives and gives a sufficient justification to formulate the third theoretical assumption that the dissertation employs.

THIRD THEORETICAL PROPOSITION:

Narratives: Radical influencers in post-war societies are likely to combine global jihadi narratives (macro level) with local jihadi narratives (micro level). Thus, radical influencers utilize war memories and legacies of local conflicts to make their recruitment messages for a global cause appealing to local followers.

3.5.4. Followers and their Relationship with the Radical Milieu

Knowing the origin, the structure, and the narratives of a radical milieu may not be sufficient to understand the recruitment of foreign fighters. The availability of each of these components separately is unlikely to be a factor in persuading people to engage in risky behavior, such as becoming a foreign fighter. While influencers rely on various functions of authority to engage with the radical milieu, their followers may also socialize into the community through different pathways.

Radicalization in this dissertation is a process of socialization wherein group dynamics are often more important than ideology, as the latter has only been employed as a framework for action. As radical socialization may or may not manifest itself in individuals' decisions to engage with violence, this means that the number of foreign fighters is only the visible part of invisible processes of radicalization. Foreign fighter recruitment is one among many forms of utilizing a post-war radical milieu's social capital. Consequently, to understand how followers get involved with radical milieus at the pre-departure phase, it is important to look beyond the actual number of departures.

Social movement and political violence scholars have argued that the process of joining a militant group is often initiated by personal contacts, such as acquaintances, friendship-groups, or family ties, meaning via personal networks that link violent groups to their social environment (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, 982). In fact, members of local Salafi communities know each other and interact socially before radical actions are taken. Regular meetings between familiar faces in non-threatening settings facilitate the exchange of ideas and attitudes between influencers and their followers (Hegghammer 2006; 2008; Hafez and Mullins 2015).

A radical milieu secures a pool of potential recruits, who can possibly be activated through the power of re-enforceable group commitments (Oberschall 1993; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Malthaner and Waldmann 2014). The availability of such a recruitment pool of individuals with a shared sense of unity or identity largely facilitates the turn to action, which is assumed to be among the strategic goals of radical influencers. Pointing to the importance of in-group dynamics, Sageman (2004) notes that it may be more accurate to blame global Salafi jihadists on "in-group love" than "out-group hate" (Sageman 2004, 135). Following this argument, a radical milieu is a

venue where followers can find excitement, a sense of purpose or empowerment and status, if they feel excluded from a larger society (Hafez and Mullins 2015; Orehek et al. 2009; Roy 2017).

A radical milieu relies on the social interactions between influencers and followers and, at the same time, secures this "social capital" generated through informal relationships, trust, and loyalties (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994). Being linked to people who already commit themselves to a cause enables individuals to feel part of a "collective we" (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Once belonging to a radical milieu, individuals tend to act in accordance with established rules, norms, and values, even without knowing each other (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994).

In analyzing recruitment, it matters little if a prospective recruit has any formal relation to the radical milieu's local structures, such as Islamic NGOs or mosques. The emphasis is on the informal interaction that allows followers to be introduced to radical influencers and, thus, to become a part of the radical milieu. Previous research on recruitment into Islamist militancy shows that informal religious lectures and gatherings are common recruitment grounds where radical influencers and their followers meet (Hegghammer 2006; 2010; 2010; 2013a). Influencers would invite followers to a lecture or other social gathering and give them pamphlets to read. Then they would show their followers videos of jihad from a warzone and thus motivate people to travel to the battlefield (Hegghammer, 2006, 50).

Participation in a radical milieu differs depending on the phase of involvement, opportunities, roles, levels of engagement, and commitment (Shapiro 2013). The way radical influencers engage with the community differs from the way their followers and targets of recruitment get involved. One of the key channels for influencers to access their followers in post-violent societies is through service provision as one of the tools of "community politics". This

refers to highly localized political action, centered around looking after the basic needs and everyday concerns of residents (Zeller 2020).

As people do not join a radical milieu the same way they join formal organizations, the boundaries of the community are often blurred and never clearly defined (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Bloc recruitment (Oberschall 1973) is often facilitated by peer pressure, concerns for individual image, a desire to comply with group dynamics, maintaining extant friendships or spousal relations, and/or feeling guilty for staying behind (Hafez and Mullins 2015; Roy 2017; Sageman 2016). Thus, radical followers may join the radical milieu after being exposed to direct socialization with radical influencers or by following peers/family members.

Having in mind various ways of socialization, a distinction is made between a *positive active* and *positive passive* relationship of followers with the radical milieu. While some individuals may actively seek to identify with a cause, community, a group, or are engaged in regular social interaction with radical influencers, e.g. going to a mosque, others experience passive exposure to the subculture and the narratives. Thus, their socialization happens through the initiative of a family member, who is in charge of the active relationship with the radical milieu. Following the arguments discussed above, the fourth theoretical assumption can be formulated.

FOURTH THEORETICAL PROPOSITION:

Followers: Only if followers have an active positive relationship with radical influencers and the respective radical milieu, they could participate in a decision-making process concerned with a departure to a foreign battlefield.

This now concludes the four theoretical propositions concerned with origin, structure, narratives, and followers from the literature on recruitment into Islamist militancy, social networks, and framing. In the next chapters, these four propositions will be employed to guide the

empirical analysis of the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus. To apply DOS to foreign fighter recruitment, the collected data is discussed in relation to each proposition separately.

Concerning the origin of a radical milieu (Proposition One), I will examine the role of two recent wars in the Balkans (BiH 1992-1995 and Kosovo (1998-1999)) as triggering moments for post-war radical milieus to emerge. To understand the history and the evolution of the two post-war radical milieus, I will specifically look at activities, such as the influx of Islamic charities and NGOs; post-war donations and investments conditioned with the proliferation of Salafism; and activities tailored to attract followers to the radical milieu.

Concerning the structure (Proposition Two), I will investigate local leadership networks and the power centers, established by influencers to recruit followers. Furthermore, I will look at leader-led radical structures, such as radical settlements, religious NGOs, and illegal praying congregations, to understand their role in the radical socialization of foreign fighters.

Concerning the narratives of a radical milieu (Proposition Three), I will focus on the rhetoric of radical influencers. I will look for messages that explicitly engage with violence. I will further investigate how influencers used radical rhetoric to sustain authority in the period between the domestic wars and the Syrian War, when they then framed the distant conflict as a cause of jihad.

Concerning followers of a radical milieu (Proposition Four), I will study what kind of people in the radical milieu were targeted to become foreign fighters. Furthermore, I will examine the clusters of departures that appear around local influencers to understand the geographical distribution of recruitment.

I will argue that the interdependence between origin, structure, narratives, and followers of a radical milieu is defined by the discursive opportunities provided by domestic wars and that such

contexts condition the influence of ideological actors and narratives. The war in Syria and the large-scale propaganda campaign of IS triggered pre-existing radical milieus. While foreign fighter recruitment has been perceived as a global phenomenon, its locality shows the importance of grassroots radical influencers in this process and the strategic choices they have made. If there was no legacy of war in the communities under examination, perhaps the evolution of local radical milieus would be different.

What I argue here is that foreign fighters from post-violent societies are the outcome of long-term efforts to build radical milieus that have played the unique role of constructors, as well as exploiters, of radical values. They only have this impact due to the conducive environment set by war and post-war circumstances that have largely facilitated their survival over time. The evolution of these radical milieus is boosted by post-violent fragility. In reinforcing radical values and narratives, influencers connect the legacy of past local conflicts with present opportunities for radical action.

3.6. Research Design

The key theoretical task of the dissertation is to establish a link between the appearance of radical actors and activities in societies with a war legacy and the recruitment of jihadists from these societies. The key empirical task of the dissertation is to trace and analyze the evolution and the role of local radical milieus in order to understand the recruitment of Bosnian and Albanian foreign fighters. The dissertation aims to find out how radical influencers have built their authority in the context of post-war fragility. This is to fill the gaps left by previous studies on European foreign fighters that did not examine indigenous Muslim communities with recent war experience and contributions of foreign fighters in-depth. By looking at the pre-departure socialization of foreign fighters into Salafi communities, the dissertation seeks to provide insights about social relations, structures, authority, and decision-making concerning departures to the battlefield.

This dissertation aims to find out how post-war radical milieus shape the recruitment of foreign fighters. In both data collection and analysis, the study follows a qualitative methodological approach. This is the most suitable approach to answer the research question, as the dissertation seeks to get in-depth insights into the role of influencers in managing post-war radical milieus and the implications of their influence on foreign fighter recruitment. To collect data, the dissertation relies on interviews and desk research. To analyze the collected data, four datasets were built containing biographical information about foreign fighters and radical influencers. In the analysis, the dissertation applies process-tracing based logic in order to trace the evolution of local radical milieus from their post-war establishment to the moment when foreign fighter recruitment took place (2011-2016).

The dissertation is a case study-based analysis, which uses primary and secondary sources. The data collection process was tailored to produce knowledge about agency and social structures that have encouraged foreign fighter recruitment from societies with a recent war experience.

While collecting data, there were ethical considerations and research limitations that are addressed in this chapter. As a researcher, I am aware of the sensitivity of the topic, and therefore, I have critically approached every piece of data obtained through interviews, research meetings, and open data sources.

The dissertation aims at theory-building rather than theory-testing. To get insights into the role of influencers in managing post-war radical milieus, the dissertation relies on the four theoretical propositions discussed at length in the previous section. By doing so, the dissertation also follows civil-war and terrorism researchers' shift to the meso-level of analysis (Pearlman and Cunningham 2011). The theoretical problem that this dissertation addresses is whether the recruitment of foreign fighters is leader-led or leaderless. The dissertation focuses on radical actors and activities to stress the importance of locally managed social networks as a venue of socialization.

The overall methodological objective is to contribute to the concept of a foreign fighter and, through a systematic empirical investigation, to generate useful theoretical propositions for future research on this topic. To be able to maximize learning opportunities for studying foreign fighters' radical milieus and influencers, the dissertation looks at positive instrumental cases. Positive cases show the phenomenon of interest in detail and allow for the analysis of processes and mechanisms, which is justified by previously formulated theoretical expectations (Schwampe et al. 2018).

3.6.1. Case Selection

The Western Balkans is a region with the legacy of violent wars following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the 1990s, the region has become a strategic spot for extremist networks. More than 1000 individuals from the region have traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2011 and 2016. There is

an assumption in the literature that societies with violent experiences are willing to tolerate or reproduce violence. However, foreign fighter recruitment, for instance, has not affected entire communities or societies despite the conflict legacy of the region. Instead, there are post-war radical milieus that have largely incentivized recruitment.

The dissertation looks at the cases of Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus, as they represent typical cases of a post-war radical milieu. Both countries experienced violent conflicts in the recent decades and also have a significant number of foreign fighters who traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2011 and 2016. Both cases represent the same phenomenon of interest: foreign fighters. The expected result of the comparison is that foreign fighters might be the outcome of a slightly different mechanism in relation to similar recruitment processes that take place in the same region. I expect heterogeneity across cases at the mechanistic level, meaning the same cause, the same outcome, but possibly different causal mechanism connecting them. The comparison considers the availability of two shared characteristics between the two cases: both are set in ethno-linguistic communities in the Western Balkans (same region); share similar historical experiences, meaning a legacy of conflict (same history); and in both cases, the research has identified actors who have spread radical values over time and in communities. The case selection is justified by in-depth preliminary research, which indicates differences with respect to the role and evolution of local influencers in structuring the radical milieu (See Table 7).

Table 7 Case Selection Characteristics.

Case	Western Balkan Region	Legacy in conflict	Post-war fragility	Actors spreading radical values	Identifiable grassroots influencers	Identifiable external influencers	**Foreign Fighters**
Albanian contingent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Bosnian contingent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

A radical milieu in this dissertation connects influencers and followers through linguistic, ethnic, and geographical ties. The radical milieus of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters have been embedded in local societies, and their existence is seen here as one of the trends of post-war transformations. Consequently, the two foreign fighter contingents that originate from these radical milieus are set in post-violent, post-traumatic militarized societies (at the societal level) and in local Salafi communities (at the micro-societal level). Thus, in this dissertation, the population being examined are the radical communities that have emerged from a post-war context.

3.6.2. Data Collection Methods

The dissertation is the outcome of a two-stage data collection process that included extensive desk research of open sources and semi-structured interviews.

3.6.2.1. Desk Research

First, I collected data through open sources. I researched more than 500 media reports, research reports by local NGOs (published between November 2012 and July 2019), and judicial documents. I examined publicly available data related to jihadi foreign fighters from the Western Balkans and their known associates to collect evidence on existing jihadi Salafi networks and the relationship between radical influencers and followers. In attempt to guarantee the reliability of the media sources, I selected only those considered credible, trustworthy, and known to present accurate information that can be verified through at least one more source. In the cases when I had doubts concerning the reliability of a source, I either did not use it or researched additional sources to verify the obtained information. Visuals appear in some places in the text because the sources I am referring to (mostly videos) were not available online at the time of the research but were verified through additional sources, such as media, previously conducted studies , institutional.

3.6.2.1. Interviews

Second, I carried out fieldwork in March and April 2018 in Kosovo and BiH and in April to July 2019 in Albania and BiH. In addition, I conducted research visits in Serbia and N. Macedonia. The fieldwork included interviews and research meetings; all of them, except one interview that took place online, were conducted in person. This approach, unlike interviewing people via emails or online calls, made it possible to establish if an interviewee understands the intended meaning of a question (Wethington and McDarby 2015). Interviewing was the preferred research method, as it represents an active form of observational data collection (Wethington and McDarby 2015).

Overall, I conducted 37 semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview was a suitable research method as it allowed participants to provide information about their behavior and attitudes, and this is crucial to understanding social processes and group dynamics. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was a suitable research method, as it allowed for capturing the nuances in the profiles of interviewees - from security officials to religious leaders and imprisoned foreign fighters. Most interviews were taken with representatives of the police, prosecutors, official religious authorities, mayors of affected municipalities, security experts, and journalists. A limited number of interviews in this sample (10) were with returnees, family members, and friends of fighters, who either got killed or returned from Syria to their home countries. The conducted interviews and research meetings provided rich contextual details on individual pathways into the radical milieu, the process of recruitment, and relationships with radical influencers and peers, prior to departing for the warzone.

Conversations with former fighters, relatives, and friends of fighters were based on life story methodology, which is a qualitative method of data collection in which people are asked to document their life, linked to a specific place and period of time, and include their social ties to others and key life events (Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017). Guided by the research concern that

memories of past events are potentially biased, I structured my questions around past events rather than past attitudes (Viterna 2006, 13; Schwampe et al. 2018).

The empirical research in this dissertation has followed strict ethical rules. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, every interviewee was asked if they prefer to talk on the condition of anonymity. When respondents were comfortable with being recorded and gave their permission, an audio recording was produced.[1] When participants were not comfortable with being recorded, detailed notes were taken. Yet, not recording the interviews in some cases created difficulties to go back to the data and check it. I am confident that I do not reveal information that could potentially harm the interviewees. The names of those interviewees who explicitly insisted to remain anonymous appear as "Source No." The research presents the true and full names of those who appeared in the media through interviews, propaganda materials, or for whom personal details already exist in various open sources.

3.6.3. Challenges in Data Collection

Methodological challenges met by scholars in previous research have been identified in the process of preparing and conducting fieldwork. These include language barriers, lack of contact information, cultural differences, and legal and political factors. While being in the field, I conducted field visits to municipalities with reported departures of foreign fighters. Both formal and informal efforts to access interviewees were made, including contacting prison services, and the prosecutors and defenders of the individuals sentenced for joining terrorist groups. In some cases, these efforts were unsuccessful due to legal reasons, time constraints, or lack of consent from potential interviewees who were approached. Interviewees on the ground were contacted via

[1] In some cases, interviewees themselves did not allow audio recordings, in others, records were not permitted by the respective security institutions.

phone calls, emails, or social media, or by going straight to institutions, home addresses, mosques, and other public spaces known to be meeting points for radical circles.

The issue of trust has been critical to both accessing respondents and carrying out research meetings and interviews. Even after establishing contact, some of the prospective interviewees showed an unwillingness to be interviewed, which was a major obstacle to collecting data. Feelings of fear and shame and levels of marginalization are among the features of post-violent environments that have made it hard to reach potential interviewees (Cohen and Arieli 2011).

As the research population includes extended Salafi communities that have been, to a certain extent, marginalized and generally "hidden", it has been a challenge for me as an outside researcher to reach them. To overcome these challenges in recruiting interviewees, I employed a snowball sample methodology (SSM). This approach has facilitated the creation of a trusted social network on the ground that includes researchers and journalists. I used SSM to establish contacts within a specific population who preferred to remain isolated from the larger society (Cohen and Arieli 2011).

Furthermore, the language barrier of not speaking Albanian and only having a limited understanding of Bosnian (BCS) made it difficult to build trust with some of the interviewees. Language barriers in conducting interviews have been overcome with the assistance of local interpreters. Some of the interviews were carried out in English, while others in Albanian and Bosnian relied on interpretation. It was a challenge to take detailed notes in circumstances when the interviewee would cry and/or experience distrust, or when the interview was assisted by an interpreter and/or was taken under time constrains. An additional challenge was the general fatigue with the topic from local security and religious communities as well as from individuals

belonging to the radical milieu. This could be explained by the overwhelming interest from foreign journalists and researchers arriving to the region at that time to examine this topic.

Further limitations to data collection were concerned with the timeframe of my fieldwork. External and domestic political and security events that occurred at that time became obstacles to obtaining information, as such events made potential respondents reluctant to meet and talk to foreign researchers. On one occasion in 2019, while in BiH, my fieldwork coincided with the holy month of Ramadan and this made some of the approached members of the Salafi community unwilling to give interviews. On other occasions, my fieldwork happened during political crises, such as the summer of 2019 in Albania and, consequently, representatives of local security institutions were not reachable. Furthermore, in a 2019 special operation, Kosovo Security Forces (with the support of the US) brought IS returnees back to Kosovo. More than one hundred women, children, and men, previously detained in a camp in Syria, were transported by plane. Although I made formal attempts to meet with some of the returnees, access to them was strictly prevented by local security agencies. In addition, this special operation reinforced feelings of fear and stigmatization among local Albanian populations, and thus, created challenges to accessing interviewees.

Another limitation was concerned with the attempt of local security institutions to restrict the dissemination of radical rhetoric. This argument was used by authorities on several occasions when I requested interviews with sentenced foreign fighters and received rejections. As one detention service director told me, some of the imprisoned recruiters and fighters were so radical that the prison authority wanted to prevent radical messages from being spread outside of the prison. Yet, in many cases I met with openness from local security institutions, which, among other factors, can be explained by the political ambitions of the countries in the region for EU accession

and the attached values, such as transparency and accountability. On the downside, I believe that some requests for interviews with prisoners were rejected due to the local authorities' concerns to give access to foreign researchers to the poor conditions of criminal detention facilities.

Furthermore, there were two external security events that mattered when trying to access data during my fieldwork. The first one was the 2019 speech of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, whose public appearance after almost five years of silence aimed to reassure of the survival of the group after the defeat of the IS "caliphate". This event renewed the interest and discussions on IS fighters in the Balkans, and consequently, security institutions were more cautious about the information they provided to foreign researchers. The second event that had implications to the fieldwork was the 2019 series of attacks in Sri Lanka during Easter, when overall 259 people were killed. Three churches in Sri Lanka and three luxury hotels in the commercial capital, Colombo, were targeted by terrorist suicide bombings. This event, although geographically distant, reinforced the fear of terrorism in Europe and thus had implications on the general atmosphere of trust and openness from security and religious institutions in the Western Balkans as well as approached local communities.

3.6.4. Data Analysis Methods

3.6.4.1. Datasets

I created four separate datasets, two for each case study, containing the names of individuals known to have been involved in foreign fighter recruitment. The rationale behind building datasets was to organize the data on individuals based on their "roles" in the radical milieu (influencers or followers) and to further profile them based on their relationship with the radical milieu. For each case study, there is one dataset on influencers and one on followers.

The two datasets on followers contain data only on those who eventually became foreign fighters, not on those who did not. Each of the datasets on followers contain biographical data on Bosnian (307) and Albanian (206) men, women, and minors. Most of them traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2011 and 2016. They joined Jabhat al-Nusra, the Islamic State, the Free Syrian Army, or other extremist or rebel groups that were part of the war theater. The biographical data has been systemized around the following categories: place of origin, centers of influence, relationship with the radical milieu (positive active, positive passive, or negative), previous combat experience, and current status.[2]

Two smaller datasets are devoted to radical and extreme influencers active in the Albanian and the Bosnian radical milieus. The individuals in this sample are selected based on evidence for activities undertaken to promote Salafism, such as videos, sermons, and organized events with followers, in the period between the Bosnian and the Syrian Wars. Individuals in the dataset represent two different categories of radical influencers: those who engage with the violent rhetoric of jihadi Salafism, aka extreme influencers, and those who do not promote violence and may even oppose it. The latter are still considered radical influencers because they promote conservative religious values and influence the manifestation of the Salafi milieu that largely disagrees with the larger society's mainstream values. The biographical information in the dataset is organized around eight categories, including place of origin, role in the radical milieu, promoting/not promoting violence, online and offline activism, background in religious studies, participation in the Bosnian War, centers of influence, and current status.

Despite the richness of the research material, the data organized in the datasets is not exhaustive. Due to a lack of data, many boxes in the datasets have remained empty, as I could not

[2] The categories employed in the datasets are permeable, as some individuals can and sometimes do pass from one category to another.

find information on some individuals concerning their prior radical socialization. The reliance on secondary sources in parts of the research was not preferred but was the only possible way to acquire information when facing negative answers to interview requests or rejections from institutions to access specific documents. The presented results, therefore, are subject to biases that may have influenced the analytical value of the dissertation in some parts.

Yet, building original datasets allows me to identify patterns of radical socialization and to establish a logic of connectivity between involved actors. It further allows me to apply the four theoretical assumptions (origin, structure, narratives, and followers) that constitute the analytical framework of the dissertation. The datasets are informed through local police sources, reports of research organizations, and media content.

3.6.4.2. Process-Tracing

To analyze the collected data, the dissertation employs process-tracing (PT) without organizing the analysis around separate parts of the process. Instead, it looks at the process by tracing the evolution of agency and structures in relation to foreign fighter recruitment. This logic applies to the empirical analysis of Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus in Chapters Four and Five. This approach follows a cause and effect logic and connects the independent variable and outcome, while additionally unwrapping and dividing the process of recruitment into smaller steps (Evera 1997, 64). It allows for a greater understanding of how a cause contributes to producing an outcome by opening the "black box" of the process (Beach and Pedersen 2019).

PT as a methodological approach has three core components: 1) Theorizing a causal mechanism that links causes and outcomes; 2) Analyzing observable empirical manifestations of the theorized mechanism; and 3) Enabling generalization from a single case study to other cases by the use of comparative methods (Beach and Pedersen 2019). Thus, by studying within-case

mechanistic evidence, process tracing allows causal inferences to be made about how causal processes work in real-world cases. The analytical focus is not on causes and outcomes but on the causal mechanisms in-between. In other words, mechanisms are not causes but "causal processes that are triggered by causes and that link them with outcomes is a productive relationship" (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 1).

Following this methodological approach in this dissertation, war is a scope condition that limits the research to indigenous Muslim communities in Europe with a contribution of foreign fighters and a recently experienced violent conflict. I consider post-war fragility, as defined in the Theory section, a cause of the emergence of radical actors and activities. The outcome of the process of radical socialization refers to the number of foreign fighters. Yet, this is only one of the possible results and the dissertation limits its theory to this measurable outcome. In some cases, radical followers did not become foreign fighters for a variety of reasons, explained previously in section 3. 5. As data on such cases is not available, the dissertation relies only on evidence that speaks for the relationship of the positive cases with the radical milieu and influencers. However, the knowledge that is produced seeks to demonstrate who is targeted to become a foreign fighter and not on why many of the targeted followers eventually did not act upon their radical views.

The dissertation employs theory-building PT logic. Starting with empirical material, it uses a structured analysis of this material to build a plausible hypothetical causal mechanism, whereby a cause is linked with an outcome that can be present in multiple cases, meaning it can be generalized beyond the single case (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 10). Although the dissertation employs theory-building PT, it does not assume that evidence should speak for itself. Instead, it relies on theoretical expectations, derived from literature on terrorism, recruitment into Islamist militancy, social movements, and social networks:

Origin:	Radical milieus emerge as a byproduct of war and post-war fragility. As fragility has been present in its political, religious, and societal aspects, the appearance of radical actors and activities have been highly incentivized.
Structure:	The geographical distribution of recruitment follows the trajectory of radical influencers. If targeted activities of influencers are present, clusters of foreign fighters are more likely.
Narratives:	Radical influencers in post-war societies are likely to combine global jihadi narratives (macro level) with local jihadi narratives (micro level). Thus, radical influencers utilize war memories and legacies of local conflicts to make their recruitment messages appealing to local followers.
Followers:	Only if followers have an active positive relationship with radical influencers and the respective radical milieu could they participate in a decision-making process that results in a departure to a foreign battlefield.

The dissertation focuses on the following observable manifestations that might increase the prior confidence that these theoretical assumptions were indeed in operation in the empirical cases under examination.

- *Agency of influence:* the dissertation studies activities and actions undertaken by influencers at various stages of the radical milieu's evolution, such as framing and the narratives that they utilize in speeches, sermons, or online videos. Such activities would indicate the informal authority role of influencers in the process of radicalization and recruitment.
- *Structure of influence:* the dissertation further examines social dynamics among influencers throughout the different stages of the radical milieu. These include ideological arguments and cleavages, social links with other radical influencers. The dissertation relies on empirical manifestations of radical influence, such as coordinated activities among radical influencers, guest lectures and sermons, shared participation in propaganda materials. This data is expected to be evidence of power centers across the radical milieu.

- *Dynamics between influencers and followers at the pre-departure phase:* the dissertation studies whether and how followers are tied to influencers, via either a passive or active positive relationship with the radical milieu, before becoming foreign fighters. To do so, the dissertation looks at the individual biographies of foreign fighters and data on social activities in which they take part together with local influencers. Concerning this observable manifestation, the dissertation relies on data collected through interviews, judicial documents, and media reports.

3.6.4.3. Variable-based Comparative Analysis

The following criteria are considered useful in comparing the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus (See Table 8), as these criteria connect the legacy of war with individual profiles of followers who became foreign fighters. The selected criteria derive from the theoretical propositions that guide the analysis.

Table 8 Criteria to compare Bosnian and Albanian post-war radical milieus.

Variable	**Value**
Origin	Cause of the conflict
	Age of the radical milieu
Structure	Power Centers
Narratives	Messages spread by radical influencers
Followers	Demographic features (Age/Sex)
	Combat experience
	Relationship with a radical milieu

Following the two individual case studies, the dissertation compares the evolution of local radical milieus to understand the recruitment of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters. The dissertation seeks to find out how the origin and dynamics of foreign fighter influencers are related to the legacy of war and post-war fragility. The comparative analysis seeks to establish whether the evidence in both cases speaks for similar organizational and ideological patterns of radical influence, and, if not, why, and what the implications for foreign fighter recruitment are.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BOSNIAN FOREIGN FIGHTER RADICAL MILIEU

4.1. Introduction

Nasser bin Ali al-Ansi, the man who took credit for the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, was a veteran of the Bosnian jihad in the 1990s and, subsequently, became a leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Counter Extremism Project 2015). His case, among others, testifies to the ideological and organizational links between jihadists in the Bosnian War and the latest generation of jihadists in Europe, many of whom travelled as foreign fighters to Syria. The Bosnian foreign fighter contingent consists of men, women, and children from BiH, Serbia, and Montenegro as well as from Bosnian diaspora communities across Europe, the United States (U.S.), and Australia. The available data shows that above 400 people of Bosnian descent traveled to Syria between 2012 and 2016 with the intention to join extremist groups such as al Nusra or the Islamic State. About 1/3 of them have died, some have returned or were captured in the battlefield, while others were charged with recruitment-related activities. Thus, once a destination for foreign fighters, like Nasser bin Ali al-Ansi in the 1990s, BiH turned into a place of origin for them.

This chapter is concerned with the evolution of the radical milieu of Bosnian foreign fighters. It examines how war and post-war actors and activities contributed to the growth of Salafism and how the subsequently established radical milieu increased the likelihood of some followers to become foreign fighters. The analysis points to three early pillars of the radical milieu: 1) the presence and legacy of foreign mujahideen in the Bosnian War; 2) foreign-funded humanitarian organizations tasked with spreading Salafism; and 3) a network of NGOs tied to local Salafi influencers. The dissertation in this part argues that specific aspects of war and post-war fragility facilitated the emergence of the Bosnian radical milieu. These are political, religious, socio-economic, and societal fragility.

First, concerning political fragility, a quarter century after the end of conflict, there are still unresolved narratives of religion and ethnicity that feed the emergence of radical and extremist movements (Bećirević 2018, 4). The Dayton Peace Agreement can be seen as a key factor in weakening the resilience of the local population against processes of polarization and radicalization. The document is criticized for establishing a constitutional reality in BiH that has perpetuated the political extremism of the war (Azinović and Jusić 2015; 2016; Bećirević 2016). Thus, the local population has been particularly vulnerable to manipulations of ethnic and religious identities tightly linked to political and socio-cultural belonging (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 92).

Second, these processes of political fragility have led to religious fragility, as defined in Chapter Three. Bosnian Muslims were exposed to various streams of Islam that found a fertile ground in the post-war socio-political context. Consequently, the local population failed to develop "immunity" against the religious interpretations that over the past century have taken an ideological approach in the Muslim world (The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Council of Muftis 2018). This aspect of post-war fragility plays a crucial role in motivating, legitimizing, and sustaining recruitment to radical and extremist groups (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 92).

Third, concerning socio-economic fragility, more than two decades after the war, the official unemployment rate in BiH is about thirty-five percent (Trading Economics 2019). The unofficial estimates of youth unemployment are even higher, reaching sixty percent, which arguably makes young people a suitable target for radical and extreme ideologies (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 8). In addition, endemic corruption and economic inequality draw the contours of the socio-political reality of BiH in the post-war decades. The state has witnessed failures in basic service provision. Gaps left by dysfunctional welfare and education systems could be easily

exploited for the purposes of ideological proliferation attached to humanitarian aid and charitable activities. Moreover, the education system of BiH is built on "ethnification" that encourages an "us" versus "them" type of rhetoric in a society that is still in the process of social reconciliation (Perry 2015). Consequently, the presence of the Salafi movement provided one of the loudest responses to the need of many young people for identification and belonging (Perry 2015).

Finally, aspects of societal fragility are also seen here as contributing to the emergence of the post-war radical milieu. Previous research argues that the combination of war conditions and the subsequent feelings of besiegement and fear among the Bosnian Muslims allowed them to more easily accept radical ideas than during peaceful times (E. Karčić et al. 2011; H. Karčić 2010b; 2010a). Thus, in a society marked by hatred, atrocity, and genocide, Salafism, among other religious interpretations, claimed to offer the means by which the local population could "restore or instill a clear order to their lives" (Schlesinger 2011, 56). As large segments of the society have shared characteristics, such as a lack of trust in local institutions and a sense of uncertainty about the future, they could be targeted by non-state actors that have simultaneously functioned as religious and welfare institutions.

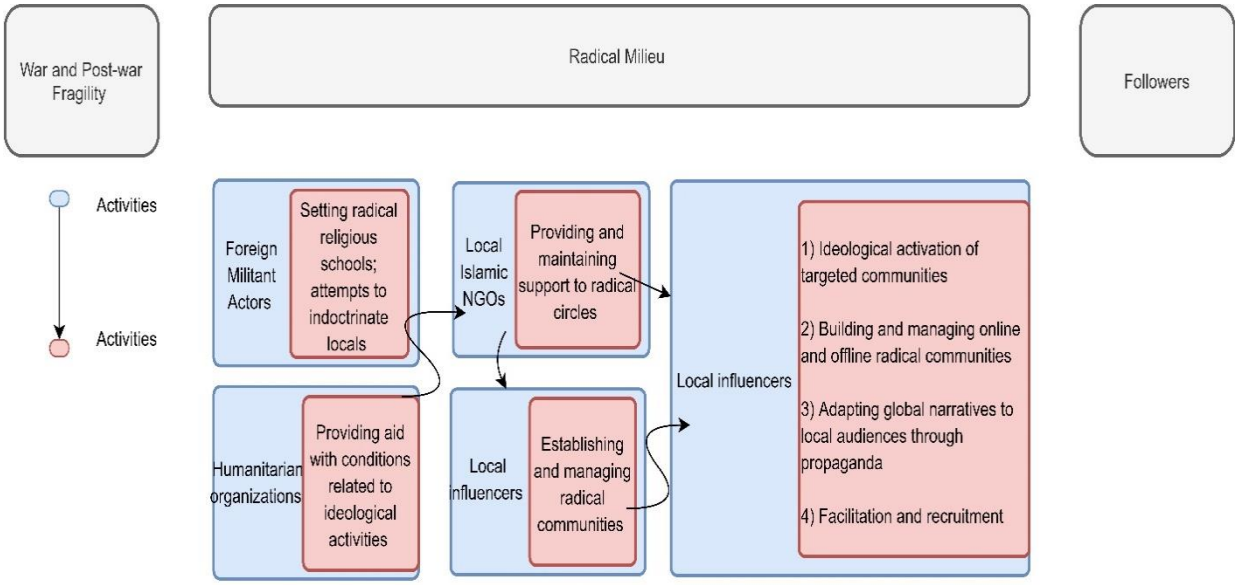
All these empirical manifestations of post-war fragility are understood as contributing to the creation of the Bosnian radical milieu. The next four sections of this chapter seek to trace the process of establishing the Bosnian radical milieu and to further understand in what sense the radical milieu can be seen as a venue for the recruitment of Bosnian foreign fighters between 2012 and 2016. I first examine the origin of the Salafi movement in BiH by looking at the presence of certain ideological actors who benefited from post-war fragility. I further investigate the structure of the radical milieu and the role of radical influencers by looking at the empirical manifestations of their authority - ideological activities justifying violence as a form to "defend" Islam. To

understand how radical influencers employ macro and micro jihadi narratives, I looked at messages quoted in research reports, media investigations, and indictments. Finally, through the collected data in the "Followers" dataset, I analyze the relationship of Bosnian foreign fighters with the radical milieu before they travelled to Syria.

4.2. Origin

To comprehend the evolution of the Bosnian radical milieu in the context of war and post-war fragility, it is necessary to look at the role of ideological actors present during the Bosnian War and in its aftermath (See Figure 5). First, several hundred foreign mujahideen fighters took part in the conflict, and some of them settled in the region after the war. Second, Islamic charitable organizations distributed humanitarian aid conditioned by ideological proliferation. Third, a number of local Bosnian Muslims graduated from Islamic studies programs in Arab countries and upon their return to the Balkans, they were tasked to engage with the proliferation of Salafism (Racimora 2013, 12). Each of these three "pillars" of the radical milieu are discussed at length in this section.

Figure 5 Evolution of the Bosnian radical milieu.



Considering the actors who were present in the establishment of the Bosnian radical milieu, one can expect that there were communities that were specifically targeted by the activities of Salafi proliferation. In the post-war context these were single mothers, children with disabilities, or young people coming from dysfunctional families. Profiling the targets of humanitarian aid and Islamic charities helps to understand the appearance of Salafi actors as the outcome of war and post fragility. For instance, students were provided with dormitory accommodation while being encouraged to embrace Salafism (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 12). Thus, new Salafi adherents were offered various material incentives to attend Salafi sermons and at the same time were integrated into a community that could provide them with a sense of belonging based on brotherhood and mutual support (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 12).

Therefore, the process of Salafi proliferation during and after the war can be considered clustered, as it could influence a small number of people across various locations in the region. There are a few studies that link this post-war development to the locations of the departures of Bosnian foreign fighters. A 2018 study has identified differences between communities affected by foreign fighter departures and those that have not been by considering their exposure to Salafi activism in the war and post-war period (Turčalo and Veljan 2018). The authors argue that communities that did not experience a wartime influx of foreign mujahideen remained untouched by early missionary activities undertaken during the conflict (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 11–12).

A comparison between three cantons in BiH (the Bosnian-Podrinje Canton (BPC), the Zenica-Doboj Canton (ZDC), and the Sarajevo Canton (SC)) testifies to the role of the mujahideen, humanitarian aid, and Islamic NGOs in relation to the high number of illegal praying congregations (*parajamaats*) and foreign fighter departures between 2012 and 2016. According to the study, during the Bosnian War, BPC was accessible only via dangerous paths controlled by Serbian

forces. Consequently, Salafi activists had a very limited presence during and immediately after the conflict. The lack of exposure to ideological proliferation in this period resulted in a very small number of Salafists and the absence of parajamaats in BPC. Unlike ZDC and SC, the unique wartime position of BPC, according to the study, may account for why it was not affected by foreign fighter departures (Turčalo and Veljan 2018). In essence, these findings emphasize the importance of radical influencers whose presence can be seen as decisive in establishing a radical milieu.

To build on this argument, I would claim that while building authority, radical influencers could actually expand their influence beyond communities exposed to war and post-war Salafi activism and reach audiences in the region that did not suffer from the Bosnian War themselves. As a result, larger Bosnian Muslim communities had already come across radical narratives by the time foreign fighter recruitment began for Syria. The rhetoric of radical influencers in the early 1990s was built on the systematic rejection of the traditional Bosnian Islam. Historically, the local religious tradition has been shaped by Ottoman influences, a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic environment, factors that have made it particularly inclusive and tolerant (Bećirević 2016, 15). Islam in BiH follows the Hanafi School of thought. About half of the population identify as Muslim. In Yugoslavia, Islam in BiH was not forbidden, yet it was practiced in strict privacy, as public religiosity was strongly discouraged. Only after the collapse of Yugoslavia did religion begin to regain its prominence.

However, this process of religious revival in BiH was challenged by the variety of foreign political and ideological actors, who attempted to influence Bosnian Muslims during and after the war (Alibašić 2014). Salafism, more specifically, Wahabbi Salafism, has become the most widespread religious stream with diverse financial sources from, among others, Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. Although Salafism is followed by a rather small minority of people in BiH compared to the overall population size, it has established solid roots. The number of Bosnian Muslims, who have converted to this narrow interpretation of Islam, is believed to have grown steadily in the years after the war (Bećirević 2018, 4). A trend that makes this process evident is the increased number of the so-called "Sharia marriages" from 4639 in 2004 to 5355 in 2009 and beyond (Alibašić 2014, 449).

The overwhelming majority of Salafists in BiH are peaceful in their worldview, and thus, constitute the periphery of the radical milieu. Unlike the jihadi Salafists' position in the core of the radical milieu, those in the periphery neither promote violence nor justify it, following the strict religious rules of the Sharia law in their everyday lives. As mentioned earlier, to comprehend the origin of the Bosnian radical milieu, the dissertation points to three "pillars" that arguably played a role in its establishment. All three are seen as reflecting various aspects of post-war fragility, and thus, benefiting from such context.

The first pillar of the Bosnian radical milieu *refers* to the presence and legacy of the Arab mujahideen in the Bosnian War, many of whom were veterans from the Afghan War.[3] The arrival of foreign fighters in the summer of 1992 is significant to the creation of the radical milieu, as they were the actors who brought the concept of Salafism (more specifically, the Saudi version of Salafism, Wahhabism) to the region for the first time ("Bosnia-Herzegovina: New Book Investigates Presence Of Al-Qaeda" 2007). In the framework of the Bosnian War, the mujahideen utilized the concept of jihad to justify violence as the only way to "defend" Islam. Thus, their appearance can be understood as formative in ideological terms to today's core of the radical

[3] The Mujahideen regard themselves as Salafist, defenders of a tradition over fourteen centuries old to reform *(islah)* and renew *(tajdid)* Islam to its original purity practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. See Burr and Collins 2006, 4.

milieu, where this view is shared by radical influencers and followers. According to the scholarship on Islamic charities, the mujahideen in the Bosnian War received financial and logistical support through a network of humanitarian organizations tied to public and private sources in the Arab world. Among others, Al-Kifah and the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF) led by Osama bin Laden's associate, Enaam Arnaout, took advantage of donations to support the mujahideen in the Bosnian War (Clarke 2019, 27–28).[4]

The highest estimates that circulate in Western literature point to 5000 foreign fighters who took part in the Bosnian War. Malet (2018) suggests 1000 North Africans travelled to BiH for training during the war (12). Researchers from BiH note that 3000 to 4000 foreign fighters fought in the conflict on the Muslim side ("Bosnia-Herzegovina: New Book Investigates Presence Of Al-Qaeda" 2007). Research by Turčalo (2018) makes mention of 700 individuals from Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and other Middle Eastern and Asian countries (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 6).

Despite the lack of precise data about the numbers of Islamist militants in the conflict, their integration in loose and independent fighting units allowed them to socialize with local Bosnian fighters and exercise ideological proliferation. The best organized unit of mujahideen, El Mudžahid, in BiH was a part of the 7th Brigade in the towns of Zenica, Tuzla, and Maglaj in central BiH. The unit composed of foreign mujahideen and Bosnian combatants regularly engaged militarily in the area between Zenica and Tuzla where they set up training camps in remote, mountainous spots. They gained significant paramilitary experience and a reputation for their brutality towards the local Christian population (Burr and Collins 2006).

[4] Following the end of the Afghan war, many mujahideen found continued the cause of jihad in Bosnia and the region as employees of Islamic humanitarian organizations. See Burr and Collins 2006.

Thus, foreign mujahideen were, in a way, instrumental to the spread of radical values and the formation of the post-war radical milieu. The resource they offered upon their arrival was a combined religious and militaristic leadership style, previously unknown to local Bosnian combatants. To join the El Mudžahid unit, Bosnian fighters were required to attend a forty-day Islamic school led by [redacted], an Egyptian jihadist and cleric, who was running a network of nineteen Islamic schools (*madrasas*) throughout BiH (Bećirević 2016, 42).[5] By calling the locals "bad Muslims" and imposing the narratives of jihadi Salafism, the mujahideen sought to convert Bosnian militants: "[El Mudžahid] commanders and soldiers are showing less interest in combat but instead increased their activity in persuading Bosnian Muslims in central BiH to practice radical Islam" (H. Karčić 2010a, 158).[6] While supporting the struggle of Bosnian Muslims, they pushed for the proliferation of Salafism. This "cause" did not fully resonate with the objectives of the local Muslims in the war, which was primarily to defend themselves from atrocities. As a result, the mujahideen developed poor relations with the local militants. Although the mujahideen were initially perceived as volunteers who came to support their Muslim brothers in BiH, they gained the image of foreign, unwanted, and dangerous actors due to the incompatibility of their extreme actions and beliefs with local values (Source 19 2019).[7]

Nevertheless, the influence of the mujahideen was strong enough to boost the creation of the Bosnian radical milieu. This influence is evident through the presence of charismatic figures

[5] [redacted] was deported to Egypt after 9/11. He was convicted of terrorism and served eight years in prison. However, he is still considered an influential figure among the Salafi community across the Balkans.

[6] The quote is from a report of the Bosnian Army Centre for Analytics and Security. See Anes Alic and Damir Kaletovic, "Al-Qaida's Bosnian War Move", Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2008.

[7]The interviewee Amarildo Gutić is a Bosnian journalist who works for the online magazine Žurnal, May 2019, Sarajevo. Previously covered the Bosnian war.

whose perceived role at the intersection between religious and military duties allowed them to build informal authority during the war. This claim can be best exemplified by the case of the above-mentioned [redacted], whose legacy is perceived as a source of inspiration among Bosnian Salafists. [redacted], who arrived in BiH in 1992, was the author of a short introduction to Salafism distributed in the war and post-war years.[8] The writing, called "Conceptions We Need to Correct," suggests that local Muslims should be "reverted" to the "true" Islam (Bećirević 2016, 43). The booklet points to Bosnian Islam as an example of a religious deviation that needs to be corrected. It further asserts that Salafi adherents should leave behind concepts like "nationalism, patriotism, socialism, democracy, as their only aim is to separate Muslims from their faith" (Bećirević 2016, 43).

This rhetoric remained after the war, as many foreign mujahideen settled in BiH, although they were expected to leave the country according to the Dayton Peace Agreement.[9] Former El Mudžahid members married local women and received Bosnian citizenship. Thus, they could continue their ideological proliferation. The first post-war Salafi communities emerged around Zenica and Tuzla, reflecting locations where the mujahideen set up training camps during the war (Bećirević 2018, 4). Former mujahideen's efforts were gradually supported by the appearance of local language literature that corresponded with their ideological messages (Bećirević 2018, 5–6). The first consolidation phase of the post-radical milieu can been seen after the war, as locals, who had embraced Salafism, joined demobilized mujahideen and their families and began settling in

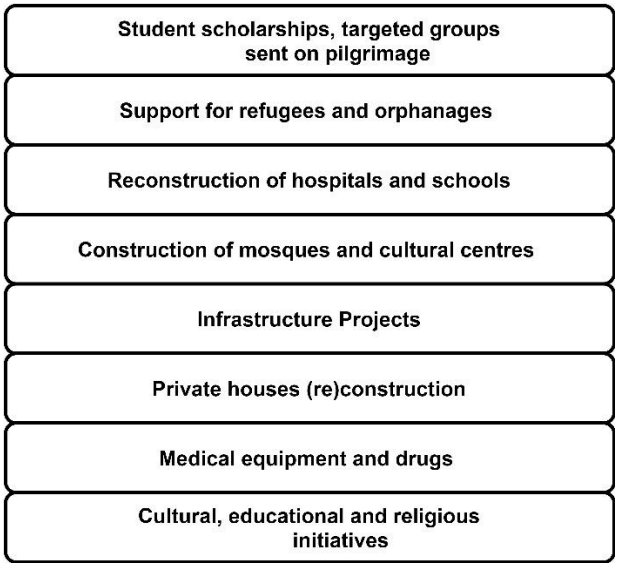
[8] The writing was originally published in 1993 funded by a Kuwaiti Islamic organization.

[9] Following 9/11 Bosnia stripped off the citizenship from many former fighters who had stayed in the country after the war.

remote areas. This was also the first manifestation of the newly born micro-society, which intended to begin a life in isolation from the larger society and follow Sharia law.

The second pillar of the Bosnian radical milieu: Aid with conditions comprises the second pillar in the establishment of the radical milieu. This pillar adds analytical value to the argument that war, and post-war fragility, facilitated the establishment of the Bosnian radical milieu. The resources that came through Islamic humanitarian organizations were essential to the ideological ground of the radical milieu. Among many legitimate Islamic charities operating during the Bosnian War, there were also organizations, whose approach can be seen as obscure and dubious, as their objectives were more ideological than humanitarian. This model, borrowed from the Afghan War, was tailored to support the presence of mujahideen and the proliferation of Salafism, while using the camouflage of charitable initiatives that came as a response to the humanitarian needs of Bosnian Muslims (See Table 9).

Table 9 War and Post-War Financial Model of Salafi Proliferation in BiH.



It would be a challenge to estimate the exact amount of the distributed aid in BiH during and after the war. Some of the biggest donors were Saudi Arabia, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, Pakistan,

United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. Among them, Saudi Arabia showed the fastest reaction of both financial and humanitarian support (Alibašić 2014). Although all influential players of the Muslim world utilized humanitarian activities to boost alternative religious interpretations, only Saudi Salafism managed to attract a larger pool of adherents in BiH (H. Karčić 2010a, 152).

Moreover, in the context of war, it was close to impossible to distinguish between Islamic charities, solely committed to humanitarian relief, and others that were determined to utilize the institution of Islamic charities to achieve political objectives by appeals to extreme interpretations of jihad (Burr and Collins 2006, 30). From personally conducted research, it seems around fifty Islamic NGOs were active in BiH between 1992-1996, with the majority located in Zenica, Tuzla, Sarajevo, and Zagreb ("International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia | United Nations" 2019). One-third of them allegedly supported extremism-related activities or employed individuals suspected of having links to terrorism (Morrison 2008).

Why humanitarian initiatives were welcomed in BiH, often regardless of the source, can be explained by the war and post-war fragility experienced by the local population. As post-war state and religious institutions could not resist humanitarian assistance, this became a permissive factor to ideological interventions that came along with the aid. As Karčić points out, rejecting Salafist clerics meant to reject substantial donations (H. Karčić 2010a). While the humanitarian aid that came through Saudi funds helped with social programs, education, and the reconstruction of mosques, they also led to changes in the character of places for worship in terms of architecture, religious interpretations, and values (Morrison 2008; Moreno 2010).

To understand the significance of the financial interventions made during the war and post-war period, it is necessary to emphasize the role of a few key humanitarian aid organizations. The High Saudi Commission for the Relief of Bosnian Muslims (HSC), established in 1992 and

overseen by Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, was perhaps the largest single Muslim donor at that time.[10] This organization supported various Salafi NGOs on the ground, such as the Active Islamic Youth (AIO), and initially sponsored the King Fahad Mosque and the King Fahad Cultural Centre in Sarajevo without consulting these initiatives with official religious institutions in BiH (Moreno 2010).[11] It further funded the Islamic Pedagogical Academy in Bihać, mosques in Tuzla, and the Saudi cultural center in Mostar, among others (Michaletos 2012).

The HSC was active both during and after the war in funding various initiatives. The organization provided financial support for the mujahedeen through a few Islamic charities, including the Muslim World League, Al Haramain, the International Islamic Relief Organization, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, the Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society, and the Islamic Waqf Organization (Racimora 2013, 12–16; Deliso 2008). After the war, HSC remained a channel for financial support to the Salafi movement in BiH (Bajrović 2007). The educational and cultural activities of the HSC included the construction and reconstruction of mosques. Previous research points to the aid with conditions provided by the HSC. For instance, to receive aid, local women were asked to wear headscarves and children to attend religious classes (Racimora 2013). The organization was also in charge of distributing books, many of which were by Salafi authors and with more than 30 different titles translated into Bosnian (Alibašić 2014, 462–63).[12]

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[10] Other major donors were the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Development Fund and charitable organizations such as Al-Haramain and Benevolence International Foundation were also active donors.

[11] Following 9/11, media investigations pointed to the HSC and related organizations as supportive of extremism- related activities.

[12] HSC publications were distributed for free, including about 500,000 copies of the Qur'an, Ibn

The humanitarian resources that were available due to various fragility factors had a great impact on micro-dynamics in the society after the war. More specifically, education-related initiatives facilitated the emergence of a generation of local Salafi influencers whose further role in the proliferation of Salafism has been essential to the growth of the movement in BiH. There is no data available on Bosnian students educated in the Middle East during and after the conflict.[13] Nonetheless, the number of scholarships given to local youth to study in Islamic institutions in the Gulf countries increased noticeably towards the end of the conflict. As some among these students adopted Salafism, their role upon their return to the Balkans became decisive in the evolution of the radical milieu. In addition, a network of informal religious institutions was rooted in the aftermath of the war in BiH. This network provided ultra-conservative religious education outside of the official Islamic Community's jurisdiction, for example, in the Saudi funded Islamic Pedagogical Academies in Bihać and Zenica (Racimora 2013, 13–14). All these initiatives boosted the influence of a number Salafi figures *(da'is)* who further shaped the core and periphery of the radical milieu.

The third pillar leading to the establishment of the Bosnian radical milieu was the role of local influencers in building a network of local Salafi NGOs. The activities of these NGOs can be understood as a continuation of the humanitarian initiatives during and immediately after the war. Nonetheless, they demonstrate that the process and evolution of ideological proliferation in the radical milieu was largely localized. Capitalizing on religious and socio-economic fragility, such organizations could establish a solidarity network within the framework of Salafism. This

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Kathir's Tafsir, and 6,000 copies of Sahih al-Bukhari.

[13] According to one estimate, in 2002 there were 107 students in Saudi Arabia, 60 in Syria, 38 in Egypt, 34 in Jordan, 28 in Iraq, 11 in Turkey, 8 in Pakistan, 2 in Libya, 1 in Kuwait and 1 in Lebanon. See Alibasić, 2014.

approach allowed influencers to increase their authority and expand their pool of followers. To illustrate this process empirically, I point to the most influential organization in the post-war period – Aktivna islamska omladina (AIO) [Active Islamic Youth]. Established in 1995 in Zenica, it was the best organized Islamic association in BiH. Some of the founders of the AIO were former members of the El-Mujahid unit, while others were locals who had previously studied in the Middle East and were ideologically inspired by their foreign mujahideen fellows (Alibašić 2014). The following quote illustrates how the legacy of the mujahideen in the war impacted local followers:

> [The] Arab Mujahideen made a huge, huge impact on me. I am proud of that…the first time I saw an Arab Mujahedin I had the impression, to put it simply, that the men didn't belong to this world…I instantly liked their way of communicating, their demeanor, their attitude towards the brothers.
>
> Izmet Fazlic, AIO administrator as quoted in Innes 2006, 111.

The AIO was tasked to keep promoting the messages of Salafism inherited by the mujahideen. The organization was initially established with funds that remained from the El Mudžahid unit and later maintained through financial support from the Saudi High Committee and the Al-Haramain Foundation (Racimora 2013, 13–14). AIO was particularly popular among youth, and within the first years of its existence, its membership expanded up to several thousand members through branches in Sarajevo, Travnik, Zavidovici, Visoko, and Bugojno (Source 19 2019). AIO initially lacked a charismatic leadership until Adnan Pezo took over in 1997. With a background of an aviation cadet, Pezo was a part of the El Mudžahid during the Bosnian War: "Several of us, Bosniaks, decided to establish the AIO towards the end of the war, because we realized that we should continue da'wa, the Islamic mission" (Pezo as quoted in Innes 2006, 110).

The AIO had a significant impact on the evolution of the Bosnian radical milieu. Its magazine, "Saff", in print since 1997, reached a regular circulation of 5000 copies at its peak

around 2000 (H. Karčić 2010a). In addition to the Salafi agenda that the organization had been pushing, AIO employed an explicit anti-American rhetoric that led the US State Department to accuse its members of spreading anti-American propaganda. Following 9/11, AIO and its sister organization, al-Furqan, were targeted by local and international institutions due to a suspicion of it being linked to terrorism-related activities. Consequently, both were closed between 2004 and 2006. Despite their formal close-down, these organizations kept maintaining their influence through already established youth centers, such as Selam in Zenica and Oaza in Tuzla, where AIO members could be further socialized (Bećirević 2018, 17). This development led to the decentralization of their activities that contributed to the evolution of the Bosnian radical milieu's network.

The political fragility that dominated the post-war context of BiH allowed for Islamic NGOs to operate without much supervision from state and religious institutions. Moreover, major venues for socializing into the Salafi movement remained outside the control of local authorities. For instance, the King Fahad Mosque and the King Fahad Cultural Centre in Sarajevo were established in 2000 as a part of the Saudi diplomatic mission in BiH and, therefore, enjoyed extraterritorial sovereignty (France 24 2015a). While the mosque has been officially integrated into the Islamic Community, it has also managed to become a venue for the Salafi community. Throughout the years, the King Fahad Mosque has offered free courses to attract younger members, since course participants would often approach their new classmates in an attempt to introduce them to the Salafi interpretation of Islam (Bećirević 2016). In addition, the mosque has had the practice to invite influential Salafi clerics to give lectures before a wide audience of local youth (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 11).

Looking at the dynamics in the evolution of the radical milieu, the Salafi community in BiH has not always managed to benefit from post-war fragility. On several occasions, the radical milieu was pointed to as a venue for extremism and links to terrorist organizations (Racimora 2013, 12–16).[14] For instance, the security crackdown of Islamic charities following 9/11 affected the presence of major Islamic NGOs in the region. As the influence of Salafism was temporary silenced, the movement itself began to fragment (Biersteker and Eckert 2007). This development can be understood as a factor that led to a strategic shift: the post-war ideological proliferation channeled through international humanitarian organizations was replaced by the more active role of local Bosnian influencers. They capitalized on their educational background and social networks from the Middle East to establish their own NGOs and build influence among target populations in the region.

To sum up, the three factors understood as pillars of the post-war radical milieu are the presence and legacy of the Arab mujahideen, the conditional humanitarian aid, and the role of local influencers in building a network of local Salafi NGOs. Their presence, facilitated by post-war fragility, played a role in the establishment of radical influencers, whose structures are examined in the next section.

[14] Some of the organizations are: The Saudi High Commission, The Global Relief Foundation, Third World Relief Agency (TWRA), the Al-Haramain Foundation, the Benevolence International Foundation, Al Furqan, and Taibah International. In 2001 the HSC was closed after a raid carried out by US peacekeeping in Sarajevo, having evidence suggesting links to terrorism.

4.3. Structure: The Bosnian Radical Milieu, Radical Influencers, and Power Centers of Recruitment

In this part, the dissertation examines the structure of the Bosnian radical milieu. It explains in what way the Salafi informal authority has affected how recruitment has been done locally. The analysis is organized around two claims. At the macro-level, post-war fragility facilitates the build-up of Salafi institutions. At the micro-level, radical influencers, who emerge from this process, have an ideological and organizational impact on foreign fighter recruitment. To understand who among radical influencers had an influence on the recruitment of foreign fighters from 2012 to 2016, it is necessary to distinguish between the core and periphery of the radical milieu and identify power centers of radical influencers.

4.3.1. The Bosnian Radical Milieu

One possible way of answering the question of why Salafism and Salafi influencers could "institutionalize" their influence is to emphasize that various aspects of post-war fragility (political, religious, and socio-economic) were arguably enabling factors for the radical milieu's growth. Radical influencers were successful in maintaining their influence in places where former members of the El Mudžahid unit settled after the end of the conflict (Turčalo and Veljan 2018). The post-war locations of the isolated Salafi settlements, and the illegal praying congregations (parajamaats) overlap with that of the mujahedeen activities during the war. It is argued that the Salafi settlements and parajamaats have been "institutions" essential to the radical socialization of foreign fighters who travelled to Syria. However, not all of them are venues for recruitment, nor did all members of the Salafi milieu become foreign fighters. Consequently, to comprehend the role of the Salafi settlements and parajamaats, we need to understand the role of the Salafi influencers (*da'is*) administrating these structures. As the radical milieu of foreign fighters is

understood here as highly influenced by authority figures, I first look at the macro-level, that is radical settlements and parajamaats, acting as the "institutions" of the radical milieu. Meanwhile, the radical influencers who represent the authority are on the micro-level.

Radical Settlements: The establishment of Salafi settlements is a post-war phenomenon in the Bosnian context, which initially became evident in several remote spots across the country (Gornja Maoča, Ošve, and Bočinja). Most people in these settlements lived in peace and seclusion, but a few cases of support for terrorism-related activities by Salafi adherents have shown that such structures could also function as a venue of extremist socialization.[15] Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the highest numbers of foreign fighter departures to Syria and Iraq were linked to Salafi settlements (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 37).

The post-war formative period of the radical milieu was crucial in terms of authority building and establishing social relations between influencers and followers within a commune. Looking at their emergence and structure, radical settlements can be seen as bottom-up communes built around shared values. Nonetheless, this argument would be incomplete without considering the role of radical influencers, who were key "agents" in setting the rules and inviting and accepting new members. In fact, radical settlements were established around charismatic Salafi figures. Although Salafi settlements initially appeared in remote areas, their ideological influence reached larger towns and suburban areas owing to the leadership and peer networks.

The first, more consolidated Salafi group emerged around Bosnian-born Jusuf Barcić in the village of Bocinja (Maglaj, Central Bosnia). Most of the people in his circle were local and foreign former members of the El Mudžahid. A charismatic figure with an educational background

[15] According to documents provided by the Court BiH, the perpetrator of the 2011 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo is known to had lived in Gornja Maoča before the plot.

from Saudi Arabia, Barcić was committed to the ideological legacy of the mujahideen, opposing the legitimacy of secular state institutions. Upon his return to BiH in 1996, he became active in preaching Wahhabism, calling for a "back to the roots" Islam and aggressively challenging the Islamic community.

On several occasions, the group, with him leading, attempted to forcefully enter mosques across BiH in Kalesija and Sarajevo (Alic 2007). In his rhetoric with followers, he would call local Muslims infidels, insist that women should wear hijab, and that listening to music and going out at night should not be allowed (Alic 2007). Barcić's community-building efforts were formative to the growth of a local leadership style that combined ideology and violence in its rhetoric and actions. In many ways, this combination was inherited from the mujahideen in the war. It then was utilized by local influencers to sustain authority especially in the aftermath of the war, when dominant voices in the Salafi milieu were the ones of former Islamist militants.

The most well-established and influential Salafi settlement, located in the village of Gornja Maoča, appeared around 2000.[16] This location was among the remote spots chosen by Bosnian Salafists to establish their communes and live according to Sharia law. Before the Bosnian War, Gornja Maoča was inhabited by Serbs, and later Bosnian Muslims settled in the village. The village drew together radicals, who believed living in isolation was the ultimate manifestation of their religious worldview.

A snapshot of the life in Gornja Maoča between 2012 and 2016 shows its inhabitants organized in a commune and following strict religiously justified rules, such as that the members are not to vote, women are not allowed to communicate with men, or a married woman can only talk to her husband. Following the conceptual tenets of Salafism, the commune opposed the role

[16] Gornja Maoča is a part of the municipality of Srebrenik, Tuzla Canton, BiH.

of the secular state, democracy, free elections, and any institutions or laws that were not based on Sharia law. In a 2018 interview with a local media outlet, a former resident of Gornja Maoča (D.P.) recalls the life there:

> [Gornja Maoča] is a village like a village. You know, villages are small communities. It is located in the forest, one cannot pass by accidentally, but only get there on purpose. [When we lived there] it was a closed community, not open to strangers at all, totally isolated. If it happened that someone came from outside, people were always suspicious. . . My father first sent me to [study] at a maktab,[17] we began to pray at home and also met other people who prayed. At the same time, [my father] began to go to the mosque more frequently and would tell [the family] that we should turn to religion. It was some time in 2003 when he met with those Wahhabis. My father got involved in this kind of radical lifestyle, then [redacted] began to visit [us] and my father did like the lectures the guy was giving . . . There were Salafi coming from Maoča to Bihać.[18] After some time, my father decided to go to Maoča for the first time because of some religious gathering there" (BIIRN 2018).

At the time of this research, Gornja Maoča, having developed the reputation of being the stronghold of Bosnian Salafists,[19] was closed to researchers, journalists, and outsiders in general. The reported number of foreign fighter departures from Gornja Maoča alone is 52, including 38 males and 14 females (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012, 15–16). Throughout the years, Gornja Maoča became known for directing the activities of Bosnian Salafists and linking them to diaspora communities across Europe and the US (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 7–8). The community in Gornja Maoča was particularly connected to Bosnian radical leaders based in Vienna, Austria, while also playing a role in the distribution of financial resources among members of the Salafi movement in BiH (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 7–8). According to the testimony of a witness who lived in Gornja Maoča at the time of active recruitment, there were "brothers from abroad" who

[17] In translation from Arabic means religious elementary school

[18] Bihać is the town where D.P. lived with his family before moving to Gornja Maoča.

[19] The quote is translated by the author from Bosnian.

used to visit the community on various occasions (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty 2018). According to the investigation of a suspect of Bosnian origin who planned a terror plot in Australia, he had spent some time in the village for the purpose of socialization in September 2012 (Source 13 2018).

The Salafi settlement in Gornja Maoča had a distinctive, informal leadership style. Initially its leader was Jusuf Barcić, considered one of the founders of the Salafi movement in BiH, while later [redacted], another key Salafi influencer, took over. [redacted] has been well-recognized and respected within the extended radical milieu, even after he left for Syria to join the al-Nusra Front in 2014. Prior to his departure, he was the decision-maker who was concerned with the commune's relationship with the external world, according to testimonies from people who used to live in Gornja Maoča (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012). In case of his absence, this position was delegated to some "brother by faith" (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012). According to previous research, fighters from at least two of the major cantons in BiH, Sarajevo and Zenica-Doboj, established direct or indirect ties to the leadership of Gornja Maoča (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 19).

According to data collected by the prosecution in BiH, among other objectives, radical settlements, like the one in Gornja Maoča, aimed at recruiting followers to be trained in religious and ideological beliefs, shared by extremist influencers in the radical milieu's core. From the court and the prosecution's acquired information, the religious literature found in [redacted]'s house shows his interest in promoting concepts such as jihad, self-sacrifice, and religious extremism (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012, 15–16). According to a local man's court testimony, his son went to Gornja Maoča to study Islam and Arabic before leaving for Syria to fight with both al-Nusra and the IS (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015).

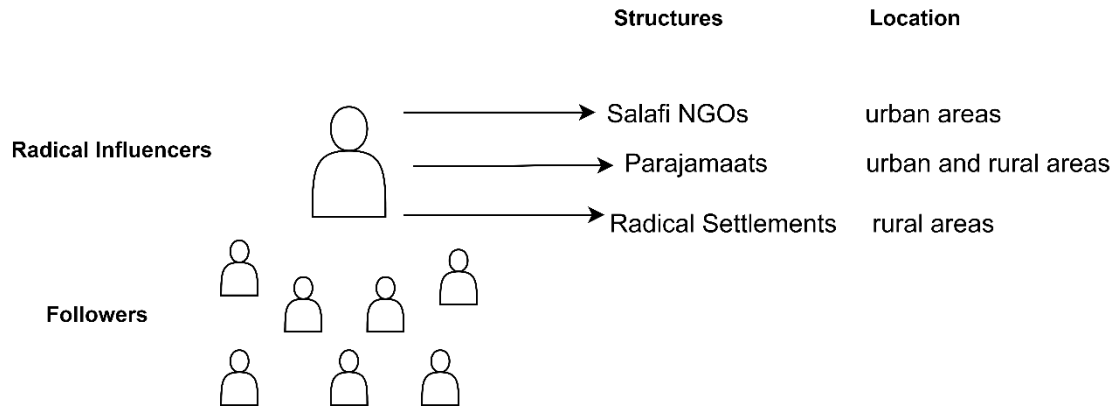
The post-war Salafi settlements established in remote areas reflect the tendency of clandestine structures to seek isolation from the mainstream society. However, in this way, the strategic objective of proliferating ideology could not be obtained. Thus, Salafi influencers gradually extended their activities from traditional and isolated enclaves to larger towns and suburban areas in BiH (Bećirević 2018). This strategic change probably reflects the desire of influencers not to isolate the milieu and not to limit its influence to only remote areas. The subsequent process of opening the milieu to more populated areas, such as suburban, and even urban centers, such as Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, and Bihać, demonstrates the intention of the local influencers to expand their pool of followers. To do so, influencers relied on various forms of socialization with followers, including parajamaats.

Parajamaats: the term can be understood as another key institution of the radical milieu that speaks for the social engagement of local influencers with their followers. It is a key venue for recruitment into Salafi circles, and thus, it is essential to the functioning of the community. A parajamaat is often described in Western literature as an illegal mosque, but in fact, it could be any private space chosen for the purpose of a religious gathering and/or as an alternative to the religious spaces of mainstream Islam. The term here means a congregation that carries out religious services and teachings outside the jurisdiction of the official religious institutions.

In the context of BiH, such "parallel structures" have appeared in both isolated and more populated areas, such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, or Zenica. Charitable activities of local Salafi NGOs are typically attached to a parajamaat's functions: trainings, language courses, and providing kindergarten services or day care. Their organization is led by local Salafi influencers (*da'is*), whose religious lectures are often offered along with some of the listed activities to attract a broader pool of followers (See Figure 6). As recruitment into the radical milieu most frequently

involves person-to-person communication, such activities played a vital role in expanding the influence of the movement. This socialization model has gradually allowed parajamaats to gain influence in areas where public provision gaps are left by institutions in a post-war context, including education and healthcare. While providing public services, influencers have offered a strong ideological agenda in line with Salafism as well. By exploiting this model, they encouraged a horizontal structure of support and loyalty among followers as well as a sense of purpose, belonging, unity, and brotherhood, which were generally lacking in the post-war context of BiH.

Figure 6 Structures built around radical influencers.



Since 2016, the Islamic Community in BiH has begun negotiations with the Islamic congregations known to have been operating outside its institutional umbrella. Out of 72 parajamaats identified by 2013, in 2018, only 24 remained active outside the jurisdiction of the Islamic Community: "We live in a free society; we cannot force anyone to behave in a certain way. What we can do is to warn people against ideas that we see contrary to our traditional understanding of Islam" (Source 20 2018).[20] Although not all parajamaats were linked to violent extremism, many among the Bosnian fighters attended parajamaats, according to local security

[20] The interviewee, Muhamed Jusić, was an appointed spokesperson of the Islamic Community at the time of the interview, Sarajevo, April 2018.

sources. With the outbreak of the Syrian War, it became evident that such parallel congregations played a role in the recruitment of Bosnian foreign fighters (Toe 2016). Data from several empirical studies conducted in the region testifies to the relationship between the presence of parajamaats, active targeting from Salafi influencers, and departures of foreign fighters between 2011 and 2015 (Turčalo and Veljan 2018; Azinović and Jusić 2015; 2016; Bećirević 2016). In BiH, the cantons with the highest numbers of Salafist parajamaats between 2011 and 2015 were Zenica-Doboj (13) and Sarajevo (12) (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 4). However, the following quote testifies to the complex nature of parajamaats, as such "institutions" cannot be entirely seen as venues for foreign fighter recruitment:

> A guy who was part of our [para]jamaat went to Syria without asking anyone, without any initiative, and he went before the law was in place. We spoke with him and told him that we did not want any troubles, so we kicked him out of the jamaat. The biggest problem of the Muslim world is exactly this Islamic state. . .Today we are part of the Islamic community (IC) and we are proud of it. So, no need to think whether there is anything wrong or not, because we're under the regulation of the IC. - Semiz Rizvić, Bocinja (Grbesić 2016).[21]

In building authority through parajamaats, radical influencers could actually expand their influence beyond communities exposed to war and post-war Salafi activism and reach audiences in the region that did not suffer the Bosnian War themselves. As a result, larger Bosnian Muslim communities across the region had come across radical narratives by the time of foreign fighter recruitment for Syria. In neighboring Montenegro, such congregations were established in at least four towns where local Salafi influencers were active, even though they were not associated with extremism and recruitment-related activities, according to local security agencies (Bećirević, Šuković, and Zuković 2018, 3).

[21] Translation of the author from Bosnian.

Furthermore, parajamaats were particularly present in bordering areas, as the collected data shows. One possible explanation may be that such regions are generally characterized by poorer socio-economic conditions, socially isolated, and religiously more conservative. To illustrate this trend empirically, I point to the case of Plav, a town in north-eastern Montenegro, near the borders with Albania and Kosovo. This is the spot in Montenegro with the highest number of foreign fighter departures. Concerning socio-economic characteristics, Plav is among the most economically underdeveloped municipalities in the region, with an ethnically mixed population, over half of which identifies as Bosniak (MonStat 2011, 8). The radical milieu of Plav was institutionalized through the presence of two parajamaats and two small extremist groups, identified by the local police as El-Bejan and the Takfir Group. According to the collected data, all individuals from this geographical location who joined the conflict in Syria were either directly or indirectly tied to El-Bejan, who used to manage their own parajamaat at the phase of active recruitment (Bećirević, Šuković, and Zuković 2018, 5–6).

Parajamaats secure space for strengthening regional ties among Bosnian influencers. Being a recognized communal structure, a parajamaat could link Bosnian communities from across the region, including Sandžak, Serbia, where a large Bosnian population lives. The popularity of Salafi influencers in this area can be explained by the presence of two competing official Islamic bodies, one headquartered in BiH and one in Serbia, operating in Sandžak. The confusion as to which institution has the final authority over religious matters let Salafism gain a particularly strong influence over targeted segments of the population (Maksimović, Dragojlo, and Ristić 2016, 40–44). Almost all departures of foreign fighters here were associated with prior socialization and participation in activities of the Islamic youth organization, Furkan, based in Novi Pazar (Source

13 2018). According to media investigations, the organization was part of a jihadi Salafi network targeting marginalized youth (Maksimović, Dragojlo, and Ristić 2016, 40–44).

4.3.2. The Bosnian Radical Influencers

The lack of a formal administrative body within the framework of Salafism particularly has contributed to the emergence of the grassroots leadership network. As the Salafi movement in BiH has never been homogeneous or highly centralized, dividing lines among its Salafi influencers have appeared in terms of their ideological and political attitudes. Although they are all associated with strategic attempts to change local Islamic traditions throughout the years, radical influencers have varied in their approaches to the radical milieu, as the majority of Bosnian Salafi leaders did not promote violence. Some Salafists are political, others are apolitical, and some accept the role of secular state institutions, while others reject it. Even though there are Salafists formally loyal to the official Islamic Community, there are also extreme parts of the movement which have been operating outside its control. Various external ideological and financial sources, such as those coming from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have created further divisions among Salafi influencers in the Balkans.

This research has identified 31 radical influencers with similar profiles. Their activities throughout the years secured the survival and consolidation of the radical milieu, as they reached Bosnian speaking audiences in BiH, Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro (Table 10).

Table 10 A profile of radical influencers.

They are graduates of Islamic universities in Gulf countries
They rely on Salafi teachings: they advocate for an allegedly ‘purer’ version of Islam compared to traditional Bosnian religious tradition
They rely on sponsorship from abroad (Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States)
They engage in discussions with Salafi adherents both offline and online

They perform the role of Sharia judges at a community level
They do not possess the prerequisites to predicate and work under the auspices of the Islamic Community

The educational background from Middle Eastern religious institutions can be seen as a source of credibility that radical influencers could use in building their authority. As most of their followers lacked religious education, this background "gap" was permissive to the way followers "institutionalized" Salafi influencers and trusted many things they said. The above listed characteristics are shared by most Salafi influencers who appear in the dataset, but they are not sufficient to claim who among them had an impact on the recruitment of foreign fighters, as not all of them employed violent rhetoric. Radical influence is indicated by the clusters of foreign fighter departures that appeared in the parts of the radical milieu where at least one radical influencer claimed authority.

The individuals in the dataset are selected based on the activities they undertook to promote Salafism and consolidate the radical milieu, such as videos, sermons, and organized events with followers, in the period between the Bosnian and the Syrian Wars. The individuals in the dataset represent two different categories of radical influencers: the core, those who engage in violent rhetoric (jihadi Salafism), and the periphery, those who do not promote violence, and even oppose it, in the framework of Salafism.

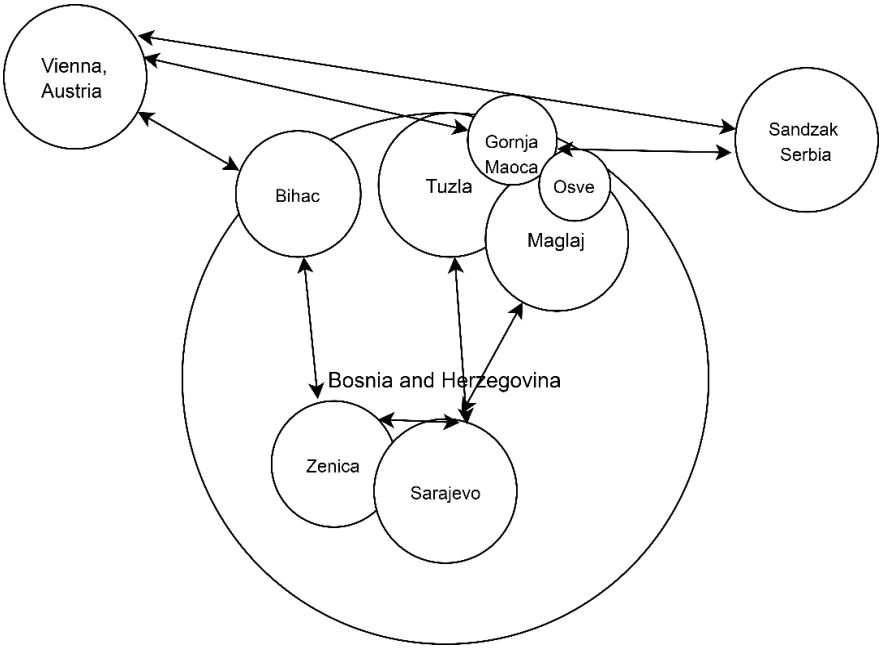
I collected specific data about individuals who promoted violence, including prison sentences, recruitment-related activities, and traveling to Syria after actively promoting jihadi Salafism. In the sample, 19 individuals are categorized as belonging to the core of the radical milieu. The research puts an emphasis on these cases, as they are thought to have had an impact on the recruitment of foreign fighters. The research does not look in detail at the radical influencers in the periphery of the radical milieu. Out of the 19 radical influencers in the dataset, five were active in Sandžak, Serbia, while six others were based in Vienna, Austria (See Table 11).

Table 11 Background and activities of radical influencers of Bosnian foreign fighters.

Total N of radical influencers	**Place of activities**	**Educational Background**	**Travelled to Syria**	**Background activities**	**Activities related to recruitment**
19	Serbia: 5	Saudi Arabia: 10	Yes: 3	Members of El Mudžahid: 5	Sentenced for recruitment: 12
	Bosnia: 7	Syria: 2		Members of AIO: 8	Still part of IS in the Middle East: 1
	Austria: 6	Local Islamic institutes: 2	No: 16	Islamic humanitarian activities during the Bosnian War: 5	No data: 6

Based on the locations of the radical influencers' activities, the research has identified at least four *power centers* that arguably had an impact on the recruitment of Bosnian foreign fighters: three of them set in the Balkans (BiH and Serbia [Novi Pazar, Sandžak]) and one in the European diaspora, which appeared around some extremist influencers of Bosnian origin based in Vienna, Austria (See Figure 7).

Figure 7 Power centers of foreign fighter recruitment.



Each power center refers to influencers who, according to data from local security authorities, capitalized on their support base and encouraged their followers to become foreign fighters. In the

figure above, the arrows reflect the collected evidence about the exchange of visits and shared ideological activities between the radical influencers. The cooperation between the power centers testifies to a pre-existing social network of influencers. Their significance to the radical milieu can be explained by their shared biographical characteristics and similar ties to Salafism, which were developed during the Bosnian War and post-war years.

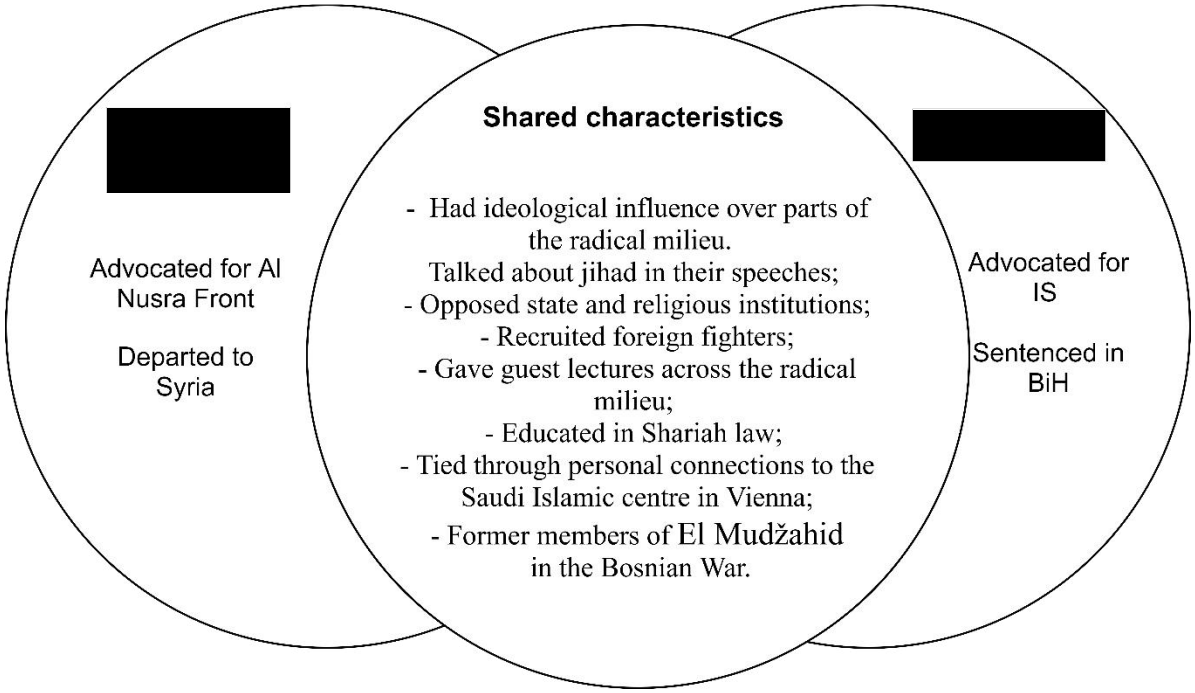
The distinction between two domestic power centers in BiH refers to two Salafi influencers, [redacted] and [redacted], who, among others identified in this research, took an openly pro-violent stance in relation to the Syrian War. While [redacted] was supportive of al-Nusra and joined its ranks in 2013, [redacted] was advocating in favor of the IS.[22] Their active engagement in extreme messages and actions indicates that they belonged to the radical milieu. In one of his speeches, [redacted] asserts that "deeds are valued upon their completion. If you die as a Muslim, everything will be calculated in your favour. If you die as an infidel, everything will be annulled…We pray to Allah to be martyred. This is the best way of dying" (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 43). A closer examination of [redacted]'s biography shows that his first introduction to Salafism happened in the1990s in Germany, where he lived with his parents. In 1992, he returned to BiH, joined the 7th Muslim Brigade, and after the war, became a member of the AIO. Unlike the majority of local Salafi influencers, [redacted] did not have an educational background in the Middle East. However, he was an active member of the post-war radical milieu since its early establishment.

Despite their manifested ideological differences, both [redacted] have certain leadership features in common and generally have similar approaches to their followers (See

[22] [redacted] was arrested in the fall of 2014 in a police operation titled Damascus and later sentenced to seven years in prison for recruitment and radicalization.

Figure 8). Both influencers played the role of an informal authority figure and showed leadership skills in recruiting followers as they managed to build their influence over jihadi Salafi communities across BiH and the region. [redacted] was established in Bihać, and while did travel to other locations to give lectures, he was rarely invited to speak before large audiences, as he was perceived as a marginalized voice in the Salafi community (Source 13 2018). [redacted] was the leader of the Salafi commune in the village of Gornja Maoča, where the largest cluster of departures of foreign fighters was reported.

Figure 8 A comparison of the profiles of key Bosnian radical influencers.



It would be an over-simplification to argue that in any given situation followers are approached by radical influencers with the intention to create individuals prone to violence and convince them to become foreign fighters. On the contrary, radical influencers perform a variety of functions, and appeals to violence are only one among the possible ones. The role of influencers is to seek, spot, and exploit vulnerabilities and, thus, identify their followers and approach them.

They do not necessarily show them any intention of sending them to a war. In fact, this pattern only emerged following the outbreak of the war in Syria.

Radical influencers typically enjoy trust from their followers within the framework of the radical milieu. Thus, the mechanism of foreign fighter recruitment follows, in essence, the logic of integrating new members into Salafi milieu. This means that pre-existing socialization between influencers and followers was simply utilized in the context of the Syrian War: "Typically, [the followers'] first encounter was their attendance or a sermon that was taking place in someone's house, everyone is kind, they offer them coffee, everyone treated them with respect, everybody embraces them, and then you see that they were actually looking for something that they did not have it their lives before" (Source 21 2018).

In fact, influencers have variety of functions in the radical milieu that could be understood beyond their presence at sermons and religious gatherings. For instance, [redacted] were responsible for issuing *tezkije* [recommendation letters] to those who intended to travel to Syria. Such confirmations were initially given by [redacted], until his departure to the battlefield and then later by [redacted]. According to police and prosecution sources, after [redacted] was arrested in 2014, the task of issuing tezkije was transferred to an authority figure outside BiH (Source 13 2018).

Another function of radical influencers that finds empirical evidence in the case of [redacted] and [redacted] refers to the application of *ruqya* [spiritual healing] to people who later became foreign fighters.[23] The practice of ruqya was a way to encourage followers who seek help, often

[23] In one of the documented cases, [redacted] used *ruqya* to remove a young man from the healthcare facility where the young man was hospitalized in May 2013 after he came back from Syria. According to data researched by Vlado Azinović, the young man had "a nervous breakdown" upon his return. The researched police documents showed that [redacted] took the young man to Gornja Maoća and "healed him by the Qur'an." Later that year, the young man travelled to Syria again and in 2014 was reported killed.

with drug or alcohol abuse, to follow the path to jihad in the day when [redacted] was arrested (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 64). Some of his "patients" were from BiH and others from Slovenia, Italy, and Austria (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015).

The power centers around these charismatic influencers did not appear in a vacuum but seem to have been the product of leadership dynamics, wherein influencers would either support or reject each other's activities. When [redacted] travelled to Syria in 2014 to join al-Nusra followed by his wife and children, [redacted] called [redacted]'s move a "mistake" in a message published on a local news portal, popular among the Salafi community (Saff.ba 2014). In fact, the differing ideological preferences of the two influencers between IS and al Nusra had implications for recruitment, as it caused re-groupings and divisions among the followers of the two leaders. The [redacted] "split" further testifies to the leadership competition, power dynamics, and various centers of influence in the radical milieu. In line with the claim about ideological cleavages, an influential figure in the Salafi milieu interviewed for this research points to the role of [redacted] in the recruitment of foreign fighters:

> When [redacted] began to advocate for the caliphate, I got in my car and went to Krajina [where [redacted] was preaching], and confronted him saying, 'Listen, I've heard that you are advocating, recruiting and sending young people to the caliphate. The two of us are men of knowledge. Give me a single argument/piece of evidence that the caliphate in Syria is the real one. If you convince me that Baghdadi is the real caliph, I trust you and in the name of Allah I will immediately go to Syria.' He looked at me, and he told me that his evidence is that he had a dream that Baghdadi was the real caliph. And I told him, 'Both of us are men of knowledge. You've studied in Syria. How come. . . I believe they paid him (Source 14 2018).

Considering their different leadership pathways, the collected data indicates that the Bosnian influencers were strategic about the rhetoric they used and the activities they undertook. Despite their individual leadership histories embedded in the Salafi milieu, they were not always explicit about inciting their followers to violence. This shows their ability to adapt to the external

political and security environment. A Bosnian imam interviewed for this research shared his insights from his friendship with [redacted] during the post-war years. In the interview, he argued that previously [redacted] did not openly engage in violence, despite his ideological stance:

> I met him in Visoko during the war and, even after that, we spent time talking about Islam, about life. Even in one moment, around 1999-2000, we were planning to go to Jordan to study together. At that time, he was a normal guy, and when I say normal, I mean, yes, he was a Wahhabi, but he did not have extremist ideas. Then the Arab Spring came. . . When I heard that my friend [redacted] had been preaching and encouraging youngsters to go to Syria, I wrote a post on Facebook. I said, 'If someone should go to Syria, it's us, because we fought in a war. The younger generation does not have any clue what a war means, and they don't know how to fight (Source 15 2019) .

This quote points to the evolution of informal authority built throughout the years between the Bosnian War and the rise of the IS. On the one hand, the gradual buildup of power shows the persistence of the Salafi influencers. On the other hand, the decisions of individual influencers as to how and whether to utilize it for the sake of recruitment seem to have be taken individually, yet in line with the framework of the radical milieu.

The evolution of local influencers can be traced to the leadership dynamics in the radical milieu long before the outbreak of the Syrian War. In fact, the legacy of some post-war ideological leaders has remained dominant throughout the years, inspiring cooperation as well as ideological cleavages among Salafi influencers in the radical milieu. For instance, Barcić, previously mentioned as one of the founders of the Salafi movement in BiH, had particularly formative effects on the establishment of the radical milieu in the post-war period. His legacy was preserved by Salafi influencers, like [redacted] This continuity in the Bosnian Salafi leadership points to long-term targeting efforts that provided local influencers with the opportunity to build their authority. Thus, they could utilize this authority within the context of the Syrian War to encourage followers to become foreign fighters and even to "compete" ideologically in their recruitment messages.

In addition to the ideological continuity, radical influence is characterized by decentralization, meaning that the recruitment process has been influenced by several different power centers, internal and external to the region. One possible explanation for this points to the online presence of radical influencers. Video recordings of lectures and religious gatherings have been a popular form of social engagement with followers. This factor impacts recruitment as social media removes national and regional boundaries and allows the recordings to reach larger audiences across Bosnian-speaking populations. However, the problem with this argument is that not all the influencers were active in utilizing online spaces. Instead, the empirical evidence suggests that pre-existing ties among the leaders facilitated the buildup of a network in which cross-boundary recruitment took place.

Nonetheless, not all parts of the radical milieu could rely on the presence of charismatic influencers. While distinct power centers appeared in the recruitment process, there were influencers with more limited authority who acted as amplifiers of the radical rhetoric. Influencers of this kind were less impactful but very proactive in their targeting efforts with followers. The case of a rogue imam from Rožaje, Montenegro empirically illustrates this type of leadership. Despite his contribution to the buildup of the Salafi milieu in Montenegro, he was not as active online as other Salafi influencers from neighboring BiH. As local followers lacked a charismatic figure in Montenegro, they looked at Bosnian Salafi leaders for ideological inspiration. Data from local researchers show that Salafi influencers from BiH have been particularly popular among the younger generation in Montenegro (Bećirević, Šuković, and Zuković 2018, 14).

An external power center identified in this research is connected to a few radical clerics of Bosnian origin, who, during the Bosnian War, were in charge of channeling humanitarian aid from Vienna to Sarajevo through several Islamic organizations. Back in the 1990s, a few Islamic

organizations with offices in Vienna were active in sending aid to BiH. Various security sources point to the "infrastructure" of Islamic charities that was used during the conflict to transfer money from Vienna to Sarajevo and its significance to the distribution of material and non-material resources following the rise of the IS and their recruitment campaign (Racimora 2013, 12–16). For instance, Barcić was the representative of the Vienna-based International Islamic Relief Organization for the city of Zenica, BiH in the 1990s (Bećirević, Šuković, and Zuković 2018, 18). This illustrates the link between the financial influx from humanitarian aid during the Bosnian War and the emergence of Salafi influencers in the post-war period.

The role of diaspora-based influencers became particularly important in the recruitment of foreign fighters, as they could utilize their images as authority figures that they had cultivated among their followers for more than two decades. The Salafi milieu was initially influenced by two Bosnian clerics based in Vienna, [redacted] from Sandžak and Muhamed Porča from Sarajevo (see Table 12). However, the reference to an external power center does not point to a centralized or strictly hierarchical leadership structure, as the influencers emerged under the conditions of ideological cleavages and power dynamics among leaders of competing groups. Table 12 shows some examples of typical cases of violent influencers.

Table 12 Radical influencers of Bosnian origin belonging to the external power center of recruitment.

Influencer	**Place of activities**	**Background activities**	**Activities related to recruitment**	**Current status**
[redacted]	Vienna (from Sarajevo, Bosnia)	Studied in Saudi Arabia; was a leader of the Salafi missionary activities and the Bosnian Salafi movement in Austria, and a "middle-man" between some Middle Eastern NGO's and Salafists in the Balkans.	Served as an imam at the al-Tawhid Mosque in Vienna, while being particularly influential in and providing ideological and material support to the radical milieu in BiH.	Arrested and sentenced for recruitment
[redacted] (known as	Vienna (from Sandžak, Serbia)	Studied in Saudi Arabia, influential in administrating the mujahedeen's arrival in	Had ties to radical circles in BiH and Sandžak, Serbia; provided ideological and logistical support to Bosnian jihadi Salafists in	Arrested in 2017 and sentenced for recruitment of foreign fighters

Ebu Muhammed)		Bosnia in the 1990s (Dragojlovic 2018).	Austria and the Balkans; an imam in the Sahaba mosque in Vienna's Seventh district; led the Vienna-based Kelimetul Haqq organization of Bosnian and Serbian Muslims, which was part of the Al-Takfir w'al-Hijra movement.	(Azinović and Jusić 2015, 57–61).
[redacted] (known as Ebu Tejma)	Vienna/Graz (from Tutin, Serbia)	Studied in Saudi Arabia	Reportedly led a Vienna-based Bosnian terrorist cell through which he had recruited Europeans to join jihadist groups abroad.	Sentenced in 2016 to 20 years in prison for recruitment of 160 foreign fighters; also convicted for murdering two Bosnian girls.
[redacted]	Graz (from Konjic, Bosnia)	No data	A close associate of [redacted] presumably planned to travel to Syria to join the IS in 2015.	Arrested in 2015 and sentenced to eight years for recruitment.

The collected data speaks for the authority of influencers situated outside of the Bosnian radical milieu. The importance of maintaining influence among Bosnian Salafists abroad is evidenced by the fact that at least 15 percent of the foreign fighters belonging to the Bosnian contingent departed from other countries (Source 11 2018). Thus, it can be argued that the strong ties to jihadi Salafi influencers in the Bosnian diaspora have significantly impacted the recruitment network. According to local security authorities, the radical leaders based in Austria could secure the involvement of Salafi adherents and recruit them into local radical milieus, which grew noticeably between the Bosnian War and the outbreak of the Syrian conflict (Source 13 2018). This way, they have acted as a bridge between the European diaspora and Salafi groups in the Balkans.

The ties between local and abroad-based influencers were maintained and reinforced through shared activities, guest lectures, engagement in online discussions, and the spread of ideological propaganda. According to the collected data, Balkans-based Salafi leaders paid regular visits to Bosnian Salafi communities in Vienna. They were frequent guests in diaspora

communities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, and Italy, which was facilitated financially and logistically through Salafi NGOs based in European countries (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 58). This shows that even recruitment is seen as a grassroots process; it is not a country-based or region-based process, but it is a transmittable function of leadership ties in the framework of the same milieu. The exchange of visits between influencers adds to their individual and group legitimacy as authority figures in their constituencies.

To sum up, at the macro-level, the Bosnian radical milieu could expand due to various aspects of post-war fragility. The ideological legacies and resources inherited from the conflict and post-conflict period have facilitated the growth of internal and external power centers of radical influence. At the micro-level, the cooperation of these power centers has strengthened the Bosnian radical milieu, and most importantly its core encouraging Bosnian foreign fighter recruitment.

4.4. Narratives

To understand how radical influencers employ macro- and micro-jihadi narratives to recruit foreign fighters, I looked at messages quoted in research reports, media investigations, and indictments. Most videos with such content were removed from the Internet by the time of this research. Thus, only in a small number of cases, I could access speeches in which radical influencers advocate for jihad and encourage foreign fighter recruitment. The analysis in this part seeks to identify interaction between macro- and micro-radical narratives, meaning how and whether radical influencers employed global jihadi rhetoric in combination with local jihadi rhetoric. This is based on references to past grievances, war memories, domestic politics, and hate speech towards representatives of local institutions and various ethnic and religious communities.

I claim that radical influencers "localize" IS propaganda to convey the messages they want and, thus, increase their recruitment potential. The research has found that at the macro-level, Bosnian radical influencers use the general IS narrative, pointing to jihad as a religious duty in the framework of the Syrian War. However, on the micro-level, Bosnian influencers make specific references to local state and religious institutions, highlighting why they should not be respected. Although radial influencers utilize pre-existing attitudes of hatred in the Bosnian society, there are no references to nationalism, nor to Serbs or Croats, who constitute the two other major communities living in BiH. There are only rare references to the Bosnian War, and mainly they convey messages of Muslim victimhood at the time of foreign fighter recruitment. Radical influencers engage with their audiences through a variety of online and offline activities (See Table 13) tailored to create a conversation-based community.

Table 13 Propaganda Toolkit of Radical Influencers.

Propaganda Toolkit of Radical Influencers	
Offline	Sermons and religious lectures in parajamaats and religious NGOs in the region and abroad
Online	Videos, social media posts, engagement in discussions Event advertisements on social media and websites of local Salafi NGOs – such pages advertise online lectures of influencers; Salafi media outlets that specifically focus on religion, politics, and conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Afghanistan
Topics	Religion, Politics, Everyday life: marriage, death, family, what "true Muslims" are (not) allowed to do

While it is not an easy task to draw the line between macro- and micro-narratives in the rhetoric of Bosnian radical influencers, they use a variety of messages to define their enemy, reject existing, local societal rules and institutions, and set new boundaries for prospective followers. In doing so, they rely on a combination of global and local propaganda, as the macro-messages tend to be more "exclusive" and seek to build a community, whereas the micro-ones are more "inclusive", thus, tailored to evoke an action (See Table 14).

Table 14 Key narratives of the Bosnian radical milieu.

Exclusive messages	Inclusive messages
Not Muslim enough The failure of Dayton Rejection of state and religious institutions Anti-West rhetoric	Join the caliphate (make *hijra*) Help suffering Muslims (the *Ummah*) Join the cause of jihad

Once followers reject the norms and values of the surrounding society, they are then encouraged to engage with their new community and contribute to it. Variations of these messages appear in the core and periphery of the radical milieu, and therefore I look at them separately in this chapter. The distinction between influencers who engage with violent rhetoric and those who do not is essential to understanding whose messages matter the most in the context of foreign fighter recruitment.

4.4.1.Narratives in the core of radical milieu

The narratives in the core of the radical milieu involve explicit references to jihad as a form of religious duty. Such framing seeks to encourage followers to obey the religious duty in the context of the Syrian War. Although limited data was obtained, it safe to argue that violence was justified in the speeches of a very small number of Bosnian influencers who appear in the dataset.

I refer to quotes from [redacted], who was sentenced for sending Bosnian fighters to IS, to empirically illustrate what security authorities viewed as "recruitment messages". Many of his religious lectures were previously available on the Internet: "What most pleases the Master of the servants, Allah, is when his servant, wearing no bullet proof jacket crushes into the unbelievers and fights against them until he is dead..." (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015).[24] On

[24] Indictment of [redacted], Case No.: S1 2 K 017968 15 K, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the document, the video was uploaded on YouTube on August 14, 2013 titled "[redacted]'s Friday sermon: Sleeping Bosniaks". The video was removed from the Internet by the time of this research.

different occasions, [redacted] expresses satisfaction over the "establishment of the caliphate", as in one of his speeches he encourages his followers with these words:

> Who is fighting [in Syria] . . .the young men in their young age are fighting . . . A brother from Sarajevo [a reference to the killed Bosnian fighter, Muaz Šabić] has fallen as a martyr, not as a coward. He sacrificed his life in the cause of Allah, because Islam is a mobilizing force (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015).[25]

In another speech [redacted] states: "This is the preparation for the establishment of [Sharia] law throughout the world, and it will start right [there] in the land of Sham. The best armies shall gather [in Syria]. The best martyrs shall fall there" (The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015).[26]

These quotes testify to the radical influencers' engagement with the topic of jihad in Syria. Their targeted efforts at the micro-level can be explained by the intention to encourage local followers to embrace violence as a way of defending Islam. [redacted] made these statements when the Islamic State was already emerging as an established actor and claimed authority over parts of Syria and Iraq, where the group proclaimed their "caliphate". Thus, global narratives offered by IS created a space for the core of local radical milieus to become more vocal in expressing their radical views.

However, the narratives employed by local influencers in relation to the Syrian War should not be understood as unique or inspired only by global-level propaganda. On the contrary, such narratives were largely facilitated by the previously discussed contextual factors that secured the discursive opportunity for recruitment. The framework of jihad that local influencers use to recruit foreign fighters is the continuation of the one used during the Bosnian War and the post-war establishment of the radical milieu. The "back to the roots" narrative, arguing that Bosnian

[25] Ibid. According to the indictment, the video was uploaded on the YouTube on September 27, 2013 and titled [redacted] Friday Sermon: Whom has Allah cursed". The video was removed from the Internet by the time of this research.

[26] Ibid. According to the indictment, the video was uploaded on YouTube on March 9, 2014 and titled [redacted] Friday Sermon: Fitna (from Arabic: Rebellion)". The video was removed from the Internet by the time of this research.

Muslims should convert to Salafism, as they were "on the wrong path", in fact reinforces the legacy of the Arab mujahedeen fighters who fought in the Bosnian War (Bećirević 2016, 74–75). Thus, radical influencers connect their messages to past conflicts where the cause of jihad was present.

In doing so, they create a link between micro and macro-narratives to potentially increase the success of their recruitment messages: "When we searched the houses, and we arrested and prosecuted them, we found films about the Talibans in Afghanistan, about the fights in Iraq, in some of their computers" (Source 13 2018).[27] Although explicit references to the Bosnian War in the rhetoric of local radical influencers are rare, such messages appear in the videos of battlefield influencers, tailored to attack Bosnian-speaking fighters from the Balkans.

In a 2015 video, [redacted] a Bosnian jihadist, calls on those who cannot travel to Syria (perform hijra) to join the IS caliphate, to "smash the traitorous government that surrendered the mujahideen, who helped defend Bosnia, to the Americans."[28].The fighter warns that "otherwise, Muslims will experience another genocide, just like the ones in Srebrenica, Goražde, Mostar" (See Illustration 1)(Azinović and Jusić 2016, 86).

Illustration 1 A print screen of a video of [redacted], a Bosnian IS fighter in Syria.

[27] At the time of this research, the interviewee was appointed state prosecutor dealing with cases of Bosnian foreign fighters, Sarajevo, April 2018.

[28] The video was removed by the time of this research. The authenticity of the content was confirmed by the author o the quoted study.

Source: Saff.ba 2016.

References to the Bosnian War and other past conflicts make recruitment narratives context-specific and, at the same time, globalist. They rarely, or almost never, refer to Christians or other ethnic and religious groups in the local context. However, the recent legacy of the Bosnian War provides them with the opportunity to exploit local collective memories and the sense of victimization through the global "clash of civilizations" rhetoric used by IS, Al-Qaeda, and other Islamist actors:

> Rise up Muslims, kill Christians and their servants in their cities and their countries. Put explosives under their cars, in their houses and offices. Use snipers and silencer guns to kill. Kill as many as you can. Even with a knife. Do not make a difference between soldiers and civilians. Yes, don't make a difference between killing soldiers or civilians, the way their airplanes don't make a difference between soldiers and civilians in the Islamic states. Trust Allah and help your brothers. Do not doubt the rightfulness of your actions. The words of Allah should be sufficient for you. And when you punish them, punish them the same way (Saff.ba 2016).[29]

While there is a great emphasis on the victimization of Muslims across history, references to the Bosnian War in radical influencers' rhetoric seem more implicit than explicit. The underlying story of Muslim victimhood is tailored to resonate with followers' attitudes building on the unspoken

[29] The last phrase is in Arabic and then translated into Bosnian.

link between their own community's experience in a war and the experience of people in Syria or elsewhere where there are victims (Source 21 2018). [30]

The radical narratives of local influencers rely on a focus on victimhood, injustice, and humiliation to build "proxy humiliation", in the process of which "a group identity is sufficiently powerful to make individuals feel grievances without experiencing them directly" (Source 21 2018). As Azinović and Jusić explain, the revenge for real or imagined injustices can be a stronger motivator than religious narratives offered by local influencers (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 72). This explains radical influencers' efforts to create a sense of sympathy combined with the narrative of collective suffering of Muslims in Syria and to justify jihad as the only possible response to the atrocities they describe.

While reinforcing the narrative "Islam under siege", radical influencers present BiH as an "infidel" country to encourage their followers to perform *hijra,* i.e. migrate to the IS caliphate. On the one hand, this rhetoric is in line with the global jihadi propaganda that points to foreign fighters' countries of origin as hostile towards Muslims. On the other hand, the localization of such messages is evident through specific references to local state and religious institutions, seemingly aimed at creating a sense of the "close enemy".

The definition of the close enemy in the vocabulary of Bosnian radical influencers, both in the core and periphery, refers to traditional Bosnian Muslims. Throughout the evolution of the radical milieu, Bosnian radical influencers have argued against the "monopoly" of the official Islamic Community in BiH to administer mosques, appoint imams, provide religious education in mosques, or organize the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, or, *hajj* (Alibašić 2014, 439–40). Thus, religious and ideological cleavages can be understood as a way that radical influencers draw the

[30] The interviewee, Professor Vlado Azinović, participated as a security expert in the court proceedings of Bosnian foreign fighters, April 2018, Sarajevo.

boundaries of the Salafi milieu and further define its core and periphery based on the rhetoric and actions they use:

> [The Salafis] believe that the [Bosnian] understanding of Islam is influenced by communism, that the Islamic Community of BiH does not teach the true, pure Islam. . . There is no way we can look at these people as [part of] our national identity. They are far from that. They themselves are very anti-nationalist, anti-cultural, [this is] not [simply] a turn to Bosniak conservatism, they dress like people from Saudi Arabia. This is foreign. It has been imported and it has roots [in BiH]. The concepts [of Salafism] were created far from Bosnia and were brought here during the war (Source 20 2018).[31]

Such pre-existing religious and cultural cleavages were utilized for the sake of foreign fighter recruitment. On several occasions, Bosnian fighters, who were already in the battlefield, sent threats to local Salafi preachers or representatives of the official Islamic Community, who had openly opposed people going to Syria. For instance, in a video from the warzone in February 2016, a Bosnian IS fighter, A.S., vows to "cut the throat of the Grand Mufti" (Nikolić 2016).

Messages focused on the "close enemy" appear on multiple occasions across the Bosnian radical milieu at the time of foreign fighter recruitment. In a video from July 2015, a Montenegrin IS fighter, presented as Abu Mariam Al-Albani, called for Montenegro's Muslims to join him in Syria or "kill the infidels in their homes" (Tomović 2016a, 32). On another occasion, in May 2015, a Montenegrin IS fighter, originally from the town of Bar, posted a threat to Muslim MPs from the same town on social media: "[The] Islamic State, with Allah's permission and help, will arrive there and will clean up this town [Bar] and Islam there from your dirt and lies" (Tomović 2016a, 35). This suggests that attacks against the "close enemy" can be an alternative to migration to the IS caliphate. In a 2015 video a Bosnian jihadist calls for jihad at the local level in case prospective recruits are able to travel to Syria:

> You must fight there. Fight them over there! If you can, put explosives under the cars, in their homes, everywhere. If you can, take poison and put it in their food, in their drinks. Kill them! Kill them with poison and misery! Kill them wherever you can – in Bosnia, in

[31] The interviewee Muhamed Jusić was interviewed in his capacity of a representative of the Islamic Community in Bosnia, Sarajevo, May 2018.

> Serbia, in Sandžak. You can do it. Allah will help you. Allah is helping. . . believers" (France 24 2015b).

In fact, targeted propaganda is not only a priority of local radical influencers but also of those who arrive in the battlefield. The "successful" foreign fighter is expected to further spread the message of jihad in an attempt to reach larger audiences back home. Engagement with propaganda from the battlefield is tailored to contribute to the domestic-level recruitment efforts and expand the pool of prospective recruits. Several videos and photos previously available on social media support this claim empirically. In a video from June 2015, a Bosnian IS fighter calls on Muslims from around the Balkan region to migrate to the IS caliphate:

> Many of you out there complain about not being able to wear a beard, niqab, that you are having a hard life. . . So, now seize the chance. Make hijra if you are in this situation to complain that much. . .Those who believe and migrate, and fight on Allah's path, with bullets and their lives, will receive the highest rewards (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 61).[32]

The engagement of foreign fighters with propaganda in the battlefield shows that "influencers" and "followers" are largely ideal-type categories that in reality may overlap and, thus, allow for functional duality. This means that there may be various pathways of becoming a radical influencer.

The departure to the warzone demonstrates a real engagement with the cause of jihad and marks a shift in the roles of the members of the radical milieu. Those who initially may be only recipients of the radical rhetoric become its messengers once they are in the battlefield. This process testifies to the importance of foreign fighters, not only in terms of martial skills, but also in their participation in spreading propaganda. Conveying consistent radical messages on both sides of the recruitment channel, i.e. on the grassroots level and on the battlefield, increases the chance for recruitment success and expanding the pool of followers.

[32] The quote is from an IS propaganda video "The Honor of Jihad", June 4, 2015. It was accessed through the website Jihadology.net, July 19, 2019. The video was not available on the Internet at the time of this research. However, the content appears in multiple credible research and media reports.

An additional aspect of the engagement of radical influencers with radical rhetoric is that some propaganda was specifically tailored to Bosnian-speaking women. Radical influencers describe women's role in the IS caliphate through creating a sense of significance and empowerment:

> Sisters, come, leave behind the land and air of infidels. Come here to live with the orphans and the mujahideen. There are brothers to marry here, there are brothers who seek to have more wives, there are brothers who want to protect you. . .Come, help the ummah (community), give birth to the mujahideen, nurture the mujahideen. (Klix.ba 2014)[33].

These messages aimed to suggest that Bosnian women were recognized as contributing actors to the establishment of the IS caliphate. Being mothers and wives in the framework of a new Islamic society is presented as more appealing and valuable than having the same responsibilities in their home countries. Propaganda tailored to women followed the macro-narrative of the jihadist propaganda concerned with a revolutionary change of the society in which women would play an essential role. On the other hand, the micro-messages referring to local politics or history are less present when women are addressed.

Furthermore, research on multiple websites and online pages offered additional insights into the nature of radical narratives of the Bosnian radical milieu. A few previously available sources openly expressed support for the cause of IS and the recruitment of foreign fighters from the region. The reference here is to Salafi-linked websites, Facebook groups, a network of social media profiles, and, finally, the Bosnian edition of the IS magazine, "Dabiq". In August 2015, a platform called "Put hilafeta [*The Path to the Caliphate*]" released a video of the Croatian hostage, Tomislav Salopek, being decapitated by IS jihadists (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 76).

"Vijesti Ummeta [*The News of the Ummah*]," blocked in May 2016, was also among the websites active in spreading jihadist propaganda. The website featured reports from the

[33] The quote is translated from Bosnian by the author.

battlefields, issues of the IS magazine, "Dabiq", as well as video and audio content translated from other jihadi media platforms. According to data from local journalists and the prosecution in BiH, "Vijesti Ummeta" was maintained by jihadi Salafists from BiH and Sandžak, Serbia. Previous research testifies to the links between "Vijesti Ummeta" and IS that became particularly evident when the website published the group's claim of responsibility for the November 2015 attacks in Paris, calling them "a blessed massacre" (See Table 15)(Azinović and Jusić 2016, 76). Additionally, the website posted their own threat to local security agencies and warned of "retributions worse than Paris," and that "heads would roll" (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 76).

Table 15 A summary of the role of websites "Put vjernika" and "Ummet Press".

The Path of Believers (Put vjernika)	**Ummet Press**
The website that has served as a platform for radical, often violent content. While previously the content was focused on the jihad in Syria and other conflicts, following the defeat of the IS caliphate, the page shifted to religious issues. According to an investigation of RFE Sarajevo, the website has been arguably linked to the terrorist organization, Al-Nusra Front,[34] known also as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The SEERECON report "From the Balkans to ISIS" has linked the page to [redacted], considered a key influencer of Bosnian foreign fighters (who also went to Syria in 2013). Although the website was blocked after [redacted] was put on the list of the most dangerous terrorists in 2013, the page is active in 2020.	The webpage often borrows content from The Path of Believers (Put vjernika). Ummet Press presents itself as "a regional medium that benefits Muslims". It follows closely and further glorifies the actions of the Talibans in Afghanistan. The webpage offers maps, infographics and analyzes in which HTS is presented as a legitimate insurgent actor. Quotes from propaganda outlets of HTS frequently appear on the Ummet press and this can be seen as an indicator that the administrators of the page follow closely the media activities of the jihadists. EUROPOL paid special attention to HTS's media activities in its latest 2018 Online Jihadist Propaganda Report.

In the broader historical context of the radical milieu, Salafi media platforms have been active in BiH since the 1990s. Some websites have focused on content that glorifies the "successes" of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the terrorist organization, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in Syria, and the previous developments related to the IS (Kešmer 2019). Pages like *Put vjernika [The Path of Believers]*, *Ummet press*, along with a few Facebook and Twitter accounts, have shared news from the "Islamic world," as seen by these platforms. They advertise the content they offer as a reflection

[34] Al-Nusra Front was formerly known as the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.

of "the real truth about the Islamic world". On numerous occasions such websites would openly express support for the actions of militant and terrorist organizations, described as "opposing the unbelievers" (Kešmer 2019).

The discussed sources played the role of multipliers of radical messages by creating spaces for the saturation of information concerned with the conflict in Syria, the virtue of jihad, and the role of Bosnian fighters in the battlefield. It can be argued that this ecosystem of sources was essential to the way issues of interest were framed and understood in the radical milieu. Thus, radical influencers could magnify the narratives they offered and reach larger audiences of prospect followers.

4.4.2. Narratives in the periphery of radical milieu

The narratives in the periphery of the radical milieu are not understood as having particular effects on foreign fighter mobilization, but they do contribute to setting the boundaries of the radical milieu. The narratives employed by Bosnian radical influencers in the periphery of the radical milieu do not justify violence. Nonetheless, such narratives are understood as radical here as they promote a radical change in the way Bosnian Muslims practice Islam daily.

The rhetoric of influencers in the periphery of the Salafi milieu challenges legal and societal norms concerning family values, gender equality, and the right to education (Bećirević 2016, 11). Such messages reflect Salafi conservatism and seek to set rules for targeted audiences by providing definitions of right and wrong deeds in daily life. For instance, some radical influencers justify polygamy and restrictions on women to vote, study, or even travel. In a 2015 video, one of the Salafi influencers in BiH, [redacted], who is considered a prominent spiritual authority,

discussed the question of whether a Muslim woman should have the right to go to a university (DIWAN BiH 2015).[35]

Social media posts of popular Salafi influencers advise their audiences to avoid musical concerts, wear certain clothing, and promote the material obedience of women (Bećirević 2018, 18–19). The following quote by a local Salafist shows that the exposure to narratives in the periphery of the radical milieu has an impact on individual and group engagement with norms shared in the community:

> Everything I do in life, I do according to religious rules. If they say it is reasonable to have four wives and I fulfil all the conditions, well, I can have four." His wife, while laughing, says: "Women are by nature jealous, [it] is natural and it would be hard for me but if Allah allows him to have more wives then I cannot prevent him from doing so (France 24 2015a).

While the dissertation makes a distinction between the core and periphery of the radical milieu based on the narratives employed in each part, radical influencers can also be strategic about the way they convey their messages, shifting from core to periphery when they seek to soften their rhetoric.

To support this claim empirically, I refer to [redacted]s speeches. In a 2016 audio posted on YouTube of an alleged recording of a 1999 lecture by him on the already blocked channel, "Dani Ponosa [Days of Pride]," [redacted] interprets religious writings to justify the murder of Jews. In the same lecture, he called for the deaths of people who curse the Prophet and further claimed that non-Salafist Muslims "deserve nothing else but to be killed" (Bećirević 2016, 46). More recently, the speeches of [redacted] and his younger disciple, [redacted] describe traditional Bosnian Muslims "sick and in need of treatment" to return to the right path (Bećirević 2016, 46).

[35] The video is available on YouTube and it is titled "Može li žena muslimanka studirati na Bosanskim fakultetima? dr. [redacted]", accessed on July 3, 2019.

The macro-framework of the global IS narratives in relation to the war in Syria triggered influencers in the periphery of the radical milieu to engage with topics like the conflicts in the Middle East, the issue of militant Salafism, and terrorism. Radical influencers generally oppose the recruitment of Bosnian foreign fighters and the use of violence as a way to defend Islam. Nonetheless, nuances also appear in the rhetoric of radical influencers in the periphery of the radical milieu. For instance, following the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack, [redacted] gave a passionate speech, in which he argued that those who offended the Prophet Muhammed should be killed (Bardos 2016).

Thus, the choice of the messages given by radical influencers matters to the narratives, allowing them to magnify an idea or not in a given moment of time. Although there are significant ideological differences between radical influencers in the core and periphery, their authority in the radical milieu shall be considered a factor in analyzing what narratives prevail in a given moment. Consequently, employing specific narratives in combination with a radical influencer's impact over followers' attitudes could either encourage or discourage foreign fighter recruitment.

4.5. Followers

To understand who gets targeted in the radical milieu to become a foreign fighter, it is necessary to look at the shared characteristics and trends among individuals in the dataset who traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2011 and 2016. It is safe to assume that a broader pool of followers was exposed to violent narratives at the pre-departure phase, but not all of them became foreign fighters. Nonetheless, the analysis is limited to positive cases, as data is only available on them. Looking at the trends of the departures and profiles of Bosnian foreign fighters, the analysis seeks to distinguish between individuals who had a positive active or a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu before traveling to the battlefields. To examine individual relationships of

followers with the radical milieu, the analysis pays attention to the migration process to (internal hijra) and from the Bosnian radical milieu to the battlefield (external hijra).

According to my dataset, the Bosnian foreign fighter contingent consists of men, women, and minors from across the Balkan region, including BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, and Slovenia (See Table 16). In addition, there are people of Bosnian origin who, for a variety of reasons, do not hold Bosnian citizenship or a passport (Azinović and Jusić 2016, 22).

Table 16 A number of men, women, and minors of Bosnian origin who traveled to Syria and Iraq (2012 – 2016).

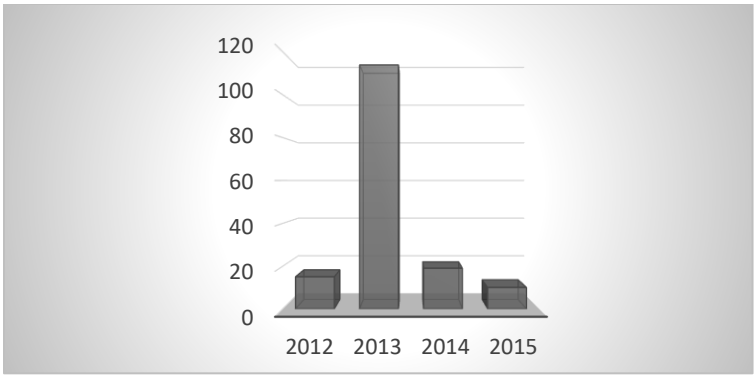
	Men	**Women**	**Minors**
Bosnia and Herzegovina	172	61	57
Serbia	37	12	10
Montenegro	18	5	4

*A number of individuals from Montenegro joined the Albanian foreign fighter contingents, while others from Kosovo (Prizren and Peja) were linked to the Bosnian one.

The majority of Bosnian foreign fighters went to Iraq and Syria between late 2012 and 2014 (See Figure 9). Some of them traveled to the warzone and back multiple times, arranging the departures of their entire families.[36]

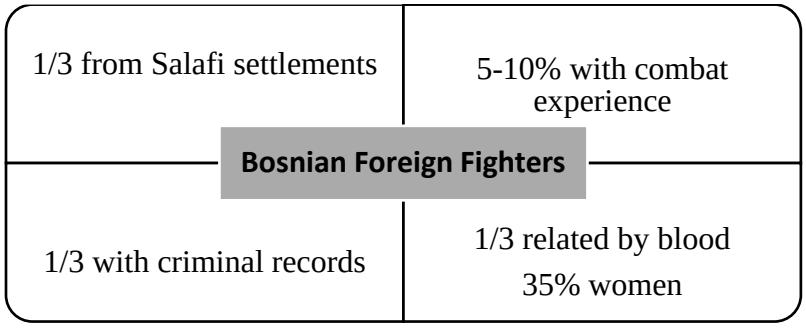
Figure 9 Departures of men from BiH to Syria and Iraq per year.

[36] Within this period: 156 men, 36 women, and 25 children. By January 2015, 48 men and 3 women have returned, while 83 men and 32 women remained in the conflict zones (data until April 2019).



One of the trends in the initial phase points to the departures of men belonging to the "old" generation Salafists. They had combat experience from the Bosnian War and some among them were former El Mudžahid members. The next phase was characterized by departures of young people born in the late 1990s. The highest number of women and children traveled to Syria in 2013 and early 2014, following the model of family hijra. The travels that took place in the latest period of foreign fighter recruitment (2014-16) demonstrate no intention of return, which is evident from videos of Bosnian fighters who burn their documents, seen as a sign of loyalty that new IS combatants were expected to demonstrate in the warzone (Source 21 2018).

Figure 10 The profile of Bosnian foreign fighters.



Compared to West European foreign fighters, the Bosnian contingent is older and includes a higher percent of women participation (See Figure 10). The average age of men upon departure was 31, but the most common age among those departing was 22. At the time of arrival, the youngest male

was 18 years old and the oldest was 74 (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 8). Thus, there are three distinct generations of Bosnian foreign fighters (Table 17).

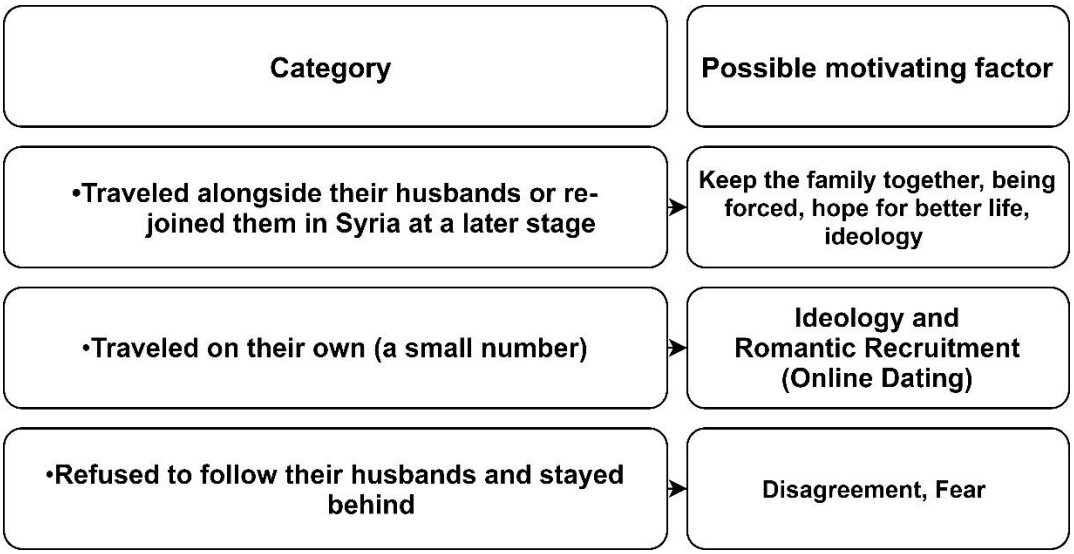
Table 17 Generational and socio-economic dynamics of the Bosnian foreign fighter contingent.

Age	**45+**	**20-35**	**18-19**
	Profile: Former members of, or linked to, El Mudžahid in the Bosnian War; did not play any specific leadership role in foreign fighter recruitment. A possible motivating factor: saw the war in Syria as a continuation of the jihad from the 1990s	**Profile:** Newborn Islamists and converts to Islam A possible motivating factor: adventure, a quest for self-validation, group belonging, and search for a cause	**Profile:** Newborn Islamists and converts to Islam A possible motivating factor: adventure, a quest for self-validation, group belonging, and search for a cause
Pre-departure criminality: Around 1/3 of the Bosnian men who went to Syria had previous criminal records (terrorism, illegal possession of arms and explosives, robbery, assault, battery, extortion, illegal trafficking, and statutory rape)			
Religious Background: More than 2/3 had limited or no prior knowledge of religion before adopting Salafism			
Social exclusion: The vast majority of Bosnian foreign fighters came from geographic, social, and economic margins: were excluded from their own families (reasons: drugs, alcohol, criminal experience, anti-social behavior); had poor education, lacked critical thinking, had limited chances to be integrated into society			
Ties to diaspora: 20% of all Bosnian foreign fighters lived abroad either permanently or temporarily, mostly in Western Europe (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) and the US; some fighters had EU citizenship.			

Sources: Azinović and Jusić 2015; 2016; Bećirević 2016; 2018; Turčalo and Veljan 2018; Source 11 2018; Source 12 2018.

The vast majority of Bosnian women were already married before their departure. A small number of women went alone and married in Syria (See Figure 11). Some met their spouses on social media and later traveled together to the IS caliphate. In the data set there are 37 couples who were part of the Bosnian contingent (including from BiH, Montenegro, and Serbia). Between 2013 and 2015 at least 80 children have either been taken to the war zone by their parents or were born there to Bosnian parents.

Figure 11 Departures of Bosnian women to Syria.



Data: Azinović and Jusić 2016, 64.

According to various sources interviewed for this research, the majority of Bosnian foreign fighters were recruited from the Salafi milieu. The research has identified at least six spots of recruitment where clustered departures are evident (See Table 18). Traces of radical socialization point to the role of radical influencers and institutions, such as radical settlements and parajamaats. Although departures were initially limited to remote areas, at a later stage they were also evident through Salafi communities established around major cities such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihać, Maglaj, Zenica, and Novi Pazar (Serbia).

Table 18 Geographical distribution of foreign fighter departures from BiH.

Area of departure			**Number of people**
Gornja Maoča			52 (38 men and 14 women)
Sarajevo			38 (29 men and 9 women)
Zenica			27 (20 men and 7 women)
94% Federation BiH	4% Republika Srpska	1% Brcko District	
Most affected cantons: 1) Zenica-Doboj, (2) Tuzla, (3) Sarajevo, and (4) Una-Sana; The least affected cantons: Neretva and Livno Cantons; no departures from Podrinje and Posavina Cantons			

Data: Azinovic and Jusic 2016, 7, 38.

In addition to BiH, clusters of foreign fighters linked to the Bosnian radical milieu originated from neighboring Serbia and Montenegro (See Table 19).

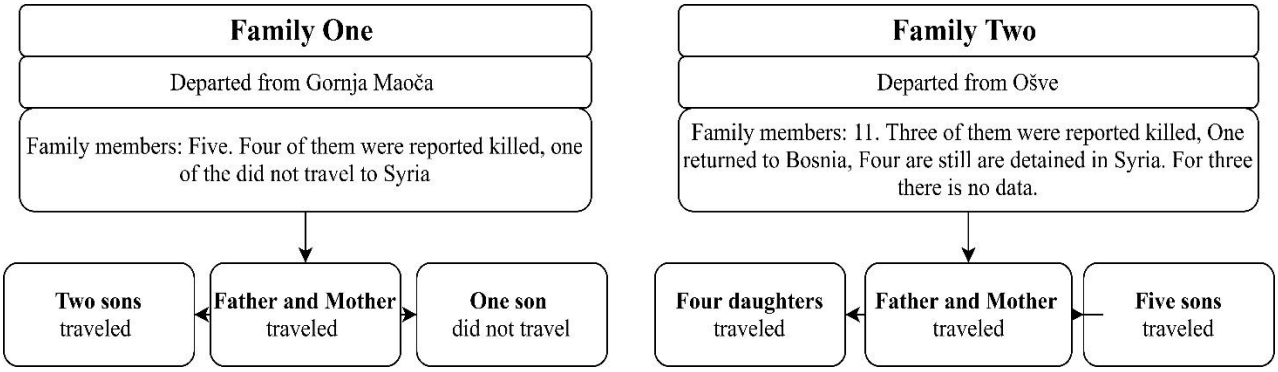
Table 19 Foreign fighter departures from Serbia and Montenegro.

Serbia	**Montenegro**
Three mosques in Novi Pazar (Sandžak, Serbia) were considered key spots for radical socialization of foreign fighters, according to multiple sources. A 2018 study points to 49 people from this area who traveled to Syria between 2012 and 2016 (Petrović and Stakić 2018, 4). The majority of Serbian nationals who went to the warzone were Bosnian Muslims. In addition to the largest cluster of foreign fighters from Novi Pazar, there were also departures from the town of Smederevo in central Serbia and the Belgrade suburb of Zemun, areas with a sizable Roma population (Maksimović, Dragojlo, and Ristić 2016, 40). At least 10 people from Roma communities in Serbia went to the battlefield, including the former imam of the Zemun parajamaat G.P. (Maksimović, Dragojlo, and Ristić 2016, 40–44).	In the case of Montenegro, at least 13 men joined either IS or Al Nusra in Syria and Iraq, six of whom were originally from the Montenegrin part of Sandžak. A 2015 National Security Agency report states that individuals and families were placed under surveillance from towns in the region, including Plav, Gusinje, Rožaje, and Bijelo Polje (Maksimović, Dragojlo, and Ristić 2016, 33).

4.5.1. Migration to and from the radical milieu

The link between the evolution of the post-war radical milieu and the departure of foreign fighters can be found in the process of internal hijra that took place years before the Syrian War. In a number of cases, people from across BiH moved to post-war Salafi settlements in Gornja Maoča, Ošve, Dubnica, Liješnica, and Bočinje. According to the data collected through interviews, there was a noticeable influx of individuals from, and passing through, these spots before going to Syria and Iraq (Source 11 2018, Source 12 2018, Source 13 2018). In some cases, families who first performed internal hijra, migrating from one spot to another in BiH, later committed to external hijra by traveling to the IS caliphate. I will look at two cases of family hijra that appear in the dataset (See Figure 12). These are two families, who first performed an internal hijra in BiH by moving to post-war radical settlements, later departed to Syria.

Figure 12 Bosnian families who performed both internal and external hijra.



Data collected until July 2019.

The data indicates a pattern based on similarities that Families One and Two share: poor socio-economic conditions, more than two children in the family, and a gradual integration into the radical milieu. In both cases, the father was the decision-maker concerning the steps of radical socialization, including the departure of the family to Syria. According to data collected through interviews, both families received financial support from Salafi "brothers" to buy properties and move to some of the radical settlements established in the post-war period.

The interviews point to a similar pattern of departures: first, the father traveled to Syria, and upon his return, he told the family that "he had found a job in Austria", thus, they are expected to move with him. In both cases, there was an Interpol Red Notice issued on the names of fathers, once they were already in Syria with the entire families. During an interview, a member of one of the families recalls the gradual path of socialization into the radical milieu:

> It was sometime around 2005 when my father started to pray. Before that, he was having an ordinary life, he used to drink, for example. When we asked him where this change came from, he would always say it was something he had felt deep down inside. At first, he prayed at home and only later started to go to a parajamaat . . . His relationship with us, with my mother changed. He asked her to cover herself, to also pray and not to smoke. My mother was not happy with all these changes, as she had never been a practicing Muslim. But I believe she agreed only because of us, because of the kids . . . In the beginning, we did not take this change seriously. As we were kids, we even thought it was a joke. But at some point, [my father] forbid us to play with ordinary children [who were not from Salafi families]. We lived in isolation, where they taught us what was right and wrong . . . Our

> father told us not to talk to people who do not pray; that police was to be disrespected, and police officers were to be killed. He had not been this way all the time but quite forceful in the moments when he asked us to comply with these rules. And then he would go and show off before other members of the community stating that his family was "pure", and we were all "pure believers" (Source 16 2018).[37]

These examples of family hijra provide an explanation of clustered departures that, in some cases, affected entire families. They further testify to the link between radical socialization and foreign fighter recruitment that appear in the context of post-war radical milieus. The quote by Source 16 points to variations of individual relationships with the radical milieu: their father had an active positive relationship with the community, whereas the rest of the family were passively exposed to radical norms and values. Therefore, family members differed in terms of deciding whether, how, and when to travel to Syria.

The collected data testifies to a variety of incentives employed by radical influencers to encourage migration to and from the radical milieu. As the majority of followers lived in poor socio-economic conditions prior to their departure to the battlefield, this can be understood as a factor that facilitated their involvement in activities directed or initiated by local influencers. Along with the humanitarian call offered by local influencers in the initial phase of the Syrian War, there were also economic-driven incentives: some followers were promised to live in a big house if they moved to Syria with their entire families.

A former fighter who returned to BiH and was interviewed for this research recalled the "brothers" who helped his father to buy a property in one of the radical sentiments in BiH and later to travel to Syria with the entire family:

> We moved to Ošve in 2010. My father was unemployed at that time. The money for the house came from some Wahhabis. In addition, my uncle, who lives in the US, sent 2000 euro . . . I saw with my own eyes people giving my father money. It was a Wahhabi guy,

[37] The quote is translated from Bosnian with the assistance of an interpreter.

> quite active in the community when people started going to Syria […] he helped many people to go to Syria. He found money for tickets. Later when people began to return and police investigations were launched, this same guy shaved his beard and disappeared as if he had nothing to do with the whole story (Source 16 2018).

This quote shows that migration to and from the radical milieu was not a spontaneous process but rather influenced by actors whose authority was well-recognized in the community. This explains the role of material incentives in addition to the non-material ones: belonging, a sense of brotherhood, and a meaningful cause.

4.5.2. Followers' Relationship with the Radical Milieu

A conceptual distinction between positive active and positive passive relationship with the radical milieu helps to comprehend the existence of various patterns of recruitment of foreign fighters.

4.5.2.1. Positive Active Relationship

From the dataset, it is evident that the majority of males who traveled to Syria or Iraq had a positive relationship with the radical milieu preceding their departure to the warzone. A typical case is the one of Emrah Fojnica, who became the first Bosnian suicide bomber in Iraq; he blew himself up in August 20014 in Baghdad. He initially traveled to Syria with his family, and they spent around six months there before the suicide attack. Fojnica departed from one of the radical settlements in BiH, Ošve, and was the first to become a foreign fighter from this settlement. Although there is no data showing that Fojnica was linked to any of the prominent Bosnian influencers in the Balkans, his network drew the attention of local security authorities. He was accused and later acquitted of helping the attacker of the US Embassy in Sarajevo in 2011, when a gunman fired with a Kalashnikov rifle (Sito-Sucic 2011).

In contrast with most cases of positive active relationships with the radical milieu, there is one in the dataset that can possibly be categorized as a negative one. Ines Midžić, a young man and former student of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Bihać, BiH and an activist of a local NGO

"Solidarnost [Solidarity]"), became one of the most notorious voices of Bosnian jihadists in Syria. He was reportedly killed in March 2018. I consider this case negative, as, according to the collected data, Midžić was not integrated into the radical milieu prior to his departure to Syria. Nonetheless, his exposure to radical online content played a significant role in the decision to become a foreign fighter.

As data for many of the cases in the dataset was not obtained, it is a challenge to provide clear-cut empirical evidence on the radical socialization of every individual who became part of the Bosnian foreign fighter contingent. Yet, a distinction between positive active and passive relationships with the radical milieu speaks for the variations of exposure to radical narratives – either through active socialization with radical influencers or through a family member and/or online content. The brother of an IS supporter, interviewed for this research, explained how he was exposed to propaganda through his brother:

> While getting more conservative, my brother also tried to influence me. He sent me some readings, and I did read them. However, I am not the kind of person who can easily buy these things. I have my [own] opinion about Islam, and what's right and wrong. I disagreed with the interpretations of the Quran that [Salafists] offer . . . I don't know when the whole story began, but at some point, I realized that [my brother] got in touch with some guys in Syria. Then he talked about the meaning of going to jihad and said he had been researching and reading on the Internet to see if the IS were actually good or bad (Source 17 2018).

Being introduced to radical narratives through a family member and/or online content suggests a lesser influence of radical influencers and their authority in recruitment. In contrast, the positive active relationship of followers with the radical milieu is manifested through frequent social interaction between followers and radical influencers. In this case, family and exposure to online contents are secondary in adopting a radical worldview. Coming from a background of social exclusion, marginalization, or family rejection, radical followers are welcomed by influencers, offering them consolation, narratives, acceptance, and values. Those who are "new"

to the radical milieu usually get involved via a person who is already a part of the community. Thus, prospective followers are invited to attend a religious gathering, spiritual, or missionary event:

> I remember exactly when [my brother] got more radical. It was last year before Ramadan. He didn't go to the mosque with me or with my family but with his new circle . . . We saw the change. [My brother] became radical before our eyes. Although he was getting more conservative, he wasn't satisfied with himself. He began to hang out with a guy in our neighborhood. Their community had something like a mosque where they used to pray. Then he suddenly decided that this friend wasn't good enough for his belief and met some other guys. He had gradually become more and more radical, started wearing short trousers and a long beard. We had many arguments with him at home, trying to convince him that this was not the right direction. The girl he married was from the same community, this is how they met. She was very young and already covered. I hadn't seen her at all, I don't know how she looks like. I talked to her only once, when we visited [my brother] in jail. She has the same conservative views [like my brother]. They were planning to go somewhere, live in isolation, and do farming and agriculture . . . (Source 17 2018).

Although some followers developed a positive active relationship with the radical milieu, there are variations in the way radical influencers played a role in this process. In one of the Salafi settlements in BiH, the foreign fighter departures did not appear around the Salafi leader leading the commune. Rather, they appeared around one of the adherents who also evolved into an authority figure before leaving for Syria with his entire family. During an interview for this research, the Salafi leader of the commune in Ošve argued that he was witness to the process of departures as an imam, without being involved in recruitment. He recalled that the house of one of the followers in the village became a central venue for prospective fighters:

> [There were] 15-16 [people] from Ošve who travelled to Syria, but only four of them were men. I could guess this was coming. I saw [the recruitment] with my own eyes, and now I realize I was right. Those who intended to become foreign fighters prayed together with me, but when there was a talk about going to Syria, they were hiding it . . . I was also worried what would happen if they decided to come back from Syria. I contacted the security authorities and told them J. B., A. K. and also that E. F. went to Syria, but the police did nothing (Source 14 2018).[38]

[38] The quote is translated from Bosnian with the assistance of an interpreter.

The interviewee, who is also a very respected authority figure in the Salafi milieu, claimed that he contacted the police because, in his words, he was concerned not to be accused of radicalizing people from the village. He further recalled his attempts to prevent other followers from going to the battlefield.

> I met with A. K. before he decided to go to Syria, and I told him: 'I will give you 100 euro if you give me any evidence that jihad in Syria is indeed a religious duty, as they had told you'. He did not say anything, just scratched his head. I was convinced he did not have an answer, and, therefore, I offered him 200 euro. His response was that according to the Sharia law, 'it was written'. I said, give me a single quote to prove it. Then he got silent again . . . [Bosnian fighters] went [to Syria] with the argument to defend Muslims but are also promised wealth and Islamic land. This is what they were told but found nothing of these promises in reality (Source 14 2018).

Some clusters of foreign fighter departures that appeared in the database testify to followers who developed a positive active relationship with the radical milieu. These clusters are usually characterized by the presence of a radical influencer and/or by strong peer-to-peer socialization. On the other hand, clusters of departures that emerge through family relations point to a number of individuals who were passively exposed to radical norms and narratives.

4.5.2.1. Positive Passive Relationship

The central assumption of this framework is that a number of individuals who traveled to Syria were not decision-makers regarding their journey. To investigate this claim, I looked at cases in the dataset where there is evidence that they were only passively exposed to radical narratives and group dynamics before going to the warzone. Unlike most Bosnian Muslim men in the dataset, who were actively integrated into the radical milieu, women and children were more often socialized through family dynamics. Therefore, they developed a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu. To support this claim empirically, I point to a quote from a young Roma woman from Montenegro published on local media upon her return from Syria:

> My husband explained some things about Islam to me, this is how I decided to embrace [religion]. Everything was fine in the beginning. It was a change, but it was good…and

> when we went to Syria, suddenly everything changed. Everything he had told me [to go there] were fairy tales. I went because I believed [my husband] (Tomović 2016b).[39]

This quote summarizes the path of this woman to the radical milieu, and then to Syria, where she followed her husband and brother, while also taking her child with her. Although the data is not available for each case in the dataset, it is safe to argue that in at least 1/3 of the cases, individuals traveled to the warzone after being exposed to this idea through a family member. Women and children were not regular attendees of sermons or religious gatherings, unlike their male relatives.

Social media sharia marriages are another pattern that, to a certain extent, can be understood as a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu. Some Bosnian women who traveled to Syria, got in touch with Salafi men before this, married them, and then followed them to the IS caliphate. This was the case of a Bosnian woman whose sister I interviewed for this research in 2018:

> It was December 2013 when my sister came to visit me. She told me that she had begun to date a guy who lived in Austria at that time, but they got in touch on Facebook . . . I noticed a gradual change in the way she dressed. First, she started to wear longer skirts. When I asked her why, she would say: 'you know, he is religious' . . . They married in a parajamaat, not in an official mosque, it was a Sharia wedding. After the ceremony, we went to his mother's house to have lunch. When all the family gathered, I saw my sister was not there and I asked if she was not joining us. [Her husband] responded that she was staying in the kitchen instead, as a wife and a husband were not supposed to sit and eat together (Source 18 2018).[40]

Data on another case, D.P., categorized as a positive passive relationship points to an individual whose entire family traveled to Syria, but he opposed the idea. His family first undertook an internal hijra in 2008, moving to Gornja Maoča, one of the radical settlements in BiH. In interviews with local media, D.P. explains that his family was an ordinary one and rather secular when suddenly his father adopted Salafism (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty 2018). Shortly

[39] The quote is a translation of the author from Bosnian.

[40] Before going to Syria in 2014 the couple payed visits to Gornja Maoča on several occasions.

after that, his father imposed the Salafi lifestyle on the entire family and D.P.'s mother embraced the change, being "among the first women in Bihać to wear niqab" (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty 2018). I consider the case of D.P as an example of a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu, as he was exposed to radical narratives and norms without being a decision-maker in the family concerning the departure to Syria. The data shows that his entire, immediate family, except for him, traveled to the battlefield in 2014.

4.6. Conclusion

The research on the Bosnian radical milieu identified strong ideological and organizational origins in the Bosnian War. The existence of the three early pillars of the radical milieu had implications for the way radical influencers could institutionalize their authority in the post-war context. The key features of the Bosnian radical milieu that emerged from post-war fragility include: a strong leadership network of Salafi influencers, a well-developed infrastructure of religious NGOs, ties to Bosnian diaspora communities across Europe, and power dynamics between local radical influencers. Thus, the ideological actors present during the Bosnian War and in its aftermath have had a formative role in shaping the core and periphery of the radical milieu.

The power centers of foreign fighter recruitment identified in this research show that radical influencers could build their authority on the legacy and resources inherited by war and post-war humanitarian activities. Consequently, foreign fighter recruitment followed the trajectory of radical influencers, both internal and external to the region. The cooperation of internal and external power centers strengthened the Salafi milieu in BiH, and, most importantly, its core. Institutions of the Bosnian radical milieu, such as radical settlements and parajamaats, made it possible for radical influencers to expand their influence beyond communities exposed to war and

post-war Salafi activism and reach audiences in the region that did not suffer the Bosnian War themselves. Such institutions further strengthened regional ties among Bosnian influencers.

The narratives employed by local influencers in relation to the Syrian War should not be understood as unique or inspired only by global-level propaganda. Such narratives are largely facilitated by previously discussed contextual factors that secure the discursive opportunity for recruitment. While the narratives of global and local Muslim victimhood have been present for more than two decades after the end of the Bosnian War, direct incitements to violence at a strategic level only appear in the context of the Syrian War. Thus, the Salafi rhetoric that remained present after the war was utilized by radical influencers to recruit foreign fighters. Although the narratives in the periphery of the radical milieu are not seen as contributing to the recruitment of Bosnian foreign fighters, they largely set the boundaries of the radical milieu.

The research demonstrated that there was a strong link between the evolution of the post-war radical milieu and the departure of foreign fighters, particularly evident in the process of internal hijra that took place years before the Syrian War. The high number of Bosnian women and children who had a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu speaks for the local resonance of the global IS appeals for family hijra. The three distinct generations of Bosnian foreign fighters point to three profiles: older men with combat experience from the Bosnian War, men in their 30s, who had a very distinct positive active relationship with the radical milieu, and men in their 20s, whose profile is similar to the foreign fighters from Western Europe. All these findings testify to the significance of the Bosnian post-war radical milieu in cultivating authority, resources, narratives, and values that shaped the opportunity for foreign fighter recruitment.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ALBANIAN FOREIGN FIGHTER RADICAL MILIEU

5.1. Introduction

In 2016, Albanian extremists linked to the Islamic State planned an attack on the Israeli football team during a match that took place in the city of Elbasan, Albania (BIRN 2018). One of the alleged masterminds behind the plan was [redacted], a Kosovo-born IS commander in Syria between 2015 and 2017. While the terror plot was successfully prevented following a police operation across Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia, the intention of IS affiliates to cooperate at the regional level speaks to the significance of local radical influencers capable of recruiting, planning, and acting in line with the cause of global jihad.

This chapter examines the origin, structure, narratives, and followers of the Albanian radical milieu in order to understand the role of radical influencers in encouraging foreign fighter recruitment. The Albanian foreign fighter contingent refers to ethnic Albanian Muslims (with a few exceptions) from different parts of the Balkans, mainly from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia who were connected through informal social networks prior their departure to Syria and Iraq. About 600 ethnic Albanians have traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016, and the majority joined the IS or Jabhat-al-Nusra (JN).[41]

There are two datasets built for this chapter. The dataset on Albanian radical influencers contains data on 27 individuals. The analysis specifically focuses on 14 of the cases where the data shows engagement with violent rhetoric and/or actions concerning foreign fighter recruitment. The data collected through open sources was also confirmed through interviews with former fighters, who had insights into the role of radical influencers, investigative journalists, governmental counter terrorisms experts in Kosovo and Albania, representatives of the Kosovo Police and the

[41] Data is collected from primary and secondary sources.

Special Prosecution Office in Kosovo, experts from the Institute for Democracy and Mediation, the Kosovar Center for Security studies, and others.

The dataset on foreign fighters created for this chapter contains the biographical data of 206 ethnic Albanians (men, women, and minors) known to have gone to Syria or Iraq. The data is systemized in a way that goes beyond the value of individual stories and gives more comprehensive information about clusters of foreign fighters. Both datasets are informed through interviews with police and prosecution sources, reports from local research organizations, and media and social media content.

In this chapter, I will argue that although Albanian Muslims in the Balkans were exposed to various sources of fragility, such as political crises and transitions, it was the Kosovo War that catalyzed the evolution of the Albanian radical milieu and the role of radical influencers in it. The analysis engages with the recent historical experiences of Albanian Muslim communities in the Western Balkans in order to trace the growth of the Albanian radical milieu in a context. Following the overarching argument of the dissertation, the conflict in Kosovo (1998-1999) is seen as the key source of post-war fragility among Albanians in the region, including political, religious, socio-economic, and societal fragility. Kosovo separated from Yugoslavia, following the 1998-1999 NATO intervention, and thousands of refugees fled to neighboring Albania and North Macedonia. However, it is not only the Kosovo War that could be considered a triggering event with post-conflict consequences for the Albanian communities across the region. North Macedonia also experienced an armed conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in 2002-2003, and Albania almost reached a civil war in 1997 and still bears the marks of militarization in the form of arms possession by civilians.

5.2. The origin of the Albanian Radical Milieu

To comprehend the role of post-war fragility in establishing the Albanian radical milieu, it is necessary to give an overview of the recent history of Albanian Muslims in the Balkans (mostly Sunni Muslims). Although the dissertation examines the origin of the radical milieu in relation to the Kosovo War, it is also necessary to take a more complex look at the different relationships that Albanian Muslim communities have developed with the state and religion before and after the war. The reason is that not all Albanian foreign fighters come from a post-war context. The Albanian foreign fighter contingent links individuals from all parts of the Balkans. It is argued here that the Albanian radical milieu has three evolutionary stages: pre-war, war, and post-war, which will be discussed in more detail below. I will first discuss the pre-war stage and then look at the war and the post-war stages together, as the radical actors present in the war continued their activities in the post-war time.

5.2.1. Pre-war formation of the Albanian radical milieu

Albanians across the region are generally secular as they were exposed to secularizing policies (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014). In Albania, religion was banned for decades under the regime of Enver Hoxha, who declared the country to be the first atheist one in the world. In Kosovo and North Macedonia, previously part of Yugoslavia, Muslims were governed for a long time by a Slav-dominated central religious organization (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014). Representing religious and ethnic minorities, Albanians were often labelled as a "threat" to the national security of Greece and Yugoslavia throughout the Cold War, and later in Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 4).

The diverse relationships of Albanians with the state and religion make them a unique example of how an "ethnic" group's collective identity is not formed by religion alone but also by

socio-political factors (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 1). Today, ethnic Albanians live in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia and in smaller numbers in Serbia and Montenegro. While in Albania and Kosovo they are majorities, in North Macedonia, they are about 25 percent of the population, according to the available data ("Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia" 2002).[42] Although religious and national identities have been intertwined to varying degrees in the Albanian communities, the Albanian identity has been generally defined by the concept of Albanian nationalism and nation, thus leaving little space for religion (Karaj 2015).

Therefore, Islam as a form of religious representation or a doctrine for political activism did not play a major role in communist Albania and socialist Yugoslavia, where the majority of Albanian Muslims lived (Karaj 2015). However, the 1990s cultural and socio-political transformations that took place among Albanian communities led to the revival of Islam but also to the emergence of radical actors who capitalized on political, socio-economic, and societal fragility. The three macro-developments that can be seen as contributing to fragility, and the consequent appearance of such radical actors, are the end of the communist regimes, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the post-9/11 context (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 34). The phenomenon of militant Islam has become visible only following the outbreak of the Syrian War (Kursani 2018; Elbasani and Puto 2017).

Foreign religious influence was channeled through "faith-based" international structures engaged in the process of transforming societies and identities (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 31). The region has become a venue for rivalry between various Islamic traditions. Organizations from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey were particularly active among Albanians (Blumi 2003, 20;

[42] The document is contested by both the Albanian and Macedonian communities in the country.

Deliso 2008; Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 8). Some religious interpretations of Islam grew among Albanian-speaking communities under the camouflage of charitable and humanitarian activities, among them Salafism and Wahhabism.

Looking at Albania, Kosovo, and N. Macedonia separately, this process began at different times and had implications for the growth of the Albanian radical milieu. In Albania, the first interventions of radical Islam happened right after the collapse of the communism in the early 1990s. The Muslim community was particularly open to foreign influences, as this was the time of religious revival after decades of isolation. The religious void left by the communist era was seen as an opportunity by various Islamic organizations to offer their religious interpretations to local Albanian Muslims. These efforts, more evident first in Albania, later reached Albanian Muslims in Kosovo and North Macedonia. Following an established model, Islamic organizations employed a variety of cultural, educational and charitable activities to target their audiences. Thus, Albania can be seen as an entry spot for ideological proliferation, as between 20 and 30 Arab Islamic foundations established a strong presence in the early 1990s.

The charitable missions, taking such forms as the construction of mosques and Islamic centers, support for poorer segments of the population, and providing education, including scholarships given to young people to study in Islamic countries, were also tied to the spread of rigid religious interpretations, among them Salafism and Wahabism. Data obtained from security sources in the region indicates that some of the funds behind Islamic charities at that time were used to support terrorism-related activities and individuals. A security source from the Special Operations Battalion in Albania, who provided information for this research, confirmed that groups, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), the Algerian Islamic Front (AIF), Al-Qaeda, and

the Islamic Armed Group (GIA), used the cover of NGOs, charities, and related businesses to set up their activities in Albania and across the region (Source 1 2019).[43]

Many of the Islamic NGOs that first established branches in Tirana later expanded their activities to Kosovo and, to a lesser extent, to N. Macedonia. In the aftermath of 9/11, some of the founders of these organizations appeared on the UN Security Council's list that sanctioned individuals with ties to Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is known to have used Albania in the 1990s as one of its spots for the preparation and planning of operations (Counter Extremism Project 2016). While hiding their activities behind humanitarian organizations, the terrorist group was able to raise funds through money laundering, human trafficking, and weapons smuggling (Bodansky 2011; K. Krasniqi 2019). A 1998 police raid of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society and structures related to four other organizations led to the arrests of several foreign terrorist operatives employed by those charities (Smith 1998). The police forces identified a cell of the EIJ and reportedly prevented a bomb attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tirana (Shtuni 2015a; 2015b).[44]

To comprehend the appearance of radical actors in this period, it is important to stress that societies in the region had transitioned from a little, or not religious all, to more religious, leaving more opportunities for ideological influence. Religious life in Albania has been historically less present compared to Albanian communities in N. Macedonia and Kosovo. In N. Macedonia, religion began to play a more decisive role towards the end of the 1990s, when the politicization of Islam became evident. Both being ethnically Albanian, as well as Muslim, were deemed incompatible with the N. Macedonian elite's vision for a national, Orthodox Macedonian state (G.

[43] The interview with Source 01 took place online. Source 01 is a former commander of the Albanian Special Forces.

[44] A coordinated operation between the US and Albanian security forces reportedly prevented a plot on the U.S. Embassy in Tirana and the raids disrupted a cell of Al-Qaeda (Counter Extremism Project 2016, 4). EIJ was responsible for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and for targeting U.S. and Israeli facilities in a number of countries. See John Kifner, "Police Seek Suspects Tied to Terrorism in Albania." The New York Times. August 21, 1998.

Krasniqi 2011). Nationalist policies have sought to create fear among the Christian and non-Albanian populations about the "Albanization" of N. Macedonia through Islam (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014).

Consequently, the country experienced an armed conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians between 2002-2003. This period created insecurity, in terms of both the Albanian national and religious identity. Feelings of social exclusion and isolation among minority ethnic groups, mixed with the desire to find belonging, were exploited effectively through extremist rhetoric that also relied on "inclusivity" in its messages (Selimi and Stojkovski 2017).

In addition, divisions within N. Macedonia's Muslim community created space for competition between different interest groups that appeared in the forms of religious sects and political parties (G. Krasniqi 2011). Previous research points to power struggles between the moderate and the radical, usually referred to as the "Wahhabi", wings of the Islamic Religious Community. Several incidents, including physical confrontations, have taken place in different mosques over the years as an illustration of this contentious process. The core of the radical milieu in N. Macedonia has been known for its "control" over several mosques in Skopje (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 16–17).

This overview of the early stage of the Albanian radical milieu testifies to the presence of radical actors before the Kosovo War, seen in this dissertation as a source of post-war fragility and permissive factors for such radical actors. However, in Albania, radical Islam and its extreme ideological forms did not spread on a broader scale, remained largely marginalized, and had limited impact. The proliferation of rigid religious practices back then clashed with the indifference towards the religion of the local population, coming out of decades of an atheist regime. Unlike Kosovo and N. Macedonia, which had strong conflict legacies, Albania did not get involved in

major territorial conflicts with neighbors in the first decades of a political transition and did not face a similar war fragility. Therefore, the ideological interventions at the beginning of the 1990s did not have a major impact on the establishment of the Albanian radical milieu.

5.2.2. War and post-war formation of the Albanian radical milieu

The previous section demonstrated that, despite various sources of fragility present in the region, the Albanian radical milieu did not grow significantly. To understand the Kosovo War (1998-1999) as a catalyst for the evolution of the radical community, I point to war and post-war fragility facilitating some of the radical actors who were already in the region to retain and expand their influence. If Islamic organizations reached Albanian Muslims in Albania in the early 1990s following the "revival of religion", their influx in the Kosovo War was a response to the humanitarian needs of people in Kosovo.

Kosovo, born out of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, declared its independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008 following the 1999 NATO strikes against the Yugoslav Army, and then for nine years it was administrated by the United Nations (UN). In the conflict (1998-1999), fought by the forces of Slobodan Milošević's regime and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), about 10 000 ethnic Albanians lost their lives, while tens of thousands of Serbs fled the region. Today the Serbs who remained in Kosovo live mostly in the Serb-dominated north or in smaller Serb-populated towns or villages. It should be noted that at that time KLA was a strictly nationalistic insurgency group, meaning that they did not readily embrace "help" from mujahedeen who previously fought in BiH facilitated by a network of Islamic charities. When the mujahedeen attempted to engage in the Kosovo War, KLA was reluctant to accept their support, although there is evidence for cooperation between KLA insurgents and mujahedeen fighters in individual cases.

The outbreak of, and especially the end of, the Kosovo War marks the moment when Islamic charities (primarily Saudi funded) actively penetrated Albanian-speaking communities. This happened almost a decade after faith-based organizations' first attempts to infiltrate post-communist Albania. Although foreign Islamic actors did not play a major role during the insurgency, they increased their presence towards the end of the conflict. Humanitarian organizations and religious NGOs were providers of financial assistance to Kosovo, specifically targeting refugees and the poorest segments of local populations. They donated to schools, universities, hospitals, and local government institutions established after 1999 under the direction of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (Blumi 2003; Blumi and Krasniqi 2014).

While helping local population, Islamic organizations funded the construction of a number of Salafi mosques and madrassas (Shtuni 2015b, 11–14). Overall, around 100 unlicensed mosques appeared in the first decade after the war (Besiana Xharra 2012). The Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo and Chechnya (SJRC), considered a key agent of the Wahhabi proliferation in Kosovo, reportedly built a number of primary and secondary schools in the region in addition to mosques (Deliso 2008, 45:54–55). The Islamic Endowment Foundation (an entity of SJRC) supported the establishment of more than 30 Islamic schools in rural areas in the first few years after the war (Kursani 2015).

Capitalizing on post-war fragility, Saudi charitable organizations in Kosovo carried out religious activities in ways that often opposed the local Islamic tradition and religious institutions (Blumi 2005). As the war left around 200 mosques (of the more than 600) damaged or destroyed, places of workshop, mostly funded with money from foreign religious organizations and networks, appeared in rural and urban areas. Since 1999, the Islamic Community of Kosova (ICK) has reconstructed 113 war-damaged mosques and built 175 new ones relying on various funding

channels. A 2012 investigation by Balkan Insight reveals that almost all newly built mosques have been erected illegally, especially the ones in rural areas (Besiana Xharra 2012). In addition, the distribution of Wahhabi literature along with charitable assistance largely facilitated radical Islam's inroads to the local cultural and religious context. This process enhanced the consolidation of small "pockets" of the radical milieu through religious congregations operating outside the teachings and the jurisdiction of official religious institutions (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014).

Political fragility benefitted Islamic networks, owing to the weak institutional controls and a corrupt political environment in Kosovo. This enabled the networks to gain recognition as influential actors. They further capitalized on their previously established structures to expand their influence to neighboring Albania and N. Macedonia, where thousands of refugees were hosted.

Islamic organizations operated in the post-war Kosovo context without much supervision from local state and religious institutions. One criticism in the literature concerns the absence of the international community and its inadequate support in post-war Kosovo, which largely facilitated the role of foreign-funded Islamic charities (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014). Scholars, studying the post-conflict performance of the UNMIK, argue that policies adopted by the international community contributed to the marginalization of many of Kosovo's rural poor - a result of political opportunism among cultural or economic elites closely linked to the U.S. and EU (King and Mason 2006). Both local and international actors failed to address the needs of the population, especially in rural areas. Therefore, instead of UN agencies providing the necessary support to Kosovo's destitute people, the provision of aid was "outsourced" to wealthy Gulf-based charities, which have provided the material support to those in need.

Thus, socio-economic fragility, i.e. the poverty and destruction in the post-war period, paved the way for foreign actors to increase their influence over the local population. As Islamic organizations were essential to the distribution of humanitarian aid, they quickly gained monopoly over the assistance provision in Kosovo. Their role was largely facilitated by post-war fragility, and more specifically, stable religious and welfare institutions (Shtuni 2015b, 11–14).

Islamic charities in the post-war period would often condition the aid that they provided with attendance to religious lectures. Islamic relief groups supported by the Saudi government took over the responsibility for the nourishment and religious education of children in the rural areas and consequently were seen as trustworthy providers among the population (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014, 21). Thus, the poor economic conditions in which many Albanians lived, along with the large amounts of money available to the Salafist groups, led to the relative success of radical Islamic groups across the region (Blumi and Krasniqi 2014). Although no accurate data is available, some estimates point to a sum of $800 million distributed by Middle Eastern charities in Kosovo (Poggioli 2010).

Islamic charities further boosted the presence and the recognition of local religious leaders as informal but influential authority figures, who became a source of guidance for everyday life questions regarding family, marriage, heritage, death, food, or Internet usage (especially in rural areas) (Shtuni 2015b; 2015a; Kursani 2015). The development of an extensive religious infrastructure further required a significant increase in the number of qualified clerics. Actors such as The World Assembly of Muslim Youth provided scholarships to Middle Eastern Islamic institutions.[45] Many young men received trainings as imams from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt, among other countries.

[45] Scholarship were available not only for clerics but also for youth and medical professionals.

Exposed to non-Hanafi Islamic schools of thought, which is the dominant school of thought among Balkan Muslims, this generation of local clerics was highly influenced by fundamentalist religious practices, such as jihadi Salafism, or Takfir. The recently adopted Salafi views by local graduates shaped a network of Salafi influencers who joined the growing number of mosques and madrassas across Kosovo. Therefore, the Kosovo War can be understood as a catalyst to the evolution of the Albanian radical milieu due to the available resources used in addressing war and post-war fragility.

Concerning religious fragility, the post-war context was a driver of both a real and perceived alienation of Albanian Muslims and thus led to the expansion of the radical milieu and its links to radical circles in the Middle East (Gibas-Krzak 2013; Ghodsee 2010; Ranstorp and Xhudo 1994; Merdjanova 2016; Shay 2008). Although the Kosovo War put nationalism in the focus of the identity formation process, the commitment to a national cause faded after the liberation in 1999 and even more so with Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 (Kursani 2015). Moreover, the Kosovo national identity has not been widely embraced by the local population, as people in Kosovo tend to identify with their ethnic Albanian identity.

Due to domestic and international attempts to de-emphasize the Albanian identity, the Kosovo identity has been perceived as externally driven (Knudsen 2017, 17). These processes in which national identity could be understood as fragile have arguably had negative effects on the individual and collective needs for belonging and identification. Radical influences were able to utilize this void and offer a more powerful identity based on religion (Kursani 2015).

Previous research indicates that while the "imported" Salafi practices have not received broader support among Albanians, local Muslim communities across the region have generally become more religious in the post-violent decades. The search for authenticity that some people

have found in religion has been channeled by both formal and informal religious institutions. Previous research shows that trust in religious institutions across the region has increased in recent years (UNDP 2016).

To sum up, although Albanian Muslims in the Balkans were exposed to various sources of fragility, such as political crises and transitions, it was the Kosovo War that catalyzed the evolution of the Albanian radical milieu and the role of radical influencers in it. The specific empirical manifestation of political fragility refers to the failures of state building in Kosovo after the war. This led to socio-economic fragility evident through poor welfare and education institutions, and societal fragility evident through lack of trust, feelings of frustration, and a lack of a future for the youth. Religious fragility concerns the identity formation process in the post-war period when cracks in the national identity became apparent. Therefore, post-war fragility was a permissive factor to the influence of radical actors and activities. The analysis indicates that the Albanian radical milieu's pre-war origin took roots as a result of the dissemination of ultra-conservative religious ideas in Albania and N. Macedonia in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, only after the Kosovo War did ideological interventions find sufficient ground for the growth of the radical milieu.

5.3. Structure of the Albanian Radical Milieu

In this part, the dissertation examines the structure of the Albanian radical milieu in order to understand the location and organization of radical influence in relation to foreign fighter departures. In this section, I first look at the venues used by the Albanian radical milieu, such as mosques and Islamic NGOs. Then I focus on the role of radical influencers by specifically analyzing two power centers of foreign fighter recruitment.

5.3.1. The Albanian Radical Milieu

In the past three decades, the official Islamic institutions in Albania, Kosovo, and N. Macedonia have struggled to establish control over mosques and Islamic NGOs, largely due to the dramatic changes in religious freedoms and exposure to new interpretations of Islam that followed the collapse of communism in 1990 and the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of religious parallel structures, parajamaat, to radical socialization. They could create a monopoly over areas, such as education, social services, and healthcare, and thus, fill the gaps left due to various aspects of fragility. As a consequence, illegal prayer spaces across Albanian-speaking communities have been used by radical imams to disseminate their messages (Azinović and Neumann 2017, 14). For instance, mosques outside of the Komuniteti Mysliman i Shqipërisë (KMSH)[Muslim Community of Albania] reportedly were under the control of Salafi circles, and at least seven of those were directly linked with jihadi Salafi propaganda and recruitment for IS and Al Nusra in the recent years (Bogdani 2016a, 4–5). Unlike most of Albania's mosques (727), these other mosques rejected the leadership of KMSH-appointed imams (Bogdani 2016a).

The Albanian radical milieu has been further evidenced by a network of Islamist NGOs linked to foreign humanitarian organizations active in Kosovo during and after the war. At the macro-level, this network played a role in promoting extremist Islamist ideologies by encouraging hatred towards other religions and creating cleavages among members of the Muslim community. I identified some of the NGOs that encouraged the engagement of Albanians with jihad in Syria and Iraq through interviews and research meetings in Kosovo (See Table 20).

Table 20 Islamic NGOs operating in Kosovo in the decades after the war and closed down in 2014 under the suspicion of extremism-related activities.

Closed Islamic NGOs in Kosovo		
"Gjurma"	"Pema e Bamirësisë" in Peja[46]	"Rinia Islame"[47] in Kaçanik
"Kalliri i Mirësisë"	"Argumenti"	"Meszxhidi Studentor"
"Njeshmëria"	"Çelësi"	"Rinia Istogase" in Istog
"Sinqeriteti"	"Parimi" in Kaçanik"	

These associations served as gathering spots to learn about Islam but also for garnering support to vulnerable communities (Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017). In 2014 the police closed down several cultural associations and organizations with links to radical imams and foreign fighters from Kosovo (Bytyci 2014; Gazeta Express 2015a).

A shared characteristic of these NGOs is that they were financially linked to some foreign humanitarian organizations operating in the region during and after the Kosovo War. Islamic NGOs in Kosovo acted as a network since they cooperated with one another, exchanging personnel and funds for the realization of joint Islamic projects (K. Krasniqi 2019). Most of the above-mentioned NGOs were closed down by local security agencies in 2014 under the suspicion of extremism-related activities.

In other cases, there is evidence for radical influencers linked to political parties. A radical influencer detained in 2014 was the leader of Lëvizja Islame Bashkohu [Islamic Movement Unite], a hardline Muslim organization that later transformed into a political party (RFE 2014). Another imam from the city of Mitrovicë in Kosovo, which, according to the dataset, belongs to the periphery of the radical milieu, was among the arrested radical influencers in 2014. Although there

[46] "Pema e Bamirësisë" was is in touch with alleged terrorist Arfan Qadeer Bhatti from Pakistan, See (K. Krasniqi 2019).

[47] This organization had as its "emir" [redacted], notorious Kosovo Albanian IS commander.

was no evidence that he had encouraged Albanian foreign fighters, his activities linked him to the infrastructure of the radical milieu. Previously, he was an editor-in-chief of Peace TV Shqip and known for distributing "numerous anti-Semitic statements," as described by the U.S. State Department (RFE 2014). This data points to the interconnectedness of individual actors, whose availability at the micro-level determines the power of radical authority.

5.3.2. The Albanian Radical Influencers

As in Chapter Four, the conceptual distinction between the core and periphery of the radical milieu aims to identify the radical influencers who, based on evidence, engaged with violent rhetoric and actions. The analysis takes place between 2011-2016, when Albanian foreign fighters were being recruited.

In the dataset on Albanian radical influencers, 14 belong to the core of the radical milieu. They share characteristics, such as education background and ties to local Islamic NGOs. For nine people in this sample, the data shows that they are Islamic studies graduates from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt during the war or post-war period. The Albanian radical influencers were between 25 and 43 years old at the time of their departure to Syria. Three of the radical influencers were based in Kosovo, two in N. Macedonia, and nine in Albania. At least four of them were appointed imams in mosques, while the rest preached in parajamaats. Considering the limited access to data, it is safe to assume that the number of radical influencers is perhaps higher and goes beyond the names in the dataset. In a 2014 police operation in Kosovo, at least nine imams were among the 15 people arrested and charged with "terrorism, threatening the constitutional order, incitement and religious hate speech" (Bytyci 2014; Gazeta Shqip 2014).

To understand the radical influence in the core and periphery of the Albanian radical milieu, I look at the pathways of two influencers who belonged to the periphery according to the

dataset, and yet at some point, they engaged with violent rhetoric. The first one is the imam of the Grand Mosque in Pristina, [redacted]. He is an influential and, at the same time, controversial figure. He drew the attention of the security agencies due to his efforts to advocate for Salafism, his alleged financial links to ultra-conservative groups in Saudi Arabia, and his public approval of the martyrdom of Albanian jihadists dying in Syria (Spahiu 2014, 3; Gazeta Express 2014).

According to the collected data, [redacted] was among the first in the region to declare support for the Balkan foreign fighters. Previously, [redacted] taught at the Islamic Studies department at the University of Pristina. In May 2013, [redacted] publicly blessed a young Albanian man who was reportedly killed while fighting in Syria. In a Facebook post from the same period, he commemorated an Albanian fighter from neighboring N. Macedonia who had died in Syria. In the same post, [redacted] referred to a quote from the Quran about promised blessings for martyrs who sacrifice their lives for Allah (Spahiu 2014). Among the accusations he faced was facilitating money laundering through the financial accounts of the Islamic community in Kosovo (Spahiu 2014). The case of [redacted] shows that although he is technically situated in the periphery of the radical milieu, it is a challenge to draw the line between radical influencers in the core and periphery of the radical milieu. This case further suggests that radical influencers may be strategic about their rhetoric and actions and shift them depending on external political, ideological, and security factors.

Another case from the dataset that supports this claim empirically is of [redacted], another imam from Kosovo. Research on his biography shows that he studied in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and later, back in Kosovo, he took part in the war. [redacted] had previous police records for hate speech and dissemination of extremist propaganda. He was detained in 2014 and later acquitted by the

court, giving an interview as well after the acquittal.[48] In the interview, he rejected any accusations of encouraging Albanian fighters to go to Syria:

> How [is it possible that] the government accuses me of terrorism? It accuses someone who had defended his family, his community, and state . . . I have been working all my life to serve the people of Kosovo, because this is my country, I wouldn't do any harm to my people . . . those who are really familiar with Islam know that terrorist attacks and radicalization are not the real Islam (Source 25 2018).

The two examples point to variations of radical influence that had formative effects on the radical milieu. Although the court did not find evidence in these two cases for recruitment-related activities, the rhetoric of imams who spread hatred contributed to the general narratives of the radical milieu.

To analyze the role of radical influencers in foreign fighter recruitment, I present biographical data on individuals belonging to the core of the radical milieu, according to my dataset (See Table 21).[49]

Table 21 Albanian radical influencers belonging to the core of the radical milieu.

Influencer	Place of activities	Destination of Education	Background activities	Activities related to recruitment	Traveled to Syria	Current status
[redacted]	born in Kosovo, based in N. Macedonia.	Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt[50]	Imam in Gazi Baba mosque in Skopje associated with foreign fighter departures.	One of the notorious Takfir voices in the region long before the Syrian War; suspected of being the ideological mentor of the perpetrators of the Smilkovci Lake killings in N. Macedonia (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski 2018, 11). In 2004, he moved to Kosovo where he managed to build a solid support base, while keeping his influence over adherents in Skopje. His social network in	No	Sentenced

[48] The interview with [redacted] was conducted by the French journalist Linda Lilefebvre in Arabic in May 2018. The full recording was provided for the purpose of this research.

[49] The names of the listed individuals appear in multiple open sources and were confirmed in interviews with representatives of Kosovo Police and Kosovo's Special Prosecution Office in March and April 2018. Biographical data of radical influencers is presented here due to the importance of these individuals to the overall radical socialization and recruitment of foreign fighters.

[50] Multiple sources refer to his expulsion from Medina due to following extreme branch of Salafism (Takfir). In Egypt he deepened his commitment to the ideology and established ties to radical circles there.

				Kosovo includes [redacted] and Lavdrim Muhaxheri.		
[redacted]	Kosovo, particularly active in several municipalities along the Kosovo-Macedonian border	Egypt, Al-Azhar University	Served as an imam at the Al-Kudus mosque in Gjilan	Linked to Islamic NGOs in Kaçanik; performed sermons and religious lectures across the region; on numerous occasions [redacted] spoke about "the importance of jihad" (Kraja 2017). Considered the key ideologue behind recruitment of foreign fighters in Kosovo; a close associate of [redacted] At least 22 of his followers have joined IS or JN between 2012 and 2016, according to data from the prosecution (Source 4 2018).[51]	No	Sentenced to 10 years
[redacted]	N. Macedonia, Skopje	Saudi Arabia, between 2004 and 2006 he joined Takfir circles in Egypt [52]	Served as an imam at Tutunsuz and Jahja Pasha mosques in Skopje.	Recruited for IS in N. Macedonia; widely respected among extremist circles across the region. He further gained popularity with Albanian diaspora communities in Germany and Scandinavia. Openly expressed support for IS during sermons in Jahja Pasha Mosque in Skopje. A family member of Memishi got killed as an IS fighter in Syria (Kursani 2015).	No	Sentenced
Lavdrim Muhaxheri (Ebu Abdullah el Albani and Abu Abdallah al-Kosovi)	Kaçanik, Kosovo	Kosovo, KFOR and NATO employee	Associated the local religious NGO "Parimi", and later "Islamic Youth-Kacanik" (Source 3 2018). In the second organization he was considered "emir" (a commander).	IS commander and recruiter; He went to Syria in the second part of 2012; He was the link between the IS leadership in Syria and Albanian fighters from the Balkans (UN 2015). Appeared in several IS videos and photos calling on ethnic Albanian Muslims to join IS. In September 2014, the US State Department of State added Muhaxheri to its list of global terrorists (US Department of State 2014). Social network: strongly influenced by Shukri Aliu, was a protégées of [redacted].	Yes	Killed in Syria in 2017
[redacted]	Kosovo	Egypt	An imam in Skopje	Robaj advocated in favour of Jabhat al-Nusra, unlike other radical influencers who were pro-IS. On several occasions in sermons and discussions with followers he justified participation in a "holy war" in Syria (Kursani 2018).	No	No data

[51] The interviewee is a state prosecutor in charge of the case of [redacted] February 2018.

[52] Like [redacted] he studied in Saudi Arabia and similarly was expelled from the university there due to his radical views. The data is confirmed through two interviews. The first source is a former adherent of [redacted] from Kosovo (February 2018). The second is an intelligence source from N. Macedonia (October 2018).

				Social network: Initially part of the [redacted] circle.		
Ridvan Haqifi (Abu Muqatil al-Kosovi)	Kosovo, born in Gjilan	A student of a madrassa in Kosovo	Active in Islamic NGOs in Kosovo: lecturer at Cultural Association Realiteti in Gjilan, as well as at the El Kudus Mosque.	He replaced Lavdrim Muhaxheri as an IS commander and recruiter of ethnic Albanian fighters. He became infamous because of a video in which he warned people of Kosovo that "black days were coming" to them (Morina 2017). According to local security agencies, in 2016 Muhaxheri and Haqifi planned a coordinated attack on the Israeli football team during a match in Albania and institutions in both Tirana and Pristina. The assault was prevented by the police and 19 suspects were arrested (BIRN 2018). His two brothers followed him to Syria and joined the ranks of IS.	Yes	Killed in 2017
[redacted]	Tirana, Albania	Saudi Arabia, Islamic University of Madinah	An imam of the Unaza e Re Mosque in the outskirts of Tirana.	Played a crucial role in spreading jihadist propaganda and recruiting fighters in Albania. The mosque where he served had been refusing to concede to the authority of the official Muslim Community in the country. According to security reports, the space was used for ideological training of foreign fighters, schooling of young children in Islamic teachings and Sharia law (Spahiu 2018). Arrested in 2014, following a police raid on two self-proclaimed mosques that were allegedly responsible for facilitating travel for over 70 people who joined Al-Nusra and later IS in Syria and Iraq.	No	Sentenced to 17 years
[redacted]	Tirana, Albania		An imam at the Mezez mosque in Tirana (not officially appointed).	Sentenced for recruitment of Albanian foreign fighters (Court Decision Nr. 100 51005-00202-76-2016 2016); Targeting local Muslim communities with extreme religious messages. On several occasions [redacted] were kicked out from mosques across Albania where they made attempts to establish their presence as religious authorities (Spahiu 2018). According to data from local security agencies, he encouraged young Albanians to go to Syria (Source 2 2019). According to the indictment against [redacted], he said in a secretly recorded sermon on February 21, 2014: "The day will come in this world very soon, Allah permitting … to break the teeth of	No	Sentenced to 18 years

				the infidels, who have oppressed us too much" (Karaj 2015). Hysa pledged allegiance to IS, but his recruits joined both IS and Al Nusra (Spahiu 2018).		
Almir Daci (known as Ebu Belkisa).	Pogradec, Albania	Saudi Arabia	Served as an imam in the village of Leshnica in the area of Pogradec	A number of his followers traveled to Syria before he joined IS himself. In 2013, Daci was discharged by the Islamic community due to his radical views. He allegedly encouraged parents to take their children out of "secular schools" and others to stop listening to music or participating in their communities' social activities (Spahiu 2015b, 6–7). He departed to Syria along with his wife and three children. From Syria, he continued to serve as a communication link between Albanian recruits and their families in Albania. He also appeared in videos on social media, one of them speaks particularly for the strategic importance of the Balkans to IS's strategy back then (Spahiu 2015b).	Yes	Killed

The data in Table 21 shows that most influencers in the core of the radical milieu did not travel to Syria but were mostly active in ideological activities at the local level. Another finding is that they were linked to each other within the framework of the Albanian radical milieu. Although the list of names in Table 21 is not exhaustive, based on the presented data, I argue that Albanian radical influencers were able to develop a strong regional network exerting radical influence (See Figure 13). The arrows in Figure 13 point to social ties that were evident among radical influencers in Kosovo, N. Macedonia, and Albania.

Figure 13 A leadership network of Albanian radical influencers.

The presented data shows that all radical influencers in the core of the radical milieu embraced jihadi Salafism as an ideological stance at an earlier stage, preceding the recruitment of

foreign fighters. Their education background from the Middle East and socialization into radical circles largely determined their shared purpose of spreading a violent, ultra-conservative stand of Islam across the region. This leadership network could target communities that were not necessarily linked to each other in the pre-departure phase. Nonetheless, in Syria, their followers joined the same contingents that involved Albanians from different parts of the Balkans.

The empirical manifestation of their leadership network refers to the regular exchange of guest lectures. While being active in Skopje, N. Macedonia, [redacted] frequently attended sermons and religious gatherings in Pristina, Kosovo, managed by their disciples, [redacted] and Haqifi (Source 04 2018; Source 05 2018).[53] Both [redacted] had frequent visits in the south-eastern part of Kosovo, in the municipalities of Kacanik, Hani I Elezit, Viti, and Gjilan along the Kosovo-Macedonian border. In fact, at least 50 people from this area traveled to Syria by December 2016. Among them were the top IS fighters, Muhaxheri and Haqifi, who were also inspired by the ideological influence of [redacted] (Kursani 2015; Kraja 2017; Qehaja and Perteshi 2018).

Media reports and video lectures previously available on social media suggest that Albanian influencers were associated with one another in the past. Influencers from across the region, such as [redacted] from Albania, [redacted] from N. Macedonia, the Kosovo-based [redacted] appear to have lectured at [redacted]'s mosque, El Kudus in Gjilan, Kosovo. Data from the Kosovo Police and reports of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) show that Albanian influencers were also frequent guests to several local cultural associations linked to terrorism in eastern Kosovo, including Association Realiteti in Gjilan, Association Rinia Islame in Kacanik, Association Nektari H.E. in Hani i Elezit, and

[53] Source 05: The interviewee is a former adherent of the jihadi Salafi influencers in Kosovo.

Association Këshilla in Viti (Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017, 33; Zaimi 2017; Hajdar 2015, Source 3 2018)

A 2014 video makes the leadership network of Albanian radical influencers evident (Dailymotion 2014). The video shows some of them from Kosovo, Albania, and N. Macedonia at a religious gathering. The clip is an introduction to a religious lecture from one of the attending radical preachers. The face of the speaker remains hidden but warns the guests of the lecture that they are not allowed to film or record, especially the speech of [redacted], later sentenced for the recruitment of foreign fighters in Albania.

Considering the links of local Islamic NGOs to this network of radical influencers, it is safe to argue that such organizations served to build communities of followers and helped radicalize them, ultimately paving the way for some to travel to Syria and Iraq (Source 3 2018; Source 4 2018; Source 5 2018). Kosovo IS commander Muhaxheri, who was reportedly killed in Syria in 2017, was the founder of the Cultural Association Rinia Islame in Kacanik. His successor, Haqifi was an associate of [redacted] and a frequent lecturer at the Cultural Association Realiteti in Gjilan, as well as at the El Kudus Mosque, run by [redacted], prior to leaving for Syria (Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017, 34). The arrests of jihadi Salafi authority figures by the police in Kosovo, N. Macedonia, and Albania further emphasize the significance of radical influencers. The regional network of Albanian influencers could be traced through activities they undertook to socialize with their followers (See Illustration 2).

Illustration 2 Screen shots of video lectures of Albanian influencers, Source: UNDP, November 2017.

Description: [redacted] at a lecture published by the cultural association Këshilla (top left); [redacted] at a lecture published by the cultural association Relatiteti (second top) [redacted]ecturing at an unknown location in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (top right); [redacted] and Ridvan Haqifi, an IS Albanian Unit commander and lecturer at Qazimi's El Kudus Mosque who is now deceased (centre left); [redacted] purportedly lecturing at the cultural association Rinia Islame (centre middle); [redacted]ecturing at an unknown location (centre right); [redacted] at a joint lecture at an unknown location (bottom left); [redacted] lecturing at a joint event of associations Realiteti Islam and Keshilla (bottom centre); Haqifi lecturing at association Realiteti (Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017).

The data from open sources and interviews suggests that some radical influencers' authority was sufficient to build power centers that were more or less coordinated with each other during the period of foreign fighter recruitment. Consequently, there was no centralized decision-making process across the Albanian radical milieu, despite the network of radical influencers. This observation may be due to individual pathways, geographical proximity, or social networks. These factors indicate a loose structure of influence and have implications for foreign fighter recruitment: radical authority is organized around horizontal power centers without having a strict hierarchy.

Therefore, the clusters of radical followers were more connected to individual radical influencers in the region than to each other. This conclusion stresses the importance of the top-down radical socialization and two of the key functions that radical influencers have: ideological

influence and building the image of a spiritual authority. In some cases, radical influencers provided prospect foreign fighters with logistical and financial support. Looking at individual power centers in the next section is necessary to understand the effects of this radical influence on individual and group socialization.

5.3.2.1. Domestic Power Centers

The previous section demonstrated that radical influencers across the Albanian radical milieu relied on a pre-existing social network to build authority in the post-war context. Power centers, defined as more than one influencer tied to each other, secure reliable and consistent obedience from followers. Thus, the ties between influencers and followers are understood as essential to influencers ability to encourage followers to become foreign fighters.

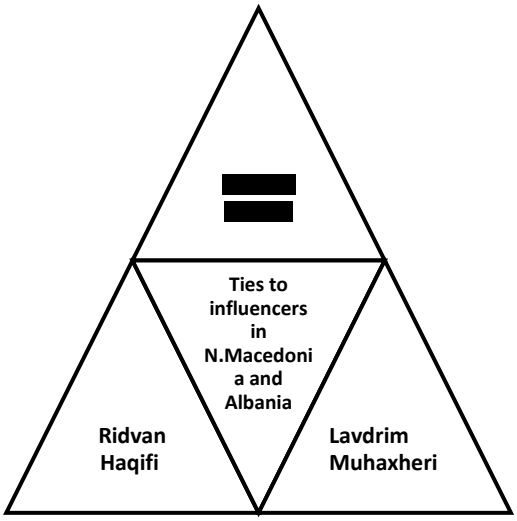
To examine the role of power centers in the overall structure of the Albanian radical milieu, I look at the two power centers separately. The first one, called here the Triangle, refers to cooperation among at least three radical influencers along the Kosovo-N. Macedonian border. The second power center, titled the Ring, is composed of nine individuals, sentenced in Albania for previously being involved in the recruitment of foreign fighters. Both power centers are defined by individual pathways, geographical proximity, and social networks.

Concerning the individual pathways of radical influencers, I focus on evidence regarding their turn to jihadi Salafism as an ideological stand. In terms of geographical proximity, I emphasize this factor because radical influencers, whose activities were situated geographically close, could cooperate and, simultaneously, influence the same clusters of followers. Finally, the social network of influencers with shared views and audiences is seen as essential to the success of foreign fighter recruitment.

5.3.2.1a. Power Center One: The Triangle

The first power center I identified based on the data presented in Table 22, refers to three radical influencers in Kosovo whose activities seem related to each other. They also had ideological and organizational influence on the recruitment of Albanian jihadists, according to interviews with former fighters and representatives of security agencies in Kosovo (See Figure 14).

Figure 14 Power Center One.



Looking at the first power center as a triangle allows us to distinguish between the different roles of radical influencers. Multiple sources suggest that [redacted] was considered the ideological mentor of Albanian foreign fighters in Syria. His frequent presence in various spots in southeastern Kosovo, such as Gjilan, Ferizaj, Kacanik, and Hani I Elezit, provided him with direct access to followers (Source 4 2018). The location of this power center along the Kosovo-Macedonian border hints at cooperation with radical influencers from neighboring N. Macedonia. Qazimi situated his activism in the region without traveling to the warzone.

Unlike [redacted] the other two names in the triangle refer to radical influencers who had more operative functions, and thus, their decision to travel to Syria to join the cause of jihad can be understood as part of their profile: more militant than ideological in essence. According to an

interview with the prosecutor in charge of [redacted]'s case, this power center inspired and facilitated foreign fighter departures, particularly from Kosovo, but also from the larger region. The social ties in this power center were also examined at [redacted]'s trial:

> Z.Q. I have been doing my duty as an imam since I returned from Egypt. In my speeches and my work as an imam and my daily life I am guided by the Quran.
> The Judge: How do you understand the word jihad?
> Z.Q. The word jihad has more than fourteen definitions, but in translation, it means "effort for the good".
> The Judge: Have you helped anyone to go to Syria?
> Z.Q. No, I haven't helped anyone in any form to go to Syria.
> The Judge: Have you had telephone contact with Lavdrim Muhaxheri?
> Z.Q. No, I haven't spoken on the phone with Lavdrim Muhaxheri.
> The Judge: Are Kosovo Muslims encouraged to go and fight in Syria because of their religious background?
> Z.Q. This question needs a comprehensive elaboration and I believe I cannot explain it in detail here […]
> The Judge: How do you know Lavdrim?
> Z.Q. I know him in two aspects, the first is that I know him personally and the second is what I know through the media. I know him as a quiet boy who has come to my lectures […]
> The Judge: What about Ridvan Haqifi?
> Z.Q. I know him in his role as Hoxha, an imam. I know him because he was a student in the high school of madrassa.
>
> Court hearing of [redacted] (Kallxo.com 2016)[54]

According to the interviewed prosecution, [redacted] held lectures on the importance of jihad at El-Kuddus Mosque in Gjilan, as well as at the "Islamic Youth", a local NGO established in Kacanik, Kosovo (Source 4 2018). Before being detained, [redacted] actively used social media to call on his followers to join the cause of jihad in Syria, while praising the war that other jihadists had already begun against Bashar al-Assad's regime (Spahiu 2015a, 6). In a 2013 video, quoted by multiple open sources, [redacted] states: "The blood of the non-believers is our sweetest drink" (Hajdar 2015). Several accounts attempting to expose Al-Qaeda's early network in the Balkans

[54] The quote was translated from Albanian with the assistance of an interpreter.

describe [redacted] as a graduate of al-Azhar in Egypt, where he was first introduced to other religious militants (Spahiu 2015a).

However, the analysis of the role of radical influencers should not be limited to their engagement with violent rhetoric in the context of the Syrian War. The broader cultural and socio-political context in which the post-war radical milieu is embedded provide them with space to build authority. While devoting most of his video lectures to the importance of praying, [redacted] also challenges local religious and state institutions as well as societal and cultural values. For instance, in a 2014 social media post, he encourages his followers not to celebrate New Year's Eve and to disregard Christian religious holidays because they are not related to Islam (Spahiu 2015a, 6–8).

What is evident from the analysis of Power Center One is that the three radical influencers have different profiles and, consequently, differ in their functions. While [redacted] played the role of an ideological authority, Muhaxheri and Haqifi combined militant and ideological characteristics. This means that they could provide a link between the warzone and the IS caliphate. Thus, by traveling to Syria themselves, they could control the recruitment channel of Albanian jihadists on both sides. Quotes from intercepted phone calls and messages provide evidence for such coordination between radical influencers in Kosovo.[55] In 2014, [redacted] informed Muhaxheri, who was already in Syria, that the latter should expect to be replaced as commander of the Albanian IS fighters by another leading figure, Haqifi (Source 3 2018; Source 4 2018). In another intercepted message from September 2013, Haqifi, already a commander of the Albanian IS fighters in Syria, reported to [redacted]: "Hodzha, 11 guys from Kosovo have just arrived"(Gazeta Express 2015b).

[55] Intercepted phone calls and messages were obtained by the Prosecution in Kosovo and made available on local media. The primary sources were officially requested for this research however the request was rejected. Therefore, the quotes are from secondary media sources.

According to my dataset on Albanian foreign fighters, two of the 11 fighters mentioned in the intercepted communication were reportedly killed soon after their arrival in Syria.[56] Although the specific content of these messages could not be accessed for this research, the selected quotes highlight the ideological and strategic functions performed by local radical influencers in recruitment. Their ability to coordinate the departure of recruits from the Balkans and their arrival in the warzone testify to the functions radical influencers have in the provision of logistical support. Another intercepted message to Muhaxheri from one of his associates provides further empirical evidence to this claim: "Our brothers are departing tomorrow at 11:45 from here. The tickets are to Hatay (Turkey) by plane. Let me know where he is waiting for them, at the airport or somewhere else"[57] (Telegrafi 2016; Panorama Online 2016). According to security sources in Kosovo, the departures of foreign fighters from Kosovo were financially facilitated by fundraising in the Balkans and from diaspora communities in Western Europe, specifically communities in Belgium, Sweden, and Switzerland (Source 4 2018).[58]

To sum up, the analysis of Power Center One shows the diverse profiles of radical influencers as well as their ability to coordinate ideological and militant functions and to maintain authority on both sides of the recruitment channel. The combination of functions at the micro-level shows the strength of the power center and its potential for radical influence at the local level.

[56] Another man who was part of this cluster L.K. and returned to Kosovo was interviewed for this research in February 2018, while serving his sentence in Dubrava Prison, Kosovo.

[57] The quote was translated from Albanian by the author's interpreter Dora Nini.

[58] In 2015 a local businessman was sentenced for providing logistical and financial support to radical circles in Kosovo and sponsoring jihadi fighters to travel to Syria. He was convicted for supporting financially religious activities of [redacted]. He was linked to the illegal religious congregation in Pristina, Kosovo.

5.3.2.1b. Power Center Two: The Ring

The second power center I have identified, based on the data presented in Table 22, comprises radical influencers situated in Tirana, Albania. This power center is described by local security agencies as a "recruitment ring", as one authority figure, who held major leadership functions, relied on a circle of eight radical influencers, sharing the same ideological views (See Figure 15).

Figure 15 Power Center Two.

The size of the circles in Figure 5.3. indicates the concentration of power that the radical influencers in the Ring possessed. From the earlier presented data in Table 5.2, it is evident that the two self-proclaimed imams, [redacted], were the leaders, while the rest of the network performed various supportive functions, including funding and facilitation (General Prosecution Office, Republic of Albania 2016). In 2016, the group was sentenced to a collective 126 years in prison by the court in Tirana (Bogdani 2016a). The group was found guilty on charges of recruitment to terrorism, calling for terrorist acts, and inciting hatred (Court Decision Nr. 100

51005-00202-76-2016 2016). While all people in Power Center Two shared the same ideological views, four of them were also subject to international arrest warrants, which testifies to the significance of their radical influence at the local level.

According to the indictment, the nine recruited the majority of the fighters from Albania between 2012 and 2014. During the trial, the nine defendants opposed the rule of the court as a state institution, stating that they only recognized the will of Allah: “Our Lord protects us. We do not obey any other law except that of Allah" (Panorama Online 2015b); “We are going to make disbelievers vanish. We do not recognize your laws. We only recognize the law of Allah . . .You give acquittal for a murder. We are not naïve, you are playing theatre with us here” (Illyria Online2015); “You die all, inshallah! . . . We are proud to be Muslims . . . May God reward our fifteen brothers in Syria! . . . This is the court of the devil! We only know the laws of Allah" [redacted] as quoted by Illyria Online 2015); “This [trial] is a crusade against Islam. Communism died, democracy will be gone, and Islam will triumph” ([redacted] as quoted by Koleka 2016). The selected quotes testify to the strong ideological commitment of the radical influencers belonging to the Ring.

To understand the role of individual radical influencers in this power center, I look at the profiles of the two leading figures. [redacted] has a solid ideological background and social ties with jihadi Salafists, both in the region and in the Middle East, whereas [redacted] does not have such significant sources of credibility. Although the latter did not enjoy the same popularity as [redacted], he was influential among a cluster of followers, mainly in Tirana (Source 2 2019). The rest of the group performed operative roles, while being loyal to the [redacted] leadership. A profile that may be surprising is that of [redacted], a cook at a mosque, who served as a facilitator in the group.

Research on [redacted] power center shows ties to a chain of 14 Islamic NGOs and cultural associations set up in the region in the 1990s. Throughout the years, [redacted] managed to build a support base all across the region, and his attempts to gain prominence as a religious leader and influence broader audiences of Albanian Muslims have a long history (Source 22 2019). Upon his return from studying in Saudi Arabia, [redacted] attempted to forcefully impose his new ultra-conservative religious views in his parajamaats in Tirana, Elbasani, and other spots in Albania (Source 22 2019). He further attempted to intervene in the Muslim community, although without much success, as the Salafi (Wahhabi) preachers in Albania have never enjoyed support from the official religious institutions. This, however, contributed to the marginalization and consolidation of the power center around him and the foundation of parallel religious structures (Source 22 2019).

Looking at Power Center One and Two, the data shows that both had distinct locations, which matched the activities of radical influencers. While the first one was situated in Kosovo and N. Macedonia, the second was set in Albania. The presented data has indicated that the "Triangle" in Kosovo was well-connected through a social network to radical influencers in Skopje, N. Macedonia, while being slightly detached from radical influencers in Albania. Thus, if we look at Kosovo as the heart of the post-war radical milieu, this means that the radical influence established there had a more ideological than organizational impact on the grassroots recruitment process in neighboring Albania. The existence of separate power centers within the Albanian radical milieu serves as evidence of a decentralized recruitment network that overcomes national borders.

5.3.2.2. External Power Centers

To understand the role of the Albanian radical milieu in foreign fighter recruitment, it is necessary to apply the logic of decentralization and look at the ties between radical influencers and the

Albanian diaspora communities. The data I collected through conversations with security experts in Tirana and Pristina point to several patterns of radical influence in the Albanian diaspora, although these patterns do not necessarily indicate the existence of a power center external to the Balkan region. Radical influencers from the Balkans have traveled to Western Europe to pursue their campaigns among Albanian diaspora communities. In doing so, radical influencers from Albania established ties with Albanians in Italy, while the Kosovo-N. Macedonian power center has been more closely connected to Kosovo and N. Macedonian Albanians in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and Belgium.

One possible explanation of these patterns points to the local emigration histories of Albanians from the Balkans to Western Europe. The Kosovo-N. Macedonian diaspora has a longer history, and therefore, already has members who are second and third generation.; both countries were previously part of Yugoslavia and their citizens could travel freely. On the other hand, Albanians from Albania only had this opportunity from the early 1990s. These processes have had implications for the way Salafi proliferation has evolved within Albanian diaspora in recent decades.

According to an interview with a security expert in Tirana, dividing lines are particularly evident through individual "memberships" in illegal mosques or Salafi NGOs. A distinction can be observed between Albanians from Kosovo and N. Macedonia and those who originally came from Albania (Source 22 2019). Islamic NGOs, which are sponsoring certain sides in the development of the radical milieu, usually attempt to foster a horizontal social network among their followers. However, these efforts are often affected by the above-discussed diaspora histories and leave the Salafi infrastructure in the Albanian diaspora loose and without identifiable power centers. Although influencers from the Balkans would frequently pay visits and give lectures to

Albanian Muslim circles in Western Europe, these activities seem to lack strategic cooperation and, therefore, have not led to the emergence of a prominent leadership (Source 22 2019).

Some Albanian foreign fighters recruited in Germany or Switzerland provided material support or participated in terrorism-related activities. However, the numbers of Albanian recruits from Western Europe, according to the prosecution in Kosovo, were insignificant and the networks behind them seem rather elusive (Source 4 2018). The case of [redacted] illustrates a "lone wolf" relationship with the Albanian radical milieu abroad. The young Kosovo Albanian did not participate in recruitment-related activities but contributed to the IS. While studying in Malaysia, [redacted] was allegedly a key figure in providing IS operatives with strategic information aimed at encouraging future attacks against U.S. military personnel. He was arrested in Kuala Lumpur and extradited to the U.S in 2015 (Spahiu and Zenn 2016). He was accused of computer hacking and delivering confidential material and personal information on 1351 U.S. service members and federal employees to IS operatives (US Department of Justice 2015).[59]

To sum up, the Albanian radical milieu has several offshoots, but it lacks a consolidated or particularly influential power center linked to Albanian diaspora communities. In comparison, the domestic power centers discussed in this chapter were highly determined by individual pathways, pre-existing social ties among radical influencers, and geographical proximity. The individual profiles of Albanian radical influencers testify to the role post-war Islamic charities and scholarships have in developing the radical milieu and creating space for radical authority.

[59] [redacted] used Twitter accounts to provide personal data to the IS member, [redacted]. He had also provided information to another high-ranking IS operative, [redacted] who in August 2014 published the obtained data through his Twitter account and that of the IS Hacking Division. Most of the data included "emails, passwords, phone numbers, and location information" aimed at encouraging lone wolf attacks against U.S. service personnel and federal employees.

5.4. Narratives

This section examines the macro- and micro-narratives that appear in the Albanian radical milieu to understand how radical influencers utilize them to encourage their followers to become foreign fighters. The analysis pays special attention to the micro-narratives in order to see if radical influencers rely on references to the Kosovo War to recruit fighters. Empirically, this section looks at video messages of radical influencers, quotes from open sources, indictments, and court decisions. Due to language limitations, the data was translated from Albanian with the assistance of an interpreter.[60]

To comprehend the interplay of macro- and micro-narratives in the rhetoric of Albanian radical influencers, I trace ideological arguments that appear to be locally inspired by the global jihadi propaganda. This is necessary because the messages used in the recruitment of foreign fighters do not appear in a vacuum, but they are arguably tied to the history of the Albanian radical milieu. The way key concepts of Salafism were utilized largely boosted the creation of communities with shared ideological views (Kursani 2018). This process further highlighted the differences between the core and periphery of the Albanian radical milieu. However, in some cases, it has been a research challenge to distinguish between messages that call on Albanians to strengthen their faith and messages that call on them to join the cause of IS. Therefore, it is safe to assume that this challenge may exist at the grassroots level as well and not all followers are able to distinguish between radical influencers in the core and those in the periphery of the radical milieu.

From the interviews I took in Kosovo in 2018 with security experts and former radical followers, it seems that ideological cleavages between radical influencers is a strong characteristic

[60] Many videos and content of their lectures were already removed from the internet at the time of this research. Primary sources were requested through police and prosecution sources but could not be accessed.

of the evolution of the Albanian radical milieu. Although the dividing lines became more evident following the outbreak of the Syrian War, they had already existed long before the first departures of Albanian fighters to the battlefield. Kursani (2018) systematizes these debates around three key topics: 1) the role of the secular state and participation in elections; 2) the concepts of nation and nationalism; and 3) the issue of militarism in the context of the Syrian War (Kursani 2018). As these arguments did not follow state borders, radical influencers across the region, as well as their followers, could engage with discussions both online and offline.

First, a major question of discussion was whether Muslims should vote or not, considering that participation in elections is seen as incompatible with the Sharia law. Two political events in the region particularly triggered this argument: the establishment of a UN administration in Kosovo in 1999 and the Ohrid Framework Agreement in N. Macedonia in 2001.[61] As radical influencers sought to benefit from weak political institutions and gain influence over targeted communities, they openly rejected the role of the state and advocated against participating in elections. Influencers in the core of the radical milieu argued that Islam cannot be defended through voting. In their speeches, they referred to unbelievers (*kufar*) to describe those who participated in the elections (Kursani 2018).

Second, another question that created ideological cleavages was if Muslims should be loyal to a nation and nation state, as these two notions contradict the idea of belonging to the global Muslim community (*ummah*). Radical influencers in the core argued that Muslims should pay loyalty only to God, while disregarding national identity. [redacted], one of the radical

[61] The Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed on 13 August 2001 in response to the armed conflict between the Macedonian Army and police and the paramilitary Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA).

influencers listed in Table 22 in the previous section, asserted in his lectures that those who die for any flag other than the flag of Allah go to hell (*jahannam*) (Kursani 2018).[62]

As a continuation of this rhetoric, messages of radical influencers following the rise of IS called on Albanian foreign fighters to abandon their national identity (See Illustration 3). In a 2014 video, Muhaxhiri called on his followers to join him in his fight against the unbelievers: "We praise Allah for his blessing and for gathering us together with the lions of IS from all around the world". In the video, the Albanian jihadist is surrounded by men holding national passports and the clip ends with everybody tearing up their documents as a sign of loyalty to IS (KlanKosova TV 2017). This piece of IS propaganda shows the survival and utilization of radical narratives that were present in the Albanian radical milieu long before the war in Syria. It further testifies to the conflation of global and local narratives tailored to attract new followers.

Illustration 3 The Albanian IS commander Lavdrim Muhaxhiri holds his Kosovo passport, a print screen of a YouTube video.

The third major issue of contention among Albanian influencers is indeed the issue of militant jihadism. The narrative of jihad as a Muslim duty fulfilled through participation in a

[62] Data obtained by Kursani, Shpend. 2018.

foreign conflict has been present among Albanian Salafis even before the outbreak of the war in Syria. Several radical influencers in the core of the radical milieu openly supported militant jihadism in various conflicts. For instance, in a 2012 sermon, in the initial phase of the Syrian War, Memishi, who is an influencer located in the core, states: "One has an obligation to go to war even without permission: . . . women without a husband's permission and children without a parent's permission."[63] Thus, encouraging foreign fighter recruitment should be understood in the context of the ideological disputes between Albanian radical influencers in the core (in favor of militant jihadism) and periphery of the radical milieu (against militant jihadism).

Focusing on the timeframe between 2012 and 2016, there are three narrative trends that can be distinguished: two of them are general, or macro-narratives, and one of them is tailored to evoke an individual action, and therefore, a micro-narrative. According to 2017 research by the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), Albanian radical influencers explicitly engage with the global jihadist framework describing Islam as a religion under a siege. Being consistent with the global IS campaign, this narrative suggests that atrocities against Muslims are part of the current international order. Furthermore, radical influencers convey messages that refer to broader cultural threats. These messages are tailored specifically to reflect individual perceptions of the assimilation of their traditional culture and values to modern society.

At the micro-level, radical influencers seek to evoke individual responses to their efforts to maintain the radical milieu and to make it visible through their actions. Thus, they oppose local state and religious institutions and encourage disobedience in an attempt to set the boundaries of their radical authority. While bringing explicit examples of brutality to encourage radical actions

[63] Data obtained by Kursani, Spend, 2018.

from their followers, influencers also promise an alternative to a "failed" secular state, namely, a wealthy life in the IS caliphate (Kraja 2017).

Although Albanian radical influencers define local institutions as hostile, they rarely advocate for overthrowing the governments of their home countries. Therefore, the micro-narrative of a "close enemy" rather served the global jihadi campaign tailored to recruit fighters between 2012 and 2016. In fact, Albanian radical influencers more often call for migration towards the IS "caliphate" than encouraging jihad at the local level (Kursani 2018).

However, my research on radical messages shows that the narrative addressing the homeland as a target of jihad is not entirely missing from the rhetoric of Albanian radical influencers. For instance, in a video from June 2015, the Kosovo Albanian IS commander, Haqifi, aka Abu Muqatil al-Kosovi, vows that "black days will come" to Kosovo. He continues: "You will be frightened and terrified in your dreams as you sleep. We will kill you with the permission of Allah. We will come to you with explosive belts" (Morina 2017).

The same video features a former imam from Albania, Almir Daci, aka Abu al-Biqlis (See Table 5.2), who threatens Albanians with attacks in Albania and across the region if they refuse to embrace the cause of jihad: "The Islamic ummah is for the brave, for the lions. The Islamic ummah needs to be united under the almighty word of Allah. The enemies of Islam know the risk of the Islamic caliphate; this is why they try to destroy this state with everything they can" (Bogdani 2016a). The presence of Albanian radical influencers from various parts of the Balkans in the same propaganda materials speaks for their shared target: Albanian-speaking followers from across the Balkans. This approach points to strategic actions undertaken by Albanian influencers, meaning that they cooperated on both sides of the recruitment channel, locally and in the warzone.

Thus, while adopting the global IS framework, Albanian influencers have also adjusted their narratives to the specific needs of their targeted communities. A topic that they have exploited in particular is the "failed cause" of nationalism in Kosovo. According to an interview with a former fighter, radical influencers utilized young people's disappointment with domestic politics to present the cause of IS, framed as a religious duty and a more appealing cause: "[Radical influencers] say, we fought for nationalism, now we have nothing, thus, fighting for a nation is wrong, and we should fight for something else" (Source 6 2018). In one of his recorded sermons, [redacted] fiercely attacks "infidel" Albanians stating that "…[t]hey have instilled the spirit of nationalism in imams" (Karaj 2015).

On other occasions, Albanian radical influencers would attack the peaceful coexistence between different religions in the Balkans. The aforementioned [redacted] asserted that religious harmony in Albania is a political trap to "undermine and control Muslims" (Tema Online 2014) and that the local Islamic community (KMSH) is "protecting Christians and Jews and openly attacking Muslims" (Vizion Plus TV 2016). At his trial, [redacted] further argued against relations between Christians and Muslims in Albania and claimed responsibility for translating jihadi Salafi literature (Shekulli 2014). Throughout the years, [redacted] was persistent in conveying the message that parents should not allow their children to go to secular schools, as, in his view, public schools oppose Islam. [redacted] was particularly singled out for his role in convincing some of his followers to bring their children with them to the Middle East (Shqiptarja 2014).

Concerning the localization of global IS narratives, one of the key expectations of the dissertation has been that radical influencers in post-war radical milieus use war memories and past grievances to aid in recruitment. The empirical research conducted on the messages of Albanian radical influencers shows that references to the Kosovo War do not appear often in their

public rhetoric. However, Kosovo Albanian radical influencers instead exploit specific vulnerabilities related to the post-conflict characteristics of the society, such as the fragile national identity and the general dissatisfaction of citizens with the state-building process. Radical influencers portray the government and the official religious authorities in Kosovo (BIK) as oppressive and hostile to Muslim believers, as the state is run by "infidels" and servants of the West (Kraja 2017; Kursani 2015; 2018). These efforts seek to create a link between local followers and an imaginary global community, to create a sense of belonging, loyalty and religious duty. Two years before the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Naman Demolli, believed to be the first ethnic Albanian fighter killed in Syria, organized demonstrations for the construction of a new mosque in Pristina. [64] He spoke against a newly built Catholic Cathedral in the center of the city (YouTube 2015b). In another recording in front of an unfinished Serbian Orthodox Church in Pristina, Demolli states:

> You can see on YouTube videos how [Serbs] were blessing theirs bombs with holy water . . . they were blessing Serbian soldiers to go kill and slaughter children . . . Those who believe that the Kosovo War was about the nation are far away from justice . . . They came to fight our Islam (YouTube 2015a).[65]

The video shows Demolli surrounded by like-minded peers, including Muhaxhiri. The message was tailored to challenge the widely held understanding that Serbia's 1999 crackdown against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo was based on the ethnic Albanians' struggle to end the regime's oppression and establish an independent state (Kraja 2017).

In exploiting micro-narratives, radical influencers further challenge national and historical Albanian symbols. For instance, a video from 2014 shows two young men from Kosovo who mock

[64] In November 2012 local media reports the death of Naman Demolli, a 35-year-old Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) veteran and an activist for a radical Islamic movement in Kosovo.

[65] The quote is translated from Albanian with the assistance of an interpreter.

the statue of an Albanian national hero, Skanderbeg calling him an unbeliever (*kafir*).[66] On another occasion, radical influencers spoke against Mother Teresa, who was considered a widely respected figure in the post-war context of the Balkans. In a 2014 sermon, the previously mentioned controversial imam, [redacted], [67] criticized her as she embraced Christianity instead of Islam.

The resonance of radical influencers' messages with their followers is evident through the clusters of foreign fighters that are analyzed in section 5.5. What matters here in understanding the power of radical narratives is that Albanian radical influencers enjoyed an increased popularity in the period when the IS campaign took place. In an intercepted text message, a foreign fighter, socialized in the cluster around [redacted], wrote to his brother from Aleppo in 2014: "Hey brother, the YouTube guy that called for jihad was here today" (Indictment PPS nr. 111/2014, Basic Court of Prishtina, May 7, 2015).

The collected data shows that radical influencers maintained a regular public presence and made extensive use of social media to convey their message and communicate with their followers. A 2017 study by KCSS provides insights on the vocabulary of Albanian influencers and followers on social media (Kelmendi and Balaj 2017). The data is derived from more than 60 pages and 150 Facebook accounts, YouTube, and Telegram. According to this study, a selection of the most common words in the analyzed data includes: islamophobia, jihad, mujahid, Islamic State, soldiers of Allah, Islam under attack, Assad regime, defenders of Islam, Jews, join the caliphate, jihadi bride, loyalty towards Allah, support jihad, attack the West, caliphate lions, and non-believers (Kelmendi and Balaj 2017, 8).

[66] Skanderbeg was an Albanian nobleman and military commander who led a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire in 15th century in what is today Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo. He was a Christian Albanian, according to various sources.

[67] [redacted] was previously appointed to the central mosque in Pristina, arrested in 2014, and released later.

A Facebook page called Krenaria Islame [Islamic Pride] has been among the venues for propaganda of the Albanian influencers. It featured videos with translations in Albanian, praising mujahedeen of Albanian descent who have died fighting in Syria. In a 2014 video on this page, Muhaxheri called on Albanian Muslims to join IS. “Brothers, I encourage you not to stay[68] Back then, Muhaxheri also uploaded photos of himself beheading a young Iraqi man on social media (See Illustration 4). Another video posted on Kernaria Islame showed bearded men calling on Muslims to boycott elections, stating that true Muslims should not vote. The Facebook page further used photos and posts to attack moderate Albanian Salafis, seen as the internal enemy. Concerning the external enemy, the page features anti-West rhetoric: on numerous occasions it condemned former U.S. Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. A picture of Bin Laden, with the burning World Trade Center’s Twin Towers in the background, featured one of Al-Qaeda’s leaders’ quotes: “Even if I die, hundreds like me will be born every day”.

Illustration 4 A screenshot of photos uploaded in 2014 by the Albanian IS commander Lavdrim Muhaxheri on Facebook. The beheaded man was a 19-year-old Iraqi citizen.

[68] The data on the content of Islamic Pride is obtained through a secondary source (an article on Balkan Insight) as the Facebook page was already blocked at the time of the research.

Even without having regular contacts with their followers, radical influencers could rely on their online legacy to maintain their influence. Once radical content is created, its shelf life on the Internet sometimes even outlives that of its creators. [redacted] cultivated a significant online presence, which remains active despite his imprisonment (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski 2018, 108). After he was sentenced, his YouTube channel "Minber Media" was still being updated with content, even well after his incarceration, and it has had over 7 million views. Similarly, his "Minber Media" Facebook page, with 54,000 "likes", continued to be active with weekly updates (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski 2018, 28–30).

However, not all influencers relied on a regular online presence, which is not to be overlooked as a strategic choice. Some influencers preferred to build their authority image mainly through in-person socialization with followers, which gave them full control over the messages they conveyed. This was the approach of the most influential leader in Albania, [redacted], who made only limited use of online videos to communicate with his followers. Unlike other influencers across the Albanian radical milieu, who made their sermons available on the internet, he chose to

share only sound recordings of his lectures. In some of them, he openly calls for jihad in Syria. Some of his recordings appear on social media covered by photos of Osama bin Laden (A1 Report - Videoja e Imamit: Shkoni Ne Siri Burrat Ne FB Jane Vetem Lepuj 2014). The prosecution in Albania seized many such videos and audio recordings, where they found calls for violence and hate speech against people of different races and religions.

5.5. Followers

To understand the pre-departure radical socialization of Albanian foreign fighters, I summarize the empirical knowledge collected about them in this section. I further look at the "migration phase" of Albanian fighters to identify patterns of departure. I then analyze the cases of foreign fighters that, according to the dataset, illustrate a positive active or a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu.

Table 22 Men, women, and minors of Albanian descent who traveled to Syria and Iraq (2012-16).

Country	Men	Women	Minors	Families
Albania[69]	79	27	38	14
Kosovo[70]	255	48	96	20
N. Macedonia	140	14	No data	At least 3[71]

Source: Azinović and Bećirević 2017.

In the sample of Albanians who traveled to Syria and Iraq, the majority come from Kosovo, followed by N. Macedonia and Albania (See Table 22). The collected data further testifies to

[69] BIRN, 2016, Bogdani: From Albania, 3 fought with Turkish Al-Qaeda-affiliate the Murat Gezenler battalion, all others joined Al Nusra or IS. 42 returned to Albania before the government introduced legislation prohibiting foreign fighting.

[70] UNDP, 2017, Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017. According to this report, 253 of those who travelled to Syria and Iraq from Kosovo were men and 55 were women; 36 of all war travelers from Kosovo were minors.

[71] See Selimi and Stojkovski 2017, 10.

clusters of foreign fighter departures from certain geographical areas in the region (Table 23). The two trends the research has identified is that most Albanians left for Syria from urban centers or from border towns and villages.

Table 23 Clusters of foreign fighter departures across the Albanian radical milieu.

N. Macedonia	Skopje and nearby ethnic Albanian villages (the neighborhoods of Cair, Gazi Baba, and the rural Skopje suburbs of Aracinovo and Saraj) Tetovo, and Kumanovo
Albania	Suburbs of Tirana, Elbasan, Shkodra, Dibra, Korca, Cerrik, and Pogradec
Kosovo	Pristina, Prizren, Hani I Elezit, Kacanik, Mitrovica, Gjilan, Viti, Ferizaj and Peja.

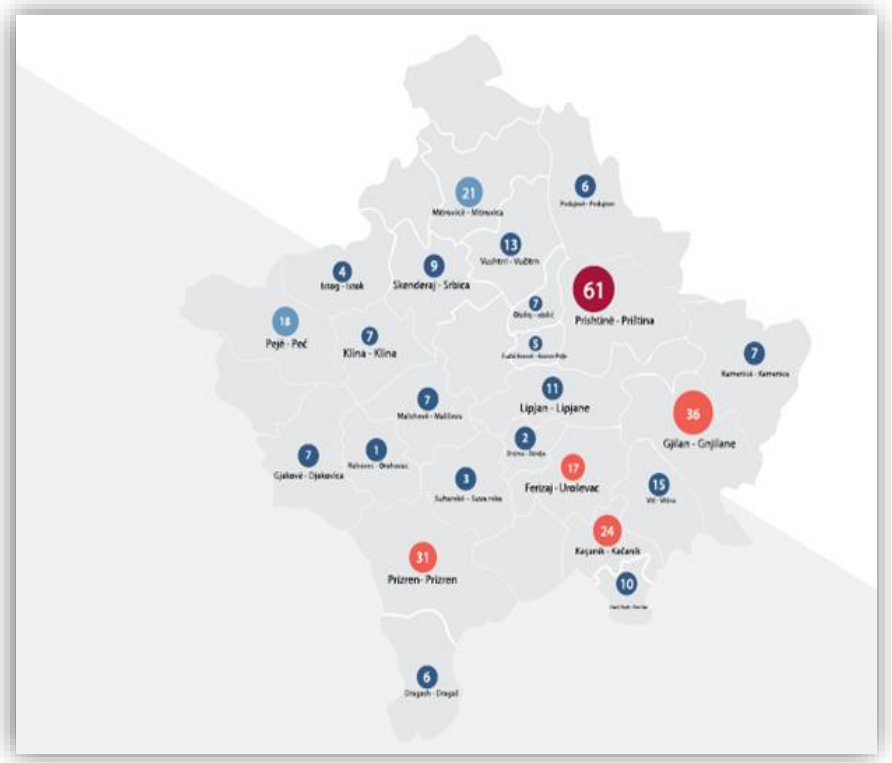
Sources: Azinović and Jusić 2016; Shtuni 2016; Kursani 2015; Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski 2018.

For instance, a disproportionately large number of recruits, 24 men, women, and children left from the town of Leshnica and its nearby villages, Zagorcan and Rremenj in southeast Albania. According to security sources, the central recruitment node in this area was a local mosque in Leshnica and an in-person network tied to it. Almir Daci, a former imam there, was active in spreading radical religious ideas among isolated groups of youngsters (Bogdani 2016b). In December 2015, Daci was charged in absentia for recruitment, and a few months later, he was reportedly killed in Syria (Likmeta 2014b; Michalopoulos 2017).

Like in Albania, foreign fighter departures from N. Macedonia and Kosovo speak for a geographical pattern that affects urban centers and border areas. While around ¼ of foreign fighters from Kosovo left from big cities like Pristina and Prizren, a few municipalities along the Kosovo-N. Macedonian border have a disproportionately high recruitment rate compared to the rest of Kosovo (See Illustration 5). More than 1/3 of the male fighters originate from the following places: Hani I Elezit, Kacanic, Mitrovica, Gjilan, and Viti, and the first two have a joint contribution of 30 jihadi combatants. This, however, accounts for only 2.4% of Kosovo's population (Shtuni 2016).

The municipalities with the highest number of men who travelled to Syria and Iraq are Pristina, followed by Gjilan, Prizren, Kacanik, Mitrovica, Ferizaj, and Peja. The departures from municipalities in southeast Kosovo account for about 1/3 of the overall number of foreign fighters from Kosovo (See Appendix 2). This data indicates that the region near the border with N. Macedonia was the most susceptible to recruitment relative to their population size, measured by number of foreign fighters per 10 000 inhabitants (Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017).

Illustration 5 Number of individuals from Kosovo who traveled to Syria and Iraq (2011-2016) per municipality.



Source: UNDP, 2017, Behar Xharra and Gojani.

The geographical locations of the recruitment of Albanian foreign fighters suggests that Kosovo was the heart of the IS-inspired departures of Albanian fighters. As Kosovo foreign

fighters occupy the biggest part of the sample, the saturation gives more specific insights into the phenomenon. First, the majority of Kosovo fighters joined the ranks of IS or Jabhat al Nusra, although several people became a part of the Free Syrian Army, Ahrar Al Sham or other rebel or extremist factions. According to data from Kosovo Police, more than 1/3 of the foreign fighters from Kosovo were in their early twenties prior to their departure to Syria. Out of 207 people, 63 of them were under 25 before traveling to Syria. Research by Shtuni (2016) points out that about 60% of all Kosovo fighters were born between 1986 and 1996, which means that 18-28-year-olds are the most vulnerable to foreign fighter recruitment.

Although I have not accessed sufficient data on the individual socio-economic profiles of foreign fighters, research reports by KCSS and UNDP stress that most Kosovo fighters had a moderate education, were unemployed, and generally held a low socio-economic status before going to the warzone (Kursani 2015; Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017). Around 10 percent had a dual citizenship and were known to have resided in Western European countries (Shtuni 2016, 2). At least 1/3 of Albanian foreign fighters returned to the Western Balkans before 2015 (See Table 24).

Table 24 Individuals from Kosovo who traveled to Iraq and Syria between 2012 and 2015.

Returned	**Remained**	**Dead**	**Children born to Kosovo women in Syria**
133	196	74	40 at least

Source: Data from Kosovo Police requested for this research in January 2018.

Data from Kosovo Police indicates that 40 individuals (30 men, 8 women, and 2 children) were caught in an attempt to travel to Syria (Source 3 2018; Qafmolla 2016; Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017). My empirical research has identified four people who intended join the IS caliphate,

but local police prevented them from traveling. Although this number may be insignificant compared to the overall pool of recruits, it testifies to the fact that radical followers were supportive towards the IS caliphate. Such cases remain "hidden" or out of the foreign fighter sample, as they refer to people who did not reach the battlefield. However, from a qualitative point of view, these cases show that the number of radical followers ready to become foreign fighters is higher than the actual number of Albanians who went to the battlefield.

A cluster of foreign fighters in the dataset refers to people with previous combat experience. At least 11 of them previously took part in guerilla warfare or participated in the armed conflicts in Kosovo and N. Macedonia (KLA and/or National Liberation Army). As there is insufficient data about the military background of many of the fighters in the dataset, it is likely that the number of KLA/NLA veterans who traveled to Syria is higher. According to data from open sources, they traveled to the warzone in small groups of 2-3 individuals (Hajdari 2013).

In March 2018, I interviewed a former Albanian fighter who just returned from Syria after serving with the Free Syrian Army for a month. In the interviewee's words, before going to Syria, he fought in "five wars". Previously he joined the Albanian National Army (ANA)[72] and the Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa, and Bujanovac.[73] Although he considered his combat experience a motivating factor in his decision to go to Syria, he claimed that primary reason was humanitarian (Source 8 2018).[74] The collected data on Albanian fighters with previous combat experience shows that they did not obtain high-ranked positions in Syria, although they had

[72] The Albanian National Army is an Albanian paramilitary organization and former terrorist group opposing the Ohrid Framework Agreement which ended the 2001 insurgency in N. Macedonia between the National Liberation Army and Macedonian security forces.

[73] The Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac was an Albanian militant group fighting for separation from Yugoslavia of three municipalities: Preševo, Bujanovac, and Medveđa in South Serbia with predominantly ethnic Albanian population.

[74] The interview took place in Ferizaj, Kosovo in March 2018. The interviewee did not agree to be recorded during the conversation, thus, only notes were taken.

background in domestic wars. Nonetheless, they were among the first from the Balkans to travel to Syria.

5.5.1. Migration from the Radical Milieu

The vast majority of Albanian foreign fighters left for Syria in or before 2014, when the "caliphate" was not proclaimed yet, but the IS was already developing its structures in the Middle East (See Table 25).

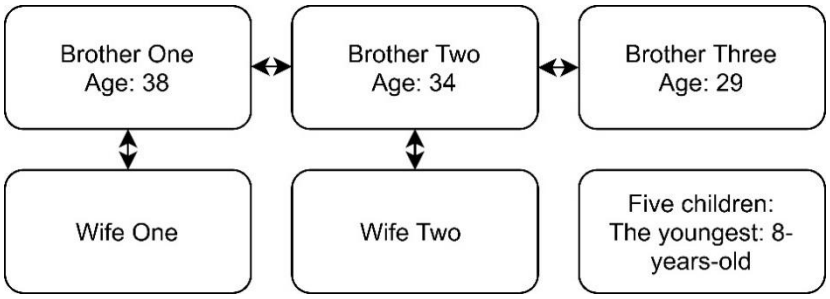
Table 25 Departures of Albanian fighters from Kosovo, N. Macedonia, and Albania per year.

Year of departure	Kosovo	Albania	N. Macedonia
2012	31%	19%	No data
2013	54%	76%	No data
2014	8%	4%	No data
2015	7%	1%	No data

Data: Albanian Prosecution Office, February 2016, KCSS 2015, Qafmolla 2016.

The Albanian foreign fighter contingent is not an exception from the general trend of entire families migrating to the IS caliphate. At least half of the Albanian men were married before going to the warzone. In some cases, foreign fighter departures included not only the nuclear family but also the extended one. To illustrate this trend of departure from the Albanian radical milieu, I look at the case of family A, ten of whom traveled to Syria (See Figure 16). Originally from a small village in Albania, the three brothers decided to take their families to the IS caliphate However, the third one failed to arrange the documents for his wife and children and, thus, traveled without them.

Figure 16 A model of extended family migration from the Albanian radical milieu to Syria.

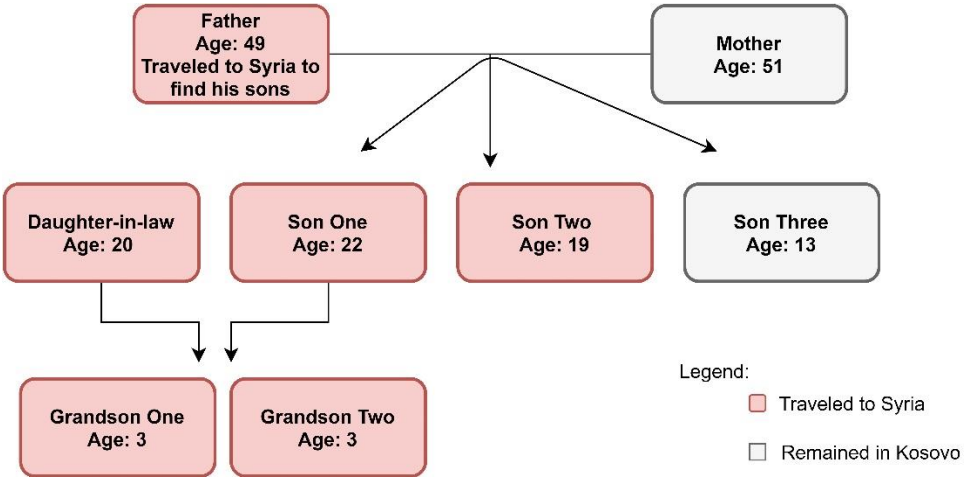


What is interesting in this case is that even the members who were left behind expressed support for the actions of their relatives who went to Syria. The mother of the three sons, as quoted in January 2015 by the local media, stated: "I am very upset, because ten members of my family are gone from me, but I agreed because they have taken the path of Allah" (Zeri 2015). This justification at the level of the extended family was conveyed by part of the family members and adopted by the others in the process of radical socialization. Therefore, the phenomenon of family *hijra* relies on at least two social networks: the ideological one, where radical followers meet radical influencers, and the family one, where radical followers have the chance to influence relatives.

In fact, at least 1/3 of the individuals in my dataset are related through kinship ties, which manifests the nature of the network through which some people traveled to Syria. This trend of kinship saturation can also be explained by the tradition of close-knit families and a patriarchal family structure that many ethnic Albanians have (Shtuni 2015b). The highest number of individuals belonging to the same family that has been identified in this research, is nineteen. This is the family of the ethnic Albanian fighter N. D. reportedly killed in Syria. There are five cases of extended family migration in my dataset for which detailed information is available. They all indicate pre-departure socialization into Salafi circles of at least one of the family members. In one case, a father who opposed his sons' migration to Syria, explained that his travel was an attempt to bring them back home (See Figure 17). Thus, the model of family hijra, although widespread

across the Albanian radical milieu, indicates variations in the level of support from the extended family. This finding may further suggest that some family members were active decision-makers regarding the journey to Syria, while others followed them, which is the case for most of the women and children.

Figure 17 A model of extended family migration from the Albanian radical milieu to Syria.



From the datasets on radical influencers and radical followers, it is evident that representatives of both categories undertook family hijra. For at least three of the radical influencers, there is data indicating that they traveled to Syria with their spouses and children. In one case, the aforementioned Albanian IS commander, Haqifi, brought his two brothers, A. and I., to the battlefield. Haqifi's father shared on local media that the family trusted the IS so much that they sent their 21-year-old son A. to Syria even though he had serious health issues before traveling (Nabolli and Haxhiaj 2018). This means that both radical influencers and followers probably considered different types of incentives to bring their wives and children to the IS caliphate.

As an extension of family hijra, there are also cases in the dataset that show family ties to the Albanian diaspora in Western Europe, particularly in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy. An example that illustrates this trend is the case known as "Lady Jihad". In July 2015,

Italian police detained ten people in an operation called "Marriage". Five of the arrested individuals were Albanians, four Italians, and one Canadian, all suspected of being part of an IS cell (Panorama Online 2015a). Those arrested were related by marriage to an Italian woman, [redacted], who converted to Islam before she married an Albanian man, originally from Lushnja, Albania (Bogdani 2015). According to the Italian investigation quoted by multiple open sources, the couple had strong ideological convictions prior to their departure, and [redacted] was a driving force in their decision to go to Syria (La7 Attualità 2015). The case of "Lady Jihad" shows that foreign fighter recruitment overcomes national and regional borders and instead follows social networks extended through diaspora ties, family, and kinship.

5.5.2. Followers' Relationship with the Radical Milieu

To understand foreign fighters' relationship with the radical milieu, I rely on data from open sources and interviews about prior socialization between radical followers and influencers. The radical socialization of followers is empirically manifested in three ways: whether they attended sermons and lectures; whether they engagement with discussions regarding the war in Syria and the value of jihad; and if they belonged to peer circles close to radical influencers. Based on the available data, I split individuals in the dataset into two categories: with having either a positive active or positive passive relationship with the radical milieu, which will be further discussed later in this section.

Out of 207 cases in the dataset, I have collected data on 147 concerning their relationship with the radical milieu. At least 94 of them were tied to Albanian radical influencers, according to the data. The remaining 53 were relatives, mostly women and children, who traveled to Syria but did not have a positive active relationship with the radical milieu before their departures. A key assumption in this dissertation is that followers who were exposed to propaganda efforts from

radical influencers were more likely to become foreign fighters. To understand the way that followers establish a positive active relationship with the radical milieu, I look at the meeting points with radical influencers.

5.5.2.1. Positive Active Relationship with the Radical Milieu

To be able to explain foreign fighter clusters, I conducted research visits to three affected municipalities close to the Kosovo-N. Macedonian border.[75] I selected the places based on the relatively higher number of foreign fighter departures compared to the rest of Kosovo. The aggregate socio-economic picture of the region in 2018 points to high levels of unemployment, a weak presence of state institutions, and limited access to education and opportunities for the youth. Although these factors do not vary greatly in other parts of the Balkans populated with Albanian Muslims, communities in the bordering area between Kosovo and N. Macedonia are also thought to be religiously more conservative.

The war and post-war characteristics of southeast Kosovo include an increased role of humanitarian organizations and Islamic NGOs, because the path refugees took while fleeing Kosovo to N. Macedonia passed through this area. Radical circles were facilitated in their attempt to establish a presence by using the framework and resources of humanitarian aid. This trend can be understood as a manifestation of post-war fragility that provided the conditions for a socialization into Salafi micro-communities. This finding was confirmed through several interviews and research meetings in the region. The mayor of Kacanik,[76] one of the municipalities

[75] Research visits to Kacanik, Hani I Elezit and Viti took place in February 2018.

[76] According to the 2011 census, the town of Kacanik has 15,634 inhabitants, while the municipality has 33,409 inhabitants.

in Kosovo where 24 individuals have been reported to have left for Syria, points to a few organizations that particularly focused on the religious socialization of the youth in recent years:

> Everything started with meetings in these NGOs, they were usually taking place in private spaces. In Kacanik, we knew that they were rather advocating for conservative forms of Islam, and at some point, started spreading propaganda about the war in Syria. I remember, they were particularly active in the days of Ramadan, so not to be noticed by the public. They had a rather strong influence over part of the youth in Kacanik (Source 7 2018).

The collected data through interviews and research reports by KCSS and UNDP testify to clusters of foreign fighters from the neighboring villages and towns who were socialized through Islamic NGOs operating in Kacanik.

The analysis in section 5.3. pointed to this part of Kosovo as one of the key spots of radical influence, as influencers belonging to Power Center One were the leading figures in two of the NGOs operating in Kacanik: Muhaxheri, the key IS commander who was killed in Syria in 2017, and [redacted] sentenced to 10 years for the recruitment of Albanian foreign fighters. Two organizations, "Parimi [Principle]" and "Islamic Youth", both located in Kacanik, were venues for religious gatherings initiated or attended by the above-mentioned radical influencers, among others (Source 4 2018). According to data from the Kosovo Police, followers of "Parimi" initially joined Jabhat al Nusra, whereas the majority of fighters who emerged from "Islamic Youth-Kacanik" joined IS.

According to interviews with two former fighters, young people from towns and villages in this area would often come to Kacanik to attend lectures given by radical influencers, and thus, socialize with peers.[77] Hani I Elezit, one of the neighboring municipalities, contributed 10 people to the overall number of foreign fighters from Kosovo.[78] The major of Hani I Elezit, who was

[77] The interviews were taken in Kosovo in March 2018.

[78] According to the 2011 census, the town of Han I Elezit has 2533 inhabitants, while the municipality has 9,403 inhabitants.

interviewed for this research, argued that local foreign fighters were not influenced by a single religious leader in the town, nonetheless some of them socialized with peers from neighboring Kacanik:

> [Fighters from our town] were not true believers; they did not believe that they were going to jihad. They did not know anything about Islam, however social media influenced them . . . There was a guy who used to work for the city council here, in the tax department. When his brother went to Syria, he decided to quit his job arguing that taking money from people on behalf of the state is a sin. He was under his brother's ideological influence back then but later regretted his decision (Source 23 2018).[79]

The research visits I conducted in southeast Kosovo strengthened the argument that clusters of foreign fighters across the Albanian radical milieu appear in given spots as a result of peer networks and the radical influencers' activism. The venues of radical socialization may change over time but what matters for followers' positive active relationship with the radical milieu is to have the opportunity for social interaction with radical influencers.

Based on the analysis of the two power centers discussed in section 5.3 and from researching open sources, I identified a number of mosques where radical influencers were active. For instance, the majority of recruited men from Albania reportedly attended sermons and lectures of [redacted], the key radical influencers in Power Center Two. The Mezez Mosque, run by [redacted], was among the mosques operating outside the official religious jurisdiction (Koleka 2016).[80] Similarly, in Kosovo, a network of mosques and Islamic NGOs tied to extreme Salafi leaders facilitated meetings with followers and peer-to-peer radical socialization. Among them was a mosque in the Dardania district in Pristina.[81] Radical influencers belonging to Power Center One

[79] The interview was originally taken in Albanian with the assistance of an interpreter.

[80] The Mezez Mosque is located in a village on the outskirts of Tirana

[81] In 2011 part of the circle around [redacted] changed their gathering location. They began to gather in a place known as the mosque near "Termokos" (in Pristina). This praying congregation was closed down in 2014 by the police following an order from the State Prosecution.

attended this mosque regularly since 2009-2010. After a prayer, they would gather with a small circle of followers for a further, informal discussion on religious matters. A former follower attending these gatherings was interviewed for this research:

> I was only 15 and trusted blindly everything that [a name of a radical influencer] was saying . . . I loved him so much, for me, he was my hero at that time . . . I was among his best students . . . I remember when Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011, [influencers] said: 'What happened, happened. Jihad will continue.' They were telling us that we were the true believers. Back then I felt very empowered by calling people around me unbelievers. However, today I feel very ashamed that I was [labeling] even respected imams this way (Source 5 2018).

Followers' positive active relationship with the radical milieu is largely determined by indeed the presence of radical influencers. The influencers' role, as described by a former fighter interviewed for this research, is to first gain respect across the different parts of the radical milieu and then further engage with person-to-person persuasion:

> [Radical influencers] first isolate you from your family. They ask you all the time if your family prays, and if not, [your relatives] are called infidels. The next step is to isolate you from the state by saying that this is not your state, as it is controlled by the Americans, thus, the state does not represent you. The state is against you, and you are expected to hate it. [At the next stage] the recruiter invites you over for coffee and throughout the conversation, he [occasionally] brings up the topic of the Syrian War and tries to convince you to go there (Source 6 2018).

Thus, the personal interaction with a figure of authority contributes to the formation of followers' positive active relationship with the radical milieu. A testimony from a former high school classmate of Muhaxheri gives further insights into this radical socialization pattern. According to the testimony, they met twice before Muhaxheri left for to Syria to join IS. The future IS commander showed the witness "YouTube videos and similar materials of killings and rapes" (Indictment PPS nr. 25/2015, Basic Court of Pristina 2015). The interrogated man, who also traveled to Syria, explains that he was encouraged by these meetings and also a 2013 appeal on

social media in which Muhaxheri called on young people from Kosovo to join the cause of jihad in Syria (Indictment PPS nr. 25/2015, Basic Court of Pristina 2015).[82]

Such individual experiences in developing a positive active relationship with the radical milieu are complex, and thus, it is a challenge to separate the role of radical authority from individual feelings and motivations for radical action. A former IS fighter interviewed for this research describes his personal transformation before going to Syria (Source 9 2018). When the Syrian War broke out, the interviewee was dealing with the recent loss of his mother. In his words, in the months before his departure to the battlefield, he would write angry posts on social media and further hide his intention to travel to the warzone from his family. Being in touch with "friends who already went to Syria" on the Internet, he planned his departure and within three months joined the Albanian contingent in the war zone. On the day he left, he sent a message to his brother: "I am going to a doctor." He returned a few months later, feeling, in his words, disillusioned and regretful. He claims that he considers his travel to Syria a mistake and a deviation from his faith, as he realized that "dying for IS was not a holy war at all" (Source 9 2018). Thus, emphasizing the role of radical influencers as persuaders through one-on-one discussions does not mean that followers are passive recipients of radical values and ideas. They are also active decision-makers with a complex set of motivations, motives, and responses to radical socialization.

The analysis of the clusters of followers and radical influencers further points to the strong resonance of radical influencers' messages with their followers. Source 6 recalls being frustrated with the political situation, corruption, and social inequality in his country and failing to "see himself in this society". He describes the political establishments as particularly oppressive towards Muslims in the years following the end of the Kosovo War. In his own words, his

[82] See Kraja, Garentina 2017, "The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo", KCSS, Pristina.

frustration escalated in 2013, when he watched videos from Syria and heard the news that Bashar al-Assad had used chemical weapons against the local Muslim population:

> In September 2013, I decided to travel to Syria together with other friends. But they gave up on the idea in the last minute, and I went alone. Of course, I already had some contacts there. I traveled at the beginning of October and returned two weeks later"[83] I wouldn't say I was recruited; I would say, I was betrayed. I told the guy who convinced me to go to Syria that I didn't want to be part of Al-Qaeda. But they knew where they were sending me, since they gave me exactly the contacts that I got . . . I've never denied that religion plays an important role in my life, but it's not religion that made me go to Syria. It was the dictatorship there and my desire to help people. I became religious after the war in Kosovo, but I never [felt drawn to] extremist organizations Never had [interest in] Al-Qaeda, I knew they had this wrong ideology (Source 6 2018).[84]

The analysis in section 5.4 showed that war memories were rarely exploited in an explicit manner by radical influencers in their social engagement with followers. However, from the interviews with followers, it is evident that Muslim victimhood narratives played a role in shaping individuals' positive active relationship with the radical milieu. The reason is that Muslim victimhood narratives made some individuals link their personal memories with the ongoing events in Syria and the appeals of local influencers.

> I was frustrated during the war. I wanted to be part of it, but I was only 13 years old . . . Trying to be useful was definitely one of my motives to travel to Syria: to have the experience to take a gun and protect the community, something that I couldn't do during the war we had. I wanted to have this experience to protect other people's lives . . . I have been volunteering for the Red Cross since I was 15, I am a regular blood donor. I cannot just stay and see people suffering. I want to do something for the community. It makes me feel useful (Source 6 2018).

> My family was well off, relatively wealthy, however, during the war they lost everything. My father became an alcoholic, one of my sisters started taking drugs. I felt isolated. I was young. I remember, I was walking down the street, I passed a mosque and heard the Azzam and decided to go and pray. It was May 2007. I was 15 years old, I was in Pristina, near the mosque of Dardania. I went inside this mosque, and I prayed for the first time in my life. (Source 5 2018).

[83] He spent nine days in Syria and meanwhile met with people from Jabhat al Nusra and IS but joined Ahrar al-Sham for 5 days and traveled back to Kosovo.

[84] The interviewee used the word "sympathy" in the original recording.

Another interviewee, a former IS fighter, recalls that he was ten years old during the Kosovo War. He witnessed the murder of a friend's mother. In his words, relating to the past suffering of his own community, he felt it was his duty to help other Muslims under siege: "It was very sensitive for us because everything they were living through at that time, we had experienced before in Kosovo" (Source 9 2018).[85]

The selected quotes are the empirical manifestation of how the radical influencers' narrative resonates with their followers' individual experiences, memories, and attitudes. Some of the followers with a positive active relationship with the radical milieu describe their reasons for traveling to the conflict zone as morally and religiously driven. Radical influencers' narratives seem to be contributing to followers' interpretations of different aspects of their lives, their actions, sense of purpose, and the socialization process by which they claim to have been radicalized.

Although the dissertation does not focus on negative cases, the examination of the pre-departure socialization of foreign fighters with the radical milieu points to cases of disengagement. This means that even though followers were part of clusters built by radical influencers, they did not become foreign fighters. A former follower of the influencers belonging to Power Center One was interviewed in February 2018 for this research. In his words, although he trusted everything radical influencers would say about Islam and jihad, he experienced a breaking point when saw a video of the Albanian IS commander Muhaxheri beheading a young Iraqi man: "I am a very peaceful man, I have never committed a forceful act, moreover, I am a conflict avoiding person, and maybe this prevented me from joining the wave of foreign fighters from Kosovo" (Source 5 2018). Such signs of disengagement can be the outcome of a variety of feelings or justifications that prevent a follower from acting upon their radical views. Considering the role of radical

[85] The interview took place in Dubrava prison, Kosovo where the interviewee was serving his sentence in March 2018.

influence, it can be argued that not becoming a foreign fighter is a reaction of an extreme form of propaganda that followers do not recognize as religiously or morally justifiable.

Furthermore, the analysis of individuals' relationship with the radical milieu makes evident cases of a post-Syria active engagement of followers with the cause of jihad. This finding points to the role of radical influence limited to the pre-departure phase. It also shows the emancipation of followers in their radical actions. According to open data sources, a former IS fighter, [redacted] has remained committed to the cause of IS after returning to Kosovo and serving his sentence for being a foreign fighter (Naddaff 2018). In a 2018 interview with *The Times* Liadrovci argues: "The caliphate is not finished . . . I want to create an Islamic state in Kosovo, and I will be happy to die for it" (Loyd 2018).

In a 2019 Facebook post Liadrovci expressed his satisfaction with the terror attack in Sri Lanka and, thus, was detained by the police. "With the help of Allah, the sons of the Ummah attacked where it hurts more, in the churches and hotels of Shri Lanka and tomorrow they will attack again, but this time in Paris, London, Washington, and New York. So, wait, we are coming for you too!!!" (Balkan Web 2019). This post-Syria active engagement of former foreign fighters with the radical milieu points to their individual potential to emancipate and become radical influencers themselves. The analysis of such cases may further provide insights into individual paths in the pre-departure and post-departure stages of followers' engagement with the radical milieu.

5.5.2.1. Positive Passive Relationship with the radical milieu

Unlike the majority of men who joined the Albanian fighter contingent, women and children were rarely part of the pre-departure radical socialization or were passively exposed to radical narratives without having a leading role in the decision to travel to the warzone. While men participated in

sermons and religious gatherings, women would more often get influenced by male relatives. Based on the collected data through open sources, I categorized 53 cases as positive passive relationships with the radical milieu (28 women and 25 children). One of the patterns that is evident in a number of cases testified to the supporting role of wives at the pre-departure phase of their husbands, regardless of whether they followed them to Syria or not:

> It's really difficult for me, but I am proud of you, sweetheart, Allah has honored us with your jihad, and I will try to preserve this honor with pride and dedication . . . I want to see you even more in those clothes[86] and don't forget that I am proud of my husband, my mujahedeen (Indictment PPS nr. 25/2015 Basic Court of Pristina, May 7, 2015).[87]

This quote shows that the distinction between followers who had either a positive active or a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu was not necessarily clear-cut and allowed for supportive forms of activism. Such support arguably played a role in the decision-making process concerned with the travel to Syria.

Similarly, an IS fighter's widow who I interviewed in March 2018 described her husband as a very sensitive person who followed the call to help suffering Muslims in Syria. She did not agree to be recorded but explained that her husband would always cry and get angry when he saw children dying in the Syrian War (Source 10 2018).[88] In her words, she fully supported her husband's intention to become a foreign fighter:

> If my children suffer in a war, I expect that someone would come and help me. This was my conviction [when my husband left] and now. He did not go there without my permission; he went with my blessing . . . today I am very proud of my husband. I am proud of him going to Syria to help people; he is a martyr (Source 10 2018).

Thus, when analyzing the positive passive relationship of individuals with the radical milieu, there are variations of exposure to radical narratives and engagement with the cause that should also be considered. Whether foreign fighters met with support or rejection from family members can be

[86] Most likely the reference is to a military uniform.

[87] The translation is taken from Kraja, Garentina, 2017, The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo, KCSS, 32.

[88] Source 10 is the widow of an Albanian IS fighter reportedly killed in January 2014.

understood as a function of their ability to persuade relatives to either approve their actions or follow them in the cause of jihad.

To illustrate these variations, I refer to another interview with a former radical follower who faced disapproval from his family: "When I first began to pray, my family followed my path and also became religious. However, when I became more radical in my views and talked against moderate Islam and respected imams in Kosovo, I suddenly became the black sheep of my family" (Source 5 2018). In another case, the father of a foreign fighter attempted to prevent his son from traveling to the battlefield: "I informed the police, asking them to arrest him so that he could not go there. However, he managed to escape the police search while I was not at home, and he left with his wife and three children [to Syria]"(Nabolli and Haxhiaj 2018).

To sum up, the analysis of followers' relationship with the Albanian radical milieu helps to understand the influence of radical authority over various patterns of recruitment. Although these ideal categories make a distinction between those who had an active socialization with a radical influencer and those that had a passive one, the research of the Albanian radical milieu testifies to variations in terms of the individual engagement with the cause of jihad.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter provided empirical evidence that the Albanian radical milieu is a post-war radical milieu that benefited from post-war fragility to expand its influence. Although Albanian Muslims in the Balkans were exposed to various sources of fragility, such as political crises and transitions, it was the Kosovo War that boosted the growth of the Albanian radical milieu and the role of radical influencers in it.

The qualitative data analyzed in this chapter testifies to the presence of authority figures who managed to build power centers and, among other forms of ideological activism, to encourage

the recruitment of Albanian foreign fighters. The chapter has found that the geographical distribution of foreign fighter clusters across Albanian-speaking communities in the Balkans is largely shaped by the way radical influencers coordinate, cooperate with, and approach their followers. Unlike the Bosnian radical milieu discussed in Chapter Four, the Albanian one relied on strong domestic power centers, yet lacked a particularly influential power center linked to Albanian diaspora communities. The research has identified pre-departure leadership ties that overcome national borders and have been established along geographical proximity, pre-existing social networks, ethno-linguistic ties, and similarities in ideological backgrounds. Although the analysis explained group and network dynamics at a community level, country-specific dynamics, such as the war in Kosovo, evidently played a role in the way radical power centers emerge and evolve over time.

While employing narratives in line with the global jihadist propaganda, Albanian radical influencers also localized their messages. The link between personal war memories and the ongoing events in Syria was rationalized by both influencers and followers. On the one hand, influencers used Muslim victimhood narratives to create a link between the conflict experience of the Western Balkans and the ongoing war in Syria. Different narratives could be diffused via relational and mediated mechanisms throughout Albania, Kosovo, and N. Macedonia. Influencers could advance their messages whilst hiding their motives until close personal relationships had been formed. On the other hand, some of the followers interviewed for this research also presented their motivation to go to Syria through the lens of individual memories. The argument goes as follows: Since they were too young during the Kosovo War, they did not have the chance to participate and defend their community. Thus, the Syrian War provided them with such a chance.

Finally, a pattern that finds support through the dataset of foreign fighters is that most individuals have been recruited from peer groups and kinships linked to individual power centers in the region. Followers, who had an active positive relationship with influencers, were the decision-makers in the decision to travel to the war zone. However, a number of individuals, mainly women and children, had a passive positive relationship, meaning that they were part of the radical milieu but were rather passively exposed to radical narratives. Although they were not actual decision-makers in the process of departure, cases of support testify to their significance in radical socialization.

CHAPTER SIX: POST-WAR RADICAL MILIEUS AND THE IMPLICATIONS TO FOREIGN FIGHTER RECRUITMENT

6.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters showed that, on a macro-level, radical milieus may appear as the outcome of locally experienced wars. The presented empirics further demonstrated how, on a micro-level, influencers can appreciate, and thus accommodate, specific contextual factors into their mobilizing activities and narratives. From the discussed data in Chapters Four and Five, it is evident that recruitment does not follow the distribution of war atrocities in the region. Instead, the determining factor of recruitment is the path of radical influencers who fill the void left by war(s) with life guidance and religious values.

This chapter compares the evolution and the role of post-war radical milieus to understand the recruitment of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters. The dissertation, in this part, seeks to find out if the differences in the formation of the Bosnian and Albanian post-war radical milieus have implications to the recruitment of foreign fighters. The comparison is justified by the availability of two shared characteristics between the cases: both are set in ethno-linguistic communities in the Western Balkans (same region) and share similar legacies of war (same history).

The analysis follows the logic and order of the four theoretical propositions that have guided the two case studies (See Table 26). Each theoretical proposition is employed with specific analytical dimensions discussed at length in the next paragraphs. These analytical dimensions are tailored to identify variations in the evolution of post-war radical milieus and the roles of the involved actors, influencers, and followers. They derive from the knowledge generated through the analysis of the two cases.

Table 26 Theoretical propositions for the comparison of the Bosnian and Albanian post-war radical milieus.

Variable	Value	Definition
Origin	Cause of the conflict	Religion vs. Nationalism
	Age of the radical milieu	War duration and time since conflict
Structure	Power Centers	Domestic, External
Narratives	Messages spread by radical influencers	Religious vs. Defense Mobilization (closer to Salafism or to Revolutionary type of rhetoric)
Followers	Demographic features (Age/Sex)	
	Relationship with a radical milieu	Positive Active Positive Passive Negative
	Combat experience	Yes/No

First, post-war radical milieus may differ in their nature depending on the cause of the previously experienced conflict, the duration of the war, and the time since the conflict. The cause of the conflict, whether nationalistic and religious, may either restrict or encourage the appearance of post-war radical milieus as influencers and followers are present through rather established radical structures. It is not argued that the cause of a past conflict leads to variations in the numbers of foreign fighters, rather it reflects the quality of the radical milieu over time. The theoretical importance of the cause of a conflict suggests that post-war radical milieus that are given an impetus to appear are more resilient and more adaptable to external factors. Thus, they can easier embrace opportunities for a radical action.

Furthermore, the age of a post-war radical milieu matters to its consolidation, ability to maintain influence over time, adjust to changes in the external political and security environments, and grow. The time that has passed since a domestic conflict affects the ability of radical networks to secure resources and generate influence. Thus, the older the radical milieu, the better established its leadership and structures are.

Second, the available structures for post-war radical milieus may have implications for where recruitment takes place. The patterns of leadership networks, rooted in war and post-war

contexts, illustrates an extended influence that may overcome national and regional borders. The analytical distinction between domestic and external power centers investigated in the empirical chapters points to the idea that foreign fighter recruitment may be decentralized to various degrees in terms of influence within the radical milieu. Power centers, both internal and external to the radical milieu, have functions related to ideological influence, influence on individual and group socialization, logistical and financial support, and building spiritual authority. Hence, this analytical dimension concerns the way the "locality" of recruitment is understood. When thinking of recruitment as a grassroots phenomenon, the focus should be on the path of influencers, not the geographical location featured by one or another set of structural factors that may influence individual radicalization. Consequently, recruitment is explained through influencers' authority and facilitation.

Third, recruitment narratives may or may not utilize the memories of local atrocities; it will depend on the target audience and the strategic choices of local influencers. There has been a very limited use of references to domestically experienced wars, contrary to the prior expectations of this dissertation. This means that influencers can decide whether constructing recruitment stories around war memories benefit their goals. Yet, frames of Muslim victimization in post-war radical milieus have been embedded in the collective memory. Even without being explicitly used in the recruitment of foreign fighters, such frames served as a bridge to the cause of jihad promoted by influencers and thus made it more acceptable.

As war memories are inevitably related to the cause of a war, there is an analytical distinction between narratives that are closer to Salafism in the case of the Bosnian radical milieu versus the revolutionary type of rhetoric in the case of the Albanian radical milieu (Religious vs.

Defense Mobilization). Thus, this distinction between the narratives may show who the target audience of influencers' messages is and where influencers may look for potential followers.

Finally, all the discussed characteristics of a post-war radical milieu have implications for the demographic characteristics of a foreign fighter contingent, bringing together followers with and without previous exposure to combat. Individual relationships of followers with the radical milieu and its influencers (positive active, positive passive, or negative) may differ based on demographic but also socio-economic characteristics utilized by influencers for the sake of recruitment. Thinking of the foreign fighter recruitment from post-war radical milieus, it could be argued that war atrocities or particular fragility factors, such as poverty, made some followers become foreign fighters. Yet, the research refutes such a correlation. Data on killed and disappeared individuals during the war in Kosovo shows no positive empirical link between the high number of victims from certain places and the departures of foreign fighters to Syria (Kosovo Memory Book Database, UN Development Programme Kosovo).

On the contrary, departures appear in places where radical entities, such as Islamic NGOs, illegal praying congregations, and radical influencers, have had an ideological presence. In other words, foreign fighter recruitment could be understood as a continuation of a local war only if the role of local influencers is considered. Their pathways have been largely influenced by the local conflict as they could benefit from the ideological and material resources supporting the intervention of Salafism during the war and post-war periods.

However, to claim that foreign fighters in the Balkans have solely emerged from war and post-war factors would be incomplete. While war and post-war factors may be country-specific, some departures of foreign fighters appeared in spots untouched by any war. Thus, the argument is that radical influencers could recruit not only from communities exposed to the war and post-

war influx of Salafi missionaries in the 1990s but also reached new audiences in the region with no conflict legacy. In other words, influencers' targeted efforts over time have determined the exposure of larger micro-communities in the region to radical rhetoric and that speaks for community-specific rather country-specific dynamics.

6.2. Origin: The Cause of a Conflict and Age of the Radical Milieu

6.2.1 The Cause of a Conflict

The key analytical distinction here is between a cause of a conflict driven by religion, as in the case of BiH, and by nationalism, as in the case of Kosovo. This distinction aims to show that a cause of a conflict may either restrict or encourage the growth of a post-war radical milieu. Thus, religion and ethnicity should be understood as formative to post-war fragility that had arguably played a role in the growth of post-war radical milieus.

The legacy of the recent ethno-religious conflicts has made community formation in the Balkans tightly linked to religion and ethnicity, as both are often expressed through political and socio-cultural belonging. As many turned to religion in post-war societies, the Salafi movement in the region capitalized on the need for the restoration of an individual and collective sense of community and values. Although this process has been similar in both Bosnian and Albanian cases, there have been differences in how war and post-war actors and activities contributed to the spread of Salafism in relation to local conflicts. In the Bosnian case, there were identifiable pillars of the establishment of the radical milieu, whereas in the Albanian case, these "pillars" were either shallowly rooted in the local populations or absent (See Table 27).

Table 27 The establishment of post-war radical milieus.

Radical Milieu	Mujahideen fighters in a local conflict	Middle Eastern Humanitarian organizations	A network of local Salafi NGO
Bosnian	3	3	3

Albanian	1	2	2

* 1 – Absent; 2 – Present, with limited influence; 3 – Well-established.

In comparative terms, the conflict in BiH was more religiously than nationalistic driven. While religion was not the cause of the Bosnian War, it became a primary dividing line towards the end of the conflict. In contrast, the war in Kosovo was driven by the cause of Albanian nationalism, and therefore, religion had a limited to no role at all in the way the insurgency was framed by the fighting sides. The cause of nationalism in the Kosovo War arguably appeared as a barrier to more widespread radical religious values since the drive for establishing an independent nation was sufficiently strong enough to prevent the growth of a strong Salafi milieu that, by its nature, rejects nationalism in the name of the global Muslim community (*Ummah*). Hence, the cause of the conflict can be understood as either a permissive or restrictive factor in the establishment of post war radical milieus.

The different causes of the two wars had implications for the integration of foreign jihadi militant actors. The struggle of Bosnian Muslims could be more easily "explained" through the narrow framework of jihad, and thus, attract mujahideen fighters. As argued in Chapter Four, their presence was formative in ideological terms to the rise of local radical influencers. The presence of jihadi Salafists in the Bosnian War was noticeable through their participation in fights and war crimes committed in the ideological framework of jihad as a system of rules and beliefs. Consequently, the Bosnian radical milieu has grown particularly tied to the legacy of the war in the 1990s.

By contrast, the combination of religious and militant leadership offered by the mujahideen did not find much space in the context of the Kosovo War. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a nationalistic insurgency group by nature, did embrace the presence of jihadi militants in their ranks on a very small scale. Therefore, the spread of Salafism and its militant derivations were

very limited in the case of the Kosovo War compared to BiH. This explains the higher degree of integration of foreign jihadi militant actors in the Bosnian War and their partial to no integration in the case of Kosovo.

Thus, the Bosnian post-war radical milieu was initially inspired by foreign influencers, whereas they were rather absent in the formation of the Albanian radical milieu. In BiH, the el-Mujahid Detachment, formally disbanded in early 1996, remained a militant-ideological structure that transitioned from a war to a post-war structure, continuing its efforts for ideological influence. Demobilized foreign fighters and their families joined locals who had embraced Salafism and began settling in remote and isolated locations as a manifestation of their community belonging. By contrast, structures of such kind were not present in the aftermath of the Kosovo War. Thus, the Albanian radical milieu lacked an identifiable, charismatic leadership, and was more marginalized in the post-war years.

Furthermore, it has become evident that radical influencers and clusters of foreign fighters are particularly present where the extended communities of Albanian Muslims and Bosnian Muslims experienced a conflict, in Kosovo and BiH, respectively. This finding testifies to the significance of post-war radical milieus and, more specifically, to the importance of ideological resources distributed to local populations that fueled the evolution of the radical milieus. Due to the wars, ideological interventions along with humanitarian activities, such as donations, infrastructure projects, and rebuilding and building of mosques, houses, and schools, were stronger in BiH and Kosovo than in other parts of the Albanian Muslim and Bosnian Muslim communities.

In the Bosnian case, humanitarian aid was channeled through external centers of distribution, mainly in Zagreb and Vienna, where some of the Islamic organizations donating in the conflict zones had headquarters. This tendency facilitated the decentralization of the radical

milieu and its extension to Bosnian diaspora communities. In contrast, humanitarian activities in relation to the Kosovo War did not contribute significantly to the extension of the radical milieu to the Albanian diaspora. This can be explained by the more limited ideological resources invested into Albanian communities since the cause of the local conflict did not incentivize substantial investments in Salafism.

Finally, even if the cause of a conflict may play a restrictive role to the growth of a radical milieu, the subsequent "failure" of the cause could then be permissive to processes of radicalization. The Kosovo Albanian case provides strong empirical support to this claim. The failure of state-building, evidenced through weak state institutions, corruption, and/or social and economic inequality in the post-war period, allowed for the growth of the radical milieu. Due to the local population's disappointment with the state-building process, the emphasis on a national identity, which was essential during the war, diminished in the post-war years. As the commitment to a national cause faded following the end of the war in 1999 and the independence of Kosovo in 2008, there was a greater space for new causes, ideological influences, and new forms of community belonging. This tendency can be seen as a facilitating factor to the growth of Salafism and jihadi Salafism.

6.2.2. Age of the radical milieu

The age of a radical milieu in relation to a local conflict is another aspect seen as a factor to the evolution of radical actors and activities. It points both to the duration of the war and the length of time between the local conflict and the recruitment of foreign fighters. The Bosnian War (1992-1995) was sufficiently prolonged and atrocious to accommodate radical extreme ideologies and their influencers, a process that, in comparative terms, was limited in the case of Kosovo.

Although the time difference between the two wars is less than a decade, time still played a role in the establishment of the post-war radical milieus. The age of a radical milieu indicates the magnitude of radical influence over the targeted communities as well as the quality of social ties among local influencers. The Bosnian radical milieu is older and therefore, well-established and influential. The Albanian one, on the other hand, is younger, and this may explain its looser structure. As the war-related proliferation of Salafism and the formation of a radical milieu is a more recent phenomenon in the Albanian case, the jihadi supporting groups have also been more recent in their establishment. Therefore, the age of a post-war radical milieu can be understood as impacting radical influencers' ability to build influence and structures.

Furthermore, the time frame of country-specific dynamics, such as a war, could further facilitate or limit the emergence of an extended radical leadership on a regional level, within the same radical milieu. For instance, the first attempts to introduce Salafism in Kosovo and N. Macedonia happened towards the end of the 1990s, whereas this process in Albania began almost a decade earlier after the collapse of communism. The difference of when different parts of the Albanian population were introduced to Salafism may be seen as a factor that drew dividing lines in the radical milieu and created separate power centers. This process led to more limited cooperation among Albanian jihadi Salafists in the region, including in the process of foreign fighter recruitment.

6.3. Structure: Power Centers in the Core of the Radical Milieu

Power centers in post-war radical milieus speak for the concentration of local influencers' authority. There are several observations that help in understanding the structure of radical influence in post-war radical milieus. First, influencers have been educated by different sponsorship circles based in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or other Islamic countries, and this has led to

ideological disagreements on certain issues. Ideological arguments, concerning the promotion and non-promotion of violence or the relationship with the state and religious norms, draw diving lines between influencers in the core and periphery of the radical milieu. Second, factors in the external political and security environments, such as the post-9/11 security crackdown on local Islamic charities, had effects on the capabilities of radical influencers. Third, influencers can build different structures of influence across post-war radical milieus, depending on the ideological and material resources they can rely on. Fourth, pre-existing social ties and geographical proximity can play a major role in the cooperation between radical influencers at the regional level. Finally, the path of humanitarian aid and refugee flows are conducive factors to establishing external power centers of influence set in diaspora communities.

All these observations testify to the variations in the influence and cooperation of radical actors at the local level. The post-war radical milieus studied in this dissertation are characterized by strong leadership ties at national, regional, and diaspora levels. Looking at identifiable signs of cooperation in both the Bosnian and Albanian radical miliues, such as guest lectures, preparation of extremist attacks, and the recruitment and facilitation of foreign fighters, leadership ties have overcome national borders while being established along ethno-linguistic and cultural similarities (See Table 28).

Table 28 Leadership ties in the Bosnian and Albanian Radical Milieus.

Leadership ties	**Radical milieu**	
	Bosnian	**Albanian**
Country-based	*Strong*	*Strong*
Regional	*Strong*	*Medium*
Diaspora	*Strong*	*Weak*

*Strong ties: cooperation in propaganda and recruitment activities
Medium ties: cooperation in propaganda but recruitment is managed separately by different radical influencers in the region

It is evident from the empirical research that power centers that overcome national borders manage to mobilize a larger number of followers and, consequently, the number of foreign fighter departures from these areas is also significant. The empirical examples from the dissertation are, in the case of the Albanian radical milieu, the influencers active along the border between Kosovo and N. Macedonia, and influencers linking groups from BiH and Sandžak, Serbia, in the case of the Bosnian one.

One possible explanation of the cooperation/non-cooperation among influencers at the regional level refers to geographical proximity. This is particularly evident from influencers who choose to be active in bordering areas. On the other hand, even if pre-existing leadership ties were available, the geographical distance in some cases may prevent radical leaders from regular cooperation, understood as guest lectures, socialization with followers, or other similar activities. For instance, in Albanian radical milieu's separate power centers, radical influencers in Albania were slightly detached from the cooperation between those from Kosovo and N. Macedonia. While the distance between Tirana and Pristina is 250 km, the one between Skopje and the border with Kosovo is only 24 km, which facilitated influencers active in this area to travel and build influence.

Furthermore, radical influencers could build different structures of influence across post-war radical milieus depending on the ideological and material resources they could rely on. One could argue that relying on more substantial resources for the proliferation of Salafism in the post-war period, Bosnian radical influencers could build a better-established infrastructure of radical settlements and parajamaats compared to their Albanian counterparts and, therefore, reach a larger number of followers. They could further rely on the well-established channels from the humanitarian aid given in the 1990s and thus expand the presence of the radical milieu abroad.

By contrast, the Albanian radical milieu lacked distinct power centers in the Albanian diaspora. The presented data points to a number of offshoots without a centralized or particularly influential external leadership. Concerning diaspora ties, the recruitment process in Albania was linked to communities in Italy, while Albanian jihadists from Kosovo and N. Macedonia have established better links with radical circles in Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium. One possible explanation leads to the local emigration histories. The Kosovo-N. Macedonian diaspora has a longer history, with already some people in the 2nd and 3rd generation, as both countries were previously part of Yugoslavia and their citizens could travel freely. Meanwhile Albanians from Albania have only had this opportunity since the early 1990s. These processes have had implications for the way Salafi circles within diaspora communities have emerged and consolidated in the recent decades.

While individual pathways matter to extending leadership ties to diaspora, ideological and organizational "roads" have linked those who used to be close to humanitarian aid distribution and support for mujahideen fighters in the Bosnian War in the 1990s with those who inspired Bosnian fighters to join radical groups within the context of the Syrian War. Back in the 1990s, several Islamic organizations with offices in Vienna were active in sending aid to BiH. At that time, Jusuf Barčić, one of the core founders of the Salafi movement in BiH, himself was the representative of the Vienna-based International Islamic Relief Organization for the city of Zenica, BiH (Becirević 2018, 18). This illustrates the link between the money flows for humanitarian aid and the early establishment of the Salafi movement after the war. Barčić's influence over the early development of the Salafi movement in BiH was enormous and his legacy has remained alive until today, years after his death in a car accident in 2007.

Consequently, the resources available due to the war and post-war fragility could facilitate the growth of radical authority and create various patterns of leadership ties. The leadership ties in the case the Bosnian radical milieu illustrate a strong mentor – successor link. One example is [redacted], one of the key jihadi Salafi leaders in charge of the radical settlement in Gornja Maoča, who joined al-Nusra in Syria in 2015. Long before the outbreak of the Syrian War, he was well-respected within the larger radical milieu, a close associate of Barčić. The empirical examination of the Bosnian radical milieu's leadership network indicates that despite the fragmentation of the Salafi community over time, its adherents look mostly to the legacy of the same influencers who had gained influence over targeted communities.

On the other hand, the leadership ties in the Albanian radical milieu are evidence for the combination of ideological and militant leadership operating on both sides of the recruitment channel, i.e. local and battlefield influencers. The research has identified specific roles that illustrate the power dynamics between local and battlefield influencers. For instance, local influencers in the case of Kosovo were in charge of setting the ideological agenda, whereas battlefield influencers had combined ideological and operational functions in terms of integrating arriving foreign fighters from the Balkans into the existing combat units.

Evidently, from the presented data, post-war radical milieus, in some areas, lacked charismatic leadership. Some influencers were more popular with followers than others due to personal qualities and charisma, and therefore, they were perceived as "inspirational" figures in the recruitment process. Nonetheless, their influence was magnified through the social ties with less impactful but very proactive radical influencers across the region. This trend is particularly evident in the case of Montenegro, considered a part of the Bosnian radical milieu. Although

radical influencers were not among the strongest voices of violent propaganda, they were tied to key figures of radical influence in BiH, such as [redacted] and [redacted].

Table 29 Comparing key characteristics of Bosnian and Albanian influencers.

	Albanian influencers		**Bosnian influencers**	
	[redacted]	**Lavdrim Muhaxheri**	[redacted]	[redacted]
Born	1979	1989	1979	1976
Role	Imam at the mosque "Al-Kuddus" in Gjilan, Kosovo	A commander of Albanian IS fighters in Syria	A leader of the Salafi settlement in Gornja Maoča, BiH	Influential in Ošve, Bočinja, Bihać, BiH
Departure to Syria	No	Yes	Yes	No
Education Background	Saudi Arabia	No religious education	Saudi Arabia	Syria
Previous Combat/Military Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

All four influencers listed in Table 29 belong to the "core" of post-war radical milieus. This means that, according to the collected data, they actively promoted violence while recruiting foreign fighters between 2012 and 2016. Influencers of Albanian and Bosnian radical milieus share characteristics but also differ in key biographical features that matter to their image of authority figures. Influencers' authority in the Bosnian radical milieu is overwhelmingly built on the image of religious leaders. In comparison, the sample of Albanian influencers points to individual profiles characterized more by militarism than ideology. In addition, Albanian influencers are generally younger. These characteristics have arguably added a revolutionary sound to the rhetoric of local influencers.

Looking at the profile of [redacted] considered as the most notorious Albanian jihadist in Syria, it is evident that revolutionary biographical characteristics prevail over ideological ones. Unlike most radical influencers, [redacted] did not have an education background from the Middle East, which did not prevent him from building ideological influence.

More importantly, his experience as a former employee of NATO and KFOR adds a value of militancy to his profile and creates the image of authority capable of mastering ideology and combat.

This observation matters in two respects. First, influencers do not limit their influence to ideology, meaning, they are not only radical imams, and they may seek to demonstrate skills as militant commanders. Second, radical influencers do not remain active only at the grassroots level. They can also be authority figures on the battlefield side of the recruitment channel where they receive foreign fighters, organize, and command military units.

6.4. Narratives: Religious vs. Defense-Mobilization Rhetoric

In 2019, I conducted an interview with Judge Amela Huskić who oversaw the case of [redacted]. In her memory of the trial, [redacted] was challenging her "representativeness" as she was appointed by a state institution, namely, the court. This moment illustrates the general rhetoric of radical influencers tailored to oppose the concept of the secular state. The narratives employed by influencers in post-war radical milieus can be summarized as follows: disobedience towards the state; no participation in elections; no interactions with state institutions, including police, judiciary, and public administration; disobedience towards the local religious institutions; opposing national and historical symbols; disrespect towards family members who do not pray; and no social interaction with people outside the community.

The primary expectation concerning narratives was that influencers of post-war radical milieus would utilize war memories in tandem with global jihadist propaganda in order to target local audiences. This theoretical proposition assumes that influencers could act strategically in the way that they engaged with radical rhetoric. The empirical data presented in Chapters Four and Five have shown that influencers rarely refer to local conflicts to mobilize fighters for Syria.

Nonetheless, frames of Muslim victimization that have combined atrocities against Muslims with the virtue of jihad have inevitably touched upon memories of the local conflicts. Considering that 60% of the recruits from Kosovo were between 18 and 28 years old, one can assume that a significant part of the sample includes people with early childhood or adolescent memories of the conflict. In contrast, the sample of Bosnian fighters includes a lower number of individuals who personally experienced the war. Whether war memories were a motivational factor at the individual level is less important than if followers were exposed to radical socialization in post-war radical milieus. There influencers sought to utilize present feelings of social frustration by awakening past grievances in an attempt to connect the memory of past wars to the conflict in Syria.

There are various, specific vulnerabilities related to the post-conflict features of a society that radical influencers may exploit, such as fragile identities or a general dissatisfaction with the state and society. Radical influencers describe government and religious institutions as oppressive and hostile toward Muslims and thus portray them as enemies. By employing the global IS narrative that connects the mythology of jihad with atrocities committed against Muslims, influencers in post-war radical milieus create a sense of belonging for those who seek to identify with a greater cause or a broader community. Usually, followers have not found this in the available institutions or norms in the mainstream society.

Most followers belonging to the Albanian radical milieu, who then became foreign fighters, have experienced the Kosovo War, yet they were too young to have participated. They may have grown up after the war but their views have been shaped by the past. Therefore, the narrative of being a part of an attacked community without the ability to defend itself turned out to be a fertile ground for radical messages. Local influencers could frame the conflict in Syria as a second chance

to defend the extended Muslim community, emphasizing "the suffering Muslim brothers and sisters in Syria".

The different causes of the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars have arguably had implications for the narratives employed by influencers to recruit foreign fighters. The significant ideological resources available in the post-war context of BiH have secured radical narratives that are more tightly linked to religiosity, whereas this research has identified a more revolutionary emphasis in the available frames in the Albanian radical milieu. Although both Bosnian and Albanian influencers relied on the framework of Salafism to justify what good Muslims are expected to do in the context of the Syrian War, the historical experiences of the two radical milieus allowed for variations in the way influencers could refer to past grievances over nationalism or religion. As nationalism, rather than religion, was a key concept in the Kosovo War, this insurgency did not incentivize Islamic actors in the war and post-war period to develop a jihadi Salafi rhetoric that could influence followers on a large scale.

By contrast, the presented data on the Bosnian radical milieu show no references to nationalism in influencers' rhetoric that could exploit anger or any pre-existing dividing lines with the Serbs and Croats living in BiH. Yet, the narratives that portray "the others" rely on religious opposition, calling on local adherents to "kill Christians, Jews". This ideological framing has largely borrowed from militant Salafi propaganda used in previous wars. In some cases, Bosnian influencers refer to the Bosnian genocide as a way to magnify the sense of threat to the Muslim community.

In addition to religious messaging, influencers in post-war radical milieus further use references to the state-building process, which they see as a failure. Radical Salafists have been opposing the Dayton Accords ever since the end of the war, and this rhetoric was present during

the days of active recruitment. Similarly, the project of state building in Kosovo has been perceived and presented as a source of frustration and major disappointment by local identity producers. Rejecting nationalism, a concept generally positively perceived among Albanians, was part of the rhetoric of the Albanian radical influencers. To delegitimize the role of officially appointed imams, Salafi preachers would argue that "the spirit of nationalism" was "installed" through the practice of [89]formal religious leaders.[90]

6.5. Followers

There are three analytical characteristics that help in understanding who in post-radical milieus is targeted to become a foreign fighter. First, I point to demographic characteristics, which show variations across the two cases of interest. Second, I examine the relationship of followers with the radical milieu before their departure to the battlefield. Finally, I look at foreign fighters with previous combat experience in attempt to profile them and reflect on their experiences in the post-war radical milieu between the domestic war in which they took part and the one in Syria.

6.5.1. Age

The demographic characteristics of foreign fighters from post-war radical milieus do not differ significantly from those western European radical milieus. The Bosnian and Albanian contingents consist mostly of men in their 20s and 30s, and in both cases, at least 30 percent of those who traveled to Syria were women and minors. This indicates that the majority did not experience domestic conflicts in their adulthood. In comparative terms, Bosnian foreign fighters are "older" than their Albanian counterparts. Despite the fact that the most common age of those

[90] Reference to a quote by [redacted], sentenced to 10 years in Albania for the recruitment of Albanian foreign fighters.

who went to Syria was 22, the average age of Bosnian men upon departure was 31. Data on fighters who were in their 40s or 50s shows that they were either part of the El-Mujahideen or close to members of this unit during the Bosnian War. Thus, the three distinguishable generations of Bosnian fighters indicate the Bosnian radical milieu's ability to link people with previous combat experience and radical socialization to those who were newly born Islamists, in terms of ideological views and fighting skills.

Furthermore, the pattern of family migration (*hijra*) from the radical milieu to the IS caliphate, widely present across both cases, demonstrates families who traveled to Syria had no intention of returning to their home countries. In comparative terms, family hijra was performed by more people from the Bosnian radical milieu than the Albanian one. The collected data points to at least 47 couples of Bosnian origin from BiH, Serbia, and Montenegro who took the journey to the battlefields, whereas 37 couples are known to have been part of the Albanian contingent, according to the data. Although this data is not exhaustive, one possible explanation for the higher representation of families across the Bosnian contingent is that the Bosnian radical milieu had more resources to act as a community, socializing entire families by creating a strong sense of brotherhood and, therefore, having the quality to encourage family hijra.

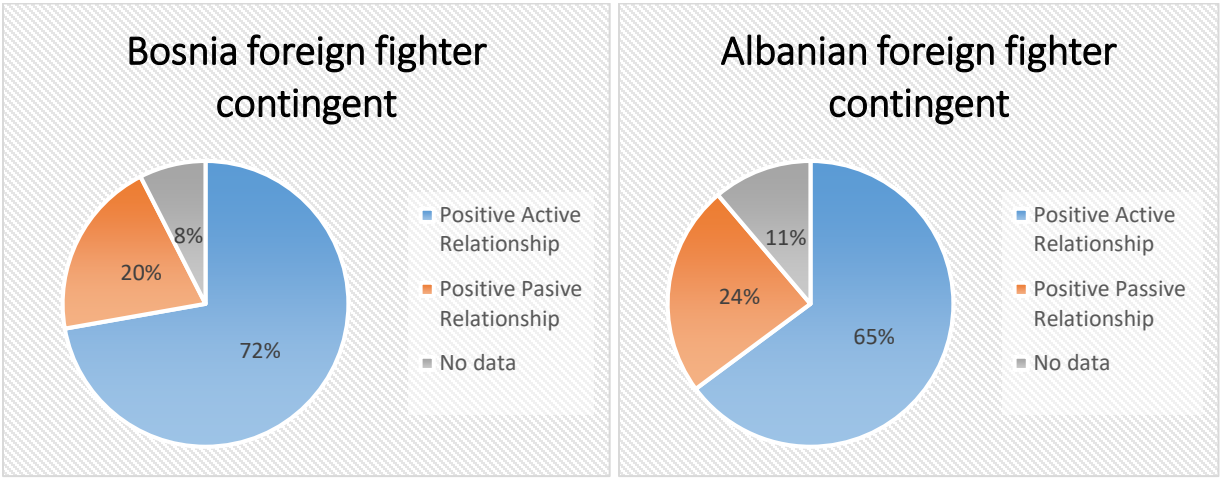
6.5.2. The Relationship of Followers with the Radical Milieu

6.5.2.1. Positive Active Relationship

To understand who is targeted to become a foreign fighter in post-war radical milieus, the dissertation has relied upon an analytical distinction between followers having a positive active or a positive passive relationship with their radical milieu. The presented data in Chapter Four and Five suggest that the overwhelming majority of male followers, who eventually became foreign fighters, had a positive active relationship with their post-war radical milieus. Before departing for

Syria or Iraq, most attended sermons given by radical influencers and religious gatherings, or they engaged in online discussions that promoted the idea of jihad and defending it by participating in the battlefield. These activities mattered to their radical socialization, as they could get information about contacts, logistics, and financial support to travel to the warzone. Consequently, they were arguably decision-makers regarding their departures (See Figure 18).

Figure 18 The Relationship of Bosnian and Albanian Followers with the Radical Milieu.



The number of those who have had a positive active relationship with the radical milieu is relatively higher in the case of Bosnian fighters compared to the Albanian ones. Data on the Bosnian foreign fighter contingent shows that out of the 306 individuals in the dataset, 221 had a positive active relationship, 62 a positive passive one, and for 23 cases, there is no data. Data on the Albanian foreign fighter contingent shows that out of 315, 204 had a positive active relationship, while 78 had a positive passive one, and for about 33 of the cases, the data was not available. Despite the lack of data on the prior socialization of all individuals in the dataset, there are almost no cases that can be classified as a negative relationship with the radical milieu.

The qualitative evidence collected for this research suggests that, almost without exception, most individuals were exposed to radical socialization before their departure. Examples include

attending sermons in particular mosques, being a part of social networks, including other individuals who departed to Syria, online and offline participation in discussions related to the ongoing conflict in Syria, or contact with local radical influencers. Yet, it would be an over-simplification to argue that all foreign fighters were targeted to intentionally have their individual mindsets changed in order to create radical individuals prone to violence and to convince them to travel to a foreign battlefield.

Looking at the radical milieu in a continuum between the domestic wars and the one in Syria, radical influencers seek, spot, and exploit vulnerabilities. They identify their followers and approach them without necessarily having the intention to send them to a warzone, which was a pattern that only emerged in the context of the Syrian War and the rise of IS. The majority of followers who had a positive active relationship with the radical milieu were not in pursuit of any violent actions in Syria and Iraq, nor were they born terrorists.

Yet, when encouraged to think of becoming a foreign fighter as a religious duty, they could easily rationalize this action in the context of belonging to the radical milieu. Drawing on evidence from the Albanian radical milieu, at least 30 percent of followers who became foreign fighters were previously tied to power centers of radical influencers. They were exposed to propaganda, shifts in ideology, and opportunities to act upon their radical views. Therefore, followers could be active participants in the decision-making process concerning their departure and further influence other people, e.g. family members and friends, to join.

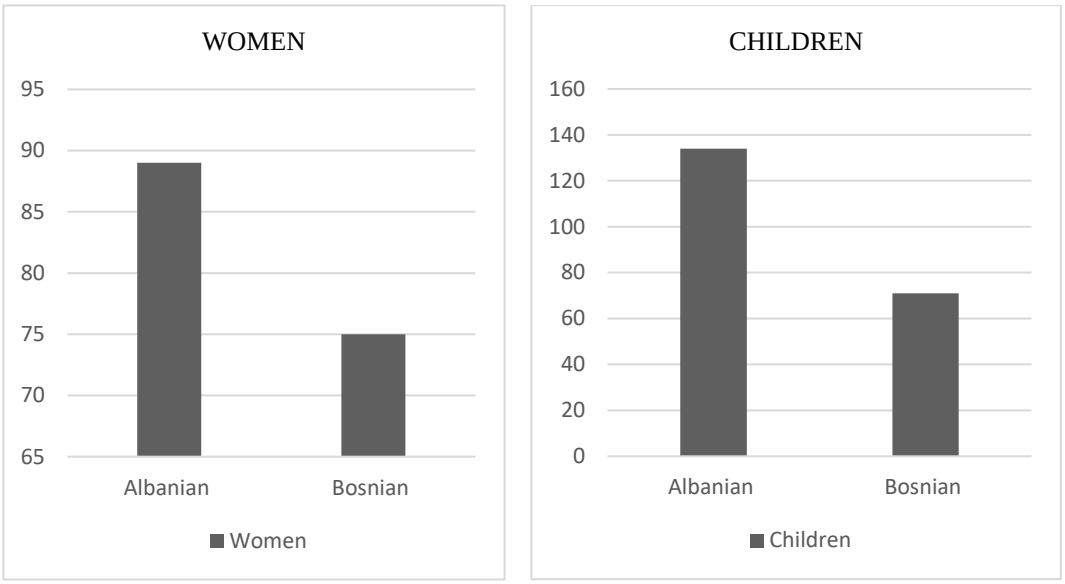
6.5.2.2. Positive Passive Relationship

By contrast, followers who did not actively participate in such activities but were exposed to propaganda and radical socialization prior their travel are seen as having a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu. Most often, these were women or children who followed a family member, e.g. their brother, father, or husband, in their foreign fighter journey. With some

exceptions of pre-departure activism, women and children were less connected to radical influencers compared to their male relatives. This indicates a more limited access to information about going to Syria and, thus, a decision-making process that is tied to family relations instead of community ones.

While the majority of men are known to have attended sermons and been actively socialized into circles led by radical influencers, women were more often influenced through family members. The pattern of "following the husband" typically appears in post-war radical milieus – either through pre-existing marital ties or through a match over social media followed by a marriage under Sharia law. The widely promoted role for women of being a mother and raising the next generation of the "caliphate" was seen as an opportunity for women from the region who traveled to the warzone to feel fulfilled. Thus, the large-scale recruitment of women from the Balkans can be further understood as a response to the sense of empowerment offered by the IS propaganda and tailored to specifically target women (See Figure 6. 2). Yet, the actual decision-making in the majority of cases was done by husbands in nuclear families or fathers, brothers, and sons in extended ones. This is evident from the data showing that initially only men traveled to the battlefield before bringing their wives and children to the "caliphate".

Figure 19 Approximate number of women and children from the Western Balkans who traveled to Syria and Iraq (2012-16).



Note: *No data on the number of children from N. Macedonia who travelled to Syria with their families.

Although the majority of women who traveled to the warzone intended to perform the traditional roles of wives and mothers, in several cases discussed in Chapter Four and Five, these traditional roles were replaced by militant ones. One example is [redacted] a woman from Kosovo, who traveled to Syria with her husband and once in the battlefield, she obtained an active battlefield role running an IS female camp. Therefore, the empirical research in both cases has refuted the assumption that all women had a positive passive relationship with the radical milieu.

6.5.3. Combat experience

Attention should be drawn to the cluster that is specific to post-war radical milieus, which is the one that is composed of fighters with previous combat experience from domestic wars. Interestingly, the number of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters who fought in domestic wars before going to Syria is rather limited compared to the overall samples (5 to 10 percent). Meanwhile, at least 30 percent of the men who traveled to Syria from both the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus had previous criminal records, including terrorism, illegal arms possession, theft, armed robbery, drug and human trafficking, rape, and domestic violence. Thus,

the number of fighters with previous criminal records, involving exposure to varying degrees of violence, is significantly higher than the one with war experience. Although still a number of individuals who fought in Syria and were searched by Interpol at that time (See Table 6. 6) had participated in the 1990s wars in the Balkans.

Table 30 Interpol notices for suspects from the Western Balkans linked to terrorism-related activities or foreign fighting in Syria or Iraq.

Albanian fighters	***Notices***	**Bosnian fighters**	***Notices***
Albania	4	Bosnia and Herzegovina	90 (42 red notices & 48 blue notices)
North Macedonia	3	Montenegro	No data
Kosovo	40	Serbia	3

While the percentage of people with individual criminal history is significant, those who participated in past wars is much lower. The number of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) former militants in the dataset on Albanian foreign fighters is also limited compared to the overall sample. In my dataset on Albanian fighters, there are eight cases of individuals, formerly affiliated with the KLA. The average profile of fighters within this sample has several key characteristics. He is between 30 and 38 years old; has weaponry skills and knowledge prior to his departure to Syria; and has ties to Islamist circles. An illustration of this profile is the case of Naman Demolli, the first Albanian Muslim fighter reportedly killed in Syria in November 2012. He was 35 years old at the time of his departure to Syria, a KLA veteran, and an activist for a radical Islamic movement that turned into a political party in Kosovo.

In a 2019 study on Albanian foreign fighters, Shtuni refers to at least 14 ethnic Albanian fighters with previous warfare experience or formal military training (Shtuni 2015). In Shtuni's dataset there are ten individuals who are former members of the KLA or the National Liberation

Army (NLA), previously active in N. Macedonia.[91] Shtuni's research points to four former Albanian Army Commandos. Media reports suggest they traveled to the conflict zone in groups and that the number of KLA veterans who fought in Syria may be even higher. In a 2013 quote in a news article, a KLA veteran argues that he was planning to join the war in Syria "with about a dozen war comrades, experts in different weaponry" (Hajdari 2013).

In comparative terms, Bosnian foreign fighters with experience in the Bosnian War are older; at the time of departure, they were in their mid- to late 40s. Previously, they were part of the el-Mujahid unit and constituted less than 10 percent of the Bosnian contingent in Syria. Out of 224 men in the dataset, I could identify only seven who were former members of the el-Mujahid unit during the Bosnian War. Despite their combat experience, they did not obtain any specific leadership roles in the recruitment of foreign fighters to Syria.

One possible explanation is that veterans from the Bosnian War did not necessarily stay closely tied with the radical milieu throughout the years and instead, tried to move on with their lives after the war. The case of [redacted] who joined el-Mujahid in 1994 supports this claim empirically. [redacted] worked as a driver and mechanic for years after the Bosnian War before he decided to travel to Syria and join the fight against the Assad's regime, in his words. In addition, some influencers in post-war radical milieus had a background in the war, but they did not travel to the battlefield themselves. A telling example is the profile of [redacted], a key recruiter, who in the 1990s, was a part of the network around the el-Mujahid unit. The example of [redacted] shows that some radical influencers perceived their role of authority in the radical milieu as more important than joining the cause of the jihad and becoming warriors themselves.

[91] National Liberation Army (NLA) was a militant organization operating in N. Macedonia in 2001 and was closely associated with KLA.

The war-to-war profiles of Bosnian and Albanian combatants points to an important feature related to causes of domestic wars. The profiles of Bosnian former el-Mujahid fighters who fought in Syria is characterized more by religiosity. For some among them the Syrian War was perhaps seen as a continuation of the jihad in the 1990s. Whereas Albanian former KLA combatants who traveled to the battlefield can be described as closer to militants in their profiles. A shared characteristic between the two groups of militants is that they took family members to Syria and convinced members of their extended social networks to also become foreign fighters.

6.6. Conclusion

To conclude, differences in the formation of the Bosnian and Albanian post-war radical milieus have implications regarding the recruitment of foreign fighters. Post-war radical milieus, as the outcome of war and post-war experiences, share origins, structures, and narratives, and they offer largely identical pools of potential followers. However, the Syrian War was a catalyst that magnified the specificities of the Bosnian and the Albanian radical milieus in relation to their respective conflicts. Although the Bosnian and Albanian contingents embraced the same cause, followed identical recruitment patterns, and contributed to the same conflict, their different histories point to variations that enrich our knowledge about recruitment from post-war radical milieus.

On the macro-level, the different causes of the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars encouraged variations in the emergence of post-war radical milieus. These processes have influenced the capacity of radical influencers at the micro-level to take advantage of pre-existing discursive opportunities set by local wars and to capitalize on their authority within the framework of the Syrian War. Thus, the social interaction between radical influencers and followers is defined by

the discursive opportunity structure, meaning, that radical ideas and norms spread in the post-war period could facilitate the reception of specific forms of collective action framing.

The analytical dimensions discussed in this chapter point to several key findings (See Table 31). First, fighters who originate from post-war radical milieus are mostly not individuals with a past experience of domestic wars. Rather, they were overwhelmingly socialized into radical milieus that appeared as byproducts of domestic wars. The causes of the conflict, the war duration, and the length of time since the war to the recruitment of foreign fighters had implications for the local influencers' ability to grow their influence, as in both cases, they could rely on different resources.

Table 31 Theoretical propositions and their empirical manifestations in the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus.

Variable		**Albanian Radical Milieu**	**Bosnian Radical Milieu**
Origin	Cause of the conflict	Nationalism	Religion
	Age of the radical milieu	(1998-99)	(1992 – 1995)
Structure	Power centers	Domestic	Domestic and external
Narratives	Messages spread radical influencers	Defense Mobilization: militancy combined with Muslim victimhood (Revolutionary type of rhetoric)	Religious, closer to Salafism
Followers	Demographic features (Age/Sex) Men Women Minors	No substantial generational variations, as more than 30 percent were in their early 20s before going to Syria. About 60 percent of all Kosovo Albanian fighters were born between 1986 and 1996. Two generations can be distinguished: 18-26 and 26-35.	Three generations: ➢ 40-50 years old ➢ 26-35 years old ➢ 18 – 25 years old Youth from urban centers throughout BiH; 5-10% ex-combatants from the Bosnian War; former members of the el-Mujahedeen
	Combat experience	10 of cases in the dataset	8 of cases in the dataset
	Relationship with a radical milieu	204 of all cases had positive active relationship 78 of all cases had positive passive relationship	221 of cases had positive active relationship 62 of all cases had positive passive relationship

The identified differences in the formation of post-war radical milieus for foreign fighter recruitment leave us with four implications. First, as radical milieus are not identical in terms of

history, motivation, and resources, radical influencers rely on various combinations of political opportunities, structures, and cultural frames to mobilize support. This knowledge helps to identity who gets targeted to become a foreign fighter. Second, insights into the formation of post-war radical milieus can uncover the profile of radical influencers, and therefore, their choice to engage with violet rhetoric or not. Knowing the profiles of individual influencers hints at possible leadership networks and the expected clusters of followers in these networks. Whether these networks rely on domestic or also external centers of influence helps to assess the potential geographical spread of recruitment, i.e. if radical milieus are centralized in a given country or region, or if they will expand to diaspora communities.

Third, the macro-narrative of jihad (IS global propaganda) has heavily relied on micro-narratives inherited from recent domestic wars in post-war radical milieus. Depending on the cause of a domestically experienced conflict, influencers may employ more ideological or more revolutionary messages. These choices reveal where influencers may look for prospective fighters, and whether they will seek to magnify more religious or more revolutionary narratives. Finally, the history of a post-war radical milieu has implications to the gender and demographic profiles of the recruited foreign fighters. Fighters who previously took part in combat differ in their age, relationship with a radical milieu, and activism, and this depends on when they experienced a domestic war.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the evolution and the role of post-war radical milieus to understand the recruitment of Albanian and Bosnian foreign fighters between 2012 and 2016. In doing so, it has pointed to the origins and dynamics of local radical influencers in relation to the legacy of war. This was to address the gaps left by previous research on European jihadists that did not focus on indigenous Muslim communities with recent experiences in conflict and a high number of foreign fighters. The research has demonstrated the potential of analyzing foreign fighters, not only as individual actors, but also as part of a group phenomenon, with boundaries that are determined by pre-existing social relations. This dissertation has provided insights into social structures and decision-making processes concerning departures to Syria by looking at the pre-departure socialization of foreign fighters into Salafi milieus.

The dissertation has addressed the research objectives by going back and forth between the theoretical approach and my empirical research many times. The application of the Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS) to foreign fighter recruitment is a new way of looking at the phenomenon of foreign fighters. This framework has proved to be a helpful theoretical lens in discovering that local Salafi milieus preceded the IS global recruitment campaign but were dependent on discursive opportunities for action, namely the outbreak of the Syrian War and the rise of IS. As radical influence is a function of the context characterized by war and post-war fragility, radical influencers' strategic choices to recruit foreign fighters are also based on the opportunities embedded in the local political, security, and cultural contexts.

The debate whether European jihadism is leader-led or leaderless has guided both the framework and empirical analysis in this dissertation. It turns out that choosing either of the answers may be incomplete or misleading. On the one hand, the global IS recruitment campaign

from the early days of the caliphate in 2014 showed the power of a top-down agenda-setting process that drew many people to Iraq and Syria. On the one hand, the clusters of foreign fighter departures once again showed the power of social networks over ideology. While recruitment of IS foreign fighters is highly decentralized, local radical milieus secured both resilient social structures and authority, concentrated in power centers. Therefore, the process is not entirely organized from the bottom-up.

The dissertation has engaged with the two major debates between Hoffman (2006) – Sageman (2008) and Roy (2004) - Kepel (2005) concerned with the origin of the jihadi threat to show that the foreign fighter phenomenon is highly contextualized in the recruitment phase. The understanding that local radical milieus differ in their histories challenges the generalized approach used by researchers in analyzing foreign fighters. It particularly contests the argument that sees "marginalization in the West" as a trigger of recruitment. The analysis of the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus has demonstrated that IS foreign fighters can also come from indigenous Muslim communities with very different experiences from the ones in Western Europe. Taking the legacy of war as an essential contextual variable made it possible to theorize the departure of foreign fighters from post-war radical milieus. This way, the dissertation addressed the need for explaining structures and dynamics set in a context instead of searching for a universal answer that could explain individual departures from various parts of the world.

The dissertation finds that foreign fighter recruitment is not leaderless in the context of a radical milieu, and thus, it stresses the importance of relationships that emerged from local conflicts. Unlike in radical milieus in Western Europe, post-war radical milieus have the resources to institutionalize radical authority due to the fragility of the context. They are the continuation of local conflicts not in a militarized way but rather an ideological one, as they permit the persistence

of radical values. Thus, post-war radical milieus shape foreign fighter recruitment by providing radical influencers with the authority to manage structures and narratives that encourage radical action. These informal authority figures are easily "institutionalized" in societies marked by recent conflicts, as these figures offer values, belonging, and a sense of community. Consequently, foreign fighter departures do not follow the geographical locations of war atrocities in the Balkans but the of radical influencers, filling the void left by the war with life guidance and values.

What the dissertation found at the macro-level is that post-war radical milieus, which appear as the outcome of locally experienced conflicts, may vary in their evolution. Variations depend on the cause of a conflict, the duration of the war, and the time since the conflict. As post-war radical milieus may lack identifiable links to terror groups, they do not represent communities generally supportive to terrorism. It is, however, a venue that allows for radical socialization, with a focus on the influence of informal authority figures over targeted populations.

What the dissertation found at the micro-level is that radical influencers can be profiled based on their prior socialization into post-war Salafi circles. They perform social, ideological, and organizational functions, and thus, generate authority over followers. While the recruitment of jihadists in post-violent societies takes place in already established radical milieus, influencers have the freedom to choose whether and when to take advantage of their influence and encourage participation in violence. Therefore, global and local radical communities are connected through radical influencers and the way they perceive and take advantage of opportunities for a radical action.

These finding have four key implications to what we know about foreign fighters. First, we should recognize that that jihadists in Europe, who originate from radical milieus, are not identical in terms of history, motivation, and resources. They rely on a different combination of political

opportunities, organizing structures, and cultural frames to mobilize support. This knowledge is useful to identify who gets targeted to become a foreign fighter. Second, knowing who the influencers are provides insights into the leadership networks and clusters of followers around them. This helps to understand whether radical milieus rely on only domestic or also external power centers; in other words, whether they are more centralized in a given geographical area or if they are connected to other countries where respective diaspora networks are present. This finding may be helpful in doing threat assessments of foreign fighter recruitment, as it can provide information about the possible geographical spread of the process.

Third, narratives of IS recruitment benefit from jihadi Salafi narratives, pre-existing in post-war radical milieus. Depending on the cause of a domestically experienced conflict, radical influencers may employ more religious or more revolutionary messages. These choices tell us where influencers look for foreign fighters and whether potential recruits are more or less committed to the religious framework of the radical narratives. In other words, the cause of a conflict hints at whether recruits have a more ideologically-driven or revolutionary profile. Finally, the history of a post-war radical milieu has implications for the demographic profiles of the recruited foreign fighters. Fighters who previously took part in combat differ in age and in their relationship with the radical milieu.

The dissertation has made both theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature on foreign fighters. The dissertation has established a theoretical link between the foreign fighter phenomenon and the spread of radical ideas as a side effect of a war in a European context. The research has conceptualized foreign fighter radical milieus that appear as a result of war. In addition, the research has shifted the analytical focus from recruits to their influencers by studying radical influence in post-war radical milieus. Empirically, the dissertation has provided insights

into group dynamics between followers and influencers in the Bosnian and Albanian radical milieus.

This dissertation is a ground for several suggestions for further research on foreign fighters. First, when analyzing recruitment, future research should consider the roles and origins of authority figures in a context. This will generate knowledge to explain why clusters of radicalized followers appear at a given place and moment of time. Looking at local authority in recruitment is important, as currently, we do not know much about the strategic targeting of local influencers across various contexts.

Second, this dissertation creates a space for comparing leadership dynamics and structures across radical milieus set in the West and post-war societies in Europe. This will expand the knowledge about the specific characteristics of radical milieus and what implications they may or may not have for the recruitment of foreign fighters. There is much to be explored concerning the relationships of individual followers with a radical milieu and, more specifically, why some people who have a positive active relationship with a radical milieu do not turn to violence. Insights on these negative cases may provide useful criticisms about the importance of radical socialization and the impact of radical influencers.

Furthermore, influencers' pathways requires further, in-depth research. In this dissertation, this topic was limited by the insufficient data on some influencers' activism. The distinction between radical influencers who do or do not engage with a violent rhetoric can be further explored through discourse analysis of speeches and sermons of influencers to gain more detailed knowledge about their messaging strategies. Applying network analysis to the social trajectories of influencers may be another useful approach to understanding authority figures and the recruitment of jihadists. The role of radical authority figures across diaspora communities is a

particularly important avenue for research, as it can provide the scholarship on European jihadism with insights about community-based leadership dynamics.

Finally, further research is necessary concerning the war-to-war links in the biographies of foreign fighters. It remains puzzling why people who had previous exposure to combat in their home countries did not obtain leadership roles in the context of the Syrian War, neither in propaganda, nor in the battlefield. Their contribution to war dynamics, something that David Malet calls a "career foreign fighter" (2020), can be examined in the framework of the militarized societies they come from.

Researching the recruitment of Balkan foreign fighters for more than four years has convinced me that we tend to oversimplify the phenomenon by labeling those who traveled to Syria terrorists. In reality, the pool of foreign fighters is a complex sample of personal stories extracted from the radical milieu. When I began my fieldwork, one of the foreign fighters who contributed to my research was about to begin his prison sentence in Kosovo for going to Syria in 2015, and we have remained in touch since then. Sometimes he would send me photos from the prison asking how my writing is going. In the days I am completing my dissertation, he is released and will hopefully be able to go back to his previous life. His intention is to fight radicalization and raise awareness by running an NGO. He has shared his story with as many people as he can, as he feels regretful for his decision to have traveled to Syria.

Unlike him, other former fighters remain committed to the cause of jihad. The foreign fighter recruitment that the Western Balkan region experienced in between 2012 and 2016 destroyed the lives of many young people who, being driven by ideological, material, or altruistic motives, ended up in a war. Many were killed. Others managed to return – some of them regretful, some more radical than before. The main challenge ahead for local security and political

institutions is how to approach Salafi milieus – whether as a venue for radicalization, a post-war cultural phenomenon, or a political movement. The lack of a comprehensive answer has left processes of radicalization hidden for years before the rise of IS. To avoid this failure in the future and have more effective threat analyses, agencies should have a closer look at what the vulnerabilities are that make radical influence possible. This is the only way to understand who in post-war radical milieus will get targeted to become foreign fighters in future wars.

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APPENDIX 1

Interviews quoted in the dissertation:

Source 01: Dritan Demiraj, a former commander of the Special Forces of Albania, July 2019 (online).

Source 02: 2019. An expert on counter terrorism at the Prime Minister's Office of Albania (in person) Tirana, June 21, 2019.

Source 03: 2018. The Director of Counter Terrorism at Kosovo Police (in person), Pristina February 6, 2018.

Source 04: 2018. The special prosecutor in charge of the case of Zekirija Qazimi sentenced to 10 years for recruitment of foreign fighters (in person), Pristina, February 13, 2018.

Source 05: 2018. A former followers of radical influencers in Kosovo (in person), Pristina, February 9, 2018.

Source 6: 2018. A former fighter who returned from Syria. The interview was taken a few weeks before he was sentenced to 3 years in prison (in person), Pristina, February 13, 2018.

Source 7: 2018. The major of Kaçanik, a town in southern Kosovo with a high number of foreign fighter departures (in person) Kaçanik, February 15, 2018.

Source 8: 2018. A former FSA fighter who returned from Syria (in person), Ferizaj, Kosovo, February 17, 2018.

Source 09: 2018. A former IS fighter who returned from Syria. The interview was taken in Dubrava prison in Kosovo where the interviewee was serving his sentence (in person) February 16, 2018.

Source 10: 2018. The widow of an IS fighter reportedly killed in Syria (in person), Kaçanik, Kosovo, February 15, 2018.

Source 11: 2018. A counter terrorism advisor to the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina (in person), March 20, 2018.

Source 12: 2018. A representative of the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in person), April 4, 2018.

Source 13: 2018. Head of the Terrorism Department of the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina until February 2019 (in person), March 13, 2018.

Source 14: 2018. A Salafi imam, representing the peaceful periphery of the Salafi milieu (in person), Maglaj, March 28, 2018.

Source 15: 2019. Interview with a former imam from the Islamic community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (online), May 21, 2019.

Source 16: 2018. A former IS fighter, (in person), March 27, 2018.

Source 17: 2018. The brother of an IS follower who intended to go to Syria but was stopped by the police (in person), Sarajevo, April 1, 2018.

Source 18: 2018. The sister of IS wife from Bosnia (in person), Tešanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina March 16, 2018.

Source 19: 2019. Amarildo Gutić, a journalist affiliated with Žurnal who works on the issue of Islamic radicalization in Bosnia and also covered the Bosnian war (in person) Sarajevo, May 20, 2019.

Source 20: 2018. Muhamed Jusić, a spokesperson of the Islamic Community (in person) Sarajevo, March 20, 2018.

Source 21: 2018. Azinović Vlado, a researcher and a security expert who participated with an analysis at trials of Bosnian foreign fighters (in person), Sarajevo, March 26, 2018.

Source 22: 2019. Ebi Spahiu, a researcher and a security expert (in person), Tirana, July 5, 2019.

Source 23: 2018. Mayor of Hani I Elezit, Kosovo (in person), Hani I Elezit, February 15, 2018.

APPENDIX 2

Departures of Kosovo Albanians to Syria by municipality/gender/age.

Municipality	Men	Boys	Women	Girls
Pristina	33	9	10	9
Gjilan	26	-	9	1
Prizren	23	1	7	-
Kacanik	21	1	2	-
Ferizaj	17	2	3	-
Mitrovica	19	-	2	-
Peja	16	-	2	
Viti	11	-	4	-
Vushtri	11	-	1	1
Lipjan	8	-	3	-
Hani I Elezit	10	-	-	-
Skenderaj	8	-	1	-
Gjakova	7	-	-	-
Kamenica	3	1	3	-
Klina	3	1	2	1
Malisheva	7	-	-	-
Obiliq	5	-	2	-
Dragash	6	-	-	-
Podujeva	4	-	2	-
Fusha Kosova (Kosovo Polje)	5	-	-	-
Istog	4	-	-	-
Suhareka	1	-	2	-
Shtime	2	-	-	-
Rahovec	1	-	-	-

Source: Behar Xharra and Gojani 2017. UNDP.