The Place of Muslim Warriors, The Place of Muslim Men

The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon as a Masculinity Performance

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Abstract

This study analyses the connections between masculinity and violent extremism. It is based on the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo , where an in-depth analysis of masculinity thus far has been lacking. The purpose of this study has been to understand how the warfare-masculinity nexus is constructed in the Albanian radical Islamist milieu.

The analytical framework of this study is largely based on social constructionist thought, particularly Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance: gender is the stylised repletion of acts, rather than a biological fact. I base my analysis on texts collected during my fieldworks in Kosovo. After analysing these texts in depth through Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, I find that Albanian Islamist milieu constructs the masculinity-warfare nexus in three ways: 1) by redefining the Kosovo war as a religious rather than ethnic war, 2) by constructing Syria as Ash-Sham, the sacred homeland of Muslims in need of the aid and protection of Muslim men, and 3) through constructing emotional and even spiritual bonds to warfare for the sake of God. I argue that to understand the foreign fighter phenomenon, we must also understand how Syria is constructed. In the words of my most central text, Syria is understood as "the place of Muslim warriors" and "the place of Muslim men". Based on this, we can argue that Islamist masculinity discourse not only constructs protagonist subject positions which are based on masculine ideals, but that these subject positions are constructed to only be occupied by men. Lastly, I argue that not only is masculinity and extremism connected, but that the foreign fighter phenomenon should be seen as an Islamist performance of masculinity.

Basing my analysis on Islamists texts, but also my deep cultural knowledge of the context as an ethnic Albanian Muslim from Kosovo, I conclude that understanding masculinity is central in understanding the recruiting of Kosovar foreign fighters. By highlighting the linkage between masculinity and radicalisation, I also identify that gender must play a central role in the rehabilitation of returned foreign fighters. Future research must not only continue to study how masculinity is constructed, it must also study how masculinity is performed.

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Glossary

- *alhamdulillah* praise be to Allah
- *Allah* God
- *argat* Albanian term for daily labourer, lowly connotations, also see rroktar
- *awliya (sing. wali)* custodian, protector, 'friend of God', historically same meaning as saint
- **ayah** verse in a Qur'anic chapter
- *azza wa jall* mighty and the majestic
- *baloz* Albanian mythical monster
- *Dajjal* evil character from Islamic eschatology, Islamic equivalent of Anti-Christ
- *hadith* written record of words and actions of the prophet Muhammad
- *inshallah* God-willing or if God wills it
- *jalla jallalehu* may his glory be glorified
- *jihad* struggle, often interpreted as holy warfare
- *mujahid (pl. mujahedeen)* a person who engages in jihad
- *rroktar* Albanian term, meaning a lowly low-paid servant, derogatory term
- *salla llahu ʿalayhi wa-sallam***:** may God honour him and grant him peace
- *shahadah* the Islamic creed which testifies the unity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad
- *shaheed* martyr
- *subhanahu wa-taʿala:* may he be praised and exalted
- *subhanallah* glory be to Allah
- *surah* chapter of the Qur'an
- **the *Qur'an*** the holy text of Islam, seen as the actual word of God as received by the prophet Muhammad
- *ummah* Arabic for community, a term used to signify the global community of Muslims
- *zullumqar* Albanian, Turkish-Arabic loanword for oppressor, dictator, a cruel person

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Më ke lyp motrën para se mejdanin,
më ke lyp berrat para se çobanin,
e jam dredhë në kët log për me të kallzue,
se ne të parët nji kanun na kan lanë:
Armet me dhanë përpara e mandej gjanë

 - *Kënga e Gjergj Elez Alisë* (114- 118)
(Zheji & Xhafka 2005, p. 11)

In "The Song of Gjergj Elez Alia" of the medieval Albanian folk epos *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, nothing prevents the hero Gjergj from his duty to uphold honour. Not even his nine wounds on his body which have left him bedridden for nine years. A monster, the *baloz,* has emerged from the sea. Going from household to household, the *baloz* demands to eat their cattle, have their daughters, and slaughter their sons. Next in line is Gjergj's household, and despite his condition, he rides to the battlefield to face the sea monster. It is then that the hero utters the words from the epigraph: "You demand my sister before engaging in battle / you demand the sheep before asking the shepherd / I come to the battlefield to teach you / an ancient law passed down since our forefathers / before handing in our rifles, we will render you nothing" (translation mine).

This "ancient law" is simple enough to understand – if we have rifles, we will fight to protect what is ours. Gjergj slays the *baloz*, and while embracing, he and his sister both die. "Never has there been a death more beautiful," (line 150, Zheji & Xhafka 2005, p.12, translation mine) the epic poem goes. Gjergj dies defending his sister's honour, defending his cattle and his pride: he defends the ancient law and fulfilled his duty. They die with honour intact. Death is no tragedy – it is even desirable, beautiful – compared to the alternative: loss of honour. When faced with what we consider a great evil – a sea monster or dictator, a *baloz*, a Bashir al-Assad or a Slobodan Milosevic – our principles alter. This is particularly clear when we analyse the connection between masculinity and warfare. Our societies are obsessed with gender. This is

evident in everything from the colour of clothes we buy them, to who we deem fitting to rule our countries. This is even clearer in situations of war. The story of Gjergj demonstrates what we expect from all men in times of war: to stand on their own feet and protect what is "theirs". The Song of Gjerg Elez Alia shows that no one can escape their duty. Not even sick Gjergj. That which is ours must be protected in times of sea monsters and other evils, despite our condition. Dying while or after (successfully) doing so is not tragic – it is honourable, it is 'sweet and fitting'.

This idea might seem outdated. Nonetheless, in this study, I argue that this perception is in no way a bygone artefact of the past. It is very much alive, albeit in a digital, globalized version. Further on, I argue that this is a narrative in which masculinity plays a central role. In this study I seek to analyse the connection between masculinity and warfare by studying the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon through a gender theory perspective. Kosovo has the highest numbers of foreign fighters per capita in Europe (Kursani 2015). On the other hand, NATO, EU, the US, and the UN are present and highly influential in the Kosovar political landscape. US flags are often seen in the streets, and the capital Prishtina yearly arranges a 4th of July concert called "Thank you, America" (referring to US intervention in the 1998-1999 war). In one of the capital's busiest intersection, George W. Bush Boulevard crosses Bill Clinton Boulevard. Yet, a New York Times article identifies Kosovo as a "fertile ground for ISIS" (Gall 2016). This is a puzzling paradox - How can the two realities co-exist?

Gender theory is an immensely important analytical tool. However, when researchers state that they will be studying gender, what usually follows is the study of *women*. Perhaps this is only natural, given the historical role of gender in politics and social movements. Women have had to claim their reproductive rights, the right to vote, the right to own property, to name a few. Certain rights are still being claimed. Nonetheless, though we rarely speak of it, men have suffered and continue to suffer under restrictive masculine culture. Men forbid men to feel fear, admit weakness and be second best – all of which are human traits. Men oppress men, men subject men to cruel treatment, and men cause men pain. Challenging this culture - often phrased *toxic masculinity* - is especially challenging. Both the oppressor and the oppressed are men, and the battle against this culture cannot be expressed in the same terms as feminist activism. There is no external source of oppression. As a result, issues like men's mental health, men's societal pressures, and men's oppression by other men do not receive the same attention – *particularly not by men themselves*.

Studying men and masculinity, however, does not make my study anti-feminist, nor does it go against central notions of feminist thought. My study will not dismiss gender as an academic approach, but rather reverse its traditional subject. The focus of this study will be men and masculinity, how it is constructed, performed and portrayed, and ultimately, the immense power of gender identities.

Even though we live in the age of gender mainstreaming, where the so-called 'gender perspective' is supposedly included in most areas of public life, few scrutinize the concepts of sex and gender beyond the separation of the two. *Gender is the cultural expression of sex*, we might say, *and while gender can differ through time and space, biological sex is a fact*. This statement might make us seem very liberal and forward minded, if not trendy, amidst our peers. We don't think women necessarily belong in the kitchen, and if they so wish they can be mechanics, plumbers or CEOs. This makes us and our opinion modern, timely, and correct. It is an opinion that is not radical, extreme nor fundamentalist.

In this study, however, I intend to go beyond this. I seek to analyse the social construction of sexed and gendered selves and explore the implications and consequences of our simplistic gender binary. I do so in a field where this is has not been done yet: violent extremism in Kosovo. In an age where we view "the gender perspective" as a side note in a talk, a paragraph in an article, or a chapter in a school book, I intend to give it the mainstage. I do so because, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, it provides us with knowledge where other perspectives fall short. As long as we expect men to be violent, being blind to the significance and power of gender identity while studying violent extremism is highly detrimental to our analysis understanding of the concept. In doing so, I argue that the gender theory is not a "luxury" we can apply if all other perspectives have been applied. It is a perspective that is at very least equally important.

The Aim of this Study

Why are Kosovars, who are usually so US-friendly, travelling to Syria? It is common to state poverty, lack of education, or unemployment as causes. That these individuals were poor, uneducated, social outcasts, victims or 'vulnerable groups'. As next chapter will show, these explanations fall short, particularly in the Kosovar case. While it might be problematic to expect there to be *one* reason behind such a complex phenomenon, perhaps we can say

something about the phenomenon itself. In this study, I seek to explore the construction of masculinity in texts produced within the Kosovar Islamist milieu. Through Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis theory, I aim to identify and analyse the Kosovar Islamist masculinity discourse.

The basis of my argument is that the act of becoming a so-called foreign fighter is an act with many layers of meaning, and that gender is of vital importance. In this study, I set out to analyse some of these layers. In doing so, I reject the common conception that radicalization is the mere result of brainwashing, or just a side-effect of a bigger issue. I therefore understand it as the active choice of these individuals. I argue that Kosovar foreign fighters were not passive marionettes, controlled solely by the wishes of charismatic Islamist recruiters. They are not necessarily "vulnerable groups" or "social outcast": they are rational individuals who happen to subscribe to a reality very different from our own. In this study I seek to explore this reality, with a focus on masculinity.

I argue that travelling to Syria to partake in the armed conflict is a *gendered* act. Moreover, it is an act that conforms to specific gender expectations and many masculine ideals and values. This connection, I argue, is intended and explicit. To illustrate this connection, I intend to analyse texts produced within and about the Kosovar Islamist milieu through philosophic and conceptual framework of discourse analysis. Accordingly, my research question is as follows:

How is the masculinity-warfare nexus constructed in the Albanian Islamist milieu?

With this study I aim to explore how masculinity is constructed in Albanian Islamist text, in order to better understand the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo. The gender-perspective, particularly through Butler and queer theory, is immensely potent in this specific field because it forces us to acknowledge the potent power of gender identity. Further on, studying masculinity in this given context can impart to us knowledge about not just gender as such, but the context and setting in which it manifests. This is knowledge that is sorely needed.

It should be noted that by phrasing my research question thusly, I assume that there is indeed a masculinity-warfare nexus in the Albanian Islamist milieu. This assumption, however, is based on the research of Albanian Islamist propaganda, and other reports dealing with the same topic. One should also keep in mind the point made by authors like Barlas: the study of

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representations of gender and gendered representations is both relevant and important because "a society's constructions of "ideal" women also shape its treatment of "real" ones" (Barlas 2001, p119). Similarly, studying the construction of "ideal" men, provides us with insight into what sort of actions "real" men might perform. In this study I assume that Albanian Islamists partake in the process of constructing gender, an assumption that is neither bold nor radical. My research question, however, focuses solely on aspects of masculinity which are connected to notions of warfare, force and violence. There might be other aspects of Islamists masculinities, but these are not addressed in this thesis.

The work of Judith Butler is particularly central in my analysis. Gender in general, and masculinity specifically, is understood as more than just a role, but rather as a performative act:

> "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way"

> (Butler 1988, pp. 527-528).

It is not just a role, she argues, because roles in their nature express or disguise an interior self. Gender is an act and as such it actively "constructs the fiction of its own psychological interiority" (Butler 1988, p. 528). Put differently, there is no gender beyond the gendered acts. There is no gendered actor behind the act of gender, there is only the act itself. The same can be said for bodies. "The body", Butler writes, "*is* a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (Butler 1988, p. 521, emphasis in original). This becomes particularly interesting when studying the foreign fighter phenomenon because it is a very specific manifestation of Kosovar Islamist discourse. We rarely are given the chance to study extremism as such a corporal act as physically travelling to Syria to take partake in warfare.

Central concepts defined

The first important distinction to make is the difference between Isla*mic* and Isla*mist*. Put in the simplest way, Islamic is an adjective, as in "similar to, or of Islam", whereas Islamist is an ideology, a noun. The definition of the word Islamist could be a study in itself, and there is no agreement among scholars exactly what the term includes. However, for the purpose of this

study, Islamism is an ideology that religionizes politics, and a belief that a certain understanding of Islam should dictate both public and private spheres. This ideology tries to derive its legitimacy from the religion Islam, and Islamists often claim that their actions are in accord with Islamic belief and teachings. To use these terms interchangeably and to say things like "Islamic terrorism", connects terrorist acts to almost 2 billion Muslims, and thereby proves the Islamists right. In this paper, Islamist is used rather than extremist, because Islamist is more descriptive of the politics behind the term, This term is further discussed in chapter four.

A term that will often be used in study is "text". Text, in this study, is understood as more than the conventional meaning of text. Text usually means any written or printed content, as opposed to speech, which is spoken. In this study, however, "text" is simply understood as empirical data necessary to conduct the analysis. It is understood as the unit on which discourses and our analysis of them is based.

Another term that should be clarified is also central to this study: "foreign fighter" or "the foreign fighter phenomenon". A foreign fighter is an individual who have travelled to the conflict theatre of the Syrian Civil War with the intention to partake in armed combat. The phenomenon therefore consists of travelling to a conflict which is not occurring in the respective place in which you live.

Why study the foreign fighter phenomenon?
In a post-9/11 world, the study of terrorism, extremism and security need no justification. It is a common notion that terrorism is our biggest threat and enemy. To be brutally honest, however, no part of that rhetoric inspired this project. What did inspire this project was curiosity. I was curious and eager to learn about a subject that was both familiar and foreign, irrational yet understandable, even common. The brutality of war, and the violence that can stem from political instability was familiar. I had not only seen it before in news, books or documentaries, I had experienced it personally as child. Yet, the mentality behind it, the reason and rationality behind it was very perplexing.

I also entered this research project for slightly egoistic reasons. As I read reports about the Kosovar foreign fighters, as I watched news stories about them, and as I became familiar with their story I returned to the same thought. "This could have been me". On average they were

around my age, they were young Kosovar men, who were born in the same country as me, around the same year, and believed in the same God as myself. They too had grown up eating the same food as me, calling their mother "*mam*" and their fathers "*bab*", and had hopes, aspirations, and needs not very different from my own. They had grown up with the same rites, rituals, and culture, and had navigated a social landscape that was not foreign to me at all. Yet our life stories could not be more different: not only did I not become a foreign fighter, I ended up being privileged enough to study them. Granted, I had emigrated from Kosovo after the war, but many young men from the Kosovar diaspora, including Norway, had travelled to Syria as well. In fact, according to Shtuni (2016, p.2) as much as 11% of the Kosovar foreign fighters hold dual citizenship, meaning they reside outside Kosovo. They ended up taking arms in Syria – I did not. Why is that?

The benefits of this study, however, extend beyond personal curiosity. Violent extremism affects everyone. We can neither understand nor combat violent extremism in the wake of the Syrian Civil War if we base our knowledge on stereotypes and anecdotal evidence. Asking the subject of the study will always yield better results: a field study in the environment of our project will always provide better knowledge than studying it from afar, in an ivory tower. I also strongly believe that gender theory is the right perspective through which to study this phenomenon. This is because this case illuminates how powerful gender identity can be. These young Kosovar men not only come from what is arguably one of the most US-friendly country on earth, they defy their own experience as victims of the violence and brutality of war. Why would young men who experienced the brutality of war, volunteer to commit the same acts against someone else? My thesis might not answer these questions, but it intends to consider them seriously.

Point of Departure: "A Once-Tolerant Muslim Society"

If we inhabit a society obsessed with gender, it is important to state that each society's obsession is materialized in different manner. Gender relations, gender roles and gender expectations differ according to the specific localities in which they manifest. The locality of this particular study is my native Kosovo.

It was summer, 2016, and I was visiting family in Kosovo. I had just watched a documentary about a *lahutar,* a player of the Albanian string instrument *lahutë,* who still sang the old Albanian epic poems. The poems, referred to as *The Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, are

believed to have been sung for centuries. Feeling ensnared, I decided to start searching bookshops to see if I could find a copy that very same day. I was relieved and surprised to find one at the very first bookshop I found. The rest of my Kosovo-stay was spent with that copy in hand. I read constantly and was amazed at how much I understood and recognized, despite the centuries between our realities. It did not feel as if I had stumbled upon an obscure, outdated archaeological artefact. The characters from the epic reminded me of the real people I knew in Kosovo; in many ways, it felt like reading about a world not very different from the one I was visiting.

Having just graduated from Development Studies with a thesis on nationalism and gender in Kosovar politics, I had yet to remove my gender spectacles. It was these spectacles that sparked an interest in the idea of manhood in these poems, and particularly the connection between masculinity, violence and force, a connection which in these poems often reached supernatural heights. That summer was spent in parks, reading about epic warriors by the statue of real warriors from the last war in Kosovo in 1999, the war that rendered me a refugee. The connection between the two, the epic warriors and the real warriors, was not yet known to me then. While the warriors in the epic poems were described using beautiful verse, with all the stylistic literary devices of the trade, the one behind me was made concrete as a statue. He was young, tall, and handsome. An RPG could be seen in his hand. 1972-1997. As I sat there, reading, I failed to notice that he was around my age. Yet he seemed stronger, older and more mature than I could ever become.

Even though centuries separated the real warrior from the epic ones, the similarities were striking. They were men, they were strong, and they were willing. Were they scared, doubtful, or hopeless? Did they feel guilt, remorse, or were they ever insecure? In both cases, there is no space for such emotions. Even though the man from the statue once lived, he was never real. Both the statue and the character from the pages of my book were a monolith, an ideal: they were the ideal men, whose lives must be glorified, repeated, imitated, performed and reperformed.

In the background, in newspapers, newscasts and radios, the Syrian Civil War was still unfolding. Earlier that year, in May 2016, Carlotta Gall had written a feature in the *New York Times* which put Kosovo on the map. Titled *How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS*, the article explores the issue of Islamist radicalization, hitherto foreign in the Kosovar

context: "Extremist clerics and secretive associations funded by Saudis and others have transformed a once-tolerant Muslim society into a font of extremism" (Gall 2016). While the article was problematic (we return to this in a later chapter), it managed to capture my attention. Despite the article's oversimplifications, the issue was real. Kosovo did have the highest European number of foreign fighters, per capita (Kursani 2015). Most of them were my age, meaning they had lived through war, and seen first-hand the atrocities and destructive force of war. These were not easily lured by extremist recruiters about the glory of war. They had experienced the fact that war was anything but glorious. Additionally, Kosovo is a country obsessed with the US. It is the most US-friendly country in the world according to a study by Pew Research Center, even after the Trump administration. The Facebook page of the US Embassy in Kosovo is liked by 300 000 people, equalling about one sixth of the Kosovar population (Sullivan, n.d.). How could the country whose capital had boulevards like George W. Bush Boulevard and Bill Clinton Boulevard become a "fertile ground for ISIS"?

Additionally, these were young *Kosovar* men. They inhabited an area notoriously obsessed with identity, nation, and ethnicity. How then, could the phenomena take place? How could these young men be so willing to join what is in essence a *foreign* war, thereby becoming *foreign* fighters? With the gender-perspective still fresh in mind, I began to wonder whether gender roles might play a role more central than poverty, unemployment or Islamist brainwashing.

The Structure of this Study

This study begins with a review of the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon, where I review reports and policy briefs to give a concise geography of the phenomenon, the media coverage, some proposed causes and how they are insufficient.

The next chapter creates the groundwork for analytical framework. I begin by outlining key characteristics of social constructivism, a philosophy on which this thesis is based. Further on, Saussure and Laclau and Mouffe are both explored, as is Judith Butler's view of gender. Lastly, I review the Islam, the Qur'an and gender.

Chapter four provides a recap of the research process, and explains the methodology applied in this study. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory will be particularly central, and this chapter will also include discussions on positionality, data-collection, and ethical considerations.

Lastly, I analyse key texts that aid us to understand the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon, with a particular focus on gender and masculinity. I present central texts and identify central signifiers. In doing so, I also explore how these signifiers are given meaning by being connected to other signs. In the words of Laclau and Mouffe, I identify central nodal points in the Kosovar Islamist masculinity discourse. I argue that not only does the Kosovar Islamist masculinity discourse use masculine ideals to construct protagonist subject positions, these protagonist roles are constructed to be played by men exclusively. Men alone must defend the sacred homeland, women and children, making warfare an act to be repeated and reperformed and a central part of Kosovar Islamist masculinity scripts. Having outlined the structure of this study, I will now go on to review literature on the phenomenon, media coverage, and insufficient explanations.

CHAPTER II:
A REVIEW OF THE KOSOVAR
FOREIGN FIGHTER PHENOMENON

Before we can begin to study this complex phenomenon a short review of the concept is in place, and this chapter seeks to provide insight to the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon. I do so by splitting this chapter into three sections. The first section will provide a summary of previous research on the issue, particularly reports that have provided an overall image and important statistics. While this subject has not been the subject of many in-depth academic projects or books, many shorter reports and policy briefs from organizations and institutes have been written, reports that often are very insightful and thorough, and provide a great basis for more complex studies. This part of the chapter is based on reports by the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

The second section seeks to outline and scrutinize the international media attention the phenomena has received, focusing particularly on one article by the New York Times. Kosovo has made it to international media headlines, despite its small size. In this section I argue that international media coverage has given an oversimplified and one-dimensional image, which also very often seems to be based on ISIS-related paranoia, thereby giving an unrealistic image of Kosovo and the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon.

The third section outlines proposed reasons and explanations, collected from reports, newspaper articles, and other popular claims proposed as causes behind the phenomenon. They can roughly be understood as deprivation or brainwashing. Deprivation-causes propose that the reason behind this phenomenon is the issue of lack: these individuals lack either a job, economic means, education, lacking social network, a lacking sense of meaning, belonging, significance, etc. Brainwashing-causes do not focus on the foreign fighters themselves at all, but rather some evil mastermind puppet master who is the root cause of the issue. What these two explanations have in common is that the foreign fighters themselves are hardly considered:

the phenomenon is caused by circumstances, of which the lives individuals are mere consequences. I strongly disagree with this notion, and indeed, this whole study is an attempt at putting the individuals in the centre.

A Geography of the Kosovar Foreign Fighter Phenomenon

The foreign fighter phenomenon, particularly in the Kosovar case, has a distinct timeline. Due to the military campaign against ISIS, whom many considered defeated in 2018, the foreign fighter phenomenon is not as pressing an issue as it was a few years ago. This is also a result the institutional policies implemented by the Kosovar government to tackle the issue, including the criminalization of civilian participation in foreign conflicts. In this section, I will provide a short timeline, then go on to more analytical reports.

A useful report that gives an insightful introduction to the phenomenon is also one of the first major reports written on this issue. Shpend Kursani from KCSS wrote in 2015 a report that would be quoted in many other reports and articles. The strength of Kursani's report (2015) is his detailed timeline of the phenomenon, and that he insightfully outlines the roots of the foreign fighter phenomenon. Kursani (2015) notes that conflicts in the Middle East have often been considered foreign and distant in Kosovo. While the concept of volunteerism in times of armed conflict is hardly new, this particular case is unique in the Kosovar context. Kursani writes:

> "For Kosovo citizens […] conflicts in the Middle East were until recently considered as remote events, with no Kosovo citizen officially reported to have been engaged as a foreign fighter in any of these conflicts […] Similarly, for Kosovo citizens the rapid spread of the Arab Spring in many majority Muslim Middle Eastern and North African countries was equally as remote as previous events in the Middle East, including the recent unrest in Syria."

> (Kursani 2015, p.17)

This, however, changed in 2012, when the Kosovar government, along with many Western countries, began condemning the regime of Bashir al-Assad. Speaking after a UN Security Council meeting, the then-Foreign Minister (FM) of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj, stated openly that Kosovo supported the opposition and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). He further on confirmed that the Kosovo government had created diplomatic ties with the Syrian opposition. "We were among the first governments in Europe who was supporting the opposition in Libya and in

other Arab countries last year," the former FM stated, "because we were fighting for the same aspirations, for the same values." (Charbonneau 2012). However, as Kursani (2015) points out, the former FM was not aware of the fragmentation of the Syrian opposition, including the FSA. He was equally unaware of the fact that many violent extremist groups, like ISIS and Al Nusra Front, were also taking arms against al-Assad and his regime. In fact, in the period between January and June 2012, as many as 17 Kosovar individuals had joined the armed conflict in Syria (Kursani 2015, p.17). The conflict in Syria further captured the attention of the Kosovar government and media in mid-November 2012, when Naman Demolli became the first known Kosovar to die in the Syrian Civil War (Kursani 2015, p.17-18). We return to Naman Demolli later in this study, in the analysis.

October 2013 saw the first spread of ISIS propaganda videos in Albanian. Lavdrim Muhaxherri, who would become a central figure in the Kosovar jihadist milieu, began appearing in ISIS-propaganda, calling Kosovar citizen to join the war against al-Assad. According to data from the Kosovo Police, in 2013 alone, more than 120 Kosovar citizens travelled to Syria (Kursani 2015, p.18). In January 2014, Muhaxherri appears in a video calling for Albanians to join other "lions" to fight the taghut (the practice of worshipping anyone but Allah) and kuffar (disbelievers) (Kursani 2015, p.18). Two months later, in March 2014, another Kosovar citizen, Rexhep Morina, "appeared on a video calling on others to join him in the "holy land" to fight a "holy war"." (Kursani 2015, p.18). Muhaxherri made Kosovar and international headlines in July 2014, when he appeared in a video beheading a 19-year old Iraqi citizen. Muhaxherri told an Albanian news page that the man was beheaded because he was suspected of being a spy. In 2015, a video of Muhaxherri surface the Internet, in which he is seen firing an RPG at a captive. This, and increased presence of ISIS propaganda in Albanian-speaking world, brought the Syrian conflict much closer to home in Kosovo. This period is largely the most dynamic and intensive period of the phenomenon. As Kursani (2015) writes, 54% of Kosovar foreign fighters travelled to Syria in 2013. This is 54% of Kosovo's 232 cases in mid-January 2015.

Another useful in-depth introduction to the foreign fighter phenomenon aimed at journalists writing about extremism has been written by Perteshi (2018). In his report, Perteshi (2018) writes that since 2012, 403 citizens of Kosovo have travelled to Syria, and that 255 of these are foreign fighters. The rest are women and children. It is thus evident that only men are considered fighters. Thus, in reports on the Kosovar foreign fighters the linkage between

gender and violent extremism is acknowledged but rarely directly addressed. In the international context, Perteshi (2018) argues that Kosovo has been particularly harsh to persons part of terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria. A 2014 police operation across the country, 80 persons were arrested. These were suspected of supporting or funding Islamist organisations in the Syrian Civil war theatre. Further on, the majority of Kosovar citizens travelled to Syria between 2012 and 2014, before the Caliphate was proclaimed. This is quite different from the families who travelled to Syria, 80% of the travelling after the proclamation.

The foreign fighter phenomenon: statistics, numbers, and dynamics
Shtuni's (2016) report is both insightful and critical. One of the most important contribution of his report is the point that the foreign fighter phenomenon affects different parts of Kosovo in different ways. Put differently, he shows how radicalization and the foreign fighter phenomenon is present throughout Kosovo, but five municipalities are overrepresented. While the municipalities of Prizren and Prishtina are home to most individuals, this is only to be expected. These municipalities are home to 20% of the Kosovar population, and home to 25% of foreign fighters (Shtuni 2016, p.4). A far more interesting point is that the Kosovar foreign fighters live in a significantly specific part of the country: "Indeed, eighty-three recruits, or more than a third of the overall contingent of male foreign fighters, originate from these five municipalities, namely, Hani i Elezit, Kaçanik, Mitrovice, Gjilan, and Viti, which account for only 14 percent of the country's population." (Shtuni 2016, p.4). Except for Mitrovicë, the rest of these five municipalities are located in the south-eastern part of Kosovo. Hani i Elezit and Kaçanik have actually five times and two times higher rate per ten thousand residents than Sint-Jans-Molenbeek in Belgium, often described as a "jihadist hotbed" (Shtuni 2016, p.4). While these two municipalities (home to Muhaxherri, among others) only account for 2.4 % of the Kosovar population, they account for thirty foreign fighters. Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit are neighbouring municipalities, and border to Macedonia. The researcher also argues that these high numbers might be connected to the fact that these municipalities always have had strong ties to Skopje, one of world's top five cities "for volume and proportion of Islamic State foreign fighters per capita, according to a recent study based on Islamic State registration forms leaked in early 2016" (Shtuni 2016, p.5). Based on these statistics, one could argue that the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo, although precedented nationally, is in fact largely a regional issue.

Shtuni (2016) also provides a detailed and insightful demography of Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon. The number of foreign fighters Shtuni (2016) operates with is 314. "Of these," Shtuni (2016, p.2) writes, "forty-four are women and twenty-eight are children. Forty others were intercepted by the police before they could reach the conflict theater". Based these numbers, Kosovo has 134 foreign fighters per 1 million citizens, among the very highest in Europe according to size. According to numbers from May 2016, 18 % all Kosovar foreign fighters perished in Syria; 37% have returned to Kosovo, and 45% of returnees are men (Shtuni 2016, p.3). 75% of Kosovar foreign fighters are born between 1984 and 1995 and are between 17 and 30 at the time of departure. Based on this data, Shtuni (2016, p.3) writes that the data suggests that "the age group most vulnerable to mobilization is twenty-one to twenty-five years old, which accounts for more than a third of the total recruits, though the group represents only 9 percent of the country's total population" (Shtuni 2016, p.3).

It is not uncommon to claim that lack of education is behind Kosovo's high number of foreign fighters. However, according to KP records,

> "3 percent [of Kosovar foreign fighters] have completed elementary education, 87 percent secondary education, and 10 percent tertiary education. The overwhelming majority of known foreign fighters from this dataset have moderate rather than poor formal education, contrary to what anecdotal evidence sometimes indicates."

> (Shtuni 2016, p.4)

In fact, Kosovar foreign fighters are not only less educated than the average Kosovar citizen, but rather, more. The percentage of foreign fighters who have completed tertiary education is in fact higher than the national average (6.7%) (Shtuni 2016, p.4). Another commonly stated cause behind the high number of foreign fighters is economic deprivation. However, as Shtuni convincingly argues,

> "of 112 known foreign fighters, about 64 percent are in average or above-average economic circumstances, and only about 36 percent in poor circumstances. Furthermore, none of the five municipalities with the highest rates of foreign fighter mobilization (Hani i Elezit, Kaçanik, Mitrovice,

Gjilan, and Viti) are among the municipalities with the lowest 2014 Human Development Index in Kosovo"

(Shtuni 2016, p 7)

These numbers are very significant. They are significant mainly because they stem from Kosovo Police records, and because they are based on the foreign fighters' own estimation. These returnees could easily have underplayed their economic circumstances to gain sympathy from Kosovar institutions and the possibility of a milder sentence. However, 64% not only stated that their circumstances were average, but rather *above* average. Further on Shtuni (2016) writs that Kosovo's poorest and least educated municipalities are not overrepresented when it comes to the number of foreign fighters.

To summarize, the Syrian Civil War was the first foreign conflict to spark interest in the Kosovar context. This is largely because of the similarities between the Syrian Civil war and the Kosovo war. Secondly, this was caused by the presence of Kosovars in high positions within organisations like ISIS. Thirdly, the presence of Islamist propaganda videos in Albanian has also made the Syrian conflict more available to the Kosovar audience. While Kosovo has a very high number of foreign fighters per capita, the issue is a regional rather than a national issue. While the typical foreign fighter might be from Prizren or Prishtina, it is much more likely that he is from the south-eastern municipalities close to Macedonia. The typical foreign fighter is a man between 17 and 30 years old, and the age group most susceptible to mobilization is 21 to 25 years old. While many reasons are proposed as to why Kosovars might have travelled to Syria in such high numbers, lacking education or economic deprivation is very unlikely – Kosovar foreign fighters are at least as well of as the rest of the Kosovar citizen. In some areas, like economic situation, many Kosovar foreign fighters consider their economic situation better than the national average.

IS narratives and online propaganda

One particularly important study from the KCSS is one in which Balaj & Kelmendi (2017) analyse the online presence of extremist groups. They find that Facebook and YouTube are the most used platforms of Islamist groups. Further on, they identify that Rexhep Memishi, whose sermon I use in my analysis, is amongst the most popular Islamist imams with the overwhelming 17980 followers on Facebook in May 2017 (Balaj & Kelmendi 2017, p. 19).

The same study also identifies that jihad and mujahid (plural of mujahedeen) are among the most used words in Islamist social media content (Balaj & Kelmendi 2017, p.9). The authors argue that the Islamist content on social media often calls for the boycott of the democratic system because it goes against the system of Islam. In fact, Islamist propaganda often calls for the boycott of Kosovar elections (Balaj & Kelmendi 2017, p.16). Islamist narratives also identify "the Jews", the West, Shia, Alawite communities and the US as "crusaders", and thus the enemies of Islam. This narrative, however, is not analysed from a gender-perspective.

There are a few reports which have tacked the issue of gender and violent extremism in Kosovo. These, however, have focused chiefly on women. For example, Jakupi and Kelmendi (2019) identify three themes in the narratives of ISIS and other violent extremist groups in Kosovo: politics, religion and gender. Their political narrative largely consists of asking their followers to reject democracy, and to "not partake in elections or any process that contributes to building a democratic society in Kosovo" (Jakupi & Kelmendi 2019, p.20), because in "democratic systems people and not God will judge others, thereby making it a sin to participate in any process in a democratic state" (Jakupi & Kelmendi 2019, p.21). Religious ISIS narratives, on the other hand, focus among others on a one-dimensional interpretation of jihad as "warfare and use of violence by Muslims towards non-believers and others who do not share the same ideology with those groups" (Jakupi & Kelmendi 2019, p.23). In the last perspective, the most central to this thesis, the authors look only on the view and role of women. The writers argue that the role of women have become increasingly important, particularly in the recruitment of other women.

Another report by the same authors from 2017 on gender and violent extremism focuses solely on Kosovar women and their role within extremist organisations. Jakupi and Kelmendi (2017) identify that as much as 40 women have travelled from Kosovo to Syria and Iraq. It warns against viewing women as mere victims, and that one cannot speak of Kosovar female foreign fighters as a single category, particularly since women were not allowed arms when in the conflict theatre.

Ergo we can see that while there is a vast body of literature on the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomena, few reports have provided an in-depth analysis of gender, and none to date of masculinity. The strength of these reports is that they are very useful in understanding the terrain of the concept, the data and statistics, but they are very often based on pull and push

factor analysis. Based on this literature review we can argue that there is a need for a serious in-depth discourse analysis in the field of Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon, particularly one which can analyse the role of masculinity. Said differently, it is this gap I wish to bridge with my thesis.

How the NYT Turned Kosovo Into Fertile Ground For ISIS

In this section, I briefly outline the media attention this phenomenon has received. I argue that this, at least to some extent, has created the issue it intended to report. While nuance and details are rarely seen in international newspaper features, they are of vital importance in complex issues like the foreign fighter phenomenon. Nuance and details are hugely important when covering the foreign fighter phenomenon, violent extremism and terrorism because they are powerful subjects with immense implications. To successfully combat violent extremism and terrorism, it must be understood. You must be familiar with the mechanisms and inner workings of the concepts you wish to dismantle. In the best case, misinformed decisions make our effort to combat violent extremism ineffective. In the worst case, innocent lives are lost, and wars declared.

International English-language media have since 2014 extensively covered Kosovo's high proportion of foreign fighters, and its challenges concerning radicalization and violent extremism (Knudsen 2017, p.4). In May 2016, a controversial article from New York Times described the situation in dramatic, albeit oversimplified terms: Kosovo, once tolerant, had now been turned into fertile ground for ISIS and extremist. "How Kosovo and *the very nature of its society was fundamentally recast*," the author writes, "is a story of a decades-long global ambition by Saudi Arabia to spread its hard-line version of Islam" (Gall 2016, emphasis mine). This extract is significant. It shows that media not only reports but offers their interpretation of the phenomenon. This is particularly important when the media source is considered serious and internationally impactful, such as the New York Times. Gall writes that Kosovo's challenges with radicalization has fundamentally recast the very nature its society. Being Kosovar, I could not disagree more. The Kosovar society isn't *fundamentally changed* by violent extremism; it is merely exposed to a global phenomenon. Kosovo's disproportionally high share of foreign fighters is a serious issue which should be analysed properly. Media coverage of the phenomenon, while important, have "begun to impact international policy towards the country [Kosovo]. Despite taking up issues that are real and serious, much of the

reporting seems to have been guided by skewed assumptions and superficial understandings."
(Knudsen 2017, p.4).

This NYT article is also important because of the narrative that it broadcasts a very common narrative on an international stage. Even though this article is reductionist and oversimplified, it is in fact based on Kosovar sources and a radicalization narrative that already existed in Kosovo prior to this article. By being told by such an impactful and significant news source, the narrative gained an almost hegemonic status. Explanations after this feature, even when if they disregarded the effect of the Saudis, very often pointed to a third external factor that somehow swayed young Kosovar men towards the Syrian conflict. The foreign fighters themselves were often ignored. This narrative has a few important characteristics. Firstly, it assumes that there is a clear and fixed meaning of so-called 'political Islam': "They promoted political Islam," Fatos Makolli, the director of Kosovo's counterterrorism police, says in the article. "They spent a lot of money to promote it through different programs mainly with young, vulnerable people, and they brought in a lot of Wahhabi and Salafi literature. They brought these people closer to radical political Islam, which resulted in their radicalization" (Gall 2016). True to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, two key signifiers ('political' and 'Islam') are coupled to create a chain of equivalence, one in which 'political' and 'Islam' equals 'radicalization', 'Islamism', 'ISIS'. 'terrorism', etc. 'Islam' is a neutral (empty) word, as is 'political', but once the two are combined the term becomes negatively charged, exclusively negative in its innate nature.

A term that is closely linked to "political Islam", as a contrast, is that of 'moderate Islam' or 'moderate imams': "The Balkans, […] have yet to heal from the ethnic wars of the 1990s. But they are now infected with a new intolerance, moderate imams and officials in the region warn" (Gall 2016). Moderate Islam or imams is never really defined but based on its antithesis 'radical' and 'extremist', one can assume that it means an Islam that an American / Western 'We' prefers, an Islam practiced moderately rather than conservatively and completely. Indeed, the main photograph in the article header features young men exiting a mosque after a Friday prayer in the city of Podujevë. "The imam," the caption reads, "a moderate, has tried to curb the influence of the fundamentalist ideology" (Gall 2016). It is striking that Gall feels the need to clarify that the imam is a moderate, thereby silencing the potential that conservative imams might also attempt to curb the influence of ISIS. Later in the article, Gall (2016) writes that Kosovo now has more than 800 mosques (240 of them built after the war), implying that all

these were built with Saudi money, intended to 'radicalize' the Kosovar population. Even if they were – these 240 mosques seem to have served their purpose unsuccessfully, managing to create only 255 Kosovar foreign fighters. After a simple calculation, we can say that these mosques only managed to produce less than 2 foreign fighters each. We should therefore question the causal link between the presence of Wahhabi literature and preachers and individuals subscribing to and following these. While exposure to Islamist ideology might be necessary in order to be indoctrinated, little suggest that there is a relationship of causality between the two.

Another feature of this narrative is the oversimplification of religion in Kosovo. A dichotomy of religiosity is created, whereby only two polar modes of Muslim-hood exist: tolerant or extremist / fundamentalist. Tolerant Muslims respect other people's faith and support the US, an Us or Ours so to speak. Radical Muslims support ISIS, hate democracy and the US, are violent savages who seek to destroy the world – a Them. Like many other dichotomies, it is highly problematic. Particularly the notion that Islam in *moderation* is good, but if the same person should become more devout, they enter the second mode, thereby becoming a Radical Fundamentalist. This narrative can very easily be challenged. What is an individual who prays five times a day, critical to US foreign policy, but *does not support ISIS or Islamist violence*? These type individuals are neither hypothetical nor few. In fact, after my six-month field work in Kosovo, I discovered that this was the norm among conservative Muslims in Kosovo. It is this tolerant / extremist dichotomy that creates the notion that Kosovo is a "once-tolerant Muslim society" (Gall 2016). It was tolerant once – now it is not. The truth is, of course, far more complex.

The international media, particularly the New York Times, have therefore presented a narrative which very often is too simple. Radicalisation can be seen as a consequence of "the presence of Gulf charities, especially organizations from Saudi Arabia," and the Kosovar foreign fighters were "radicalized and recruited (…) by a corps of extremist clerics and secretive associations funded by Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab gulf states using an obscure, labyrinthine networks of donations from charities, private individuals and government ministries" (Knudsen 2017, p.12). These charities entered Kosovo after the war and exploited its fragile institutions and weak economy. They built and funded mosques that introduced a more conservative form of Islam, so-called Wahhabism or Salafism, which contrasted sharply from the Hanafi school, "traditionally a liberal version that is accepting of other religions" (Gall 2016).

Another explanation often offered by international media coverage is Kosovo's dire socioeconomic situation, and issues like poverty, unemployment, or low levels of education. However, as Knudsen (2017, p.14) points out "no *causal* link between socioeconomic conditions and "radicalization" has been established" (emphasis in original). Sometimes, resourceful individuals become foreign fighters, both in Kosovo and other places. This, however, does not mean that socioeconomic aspects *never* affect the decision to travel to the Syrian conflict theatre. It is merely the *causality* that is questioned, the ability of this factor to *explain* radicalization. As Knudsen (2017, p.14) points out, international English language media presents their own version of the link between socioeconomic conditions and radicalization, "indicating that many people in Kosovo are poor, uneducated or both, and *as such* have been particularly vulnerable to the seductive religious ideology of foreign ultraconservatives and home-grown radicals".

The connection between poverty and the foreign fighter phenomenon has been explored. In their paper, Benmelech & Klor (2016) set out to test the common hypothesis that economic conditions determine mobilization, or that poverty explains radicalization. In a table over foreign fighters to general population, Kosovo comes on fifth place globally, followed by Libya and Bosnia (Benmelech & Klor 2016, p.19), confirming that this is a pressing and important issue. However, after analysing data from around the world, they conclude that "economic conditions are not the root causes of the global phenomenon of ISIS foreign fighters," and that "many foreign fighters originate from countries with high levels of economic development, low income inequality, and highly developed political institutions" (Benmelech & Klor 2016, p. 11).

The authors propose an alternative cause however, pointing at ethnical and linguistic homogeneity. "In fact, the more homogenous the host country is," the authors write, "the greater difficulty immigrants such as Muslims from the Middle East experience in assimilating." (Benmelech & Klor 2016, p. 11). This is a valid point, but it does not account for Western converts who also have travelled to Syria. An explanation of this nature implies that foreign fighters are unintegrated Muslims, which simply is not true, particularly not in the Kosovar case. Kosovo is both ethnically and linguistically homogenous, with around 90% of the population being Albanian Muslims. It is difficult to imagine exactly what Kosovar foreign fighters failed to assimilate in, particularly when Shtuni (2016) has shown that Kosovar foreign

fighters are more or less the same as the rest of Kosovar citizens. They are neither poorer, less educated or less employed.

This does not mean that money or other monetary gains had no role to play in the equation. Rather, I argue that it is hardly enough in and of itself – I dispute the assumed causality. I argue instead that it is never enough to only view external factors that might have enabled the foreign fighter phenomenon – we must consider the individuals themselves and their internal motivations. We must analyse their personal truths. A perspective which focuses on the individual and which analyses the construction of meaning within the Kosovar Islamist milieu is just as central and relevant in understanding foreign fighters. We must consider, and take seriously, the task of deciphering how the Kosovar Islamist milieu provides meaning, purpose, and belonging to Kosovar foreign fighters, and how it provides conditions of possibility for the foreign fighter phenomenon. The study of Islamist thought, and in particular the Islamist construction of the warfare-masculinity nexus is central to understanding radicalization. To do so, however, we must emerge in the texts themselves, instead of searching for independent factors that might have produced Kosovar foreign fighters as a consequence

Summary: The Sound of (Masculinity) Silence

This chapter has reviewed the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon. It has given an overall review, based on central reports on the issue. Based on central reports, we have primarily established a timeline. Knudsen (2017) estimates that as much as 84% of the Kosovar foreign fighters travelled to the conflict theatre between 2012 and 2013. The review of literature written about the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon has also identified a thematic and methodological gap. While the literature is rich in details, statistics and numbers, there have been very few analyses of Islamist discourses, and particularly Islamist masculinity.

Based on this chapter we can identify certain tropes in the study and reporting of Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon. Brainwashing or socioeconomic reasons have very often been identified as key reason behind the high foreign fighter mobilisation in Kosovo. What these tropes have in common is their scientific approach. They all view the outcome of becoming a foreign fighter as a dependent factor which is caused by an independent factor through different enabling mechanism. In different words, they all identify underlying structures which steer these individuals into the hands of violent extremism. If it is poverty, people's lack of sufficient income is the true cause, and this state of poverty was exploited by extremist recruiters.

Kosovars are lured by monetary gain, but it is in fact poverty that is the issue which necessitates 'Islamist behaviour' for monetary gain. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, referring to both reports and articles, very little supports this connection between poverty and terrorism.

Other explanations believe that extremism is caused by specific actors and organizations, most often based in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf countries. These organizations pretend to be charity organizations, but their purpose is to spread and promote a hard-line fundamentalist version of Islam. This version of Islam has been allowed to grow by Kosovo's weak institutions and has then gone on to produce foreign fighters. This narrative is insufficient for a few reasons. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries are among the richest in the world – why, then, hasn't Saudi money *more* foreign fighters? As mentioned in the previous section, if Gulf-funded mosques create foreign fighters, each constructed mosque has produced less than two foreign fighters. This undermines the implied causality.

This chapter has reviewed central reports concerning the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon. I established that the foreign fighter phenomenon was the most pressing in the time period between 2012 and 2013, as many as 84% having left for the Syrian conflict theatre in this period. The typical Kosovar foreign fighter is a man between 17 and 30, has moderate rather than low education. Additionally, they thought their economic situation was average or above average, going against two common conceptions, namely that foreign fighters are poor and uneducated. Further on, I have outlined media attention, and the consequences of this media coverage. Based on secondary sources, I have concluded that while this phenomenon is serious and should be reported, many international news stories on the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon have been seriously flawed. They have very often been based on problematic or reductionist assumptions, and as such given a skewed image of the issue at hand. Finally, I have gone through typical narratives as to what explains the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon. None of these solutions have actually directly dealt with the foreign fighter phenomenon itself. Rather, poverty or Gulf-based charities or poverty have been identified as 'the real issue', which has produced a consequence, the foreign fighter phenomenon.

In reviewing the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon, I have discovered a mismatch between the statistics of this phenomenon and the research and media coverage of it. The numbers have been clear: Kosovar foreign fighters are young adult men, who, on average, have a longer education than the average Kosovar. Additionally, their economic status is average or above

average. This contradicts the anecdotal image of the Kosovar foreign fighter as a poor uneducated, unemployed man. In order to better understand this phenomenon, I intend to focus my research on the discursive construction of the warfare-masculinity nexus instead. This, I believe, can give us insight which extends beyond the superficial and stereotypical narratives on which most reporting, and indeed, research, is based. Further on, the connection between masculinity and the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon has not been studied yet. Before we can do so, however, we need to establish an analytical framework with theoretic tools that can enable us to understand and analyse the construction of meaning. This is the objective of my next chapter.

CHAPTER III:
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

I'm only an image of what you see
I'm only an image of what you see
I'm only an image of what you see
You don't know me
You don't know me
You don't know me

I'm only a woman if woman is a word

- *Woman Is a Word,* Empress of

In the song quoted above, the singer Lorely Rodriguez not only articulates an experience, she also takes a stand. With lines that are very true to Saussurian linguistics and poststructuralist thought (to which we shall return soon), Rodriguez challenges the signified ('womanhood') to which she is a signifier ('woman'). Rodriguez both comments on the fact that many see her as just an image of womanhood, thereby limiting her personal potential *and* she makes clear the fact that she is *me* which you do not know. In doing so, she delinks herself from a chain of equivalence whereupon she is linked to traits and qualities she disagrees with. It is this delinking Rodriguez comments on when she sings that *I'm only a woman if woman is a word*: she refuses to take a subject position in a discourse that misconstrues her and limits her experience as a human being. True to Saussure's relational language theory, she comments on how a woman's position is society is relational to that of the men in their life.

Nonetheless, neither *woman* nor *man* are unfortunately not *just a word.* They are both charged with meaning, and in this chapter, I explore the construction of this meaning. I construct an analytical framework by identifying and combining number of theories and analytical tools which will aid me in my analysis. As per chapter one, the research question of this study is as follows: *How is the masculinity-warfare nexus constructed in the Albanian radical Islamist milieu?* In order to identify what sort of theories are necessary, we must first break down the research question. The first central term in the research question is *masculinity.* Masculinity and gender will be discussed by outlining the work of Judith Butler. The next term that needs theoretical backing is *constructed.* This, of course, refers to a social constructionism approach

to knowledge and research, where taken-for-granted knowledge is questioned (Jørgensen & Philips 2002, p. 5) and meaning is constructed through language. Lastly, my research question intends to analyze masculinity construction in the Albanian *Islamist* milieu. This, too, must be reflected in my analytical framework. In the last section of this chapter I will outline the relationship between gender, the Qur'an and Islam, with a particular focus on Amna Barlas and Amina Wadud. Both authors write about Qur'anic exegesis, and how patriarchal values are something that is *read into* the Qur'an, rather than something which is in the Qur'an's very nature.
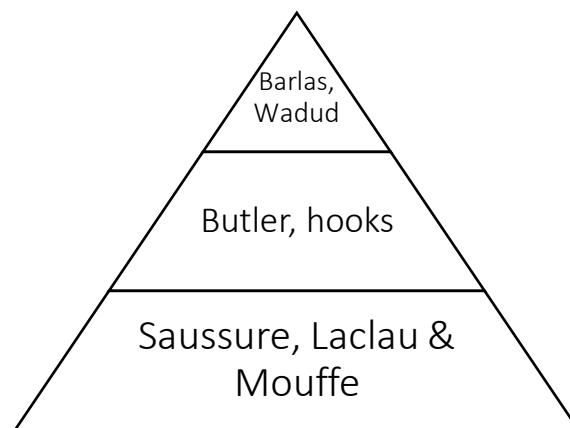
This chapter should therefore be imagined as a pyramid, illustrated by the graph above. At the base of the pyramid is the philosophical orientation of social constructionism, as explored by Burr, but also Saussure and Laclau and Mouffe. These three authors are at the bottom of the pyramid, because they deal theoretically with very vast subjects, like how meaning is constructed. In the next section, the pyramid narrows to focus on how gender in particular is a constructed meaning. Lastly, the uppermost point of the pyramid discusses the gendering of Islam. While this study might have been conducted with Butler only as a theoretical framework, I believe that the specific knowledge that Barlas and Wadud provide is necessary because it trains me in a language that allows me to better understand the Islamists I seek to study. While these three theories might seem diverse, what they all share is a rejection of essentialism. They also all share a social constructionist view, and agree upon the flawed, instable nature of language, but also agree on language being the constructor of meaning.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a difficult field to define. We can, however, begin, as Burr (1995, p.1) does, by stating that social constructionism can be seen as "alternative approaches to the study of human beings as social animals". 'Discourse analysis', 'deconstruction', and 'poststructuralism', she argues, are all part of this theoretical orientation. Beyond this point, it is difficult to propose a definition which includes all social constructionist approaches. Instead, Burr (1995, p.2) proposes that "what links them all together is a kind of 'family resemblance'". Exemplifying through a hypothetical Smith family, she writes that there is no "characteristics borne by all members of the Smith family, but there are enough recurrent features shared amongst different family members to identify the people as basically belonging to the same family group" (Burr 1995, p.2). She then proceeds to point to four features which form a common ground of social constructionism – four features that all approaches share, despite their differences.

The first point identified by Burr (1995, p.3), and one of the most central, is social constructionist approaches' "critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge" (Burr 1995, p.3). A social constructionist approach, writes Burr, "invites us to be critical of the idea that our observation of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world" (Burr 1995, p.3). In this sense, it could be said that it goes against positivism and empiricism of traditional sciences, which assumes that we can observe the nature of things, and that "what exists is what we *perceive* to exist" (Burr 1995, p.3, emphasis in original).

The rejection of empiricism and positivism has profound effects on social sciences. What follows from this rejection, is that "the categories with which we as human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to *real* divisions" (Burr 1995, p.3, emphasis mine). This can result in a study in the different categories and ways of distinguishing cheeses, or something far more fundamental, gender. While we can agree that male and female reproductive organs differ, we can question whether this entails *two different categories of personhood, and the implication of this dichotomic division*. Burr (1995) writes that social constructionist would not question the difference in reproductive organs, but rather it asks "why this distinction has been given so much importance by human beings that whole categories of personhood (…) have been built upon it (…) we might equally well (…) have divided people up into tall and short, or those with ear lobes and those without" (Burr 1995, p.3).

A second tenant of social constructionism is that of *historical and cultural specificity*. Our understanding of the world, and the concepts and categories we use to make sense of it, depends on where and when we are from. Burr (1995) refers to Dickens' work to point out how tremendously the concept of 'child' and 'childhood' has changed. Treating children the same way as in a Dickens novel in 2019, or even 1990, 80, or 70, would not just be outdated, it would be illegal. Yet in Dickens' time, it was norm. "This means that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative," writes Burr (1995, p.4). "Not only are they specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time" (Burr 1995, p.4). This goes hand in hand with the rejection of an absolute truth that can be observed, and Burr reminds us that the "particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are therefore artifacts of it, and we should not assume that *our* ways of understanding are necessary better (in terms of being any nearer the truth) than other ways." (Burr 1995, p.4).

Burr (1995) then identifies the third social constructionist base, namely that *knowledge is sustained by social processes*. Rather than from objective observation, our culturally and historically specific knowledge of the world stems from social processes. "It is through the daily interactions between people in the courses of social life," Burr writes, "that our versions of knowledge become fabricated." (Burr 1995, p.4). As a consequence, social constructionists are interested in all social interactions, particularly language. The different 'truths' of different societies – culturally and historically specific truths – are not a result of objective observation, "but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other" (Burr 1995, p.4).

Last but not least, Burr identifies *the link between knowledge and social action*. Certain understandings of the world necessitate or exclude certain actions. In our construction of certain truths, we also include the identification of certain issues, and the solutions to these. Burr writes that "each different construction brings with it, or invites, a different kind of action from human beings." (Burr 1995, p.5). Consider for example heroin addiction. If we understand it as a crime, the proper solution would be institutional criminalization and punishment. It becomes a problem which we leave to law enforcement and the courts. If we understand it as a medical condition, the addicts are not criminals, but sick patients who must be receive medical treatment through the health care system. It is a social issue which must be treated

through therapy and medication, not imprisonment. Similarly, if we construct women as caring and nurturing in their biological nature, this becomes the basis of the social act of excluding women from the labor market to care for children and home. "Descriptions or constructions of the world," Burr writes, "sustain some patters of social actions and exclude others." (Burr 1995, p.5).

While the different social constructionist approaches might differ, they share many of their basic views of language. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002 identify four points. First, "language is not a reflection of a pre-existing reality." (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.12). Further on, language is "structured in patterns or discourses – there is not just one general system of meaning as in Saussurian structuralism but a series of systems or discourses, whereby meanings change from discourse to discourse." (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.12.). These patterns are "maintained and transformed in discursive practices." To study these patters, their maintenance and transference, one must analyse "the specific contexts in which language is in action." (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.12.)

Saussure. Laclau and Mouffe
Laclau and Mouffe's theory clearly contradicts an essentialist approach to identity theory. This rejection is based upon Saussure's relational theory of value (Laclau 1990, p.207 in Smith 1998, p.84). Saussure rejects the referential theory of language, which assumes that "objects are already given to us as coherent entities (…) humans merely assign a name to each object or idea; different language-using communities might choose different names, but the relationship of every community to the totality of objects is basically the same" (Smith 1998, p. 84). Instead, Saussure supposes a relational theory, whereupon a linguistic sign "unites a concept and a sound-image – a signifier and a signified – rather than a thing and a name" (Saussure 1966, p.66, in Smith 1998, p.84). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is random, argues Saussure, and there is nothing about the combination of the linguistic signs C-A-T that should mean the four-legged pet we know as 'cat'. It could just as easily have been G-O-D, but that idea is uncomfortable, because those signs spell 'God', which is an entirely different *signified*. This becomes even more interesting when we consider that in some civilizations, like in Ancient Egypt, both these signifiers were one and the same. Cats were worshipped as Gods, and the combinations of signs that constituted the (ancient Egyptian) word 'cat', signaled to a signified with properties similar to our signified 'God'. It is unlikely

that cats have changed much biologically since then – their social role and our conceptualization of them, however, has.

Saussure's principle of the arbitrariness of signs also entails that each language system "articulates reality" (Saussure 1966, p.10 in Smith 1998, p.85). Referring to Saussure, Smith writes that "it is through language that the objects that are meaningful for us are constructed. Each language divides up, categorizes, and makes coherent the totality of objects that is used by its corresponding language-using community" (Smith 1998, p.85). Because language is the way in which we articulate reality, it is not the act of observing, but rather the act of describing that gives us access to 'the truth' or reality. When we describe that which we observe, we actually create the very reality we attempt to describe.

The same observations could be described in different ways using different signifiers for the supposedly same signified. Imagine, for example, an image of a floor packed full of roses. To some, it might signify that a soprano delivered an exquisite performance in an opera; to others, it might signify that someone is proposing to their significant other. A Norwegian citizen, however, might instead think of the aftermath of the 22. July terrorist attack, where roses flooded that space outside the Oslo Domkirke. The idea is not that different people have different associations with different symbols, nor that we construct our own reality. The idea is rather that *the reality which we construct through language is the only reality which can be meaningful to us.* There is no absolute truth – there is no ideal 'catness' to which the words 'gato', 'cat', 'Katze', or 'macë' refer. "Language therefore not only constructs contingent linkages between the signifier and the signified," Smith writes, "it also constructs the signifieds themselves in a process that is entirely independent of the extra-linguistic" (Smith 1998, p.85). Meaning, truth, and reality are not fixed concepts 'out there', waiting to be discovered, described and analyzed – they are constructed through the medium of language.

Signs, according to Saussure, attain their meaning by being related to other signs. "The word 'dog' is different from the words 'cat' and 'mouse' and 'dig' and 'dot'," write Jørgensen and Phillips, "The word 'dog' is thus part of a network or structure of other words from which it differs; and it is precisely from everything that it is not that the word 'dog' gets its meaning." (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, p.10) Laclau and Mouffe, following Saussure, insist that there is nothing of meaning outside the discursive. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) write that critics might say that according to Laclau and Mouffe's theory, reality does not exist because

everything is discourse. This, however, is a misunderstanding: "both social and physical objects exist, but our access to them is always mediated by systems of meaning in the form of discourses." (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.35). Further on, their theory implies that things in themselves possess no meaning, but rather that "meaning is something we ascribe to them through discourse." (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.35). Building further on Saussure's work, Laclau and Mouffe argue that "Just as signs in language are relationally defined and therefore acquire their meaning by their difference from one another, so social actions derive their meaning from their relationship to other actions." (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp.34-35). In the case of a flood caused by an overflowing river, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) write, the rise in water occurs independently of our language, thoughts and discourses. But, the authors write, while the "rise in the water level is a material fact," it becomes discursive "as soon as people try to ascribe meaning to it" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.9).

Laclau and Mouffe's theory provides important insight about identity, and they believe that that the "subject is fundamentally *split*," and that "it never quite becomes 'itself'" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p43, italics in original). The self, they argue, "acquires its identity by being *represented* discursively" (ibid., italics in original). Accordingly, identity is "*identification* with a subject position in a discursive structure" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.43, italics in original). Just like Saussure thought that language was relational, so Laclau and Mouffe believe that the self is "discursively constituted through *chains of equivalence* where signs are sorted together in chains in opposition to other chains which thus define how the subject is, and how it is not" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.43, italics in original). Identity therefore is "always *relationally* organized; the subject is something because it is contrasted with something it is not" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.43, italics in original). Because the subject is split, and as discourses nor meaning are never fixed, "identity is just as *changeable* as discourses are" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.43.). Indeed, this is where Saussure and Laclau and Mouffe differ. A sign obtains meaning from the relation to other signs, but this relation (and thereby meaning) is not fixed.

Another important point to keep in mind is that the subject is "*fragmented* or *decentered*; it has different identities according to those discourses of which it forms part" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.43, italics in original). This, again, means that the subject is "*overdetermined*; in principle, it always has the possibility to identify differently in specific situations (…) a given

identity is contingent – that is, possible but not necessary" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.43, italics in original). Laclau and Mouffe will be discussed more in detail again in the next chapter.

Feminist Thought and Gender Theory

A word that often reappears in feminist texts is 'the patriarchy' (or 'patriarchal values', 'patriarchal society', etc.). In *The Will to Change*, bell hooks provides a personal but insightful introduction. hooks writes that the patriarchy is a sociopolitical system that insists that "males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females," hooks writes, and that males are "endowed with the right to dominate and rule the weak and maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence" (hooks 2004, p.18). People fear challenging the patriarchy, writes hooks, because of the fear that it will doom our planet and species as humans. This is tragically ironic, because "patriarchal methods of organizing nations, especially the insistence on violence as a form of social control, has actually led to the slaughter of millions of people" (hooks 2004, pp. 29-30).

To illustrate the patriarchy, hooks draws from her own life. Comparing herself to her brother, she reflects how differently their parents raised them: "As their daughter, I was taught to that it was my role to serve, to be weak, to be free from the burden of thinking, to caretake and nurture others," she writes. "My brother was taught that it was his role to be served; to provide; to be strong; to think, strategize, and plan; and to refuse to caretake or nurture others." (hooks 2004, p.18). She was taught that it was improper for women to be violent, but that her brother "was taught that his value would be determined by his will to do violence (albeit in appropriate settings)," and that "for a boy, enjoying violence was a good thing (albeit in appropriate settings)" (hooks 2004, pp.18-19). Interestingly enough, hooks describes her reality as a young woman of color in the fifties, but the experience she captures is as relevant today as it was then. In fact, the rigidity and unyielding nature of the violence-masculinity nexus, despite an era of mainstream feminism, is one of the central observations of this thesis.

The strength of hooks' argument is the acknowledgement of what she calls 'psychological patriarchy'. More than describing the rule of men and fathers on a national level, psychological patriarchy highlights the effect of the patriarchy on the individual, for example the promise of control, and the belief that men are only men if they are in control, strong, and powerful. In an extract which echoes Judith Butler, to whom we shall return later, hooks writes: "Although we

were often confused, we knew one fact for certain: we could not be and act the way we wanted to, doing what we felt like. It was clear to us that our behavior had to follow a predetermined, gendered script" (hooks 2004, p.19).

While hooks argues that violence is expected of men, she also says that this violence is directed towards the self. The patriarchy, writes hooks, expects that men are violent towards themselves first:

> "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem."
>
> (hooks 2004, p. 66)

This is a very powerful remark, and in fact, one to which we will return to in the analysis. The strength of this quote is that it provides some nuances to a field which sometimes is simplified more than what is fair. Indeed, that feminism is a complex field and must be problematized is the subject of the nest subsection.

Butler and gender as performance

Butler point of departure is a far more philosophical and theoretical one. She begins by questioning whether or not the category 'women' is useful for the feminist movement. Feminist thought and activism has assumed the existence of an existing identity, "understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within the discourse, but constitutes the subject from whom political representation is pursued" (Butler 2006, p.2). This is easy enough to understand, particularly when remembering the historic reality in which women's lives were not only misrepresented, but not represented at all.

Butler goes on to point to the fact that in order to be represented, one must meet the qualifications for being a subject. If representation is sought on behalf of women, then one accepts that society's definition of what a woman *is*. In this way, representation can hinder gender equality, rather than promote it. In Butler's own words, "the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures," and further on, that "the feminists subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to

facilitate its emancipation" (Butler 2006, p.3). This leads her to conclude that feminist critique should not just explore how women might be more represented in society, but rather, it should decipher how the category of 'women' "is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought." (Butler 2006, p.4)

Another point of departure for Butler (2006) is the distinction between sex and gender. This distinction, she argues, is not unproblematic. She rejects the idea that sex is a biological fact, and gender is a culture-specific interpretation of sex. "If the immutable character of sex is contested," she writes, "perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender". This leads her to conclude that "indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all". (Butler 2006, pp. 9-10). Instead of a culturally specific interpretation of sex, Butler argues that gender must also mean "the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" (Butler 2006, p.10). It is not correct to argue, therefore, that gender is to culture as sex is to nature, because gender is also "the discursive/ cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive", prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts" (Butler 2006, p.10, italics in original).

Commenting on the main two feminist perspectives on gender, Butler writes that "the problematic circularity of a feminist inquiry into gender is underscored by the presence of positions which, on the one hand, presume that gender is a secondary characteristic of persons and those which, on the other hand, argue that the very notion of the person, positioned within the language as a "subject" is a masculinist construction and prerogative which efficiently excludes the structural and semantic possibility of a feminine gender." (Butler 2006, p.15). Gender according to Butler, however, is performative: "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed (…) There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is formatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler 2006, p.34). It is important, argues Butler, to maintain that gender is not a *role,* which implies that there is a gendered actor that is behind the role. Indeed, she argues that gender should not be understood as "a role which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority" (Butler 1988, p.528)

More than a noun, gender is a process, Butler argues, a doing. She writes that "*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification." (Butler 2006, p.45). Gender is a set of repeated acts within an extremely strict   Even when gender is performed so well that it appears real, this ""congealing" itself is an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. (…) Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frame set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender" (Butler 2006, p.45).

Being performative, and being a stylization of the body, gender is in no way a fixed or even stable identity. Rather, Butler argues, it is an identity is an identity that is constituted in time, through "*stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 1988, p.519, emphasis in original). She also argues that even if sex and gender were fixed binaries, there is no guarantee that a "biological male" will express manhood, just as there is no guarantee that a "biological female" will express femininity – in fact, there is no guarantee that the cultural interpretation should be limited to just two. Would a person with male reproductive organs which expresses (or in Butlerian terms, performs) femininity then be any different from a "normal woman" in any meaningful way? According to Butler's logic, no – being performative, and being a set of repetitive acts, gender is only as real as it is performed.

This can make Butler controversial in an ironic way. While Butler is very important in the queer movement, one big aspect of gender identity in the 21st century is *identification*. For many trans people, being a man or a woman means *identifying* as a man or woman. This would entail that a trans woman, early in her transition (so early that she has yet to *perform femininity publicly*) would not "count" as a woman according to Butler's theory, because she is still performing masculinity. While this is a fair observation, Butler's theory explores the construction of gender as a social concept and social function, rather than gender as a personal identity. Further on, it is important to keep in mind the difference between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. One might *identify* as a woman, but still e*xpress* masculinity for whatever reasons a person might have. Further on, gender in Butlerian terms is

never fixed, so it is not as if trans women that are not expressing womanhood *will never be women.* One of Butler's main points is to exactly reject the idea of a fixed gender binary. The body, argues Butler, as Beauvoir has, is a historical situation. It is "manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation." (Butler 1988, p.521, emphasis in original).

The body becomes gendered through a set of acts which are consolidated, renewed and altered through time. It is important to not misunderstand Butler into believing that we may wake up one day and wish to be a man, and the other day we may wish to be women. Gender is performance, but it is also "a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Butler 1988, p.522). It is a social concept regulated by a very rigid frame. Gendered acts are supposed to produce the appearance of real substance (real gender), and it is also something which "humanizes" within contemporary culture. Failing to perform right are punished, sometimes brutally. Butler writes that "because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis." (Butler 1988, p. 522). There is a tacit collective agreement to perform and maintain gender as a binary, she argues, and the performers of genders become so entranced by their construction of gender, that one believes gender is both necessary and natural.

 The different set of acts that make out gender are so consolidated and repeated so often, that we as performers of gender end up believing it to be a natural fact and a social necessity. Butler writes that "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler 1988, p.520, emphasis in original). In this sense, gender is neither a creative nor unique project. Gender is an act that has been performed even before the performer enters the stage. It is an act which has been rehearsed, "much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality again." (Butler 1988, p.526).

To illustrate argument that gender is performative, Butler uses the example of drag-queens. She argues that drag is an effective illustration of what gender is:

"The performance of drag queens plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" (…); it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*."

(Butler 2006, p.187, emphasis in original)

It is important to bear in mind that there is a different between performativeness and expression. If gender is performative, "then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender" (Butler 1988, p.528). Gender being performative thus means that the gender lies in the act, rather than there existing an 'original gender' which can be expressed differently. "That gender reality is created through sustained social performances," writes Butler, "means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed." (Butler 1988, p.528)

The work of Judith Butler pans wide and complex, and one very quickly get lost in all the details, but also the other complex theories which Butler bases her own theory on. Thus, at the end of this section, I will summarize the points from Butler's theory which will be relevant in this thesis. Firstly, my gender is constituted through the repetition of my gender performance. Gender is only as real as it is performed and can be compared to how language constructs subject positions and thus the self. According to Butler, however, it is performance which constitutes gender. This does not mean that I can choose one gender today, and another tomorrow – instead it means that gender performance constructs the gendered self. Secondly, binary biological sex is a social construction as well – gender predates sex. Lastly, the performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, where the subject becomes gendered through an imitation or impersonation of established ideas of gender. Ergo, it will vary through time and space. The power of Butlers performativity theory is that it anchors social constructionism to the real world: her work is not simply a discussion on how gender is

constructed in our mind, but rather, how this very construction acts out in real life. Butler's notion of gender as performative is powerful not just because it claims that gender is a social construct, but because it also reminds us that social constructions are not just an activity of the mind. It is simultaneously something that has profound effect on people's lives, bodies, and possibilities. It explores how language not only affects how we think about ideas like gender, but rather how it creates room for some acts, and eliminate others.

Islam, the Qur'an and Gendered Qur'anic Exegesis

One of the most commonly debated subjects in Western societies the last decades (at least since 9/11) is Islam and women. Amina Wadud begins her attempt at interpreting the Qur'an from a woman's perspective by commenting this very discussion. With a wording that almost echoes Butler, Wadud argues that the conditions on which this discussion takes place are highly problematic:

> "Are women the same as men; different or distinct from; alike or unequal to; or unlike and equal to? Each of these questions rests on a single rhetorical flaw – that women must be measured against men - that inadvertently reinforces the erroneous notion that men are the standard-bearers, which, by extension means that only men are fully human"
>
> (Wadud 1999, p.xi).

In this section, Wadud echoes Butler's claim that in order for feminism to claim rights and representation of "women," it has to agree with that system's definition of what a "woman" is. Similarly, Wadud argues that discussion on the status of women in Islam is often based on assumptions that lead the discussion into problematic territory.

Religious texts are, as one would expect, central in the Islamist texts which this study analyzes. These religious texts, however - be they surahs from the Qur'an or hadith – are not fixed in their meaning. They must be interpreted. As the first section already explored, language is fundamentally unstable and can therefore be interpreted differently. The Qur'an is particularly challenging text. Indeed, surah 3 verse 7 addresses the fact that there are some verses which are clear and easily understood, while other verses have a hidden unknown meaning, known only to God. The same verse warns against choosing one type of verses, urging believers to take a holistic approach. The matter is further made complex by the nature of the Qur'an.

Unlike the New Testament, which consists of different books written by the apostles, each a slightly different biography of the same Christ. Instead, the Qur'an is believed to be the literal word of God, as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is very important to note that the Qur'an is never one single thing – a surah can be very technical, dealing with juridical matters, only to switch to very poetic phrasings, and end with remarks about taxes. Its chapters are not thematically arranged, but rather by their length, beginning with the longest and ending with the shortest surahs. This makes interpretation highly necessary, but it also necessitates critical thinking towards other interpretations. It also means that if one wishes to know what the Qur'an says about for example orphans, the entire book must be read. The Qur'an is a book which insists on being read and interpreted holistically.

These Qur'anic features have two implications. Firstly, the verses of the Qur'an have to potential to be immensely important and powerful to Muslims. The actual words and the physical book in which they are printed are both deemed holy. The effect of receiving directions and orders from the Supreme Creator of the Universe and everything in it cannot be overestimated. Secondly, there is more room for interpretation. The classical Arabic in which it written is notorious for the multiple meanings and false cognates each word can have. An infamous example is Surah 4:34 which traditionally has been interpreted as permission for husbands to beat their wives. The Arabic word which has been interpreted as 'to beat', can also mean 'to turn away from', or even 'to have sex with'. The interpretation of the verse will therefore be deeply affected by the interpreters preconceived notions of marital power dynamics.

The fact that the reader or interpreter of the Qur'an bring themselves into their (his) interpretation of it is one of the central arguments in Wadud's work *Qur'an and Woman.* Wadud argues that the reader interacts with the text, and that this is only natural. What is unnatural, according to her argument, is the favoring of one certain interpretation (tafsir) over others. She argues that "the assertion that there is only one interpretation of the Qur'an limits the extent of the text," and that the Qur'an "must be flexible enough to accommodate innumerable cultural situations because of its claims to be universally beneficial to those who believe." (Wadud 1999, p.6). Forcing the Qur'an to have just one cultural perspective, argues Wadud, "- even the cultural perspective of the original community of the Prophet – severely limits its application and contradicts the stated universal purpose of the book itself" (Wadud 1999, p.6).

For the Qur'an to realize its potential as a catalyst for social improvement, Wadud argues that its interpretation must fit the specific cultural and social text of its readers. She warns against believing that interpretation also necessarily leads to altering the principles of the text. "It is not the text or its principles that change," writes Wadud, "but the capacity and particularity of the understanding and reflection of the principles of the text within a community of people." (Wadud 1999, p.5). Wadud goes on to present a feminist reading of the Qur'an, or rather, she interprets it as a woman. However, this is not relevant for my thesis, and is therefore left out.

Asma Barlas in many ways continues on the same path as Wadud. Much like Wadud, she wishes to show how patriarchal values are *read into* the Qur'an rather than intrinsic parts of the text. Barlas believes that it is important to study how gender is interpreted because of the power of representation. She writes that it is important to consider these questions because "a society's constructions of "ideal" women also shape its treatment of "real" ones." (Barlas 2001, p.117). Why has the Muslim world often read the Qur'an as a patriarchal text? Barlas identifies three reasons:

> "The fact that the Quran has been read as a patriarchal text (i.e., as a text that privileges males and teaches the precepts of female inferiority and subordination to men), has to do with (a) its readings in/by patriarchies, (b) by means of a conservative method authorized by a handful of male scholars during the Middle Ages, (c) with the backing of the state, which became involved in defining religious knowledge from very early times."
>
> (Barlas 2001, p. 120)

Barlas therefore argues that the oppression which is often supposedly based on the Qur'an stems not from the actual text itself, but from the context in which it was read, and the methodology of interpretation used. Bear in mind, as discussed above, the nature of the Qur'an as Divine Discourse. Trusting only a handful of people to interpret the text therefore greatly affects that society – particularly when this handful of people are all men, and the interpretation of the Qur'an also affects the lives of women.

This is not a groundbreaking argument. Many Muslims who feel like they have to defend their religion to non-Muslim peers often turn to this argument. Barlas' and Wadud's argument,

however, is on a deeper level. Interpretation does not change the actual text: it just changes the meaning in that given context. Consider again the example from the beginning of this sentence. The section which has been traditionally interpreted as giving men permission to beat their wives uses a word for 'strike' that can also mean 'turn away from'. Wadud and Barlas are not claiming that interpretation changes *the text itself*. Interpretation, however, does determine whether men in conflict with their wives might turn away from their wives or strike them. As mentioned earlier, your pre-conceived notions of husband authority will greatly affect how you read the said section from the Qur'an.

Barlas argues that understanding Islam as a whole as patriarchal is wrong on three counts. Firstly, it rests on the confusion of mixing "religion/sacred text and a particular, patriarchal, reading of it; i.e., they confuse Divine Discourse with its exegesis (and Islam with Muslims.)" (Barlas 2001, pp. 121-122). Secondly, she argues that it is ahistorical. It does not take into consideration the different forms gender-based oppression, nor on the interaction between religions. Lastly, she argues that many forms of oppression in fact stem from the colonial times, rather than being a seamless practice:

> "Western colonialism, which came, it said, to liberate us from our cultural and religious heritage, actually occasioned the reentrenchment of many practices and symbols (notably, the veil) which Muslims came to see as markers of their identities, hence *differences* from the West."
>
> (Barlas 2001, p. 124, italics in original)

The dichotomy "the West" vs. "Islam" which is outlined in Said's Orientalism, also helps sustain the idea that all social issues in the Muslim world have internal causes. Barlas writes that when we understand "the West" and "Islam" as mutually exclusive and sealed universes, we simultaneously ignore that the Western civilization was very active in forming sexual and social practices in the Islamic world. Yet the idea of Islam as inherently patriarchal also comes from within, from Muslim interpretations of the Qur'an. Inequality is sometimes read into the Qur'an from within, writes Barlas, "by generalizing what is specific in it and by decontextualizing it." (Barlas 2001, p. 128).

In fact, Barlas argues that just as inequality has been read into the Qur'an, so can liberation. She begins by outlining one of the most central concepts in Islam, that of *tawhid*, or the oneness and supreme rule of God. Based on this concept, she argues that no one can assume a role that is similar to that of God, a role which is either in conflict with or similar as that of God. "Inasmuch as theories of male privilege do both—by drawing parallels between God and fathers/husbands, misrepresenting males as intermediaries between women and God," Barlas writes, "or as rulers over women and thus entitled to their obedience—they violate the concept of Tawhid and must be rejected as un-Quranic." (Barlas 2001, p. 128) Barlas thus shows how patriarchal practices and ways of thinking break one of the most central ideas in Islam.

While the Qur'an does admit the existence of sex, Barlas argues that this distinction is not heavy with meaning. Indeed, Barlas writs that:

> "the only criteria for distinguishing between humans in the Quran are ethical-moral, not sexual: "O [human]! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct."" (Wadud 1999, p. 15 in Barlas 2001, p. 132)

This, argues Barlas, shows that while the distinction exists, it is not understood or used as a ground for different treatment, or even potential. The Qur'anic verse quoted above clearly states that the noblest of believers are not men, but rather those who are best in conduct. The Qur'an does not provide any attributes to each given sex. In this sense, the distinction between men and women in the verse above might function to point out the sameness and equality, rather than inequality, of all people, despite their sex, gender or nation.

Further on, Barlas uses the story of Abraham to illustrate the Qur'anic stand on patriarchy. Patriarchy, in her text, is understood as both the rule of fathers (males), and the idea of God as a man / father. She argues that "not only does the Quran repudiate the patriarchal construct of God as Father, but it also condemns sacralization of prophets as fathers" (Barlas 2001, p. 130). In fact, Barlas argues that one of the most radical moves of the Qur'an against patriarchy is to displace the rule of men/fathers/husbands in favor for the rule of God, once again bringing the Islamic concept of tawhid. This, Barlas argues, is not just for unbelieving fathers, but for those who believe (in God) as well. She uses the story of Abraham as an example, where God orders

Abraham to sacrifice his son, but then commands him to stop, establishing once more the primacy of God's rule.

Last but not least, Barlas argues, as Wadud has, that while biological difference is recognized, gender is in fact not. No attributes are given to womanhood or manhood, no traits are prescribed to men or women only. Indeed, quoting a verse from the Qur'an, Barlas argues that men and women have the same responsibilities and will reap the same rewards:

> For Muslim men and women, —
>
> For believing men and women,
>
> For devout men and women,
>
> For men and women who are
>
> Patient and constant, for men
>
> And women who humble themselves,
>
> For men and women who give
>
> In charity, for men and women
>
> Who fast (and deny themselves).
>
> For men and women who
>
> Guard their chastity, and
>
> For men and women who
>
> Engage much in God's praise
>
> For them has God prepared
>
> Forgiveness and great reward
>
> (Qur'an 33:35, in Barlas 2001, p.133).

This, according to Barlas, shows not only that the sexes have same rights, claims, and duties in the eyes God, it also shows that women are not supposed to take some roles over others. Barlas argues that the Qur'an says nothing about division of labor, or other social arrangement of gender. In fact, by addressing women, the Qur'an makes women it's *subject* rather than *object*.

Summary

At the end of this chapter, we can see a few analytical tools needed to answer how the masculinity-warfare nexus is constructed in the Kosovar Islamist milieu. It is important to keep in mind the power of language, and its fundamental instability yet immense potency. It is in this juncture that the term performativity becomes relevant. Because words and language are the only way to construct meaning, it is important to always distinguish between what a statement *communicates* vs. what a statement *does*. When a couple is wed, for example, they say 'yes' to the terms of marriage. We may analyze what these terms are, how they are constructed, and the power they contain. But we should also keep in mind that by saying 'yes', the lives of this couple has been significantly altered. They are considered married, with every social, juridical and cultural meanings the concept contains. Depending on when and where they live, their lives might have become significantly different in a material sense: they might be expected to live together, and their income and expenses might differ significantly.

According to Butler, gender is performative. This does not mean that anyone can be anything – rather, it means that gender is "an effect of practices" (Smith 1998, p.159). In fact, Butler argues that sex is "strategically constructed fiction whose deployment allows for the extension and intensification of misogynist and homophobic discipline." (Smith 1998, p.151). Dividing humanity into two distinct biological categories is neither a neutral and natural fact, nor free of historical and political dimensions, Butler argues; in fact, it is an assumption which is based on underlying sexism and heterosexism (Smith 1998, pp.151-152). It is important to understand the weight of Butler's argument: she is not claiming that gender is a role and that it is a certain way to act out your sex. Rather, gender creates a chain of effects, resulting in certain postures, ways of speaking, ways of walking, thereby creating the idea of womanhood or masculinity. Gender, according to Butler, is not just a fixed fact about us: it something which is constituted, negotiated, produced and reproduced daily. Gender is constituted through a set of actions which conform with dominant societal rules. As I have already outlined, Butler believes that the act extends beyond the actor (or performer). It is, to use Butler's words, an act that has been performed even before the actor entered the stage. According to Butler's argument, the individual does not create gender through their performance: rather, it is the gender performance itself that creates the gendered individual.

So far in our process of deciphering the masculinity-warfare nexus in Kosovar Islamist milieu, we can argue, as Wadud and Barlas have, that Islam and Islamic texts has historically been interpreted in patriarchal terms. The Qur'an, like any other texts according to social constructionism, is meaningless unless we interpret it; unless we understand each term and tie our understanding into a subsequent relational net of meaning. Wadud and Barlas both identify a negative space within Qur'anic interpretation: all the major interpretive works on which most Muslims rely are written by men living in a certain historical era. Given the power of the Qur'an for Muslims, this has vast consequences for gender relations in Muslim societies. Men become the de-facto mediators in the relationship between women and God, despite the fact this goes against the Qur'anic message.

CHAPTER IV:
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Having presented a review of the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon and discussed the relevant analytical framework, the research process must be outlined. This can be a tricky balance act, particularly since discourse analysis can be considered both a theory and a method. This can make distinction difficult, but not impossible. The following chapter is structed in the following way. First, I identify the method of analysing my data, its strengths and its weaknesses. Second, I will explain how the data has been analysed, namely through the theory of Laclau and Mouffe. Thirdly, I discuss my fieldwork in Kosovo, and discuss my own positionality within the discourse, my background and my preconceived notions as I begun analysing my data.

Discourse Analysis: "A Complete Package"

When I began studying the foreign fighter phenomenon, I did not know that I was entering a confusing domain. It was omnipresent in media, yet few theoretical and analytical frameworks existed to properly study of it. As chapter two discussed, the type of knowledge that is produced and distributed about foreign fighters is very rarely based on interaction with the foreign fighters themselves. The frequent terrorist attacks claimed by ISIS, as well as the abundance of ISIS-videos of gruesome acts of violence, further made difficult to neutrally and objectively analyse the subject. Few managed to discuss violent extremism in the wake of the Syrian Civil War without using morally charged terms like "evil", "barbaric" or even "savage". While the usage of these words might be understandable, its usage is very futile. Such words hinder the generation of knowledge that allows us to understand the issue at hand. As such, it silences important conversations that should be had: "evil" becomes not only a description of ISIS fighters, it becomes an explanation. According to this mentality, then, organizations like ISIS and their supporters act accordingly because it is who they are, it is their inborn nature. They also very often are based on Islamophobic and racist assumptions.

Simultaneously, amid this chaos, young men travelled to Syria willingly, often directly defying their families and local communities. These individuals did not view ISIS nor their acts as "evil" or "barbaric": in fact, they wished to actively contribute to ISIS' project. Witnessing the coexistence of two realities so divergent made me reflect about how truth is not a fixed concept. Who was I to determine which truth was truer, and which meaning that was more meaningful? It was by chance that I ended up in this particular (privileged) position of *studying*, rather *being studied.* Had circumstances been different, I myself might have found myself travelling to Syria. I wanted to identify *the Islamist truth* rather than *the truth*, to explore the realm jihadism through the jihadist's own words. In a landscape full of assumption, of unreliable knowledge and minimal contact with subject of study, I wished to dive in the foreign fighter universe to see what I would find. It was therefore evident that qualitative methods in general, and discourse analysis particular was fitting as both methodology and theoretical basis. I was interested in the analysis of one particular truth, and discourse analysis is the tool intended to do precisely that. The initial methodological choice was therefore clear early in the research process.

Further on, my methodology is tightly woven with my theoretical approach. Discourse analysis as method is intertwined with my theoretical framework in two main ways. Firstly, discourse analysis is, as Jørgensen & Phillips (2002) call it, 'a complete package': "Each approach to discourse analysis that we present is not just a method for data analysis, but a theoretical and methodological whole – a complete package. (...) In discourse analysis, *theory* and *method* are intertwined and researchers must accept the basic philosophical premises in order to use discourse analysis as their method of empirical study." (3-4, emphasis in original). Ergo, discourse analysis was deemed the most fitting way to operationalize my theoretical framework in the analysis of my data. In other words, it was considered the best way to assure that my theoretical framework and methodology become a coherent, a complete package. Lastly, the ideal of critical research was both inspiring and captivating. The goal to "investigate and analyse power relations in society," as Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p.2) write, "and to formulate normative perspectives from which a critique of such relations can be made with an eye on the possibilities for social change" seemed not only desirable but necessary, even important. If language constructs the reality it attempts to portray, it also implies that given reality can be challenged, changed, reshaped and reformed: if only for my own (and hopefully the reader's) sake.

Strengths and weaknesses of discourse analysis: Islamists in their own words

One major strength is that it serves my academic purpose exactly: showing how language creates a conditionalities for certain acts while excluding others, but it also manages to identify and provide insight into an entire worldview. Throughout this thesis I have attempted to learn rather than assume and base my knowledge on Islamists texts rather than Islamophobic assumptions. Discourse analysis has the great advantage that it is not interested in *the truth* but *one particular truth*. Throughout the process of writing this thesis it has been very important to avoid the othering of young Muslim men who chose to travel to Syria, but never to condone or praise their acts either. What has been needed in the case of the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon is knowledge and information rather than moral judgement. Discourse analysis fits perfectly with this aim. Instead of repeating the words of foreign researcher who are unfamiliar with the context, discourse analysis enables us to engage directly with the subject of our study.

One weakness of this methodology is that is hardly just one methodology, with clear and understand. Rather, it is a collection of approaches with the same foundational basis, social constructionism. One criticism of discourse analysis has been that it is a vague methodology, where formal guidelines are scarce (Waitt 2010, p.219). This might make discourse seem irregular or even unscientific, but this Waitt (2010) argues that this is an intended point: providing detailed guidelines not only makes discourse analysis "too formulaic and reductionist" (Waitt 2010, p219), it also leaves no room for scholars to customise the method to their own case and become too systematic. Thus, the lack of guidelines is both a weakness and a strength. By providing guidelines the scope of the methodology but also its aims would be seriously limited.

Although it is much less controversial now than decades ago, discourse analysis and its social constructionist foundation is not for everyone. Thus, one issue which arises when applying discourse analysis is that it's power, strength and even success is partly mediated by whether it is read by an audience which agrees with its philosophical assumptions. This, of course, is the case with all methodologies, but few methodologies have as ground-breaking assumptions as discourse analysis. Another weakness of discourse analysis is that it is extremely demanding, both in time and effort. An analysis of the discursive formation of Islamist masculinities might have been lacking the threat of violent extremism felt very urgent. Something must be done, urgently. Indeed, my analysis comes only after the issue has calmed down , as nearly all cases

of Kosovar civil involvement in the Syrian Civil War have occurred between 2013 and 2016. Having said this, the knowledge generated by discourses analyses are very valuable in understanding why individuals do what they do, and how societies, through discourse, create conditions for some acts and exclude others.

Doing *discourse analysis*

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I have already outlined Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Much of this section might thus feel like a repetition of the previous chapter. Nonetheless, while the previous chapter outlined how one *thinks* in discourse analysis, this section will outline how one *does* discourse analysis. In fact, this was the main reason for choosing Laclau and Mouffe's theory specifically – it was the theory which provided me with clearest instructions. Despite this, it was still open enough to be applied to many different cases. This careful combination of ambiguous yet specific, open yet instructional, drew me to this form of discourse analysis.

The goal of a discourse analysis is to "reveal how particular ideas that help to forge social realities become understood as common sense" (Waitt 2010, pp. 237-238). As we already have discussed in the previous chapter, in social constructionist thought meaning is constructed through the study of a signifier vs a signified. It is based on Saussure's relational theory of value, which rejected the idea that "objects are already given to us as coherent entities (…) humans merely assign a name to each object or idea; different language-using communities might choose different names, but the relationship of every community to the totality of objects is basically the same" (Smith 1998, p. 84). Instead, in the relational theory, a linguistic sign "unites a concept and a sound-image – a signifier and a signified – rather than a thing and a name" (Saussure 1966, p.66, in Smith 1998, p.84). Instead, signs obtain meaning through their relation to other signs. Jørgensen and Phillips write that the word dog is different from the word cat, and that the word dog "is thus part of a network or structure of other words from which it differs; and it is precisely from everything that it is not that the word 'dog' gets its meaning." (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, p.10) Laclau and Mouffe, through Saussure, insist that there is nothing of meaning outside the discursive. Things manifest, and they exist – but they only obtain meaning through discourse, through linking or delinking some sings to other signs.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, there are three different key signifiers: nodal points, myths and master signifiers. These are labelled key signifiers because they are used in the organization

of discourse. Through chains of equivalence links are formed between signs, whereby the signs are invested with meaning. Jørgensen and Phillips provide a detailed explanation of how data is treated and analysed in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory:

> ", nodal points organise discourses (for example, 'liberal democracy'), master signifiers organise identity (for example, 'man'), and myths organise a social space (for example, 'the West' or 'society'). All of these concepts refer to key signifiers in the social organisation of meaning. When key signifiers are identified in specific empirical material, the investigation can begin of *how* discourses, identity and the social space respectively are organised discursively. This is done by investigating how the key signifiers are combined with other signs. What the key signifiers have in common is that they are empty signs: that is, they mean almost nothing by themselves until, through chains of equivalence, they are combined with other signs that fill them with meaning"
>
> (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 50)

Thus, the analysis of data through Laclau and Mouffe's theory consists of identifying key signifiers in data and show how they are given meaning by linking them to some sings and delinking them from other signs. One challenge which I encountered, particularly with densely packed texts like the sermon of Rexhep Memishi, was choosing what signs exactly were important enough to labelled key signifiers. Other researchers might have selected different signs as privileged signs, depending on the what they were looking after. I was interested in seeing whether gender in general and masculinity specifically was important in conditions for actions in the form of becoming a foreign fighter. In short, I was interested in whether masculinity was important in recruiting of foreign fighters – I have discovered that it was. Had I been interested in, say, the role of the Qur'an I might have identified different key signifiers. Instead, in the next chapter, I argue that Memishi constructs Syria as an innately masculine space, but also as a sacred homeland of Muslims in need of protection due to misrule by the disbelievers. It has also been difficult to name signs without using remnants of other discourses. For example, if I identified "Syria" as a sign, I was in fact proving that I subscribed to a Western discourse. Memishi, an imprisoned imam, would call the area Ash-Sham, sacred homeland of Muslims. It was not until I had the task of identifying signifiers and trying to name these without positioning myself within the Western hegemonic discourses on politics and the world map, that I realised the truly complex nature of the world of discourse. Instead, I ended up

naming the sign "The geographical area north of the Arabian Peninsula". It was around this sign that Memishi constructs the idea of Syria as a masculine space.

According to Neumann (2001, pp.178), the main task of a discourse analysis it to analyse how there exists conditions for some actions (utterances and acts), and how certain statements trigger a series of social practices, and how statements in turn confirm or disprove these practices. These conditions for actions (Neumann calls them "*handlingsbetingelser*") are in flux, because they rely on renewed representations, meaning that the discourse focuses on epistemology, or the knowledge production, the theory of how the subjects knows, rather than on ontology, or the theory of what the world consists of, the doctrine of what the world consists of, the world in its being, what is true, and what is real. Thus, as an analyser of discourse, I am not interested in *the truth,* on *why* Kosovar men travelled to Syria, but rather, why according to Kosovar Islamist discourse. A discourse analysis should therefore not be judged on whether it conveys the truth, but rather, the researcher's ability to show how conditions for action create and trigger a series of social practices. Mansvelt and Berg (2010, p.339) phrase it like so:

> "It should be made clear, however, that such arguments do not assume that language and ideas are the same as 'real' phenomena, objects and material things. Indeed, arguments about the centrality of language expresses the fact that all processes, objects, and things are understood by humans through the medium of language."

The paragraphs above outline how I have applied discourse analysis to my data. I have begun with the assumption that no objective truths exist, and that instead, language is the only language through which we can understand, and thereby our understanding is never stable or fixed. It can change, and often does. My analysis therefore consists of me reading and rereading the text and identify central terms and ideas (key signifiers) like "Ash-Sham" and seeing how these ideas are given meaning through linking them from some signs while delinking them from others. In doing so, I could reveal how Islamist texts give meaning to a certain geographical area, namely the Levant.

An important step, however, was to make sure I understood all the words and references. The first times I therefore read the texts to scan words, concepts and references which I did not understand. After I identified these, I researched them quite intensively, sometimes even calling

family members to help me translate words which were particularly difficult. It was only after this step was finished that I could begin actually identifying signifiers and trace how they are invested with meaning through chains of equivalence. While I considered using a software to code the data, I found many of the texts to be so dense, that I struggled to identify exactly what to code and how to code it. Coding thus became something which obstructed rather than aided the analysis. Instead, I printed the transcribed texts and coded the texts using a pen and markers. I wrote and drew in the margins and underlined central terms and colour-coded terms which reappeared in the texts, like for example humiliation and cruelty. Having the texts in front of me physically and interacting with them physically rather than digitally actually aided me greatly and helped me maintain focus. Maintaining focus was particularly hard, because while masculinity is very central, it is far from the only theme explored in texts I collected. Sifting through relevant information was a frustrating process because while masculinity was very central in all texts, the texts were not organized in a way which made it easy to extract that which was relevant for my thesis. It was a process which could be more compared to untangling a massive knot of yarn rather than selecting groceries in a supermarket.

Having explained which method I have chosen, why, and how this was applied, I must now examine different parts of the analysis process, like the selection of texts.

A Critical Review of the Research Process: Strengths and Limitations

Having outlined which method I chose, its strength and weaknesses and what it in detail consist of, this section will be a more in-depth description of the research process itself, how I have selected texts, as well as a brief outline of my fieldwork in Prishtina. While this thesis is mainly based on discourse analysis as a method and as a strategy for data analysis, I have also been in Kosovo for extended periods of time, and this in no doubt has helped me to map the discursive terrain, or as Waitt (2010, p.225) calls it, the process of familiarization. Lastly, I reflect around the ethical considerations of this study.

Fieldwork and observation in Prishtina and the Kosovar Islamist cyberspace
This thesis is based on two fieldworks: one direct and one indirect. My first fieldwork began July 2017, when I was trainee at the Norwegian Embassy in Prishtina. This was a six-month period where I aided in most tasks of the Embassy's areas of work, including writing reports and monitoring news, as well as translating for the ambassador. Often to translated from

English to Albanian, and then from Albanian to Norwegian, simultaneously as the persons spoke. This made my understanding of all three languages much better. Further on, at the embassy I had two areas in which I specialized and wrote reports which were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Oslo: the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon and Turkish political influence in Kosovo. I also gained access to meetings, conferences and interviews through the embassy. These spaces were only available to me because I came on behalf of the embassy. Indeed, it was only after submerging myself into the body of literature and attending different meetings and conferences about the foreign fighter phenomenon that I was truly convinced that I should write my thesis on the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo.

My second fieldwork was conducted in June 2018. I was lucky to gain access to the same spaces through the embassy, for which I am very thankful. I attended conferences and conducted meetings. None of this was very heavily organised: I knew what I wanted, but most of my fieldwork consisted of observation and ethnography. It consisted of mapping the discursive terrain, but also the mapping of masculine landscapes in Kosovo: noticing the posture of men versus women, their way of speaking, how they present themselves, their body-language. During this fieldwork, in 2018, I simultaneously was conducting an ethnography in the cyberspace. I was visiting Islamist news portals, YouTube-channels, and social media accounts. I was listening to Islamic acapella songs, anasheed, with jihadist themes. My observations, both in Kosovo and the cyberspace, can be seen as what Kearns (2010, p. 246) calls "observer-as-participant". I observed daily life in Kosovo while also participating in it, given my role as an insider. This might make me blind to certain aspects whose importance I did not realise, exactly due to my insider status. Nonetheless, I have lived in Norway the last 20 years, meaning that I am not a complete insider either. All in all, due to my status and my observation method, my observation was much more fruitful form of data-collection. Speaking fluently Albanian and "looking" Albanian provided me with knowledge, but also with access which other researchers might not have had access to. In fact, I would often be mistaken for a native Kosovar citizen in most my conversations. This has undoubtably given me access to a lot of knowledge, but it also meant that I was able to also properly decipher and analyse the data which I did get access to.

Thus, concerning my data collection process, we can distinguish between tangible and intangible data. While the clearest form of data was the texts, acapella songs, sermons and reports which I found or transcribed, I also obtained intangible data as a result of my long

fieldwork and my personal cultural and religious background: a deep understanding of the social, cultural and religious aspects of daily life in Kosovo. While the tangible data is the most crucial, and the one which is analysed in this thesis, this analysis would not be possible without my intangible data as well which allowed me to better understand the tangible data.

Collecting texts

In the beginning of the research process, I wanted to interview those imprisoned for taking part in the Syrian Civil War. I wanted to base my discourse analysis on the transcribed interviews with these foreign fighters, to present a study of foreign fighters in their own words. However, I quickly discovered that this was easier said than done. Firstly, I knew nothing of whom to speak with: The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or the Prime Minister's office? After weeks of mails and unsuccessful phone calls, I met with an official from the correctional facilities of Kosovo. He very quickly said that interviewing the foreign fighters would be impossible, even with a recommendation letter from the embassy. He explained that they had had cases of "researchers" wanting to interview the foreign fighters, and quickly discovered that the interviews ended up in propaganda videos instead. Thus, during the period in which I was in Kosovo, no one could interview the foreign fighters, not even PhD students. I was told that the Ministry of Justice could not risk national security for my thesis. Therefore I had to alter my research project considerably

 Based on this interaction, I chose to base my analysis on Islamist propaganda relating to the Syrian Civil War. I knew the cyberspace was full of such propaganda, because the Kosovo Police does not have the resources to track all Albanian content on the internet, and Albanian being a relatively obscure language in the international context, neither could the social media pages themselves. By altering my text population, the issue became how to set boundaries rather than how to obtain enough texts. When I decided to sample the texts for my analysis from the YouTube, my text population size increased significantly but it also changed in nature. The Kosovar Islamist cyberspace presence is vast, and consists mostly of sermons and religious acapella songs, anasheed. Other texts include homages and texts dedicated to martyrs and other figures considered important. In widening my scope of texts so much, I had to define what I considered to be Islamist texts.

Consequently, an important aspect to discuss when considering the data collection, but also the strength and weaknesses of the collected data, is a clarification of what Islamist texts *are*. When

I set out select *Islamist* texts to analyse *Islamist* masculinities, what did I look for? Islamism is a complex term, an indeed, this entire study could easily be dedicated to the meaning of the term and its history. I do not intend to enter the discussion of what Islamism is, but choose to rather clarify, in my own words, what I have considered to be Islamist. I have done this because too much literature on Islam, particularly the one written by Western scholars, is often affected by Orientalist or racist assumptions. This is particularly the case for text which criticize Islam. While criticizing the Qur'an and Islam is for me, as a Muslim, the sincerest form of flattery, this critique is too often based on uncomfortable assumptions about Muslims and the othering of the Islamic world. One term often used instead of Islamism, which I believe is based on these very uncomfortable assumptions, is the term "political Islam". There is an assumption that as soon as Islam becomes political, stoning, arm-cutting, and suicide bombers follow. There is an assumption that all these practices are a legitimate and inevitable, one-directional. I am no expert of Islam nor the Qur'an, and the little interaction I have had with the Qur'an as a Muslim and as the writer of this thesis. I do, however, know this: the Qur'an and its principles could just as easy have been the motivation behind the Norwegian welfare state. Ideals like justice, equality and equity are central in the Qur'an. The alleviation of poverty is a central obligation for all Muslim despite gender, is reflected by the *zakat*, the Islamic tax for the poor.

What I call Islamist texts are texts which deal with the organization of social order through Islam and Islamic law, *sharia*, and the Qur'an, hadith and sunnah (the customs of the prophet Muhammad). This Islamic base is to be the foundation of all aspects of life, legal, economic, and political, as well as cultural. Further on, this Islamic society almost always exists in relation to the Western system, and the latter is considered immoral and even evil. With other words, it is considered an honourable, wise, timeless and divine alternative to the Western ideas like democracy. Said differently, that which makes Islamist texts Islamist is that they provide a way of organising society, and that this alternative is always in relation (better, more rational, and more just than) the Western system. This definition is also influenced by Jakupi and Kelmendi (2019) who argue that a central part of Islamist narratives in Kosovo is the rejection of Western presence in Kosovo, but also of secular state-building and the presence of other religious communities (Jakupi & Kelmendi 2019, p.19).

One example of this is the speech of Naman Demolli (2015) and the sermon of Rexhep Memish (2013) i, both analysed in depth in the next chapter. Demolli (2015) links Albanian identity to Muslim-hood, even though a considerable share of Albanians are Christians. By redefining the

traditional villain in Albanian nationalist politics, the Serbs, as "Christians" and "Crusaders", he also assumes that Islamic rule should reign supreme in Kosovo. Thus, Kosovo's capital should not have large cathedrals, because those belong to the Serbs who humiliated us in the war – Prishtina should rather have large mosques, because, as he says himself: "this is a place of Muslims". Memishi (2013), on the other hand, links the democratic system to the antagonistic "Jews" and "Satan". Syria, or Ash-Sham, on the other hand, is constructed as the sacred homeland of Muslims which must be ruled through Islam. Syria, however, is currently being controlled by "the Jews", ergo foreign fighters (or "mujahedeen") are needed to free the homeland of misrule of the disbelievers. The difference between these two texts is that Demolli (2015) is identifying Kosovo as the place to be ruled through Islamic governance, whereas Memishi (2013) constructs a separate sacred homeland known constructed as "Ash-Sham". But both call for Islamic governance of important spaces, of a dominance of Islam and "Islamic way of living". These texts are not Islamic, because they do not relate or stem from the religion of Islam itself, uninterpreted. The -ist suffix clarifies that we are dealing with the political realm of other -ists, like socialist, communist, or capitalist. We are dealing not with the religion itself, but with *an attempt to construct a society based on a very specific and very situated interpretation of Islam*. Islam could just as easily be the basis of a feminist project, as Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2001) argued in the previous chapter.

The religious corners of the cyberspace are wide. There are many sermons, songs, poetry and social media posts which could go under the category of "Islamist texts". What was I looking after? I have, in many ways, done what Waitt (2010) recommends: I have chosen "rich" texts. That which makes texts rich, according to Waitt (2010) is that they "provide detailed, descriptive insight into how understandings of a place is forged" (Waitt 2010, pp. 222-223). Indeed, rich is the best description of the texts which made it to my analysis. They provide explicit in-depth descriptions of not only questions of identity, but also of space, place and governance. I expected that I would have to decipher hidden meanings, that I would have to look carefully after gender ideals and gendered language. This could not be farther from the truth: Memishi, in particular, is explicit and direct. The sermon, speech and anasheed used in my analysis are then just the most effective text which witness the construction of Islamist masculinities. What they have in common is not just that they witness masculinity-constructions, however, but rather, that they are the most skilful and representative category of that sort of texts. Ergo, they are therefore both typical and rich, effective and even emotive.

The texts I have selected to analyse are therefore not just rich, they also represent the wider Kosovar Islamist cyberspace. This has strengthened my analysis, which next chapter will show.

There are strengths and weaknesses of using the texts which I use. By using Islamists text and propaganda, I can gain access to important data needed to analyse the construction of Islamist masculinities, but I can do so in the comfort of my own home. When studying a potentially dangerous subject such as the foreign fighter phenomenon, security and safety are of vital importance. This both includes the safety of my informants and of myself. By basing my analysis on texts that already exist, I can gain access to vital texts in a perfectly safe way. Another strength of using Islamist texts is that they are intended to be exactly what I need in my analysis: a tool to recruit, a convincing, a way to form an emotional bond. Had I interviewed Memishi in his prison cell, he might not have said the exact same words as he does in his sermon. YouTube videos do not change because I am a master's student from Oslo – the subject of an interview might.

There is a wonderful egalitarianism in basing my analysis on transcribed videos from YouTube – I am being exposed to the same sermon as Memishi's congregation, like his followers and potential foreign fighters. All my data is also sampled from the internet, meaning that they were intended to be shared and to reach Albanian-speaking audiences internationally. This is a great value for my analysis – I am seeing exactly the same footage as someone who considering travelling to Syria. In a sense, I am a virtually (or digitally) performing observation as a participant. Further on, as explored in the second chapter, Memishi is the one of the most important Islamist imams, his Facebook-page being the most liked. Second chapter also established that YouTube is one of the most important sources of Islamist propaganda. Memishi is therefore not just an imam chosen at random – he is, like Balaj & Kelmendi (2017) show, one of the most central imams, and his sermon uses all the most-used words in Islamist propaganda. Indeed, said report identifies the cyberspace as the new battleground of extremist groups (Balaj & Kelmendi 2017). This is immensely valuable and has contributed in the production of a trustworthy analysis.

The static nature of these texts, however, can also be a limitation. In being static, they cannot be shaped into the form of data which fits my analysis. I cannot tailor my data carefully, nor can I direct the conversation to areas of my interest. Further on, it would be naïve to expect YouTube to be the only, or even best, source of Islamist propaganda. Thus, I am likely just exploring the tip of the iceberg. Another obvious weakness is that I have no control in the

shaping of the data, nor do I control the direction in which the conversation goes. Instead, if I wish to explore one very specific aspect of Islamist thought, I must spend a lot of time to search for text which are relevant and deal with the subject directly. Further on, basing my analysis on propaganda uploaded by unknown individuals might mean that important information about the text is lost. Who made the text, for example, and when? What was the text made for? By whom was the text commissioned, and what is the relation between the maker, the owner and the intended audience? These are all important questions the answers of which I at best can speculate about. Had I based my analysis on different texts, say, strategy papers by the Kosovar government, these questions would be much easier to answer correctly. Nonetheless, this drawback must be accepted given the immensely rich nature of the text on which I base my analysis.

Once the texts were selected, they were analysed through the method described earlier. I conducted the analysis in the original Albanian and translated instead the snippets which I use in my analysis to English. I therefore have translated all my data myself. This has been challenging at times, but the experience from the embassy as a translator helped me greatly. I have also received great help from my family, particularly when relating to old Arabic or Turkish loanwords which no longer are common to use in modern Albanian. Imprecise translation can be a source of incomplete or even defective analysis, particularly when using discourse analysis as method. Nonetheless, the process of translation is one of the process to which I have dedicated most time and attention to. Further on, as the next section shows, my personal background is a great benefit in the analysis of this phenomenon, particularly due to my fluency in Albanian and my position as an 'insider'. Lastly, while the translation might be slightly imprecise at time, I can assure the reader that it never is *wrong*. I am very certain of this, as Albanian is my mother tongue.

Reflections on positionality: writing oneself 'in'

Neumann (2001, p.178) further argues that all knowledge is situated, even the researcher, and that it is virtuous to be as explicit as possible what concerns one's own positionality and how it will affect the analysis. It is also important to remember that all knowledge is situated and "research that draws upon situated knowledge is thus based on a notion of objectivity much different from that posed by positivists, and this conception of objectivity also requires a different form of writing practice." (Mansvelt & Berg 2010, p.338). Thus, objectivity is not just not possible in social constructionist, it is an irrelevant term in the realm of social constructionist methods. Instead, it is important to remain aware of how my own position

within the field of study might affect my analysis: "it is important to both reflect upon and analyse how one's position in relation to processes, people, and phenomena we are researching actually affects both those phenomena and our understanding of them" (Mansvelt & Berg 2010, p.339). Consequently, as a researcher, I must not attempt to write myself out of my analysis by becoming impartial, universal or distanced: I must write myself in, and acknowledge the fact that my position is not just not irrelevant to my study, but that it in fact may affect my analysis of the issue.

What follows, thus, is a section of my own positionality and how it might have affected my ability to identify signifiers and social practices, or to identify certain statements which trigger these social practices. Another term used for this process is reflexivity. Being reflexive means "analyzing your own situation as if it were something you were studying" (Dowling 2010, p.31). What social relations are relevant, and more importantly, are they affecting my ability to gather and analyse my data?

I am a cis-male born to ethnic Albanian Muslim parents in Kosovo, where I also spent my six first years. When I was six, my family and I migrated to Norway, where we have lived ever since. We migrated not as asylum seekers but as war-time refugees. The bloody two-year had burned down our family house, and with it, any hopes of a safe and stable future. The Kosovo war, while only two years long, has impacted most (if not all) of my life's important decision. This includes my decision to obtain a bachelor's degree in development studies, and academic interests in nationalism, identity, and more recently, gender, and this very thesis.

This might affect my analysis in three ways. Firstly, it led me to the side of political spectre which was I found most concerned with oppression, class, injustice and social relations, namely the left. This might mean that I carry political assumptions and notions unknowingly, a result of being part of the circles which I am. Thus, it might make me more sensitive to issues like oppression. It also probably affected my choice of methodology, choosing a qualitative rather than a quantitative method. Secondly, it means that I have excluded certain sources, which were particularly graphic, or which deal too directly with war-related themes. Thus, I might have ignored an important genre of data, which might have directed my analysis a different way. Lastly, having grown up in Norway with a comfortable life and a Western education, has shielded me from all other forms of Islamophobia but microaggressions. I have received stares, comments, and even demonization and dehumanization, but I have never experienced a drone-

attack, nor have I experienced an air-strike in a Syrian city. Had I done so, my ability to identify discourses would be entirely different. Had I done so, I might have attempted to decipher the American discourse on the war against terror.

I come from a Muslim middle-class family. Despite being a Muslim in an increasingly Islamophobic world, and a background as refugee, I am very privileged. Firstly, I was raised by two parents which both had a university degree. This is not common in the Kosovar context. This meant not just that my parents always had employment, it also meant that I had access to spaces others did not, but also to material goods and sources of knowledge. While my family was never wealthy, we lived a life relatively free of want. Further on, during my time as a trainee at the Norwegian Embassy in Prishtina, I gained access to people and spaces which further helped my class privilege. This might make me blind to class relations which are foreign to me. This thesis is after all being written at a program in the oldest university in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Thus, I might be too quick to dismiss economic factors of the foreign fighter phenomenon, or how monetary gain might have influenced the decision to become a foreign fighter. Being an Albanian Muslim, I might be blind to certain aspects of Islam or the Albanian culture which might be crucial in the analysis of Islamist masculinity. This can potentially be a source of an incomplete analysis. I might not have identified Islamism and the foreign fighter phenomenon as the most pressing issue within the realm of the Syrian Civil War.

But perhaps the most important point to make in this subsection is that I am in no way free of the violence of masculinity. I am not free from the discourses which I describe. In the next chapter I argue that while violence is often a part of masculine ideals, masculinity is also "put on" through violence, physical or emotional. The process of masculinizing the self, the process of performing masculine acts is a violent one. While I never considered travelling to Syria, nor would I describe myself as a violent person, I enacted violence in a different way entirely. I analysed a subject I knew would be painful, given my personal background. As a survivor of war and genocide, I knew that studying the Kosovar Islamist discourse would be painful because it would explore subjects to which I was no foreigner – they are personal and painful memories. But I proceeded nonetheless not just because I felt like I might have something to say, because I might see something others might not, but also because it might produce a successful paper. For academic glory, rather than masculinized, militaristic glory. I could just as easy conducted a study on a much less risky subject. While this research question was one

which made truly passionate and genuinely curios, my choosing of this study is also a pursuit of masculine ideals of glory, ideals I have been programmed to seek as a cis-male.

Although positionality is often seen as a discussion of how one's own position might be an obstacle to trustworthy analysis, in my case it is not so simple. My background and positionality have in fact also been a great asset. Having a background as an ethnic Albanian not only allowed me to understand the texts, but also their implications, connotations and discursive connections. The deep cultural knowledge which came from not only my background but also my fieldworks also greatly aided me in my analysis. Knowing Kosovo and Albanian Islam might have made me blind to certain traits which an outsider would notice, but I believe this is redeemed by the fact that my background not only allowed me to understand, but to truly analyse beyond the tangible data. Indeed, it is my background and positionality which allowed me to see the connections and relevance in the text, to a greater degree than an outsider would.

Ethical considerations
Given the fact that this analysis is largely based on texts which are already available online, I encountered few ethical considerations. This study has not been registered in the NSD, because I have neither recorded nor stored information which is not already available online. I have, however been aware of my positionality and my own role in this process, but this is discussed at length in the next section.

Perhaps the most important ethical considerations were actually not in terms of my informants, but rather, myself. As a researcher studying a controversial and at worst, dangerous subject, precautions must be taken. This has been done in a few different ways. Firstly, I accepted no as an answer from the Ministry of Justice. When my request to interview imprisoned foreign fighters, I did not set out to find alternative paths to informants through, say, approaching radical mosques. I was informed by some that they knew of someone who considered going to Syria, but this individual strongly opposed being interviewed by me, or even meeting with me. To this day, his name is not known to me, nor any other information. Kosovo is a very small society where there are few links between each person: had I really been interested, I could have found this individual and many others like him. Nonetheless, I knew that this would seriously harm me, my potential informants and my analysis. Thus, I only used data which was safely available.

Another precaution I made was to notify the Norwegian PST, the Norwegian Police Security Service, about my project. I had my supervisor send them a document stating that I was conducting a study in Islamist masculinities, and would therefore search for Islamist content on the internet. This letter was sent as to not notify their alarm systems and give them the wrong impression, particularly when I, as a 26-year old Muslim male am part of the group most susceptible to radicalization. Had my supervisor not sent this letter, it would mean a lot of extra work for both the PST and for me.

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the research process and the steps in my methodology. I have chosen qualitative methods and discourse analysis because it is the appropriate according to the aim of my research. In this paper I have aimed to understand not only the construction of Kosovar Islamist masculinities, but also the Kosovar Islamist universe. The strength of discourse analysis is that we can analyse Islamist through and with their own words, and who better to explain the Islamist universe than Islamists themselves? I have been interested in their truths and realities, and I have been interested in what sort of language has created the conditions for these individuals to carry arms in Syria. As an analyser of discourse, however, I cannot hope for truth or objectivity, reliability or validity. These are not only not the goals of discourse analysis, they are rejected. Instead, I must consider whether my analysis is trustworthy.

In this chapter, I have shown that it is. I have carefully weighed the methodology of discourse analysis for my case. I have discovered that my theory, my method and the aim of study form a "complete package". The complete and maintain each other. When I state that I am interested in how the masculinity-warfare nexus is *constructed,* this automatically places me within social constructionist realms. Further on, since I am interested in understanding Albanian Islamists, and to analyse them through their own words rather than some unfounded assumptions, discourse analysis becomes the fitting methodology. I wished to understand their truth, their logic, and their understandings, and how their language created conditions for certain acts, making them seem as common sense. Since I am interested in gender, particularly gender and a phenomenon which is very mundane, physical, manifested rather than ambiguous, Butler's performativity theory aided me in reaching this very goal. I was interested in how gender influenced the very real and manifested act of travelling to Syria and partake in warfare, not on

their views on abortion, or democracy. The discursive manifests, it affects the real lives of real individuals in a very real way.

In this chapter I argued that this is a trustworthy study in two ways. Firstly, I have outline not only what discourse analysis is, but rather, what it has been to me. I have outlined how I have used discourse analysis, how I have selected texts, why, their strengths and their shortcomings. The texts used in my analysis deal with themes that are central in Islamist propaganda. The narrative which I analyse is not an obscure part of Kosovar Islamist discourse, but rather typical of their social media presence. Secondly, I have discussed my own positionality, and how it might affect my analysis. In this chapter I have shown that this thesis is based on these texts, but also on my fieldwork in Kosovo which can be understood as an ethnography which is not structuralized. I have met with people, I have read books, pamphlets, posters, I have overheard conversations, been present in conferences on violent extremism. During my fieldwork in Kosovo I conducted a second fieldwork, that is within the Kosovar Islamist cyberspace. I have read Islamist texts in social media, news portals, but also on YouTube. These two fieldworks were crucial in the mapping of the Islamist discursive terrain and familiarizing with the universe. The different stages of the research process have therefore been carefully planned out, but also reflected around. It is based on all these processes, and my discussion of them in this chapter that I can claim that this discourse analysis is trustworthy.

CHAPTER V
ANALYSIS: CONSTRUCTING AN
ALBANIAN ISLAMIST MASCULINITY

To understand this analysis, and the depth of this issue, we must understand the Kosovar context. Kosovo is country which many would call a *developing country*, even though there is a large body of academic work which problematizes the term. For the sake of brevity, however, let us accept the term and consider the implications this has for a country like Kosovo and its citizens. Being a *developing,* rather than a *developed* country, assumes that Kosovo is in transition. It is being developed, transformed, it is transitioning into something new. Not counting academic circles, few rarely stop to think what countries like Kosovo ("the global South") are supposed to *develop into.*

The assumption is, of course, that "they" want or should want to develop into the rest of us (in the problematic category "the West"). While it is rarely articulated with so many words, there is an assumption that the American ideal is universal: a small nuclear family, a job, a house in the suburbs with a white picket fence, a car in the garage, a dog and 2,5 children. Everyone should own an iPhone, should have the same consumption patterns, purchase the same food in the same supermarket and walk their dog in the same parks. They should work under the same capitalist system, and vote with regular intervals. Indeed, when the preamble of the Kosovar constitution reads that the constitution is approved "with the intention of having the state of Kosovo fully participating in the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration," this is exactly the point. The Western (or American) way of living – its values, systems, structures, et cetera.

But little is in place structurally for these ideals to be the norm in Kosovo. Corruption is high, as is unemployment and poverty. Kosovar citizens can only travel to a handful neighbouring countries without a visa (Albania, Macedonia, and Turkey, among others): otherwise, a lengthy visa process, where you must document an income you probably do not have and a lot of other paperwork, follows for all citizens, be they businessmen, artists, academics or anything else.

In my fieldwork I constantly encountered frustration. I heard of people with a master's in law, working as taxi drivers – while the incompetent family members of judges and officials worked in high positions, even in the Supreme Court. Yet Kosovars are daily bombarded with images of lives that could have been theirs, a life that they feel they have a right to. Be it through the Internet, news, or social media, a better life is not just dreamt of. It is seen, daily, but it is not theirs. This is the limbo in which Kosovo and its citizens exist; bombarded with and aspiring to an improved lifestyle, but which very few political structures and situations in Kosovo allow.

In this chapter, I will first shortly cover the context and preconditions of Kosovar masculinities. I will argue that traditionally, Kosovar masculinities have been deeply rooted in ethno-nationalist ideas and understandings. The war in 1998-1999 in many ways set the terms for manhood and masculinities among Kosovo-Albanians, which make up the majority of Kosovo. This becomes challenging as the generation born during and after the war grow up. These young men can neither position themselves according to the war-narrative, nor can they anchor their masculinity performance in an event which they were not able to participate in – they were barely even born.

For reasons which will be explored in this chapter, the Syrian Civil War became the first foreign conflict to receive attention in Kosovo, and to feel personal and emotional rather than distant and irrelevant. This was also explored in chapter two. For many young Kosovar men, the Syrian Civil War became their chance to perform the masculinity which is expected of them – a theatre where fighter spirit could be displayed, sisters could be defended, honour could be restored, the homeland protected and freed from cruel dictatorship. For this to happen, the traditional ethno-nationalist masculinity had to be replaced by a faith-based masculinity – a Muslim, or rather, Islamist masculinity. In this chapter, I argue that the masculinity-warfare nexus in the Albanian Islamist milieu is constructed in three ways: 1) through the reinterpretation of Kosovar history as a religious conflict rather than ethnic one, which simultaneously also renegotiates terms and conditions for manhood; 2) by constructing Syria as a masculine space, the sacred homeland of Muslims in need of protection and whose honour must be restored; and lastly, 3) by creating emotional bond to warfare in Albanian jihadist anasheed, acapella songs with religious themes. Based on these three points, we can also argue that the Syrian Civil War became the new Kosovar theatre of masculinity and gender play.

"A War Against Islam": Reinterpreting History, Redefining Manhood

An important feature of Islamist masculinity discourse is the reinterpretation of the history of Kosovo, particularly a reinterpretation of the Kosovo war of 1998-1999, which in many ways has been both the painful collective trauma of Kosovo and the basis of the ethnic Albanian identity in Kosovo. Reinterpreting the most important event in the history of Kosovo, and indeed, the main reason why Kosovo exists as a geographic unit and state, can be very powerful if done successfully. This analysis is based on a transcribed video from YouTube. The video is titled "A short speech by the Shaheed Naman Demolli before he fell Shaheed". Shaheed is the Arabic term for martyr. The video was uploaded in 2015, but is most likely filmed around 2010-2011, when the Cathedral of Saint Mother Theresa was being built in Prishtina. Unfortunately, there is no space for a thorough discussion of this subject, even if it is interesting. It is, however, striking that a country which officially is secular supports the building of a major cathedral in the capital centre when 90% of Kosovo's population is Muslim.

This section will be divided into two subsections. Firstly, I will provide an outline of the Kosovo war, and how it contributed to the formation of Kosovar hegemonic masculinities. Next, I analyse Demolli's speech, in which he challenges the hegemonic understanding of the Kosovo war, what caused it and between whom it was fought. In so doing, he provides new conditions for masculinity and masculinity-acts. In fact, he reimagines the Nation and the Us as Muslims rather than ethnic Albanians. In short, he lays the foundations for a Muslim masculinity instead of an ethnonationalist one.

A country built by men: the Kosovo war and Kosovar hegemonic masculinities

Kosovo has a very complex and violent history, which, unfortunately cannot be given the respect it deserves in this thesis. Nonetheless, this subsection seeks to outline the Kosovo war, and how it shaped the Kosovo post-war master narrative. The Kosovo war can be identified as one of the most important aspects of the ethnic Albanian narrative of what Kosovo is, who it is for and how and by whom it was created. Beyond the forming of the current political constellation in Kosovo, the master narrative also has implications for gender relations, particularly the performance of masculinity.

In particular, the KLA (Kosovo's Liberating Army) commander, Adem Jashari, who died in the war together with his entire family of around 50, has become like a secular patron saint of Kosovo. Jashari serves as a masculinity ideal, a character around which the Kosovar

masculinity script is based. One paper which analyses the post-war Kosovo master narrative is that by Di Lellio & Schwander-Sievers (2006). In their paper, they analyse "the construction of a Pan-Albanian master narrative in post-war Kosovo, a storyline for an independent country that also anchors a collective national identity" (Di Lellio & Schwander-Sievers 2006, p. 513). The authors argue that Jashari and his family's sacrifice, and the narrative constructed around this event has created an "icon of national solidarity, [that] strengthens Albanian national political identity and makes the claim to independence non-negotiable" (Di Lellio & Schwander-Sievers 2006, p. 527). The narrative built around the massacre of the Jashari family has constructed an image of Kosovo as "a nation [that is] liberated from Serb rule after long and bloody resistance" (Di Lellio & Schwander-Sievers 2006, p. 526). In 2008, 10 years after the war began, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia.

Di Lellio & Schwander-Sievers (2006) argue that this influential narrative is highly masculinised, making it difficult for women to assume space outside the domestic realm:

> The myth of heroic personal sacrifice sanctioned by blood is a cultural signifier of patriarchy, and the Jashari legend exhibits strong gendered qualities. These latter specifically reassert the social order and masculine ideals characteristic of the Albanian tradition, an order that sidelines and marginalises women in the public sphere (...) The hegemonic discourse of the post-war master narrative makes it more difficult for women to challenge their subordination in the patriarchal order that still assigns them and their children to the husband's family, let alone claim leadership in a society that is construed as having been built by men.
>
> (Di Lellio & Schwander-Sievers 2006, pp. 521-522)

The implications of this narrative are that Kosovo was built through fighting men who resisted Serb rule, and thus the political realm of post-war Kosovo is an innately masculine one. Partaking in armed warfare is the price men paid to dominate politics, and indeed, other realms of power. Hashim Thaçi, the president of Kosovo; Ramush Haradinaj, two-times prime minister and Kadri Veseli, the chairman of the Kosovar National Assembly, were all very central KLA-figures.

It is important to remember that the division line within this masculinity discourse is ethnical, rather than religious. Kosovo was created through *the bloody resistance of ethnic Albanians*

against the Serbs. Indeed, the Albanians are one of the few ethnicities in the Balkans to include all individuals who speak Albanian, despite their religion. By contrast, an individual who speaks Serbo-Croatian and is Orthodox, is always 'Serb'. Albanians of all faiths are still Albanian as long as they speak Albanian. A quote by the 19th century poet Pashko Vasa is often quoted when speaking of Albanian identity: "Look not at churches or mosques, for the faith of the Albanian is Albanianism" (translation mine). Thus, the conditions for masculinity in post-war Kosovo are ethno-nationalist: you must perform your masculinity as an Albanian, and with the Albanian "us" in mind.

"They carried crosses, my brother": the Kosovo war as jihad

The following analysis is based on a transcribed video in which Naman Demolli appears. As covered in chapter two, Naman Demolli became the first known death of a Kosovar in the Syrian war theatre. In fact, his death was what began making the Syrian Civil War seem close rather than distant in the Kosovar context. The news of his death came mid-November 2012, and his status as martyr ("Shaheed") is referred to in the title of the YouTube video. Demolli's short speech can be divided into two separate bulks: in the first, he speaks of the cathedral and how it does not belong in a Muslim capital. In the other, he argues that the war in Kosovo was a religious one, in which the Serbs attacked Kosovo because of the Albanians' faith rather than their ethnicity. Nonetheless, both bulks have more or less the same point: that Kosovo is a Muslim place, and that Kosovo and Albanians should be *visibly Muslim.* Demolli's speech is just one of many of its sort. The strength of this text is that it represents many other texts of its nature, and that it is directed towards potential followers. Demolli is seeking to educate the general public, but also attempting to recruit others to his cause. Demolli's cause is the building of a large mosque in the centre of Prishtina rather than the cathedral which was at that time under construction. Demolli is addressing the general public, and begins his speech thusly:

> We wanted to do this recording for the sake of Allah *azza wa jall* because we heard an interview with the priest of the cathedral last night, where he said that they will not allow a mosque on the opposite side of the cathedral. So, 98% of us [Albanians] are Muslims, we have accepted Allah *azza wa jall* as God and Muhammad as a Prophet, and they want to govern us as a minority? We have nothing against their faith, but we are against the cathedral.

> (Demolli 2015)

Thus, one can say that Demolli is speaking from a point where he is offended by the priest's words. In a country which is 98% Muslim (in fact, 90% is a better estimate), a priest representing a very small fraction of the population, is trying to decide the fate of the majority. I have failed to find the interview which Demolli is referring to, so I cannot fact-check his speech, and whether the priest truly said they "will not allow" the building of the mosque. When Demolli says that "they want to govern us as a minority," he is referring to the fact that the Christian minority wishes to govern (or rather, mis-govern) the Muslim majority – a minority rule. Demolli considers this unfair and wrong. The subject of governance and mis-governance will also reappear when we analyse the construction of Syria as a masculine space and the homeland of all Muslims. If the cathedral is built in the city centre, a large mosque should be built on the opposite side, according to Demolli. Kosovo is a Muslim place and must be ruled by Muslims.

But minority rule is not the entire problem: by building a cathedral in the city centre, we are honouring the sworn enemy of the Albanians, the Serbs. Towards the end of his speech, Demolli says "Every time I see the cathedral, I see the face of Slobodan Milosevic. Every time I see the cathedral, I see the tanks of Serbia" (Demolli 2015). This chain of equivalence, this linking of the cathedral and Christianity to the Serb regime in Kosovo might seem simple, but it has powerful consequences. The imagined 'us' changes, and so does our 'nation', our 'homeland', our 'women' and 'our men'. Ergo, by reinterpreting the Kosovar history as a religious war, as a case of jihad rather than ethnicity-fuelled civil war, Demolli is also redefining masculinity. When the conditions around which masculinity is constructed alter, so do masculine practices such as warfare. This, in turn, creates conditions which makes the foreign fighter phenomenon possible.

In reinterpreting history, Demolli also redefines the enemy of the Albanians in the Kosovo War. In what I would argue is Demolli's most important, and indeed, most controversial argument, he says that the Serb troops attacked Kosovo because of their Muslim faith rather than ethnic character and desire for political self-determination. Demolli says:

> Because we know that the Kosovo war was a war against Islam. For example, they [the Serbs] from [Serbia], we have seen on YouTube how the priests of Serbia splatter [i.e., bless][…] the soldiers of

Serbia with their water [i.e., holy water] and they [the priests] tell them [the soldiers] go and slaughter children, they even slaughtered our children in their cradles.

<div align="right">(Demolli 2015)</div>

In the quote above, Demolli rearticulates the villain of the Kosovar history, seen from an Albanian perspective. While the role of the antihero has traditionally been played by the Serb state and military in Kosovo-Albanian discourse, Demolli argues that the Kosovo War was in fact initiated and called for by the *Serbian church*. The Church not only blessed the soldiers with holy water, they ordered the soldiers to slaughter children, according to Demolli. In the middle of the speech, which in many ways is its climax, in discursive terms, Demolli links war crimes committed against the Albanian civil population by Serb soldiers to the Serbs as *Christians*, rather than the Serbs as an ethnicity or political leadership. This is immensely powerful because these war crimes are etched in all Kosovo-Albanians' collective memory. They are a painful collective trauma. Describing painfully graphic events, Demolli says:

> We have cases where Muslim brothers who are still alive, *alhamdulillah,* they beat him up with an iron cross and left him for dead. *Alhamdulillah* he is alive and has told us himself about this case. We have the case in Drenicë where our sisters have been raped in a weapons factory (…) one hundred sisters or so (…) they were raped until they died. Who were they? The soldiers of Serbia. <u>They were of the cross [Crusaders]. They carried crosses, my brother.</u> Those who believe the war in Kosovo was a war for the nation is very far from the truth. They came to wage war against Islam. We have conversed with a Serb, and this Serb told me (…) he told me himself, that when they brought us to Kosovo to engage in war, they put us in a pigsty. The officers made us stab them with a knife in the stomach, they told us that if we can endure the sound of screaming pigs, you will also endure the cry of the children who beg you not to cut their throats. We know of a case in Drenicë where we have had a Muslim sister raped, they cut her face, told her to remove it [her hijab], you are ugly, we will rape you, [they said to us] your women are ugly.

<div align="right">(Demolli 2015, emphasis mine)</div>

The quote above is important and relevant because Demolli is in fact describing a collective humiliation. Demolli also redefines who these atrocities happened to: to the Albanians as *Muslims*. They are atrocities committed to the Muslims, not to Albanians of any faith (although the latter is the case). It becomes particularly forceful then, to link this humiliation to faith rather than ethnicity. As I will go on to show in the next two sections as well, this dwelling in

painful humiliation is a crucial part of constructing Islamist masculinities. It creates motivation for revenge, but it also creates conditions for actions. Said differently, it makes the individual feel necessary, like one has a role to play as a man, like one has an honour to restore. Especially linking the cry of dying Albanian children to that of dying pigs in a pigsty is extremely humiliating, given the pig's role in Islam but also in Albanian culture as a filthy, taboo animal. Demolli is never saying that Albanian children are pigs; rather, he is saying that they were treated thusly by the Serb "Crusaders". Further on, when Demolli speaks of "raped sisters" he is saying, linguistically (although this is difficult to translate properly), that "we have had our sisters raped". The rape of these women is therefore not something done to them, but to the Albanian-Muslim masculine "us". This further describes a humiliating situation which must be avenged, restored, and is ergo a condition and stage for a masculinity performance act.

When Demolli says that they carried crosses, he means both symbolically and literally. He means that they came as Christians, engaging in war with Muslims and Islam, but he is also referring to the Serbian cross, which was featured in Serb military insignia. It is important to remember, however, that Demolli is not calling for young men to travel to Syria. The Syrian Civil War was still foreign in Kosovar contexts. Rather, he is calling for the building of a great mosque in Prishtina. It is nonetheless very important to keep in mind the point from chapter two, namely that Demolli became the first known case of a Kosovar dying in the Syrian Civil War. Indeed, the video title refers to his achieving of martyr status, and was uploaded in 2015, when the Syrian Civil War and the foreign fighter phenomenon were on everyone's mind. What Demolli is discursively silencing is of course the role of the West, and particularly the NATO and UN in the Kosovo War. NATO and the US bombarded Serbia, leading to Serbia's withdrawal and end of the war. NATO and the US were equally Christian, but this nuance is not acknowledged in Demolli's speech. This silence is not acknowledged because it obstructs the distinction which Demolli (2015) is attempting to create. It obscures, rather than aides the construction of the Christian other, but also the construction of Kosovars as Muslims.

The power of this text is thus not just that it reinterprets Kosovar history and redefines Albanian masculinities, it also constructs Albanians as exclusively Muslim, and a group who should be *visibly Muslim*. This is even though the Albanians historically have been Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and even Sufi Muslims. In Demolli's own words, "We don't want to build a mosque outside Prishtina or in a hidden location. We want to be seen. When someone enters Prishtina, they must know that this is a place of Muslims, *subhanallah*" (Demolli 2015). Demolli would

not, in other words, agree that the faith of Albanians is Albanianism: the faith of Albanians, he would argue, is Islam. This is not just different from hegemonic discourses of identity in Kosovo, it actually directly challenges this ethnicity-based sense of community.

To summarize, Demolli manages to link gruesome war crimes committed by Serb forces, which are to this day a collective trauma, to the *Serbian church* rather than the *Serbian state*. Thus, the *soldiers* of Serbia become the *Crusaders* of Serbia, who came to Kosovo to wage war against Islam. Albanians, as Muslims, have been humiliated by the Christians, and must, as Muslims, be prepared and vigilant. They must protect their Muslim identity. This is very different from Kosovo's post-war master narrative, where the war was a war for political self-determination against a ruthless state aggressor. Today, the Kosovo war is understood in ethnic terms, and these terms also lay foundations for ethnic masculinities. Demolli's speech therefore ties Kosovo and Kosovo-Albanians to the rest of the Muslim world – the *Ummah*. With this link in place, the Syrian Civil War can be an emotive and personal war, rather than a distant and irrelevant one. This laid the foundation for the foreign fighter phenomenon – a level of commitment to a foreign war which was completely new in the Kosovar context.

"Sham is not just Syria": Constructing Syria as a Masculine Space

One of the main methods of constructing the masculinity-warfare nexus in the Kosovar Islamist discourse is the constructing of Ash-Sham as a social space, or as a 'myth' in Laclau and Mouffe's terms. Myths are key signifiers used to organize a social space (Jørgensen and Phillips 2004, p. 50). Key signifiers are all used in the construction of meaning. Jørgensen and Phillips (2004) identify three key signifiers in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory: myths, which construct social spaces; nodal points which organize discourses; and master signifiers which organize identity. What these key signifiers have in common, they argue, is that they mean almost nothing on their own but gain their meaning once they are combined with other signs through chains of equivalence. In this section, I will show the construction of the myth of Ash-Sham within the Kosovar Islamist discourse, and show how it is given meaning through chains of equivalence. In doing so, I also show that Ash-Sham is constructed as a masculine space.

Before we can analyse the construction of Ash-Sham, let me first clarify what Ash-Sham or Sham *is*. Ash-Sham is the name Memishi uses for geographical area historically known in Arabic as *bilad al-sham,* or land to the north. The geographical area is named thusly because

it is north of the Arabic Penninsula, where Islam was established and where the prophet Muhammad was born (present-day Saudi Arabia). Another name for this geographical area is also Greater Syria, or the Levant. According to contemporary maps, Ash-Sham is Syria, southeastern Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. As I will go on to show, Ash-Sham and the countries which make up the area are not the same in Islamist discourse. In fact, this disctinction is of great importance.

The analysis of the discursive construction of Ash-Sham as a social place is based on one text. This text is the transcribed sermon by the now-imprisoned Albanian imam Rexhep Memishi. I found this sermon on Youtube, and it is called "Syria: between hadith and reality". It was uploaded June 13th, 2013 by the channel IslamChannelworld, and is viewed more than 35 000 times. I was made aware of the sermon in a conference in Prishtina on the foreign fighter phenomenon and violent extremism. The text was referred to as a key text which directly adressed the Syrian Civil War, and which openly attempted to recruit foreign fighters. Memishi is also, as mentioned in chapter two, among the Kosovar Islamist imams with the highest number of followers on Facebook. While there are clear limitations on basing this part of the analysis on one text only, the 27-minute sermon is not only packed with meaning, it is also highly representative of other sermons of its kind. Memishi is not saying anything extraordinary or controversial, seen from an Islamist standpoint. Indeed, I encountered may other sermons on the exact same subject, with the same premisses and assumptions. The strength of Memishi's sermon is that it is explicit and direct, but it is also intended to be educational. Memishi is speaking to a congregation who might not know what Ash-Sham is. This is an enormous advantage for me as a researcher, and the text is consequently very rich with data.

It is important to consider a crucial feature of the text, which plays an important role in the construction of Islamist masculinity: it is a Friday sermon performed in a mosque. According to Albanian Muslim traditions, only men pray the Friday prayer. While most mosques have areas designated for women, these are rarely used on Fridays. Memishi was, in other words, speaking exclusively to men. Indeed, this is probably why he consistently uses the Albanian masculine form of Muslim, *musliman* rather than *muslimane*, or even *musliman dhe muslimane* (Muslim men and Muslim women). Memishi is therefore already located in a masculine space, which provides us with a unique possibility of analysing Memishi as he speaks *about* men *with* men. In fact, this can be interpreted as a sort of policing of Muslim masculinities. By speaking

of the Syrian Civil War in Friday sermon, Memishi ties the war to the religious realm rather than the political one. Thus, it is not only the actual words which contribute to constructing Ash-Sham as an innately masculine social space, it is also the context and social space in which the text is performed. These words are uttered in a mosque after the Friday prayer, the most important prayer in the Islamic world, rather than in a café, a dinner, or an event. Because of this, Ash-Sham becomes a holy and masculine social space.

The text, while very rich, is also very difficult to analyse. This difficulty is caused by two reasons. Firstly, the subject matter is challenging. Memishi is speaking of heinous acts and of gross violations of human dignity. Secondly, while Memishi is well-spoken, he is not what in the West would be considered 'rhetorically skilled'. His sermons are not polished, but rather a stream of consciousness. There is little structure and organization. He often begins stories one place, then goes into long digressions, only to return to his initial point ten minutes later. This, however, does not make him a bad leader in terms of the Islamist masculinity discourse; in fact, he becomes more fit exactly because of his lack of structured speeches. This sets him apart from politicians and Western leaders – it makes him an authentic leader, different from the Westernized rest. Memishi does not wear suits nor are his sermons well-structured and full of difficult words. In fact, Memishi often uses old Turkish loan-words instead of their Albanian counterparts, like *zaman* instead of *kohë* (time, era, epoch), *gazdallarë* instead of *drejtor, pronar, shef*, etc (boss), *tabor* instead of *grup*, *batalion* (battalion, group of soldiers, gang, group), *zullumqar* instead of *diktator* (dictator, oppressor, one who commits cruelties), etc. This makes him a man of the people, and more importantly, one who 'calls it like he sees it'. Memishi subsequently becomes one who is not afraid to speak the truth as it is, rather than dressing it up in fancy speech.

I will carry out this analysis by identifying three major themes in the text: *place, governance and collective action*. In the first theme, Memishi explores *what* Ash-Sham is and *who* it is *for*. In the second theme, Memishi explores who is it being (mis)governed by, and who it *should* be governed by. In the last theme, Memishi explores *what* should be done, and by *whom*. All three themes, as I will go on to show, have implications and set the terms for the construction and performance of masculinity.

"Sham (…) it is the place of Muslim warriors (…) it is the place of Muslim men"
What is Ash-Sham, and *who* is it for? This is the subject of this sub-section. First, let us consider what Ash-Sham is. Memishi begins his sermon thusly:

> "When Allah *subhanahu wa-ta 'ala* begins the surah in his book in which he mentions the journey of Muhammad *salla llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam* from Masjidil Haram to Masjidil Aqsa, he mentions the value of a place which currently is a place of war, where the Muslims are fighting with our sworn enemies who call themselves Muslims. This is the place of Sham."

> (Memishi 2013)

Here, Memishi is referring to Surah 17 of the Qur'an, which begins by addressing the incident of Isra and Miraj, also known as the Night Journey. In this event, the Prophet Muhammad was sent from Mecca to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where he prayed with the other prophets, ascended to Heaven and came back to Mecca in one single night. According to Abdul Haleem's translation, the verse reads as follows: "Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night *from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed*, to show him some of Our signs: He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing." (The Qur'an 17:1, emphasis mine) It is based on this verse that Memishi claims the area is blessed and abundant. Of course, the verse could just as easily be interpreted symbolically. In fact, Abdel Haleem's translation is one of the few to translate *masjidil aqsa* as 'the furthest place of worship' rather than interpreting it as *the actual mosque in Jerusalem with the same name*. Interpreted symbolically, this Qur'anic verse could refer to the growth of Islam, and the journey of the Prophet from his life as a simple merchant to the Prophet of God. This verse could just as easily refer to all land where Islam spread as 'blessed surroundings', blessed because they accepted Islam. The Qur'an says little else of Isra and Miraj directly – the notion of praying with the prophets and ascending to Heaven and back are based on hadith. Nonetheless, Memishi interprets this 'blessed place' as present-day Syria.

Thus, the sanctification of Ash-Sham begins very early, already in the first minutes of Memishi's sermon. Memishi very quickly and free of doubt links "the furthest place of worship" from the Qur'anic verse to the geographical area of modern-day Syria. It is also interesting that Memishi automatically assumes that Sham is blessed in terms of religious favour from God, not as soil which is particularly fertile in an otherwise desert-rich area (often

known as 'the fertile crescent'). So far in our analysis, we can therefore say that Ash-Sham is, according to Memishi, a blessed place of abundance.

True to social constructivist thought, Memishi is not *describing* Ash-Sham, he is *constructing* it. He is not saying that Syria is *like* Ash-Sham, or that it *reminds him* of Ash-Sham, or even that it *bears resemblance to it*: he says that Syria *is* Ash-Sham. This can easily be disregarded as a phrasing, but it is significant. It can be compared to the power of metaphors vs that of similes in fiction. In similes, the author writes that something is *like* something, whereas in metaphors something *is* something. Consider for example, the famous line from Romeo and Juliet if Shakespeare had used simile instead of metaphor: "It is *like* the east, and Juliet is *like* the sun". The strength and fame of those lines comes from the fact that Shakespeare writes "It *is* the east, and Juliet *is* the sun". The difference between Memishi's sermon and Shakespeare's metaphor is that Shakespeare wrote those lines with the intention of them not be taken literally. Juliet is not a luminous astronomical object. When Memishi says that Syria is Ash-Sham, however, he means it: he links the sign of Syria, to the sign of Ash-Sham as described in the Qur'an, the literal word of God: Syria = Ash-Sham = Qur'an = Truth. Indeed, one of the key features of Memishi's sermon is that he is not inventing his subject matter. It is real, it is foretold, and it is urgent.

Who is Ash-Sham *for*? Ash-Sham is where the Prophet foresaw that Muslim men shall gather and perform their masculinity, to put it in Butlerian terms. This point is repeated often: that the Prophet foresaw that a group of his Ummah will gather in Ash-Sham around Judgement Day. The form of masculinity to be performed in Ash-Sham is, like always, hardly new or innovative. It is a form of masculinity with which many are familiar. It is largely based on the idea of the knight in shining armour, fighting a glorious battle to aid the weak and innocent against an evil dragon. What sets this masculinity apart are the religious conditions. Whereas in the Western world, one might perform knighthood masculinity based on secular values and ideals, Memishi connects masculinity with God, by saying that mujahedeen (soldiers who engage in jihad) are sent by God:

> "The events which are happening in the Arab world is a culmination of what is called 'Arab Spring'. It
> is a culmination of a war against *zullumqar* tyrants who feed on the blood of Muslims, on the blood of
> Muslim women, and in particular, on the blood of Muslim children. Does the Muslim of this era, does
> the Muslim of this era think that Allah *jalla jallalehu* lets the blood of these children go to waste? Do

people believe that Allah will lead astray those who give their blood, particularly in this bountiful land which Allah *jalla jallalehu* has protected?"

(Memishi 2013)

The word *zullumqar* is an Albanization of the Arabic word *zaalim*, which is a person who commits *zulm.* Zulm is Arabic for oppression, injustice or cruelty. The word zullumqar is a word with very powerful connotations in the Kosovar context, particularly due to Kosovo's violent past. It is also a word associated with the Serb rule in Kosovo before the war. The above section, in many ways, discursively lays the foundations for the gender ideal to be repeated and imitated. God sends Muslim fighters who belong to the Prophet's Ummah when oppressors oppress Muslims. What is lost in Memishi's sermon is that his ideal is an ideal exactly because it cannot be reached. But this hardly makes Islamist masculinity unique: in fact, it is what makes it more similar to the hegemonic kinds of secular masculinity in the Western world. Indeed, according to Judith Butler, this is a key distinction of any gender. It is an ideal which in its nature can never be reached, and must be performed and reperformed, repeated and imitated to create the illusion of substance. In fact, this is exactly what Memishi calls for – a crystallization, a performing and reperforming of an authentic form of Muslim masculinity.

The quote above creates the c*onditions* for certain kinds of masculinity. What sort of masculinity? What acts are to be imitated, repeated, performed and reperformed? If God will not let innocent blood go to waste, he will send the mujahedeen, the foretold group of fighters fighting for God. Memishi says that the mujahedeen

"are in the surface of the earth to fight for Allah *subhanahu wa-ta 'ala*, and [God] did not bring about these people for any other reason than when they see a murdered child, or a raped woman, when they see an old man beaten up or bloody, when they see people who are weak, they emerge on the path of Allah, and they fight.

(Memishi 2013, emphasis mine)

Again, this form of masculinity is hardly unique. God sends the mujahedeen when women are raped, children murdered, elderly beaten and bloody, and people are in general weak. The mujahedeen emerge on the path of Allah and they fight, in the most militant sense of the word. This is far from a rethinking of masculinity. Man-the-provider and man-the-protector are old ideals. In his sermon, Memishi is not calling a subversive performance of masculinity: he is

calling for a revised performance of masculinity. While this revision is a small change, namely a change in the imagined community (the Muslim Ummah rather than the Albanian ethnos), it results in drastic changes. The arena of masculine performance, the theatre on which masculinity unfolds becomes Syria instead of Kosovo. It is a discursive change which also alters conditions for action, be they individual or collective. Men are still expected to rise when shame threatens their honour, just like Gjergj Elez Alia from the Albanian folk epos did when the sea creature demanded his sister. What *has* changed, however, is the notion of sisterhood. No longer is she a woman of the household, or even the country. A transnational faith-based notion of sisterhood reigns instead, one in which women become sisters in faith than in nation or even blood.

While Islamist masculinities are neither innovative nor creative, it is important to keep in mind that this is not a conventional masculinity-act, in Butlerian terms. It is an act which defies the hegemonic masculinity ideals in Kosovo. Memishi (2013) is not calling for a repetition of the form of masculinity which is dominant in Kosovo today – a masculinity which calls for the willingness of fighting for one's identity, country, or nation – but rather, replaces the ethnonationalist terms of Albanian masculinity with Islamist ones. Challenging the ethnonationalist masculinity ideal is extremely powerful because the change in the political situation in Kosovo after the war in 98-99 entails that there is no longer any battlefield whereupon young men can prove and obtain their masculinity. There is no war to fight in. The few Serbs present in Kosovo today are not only no longer enemies to be met in battle, they are citizens that are protected by Kosovar law and constitution. To use Butlerian diction, we can say that the stage where Albanian masculinities have been acted out, is crumbling, leaving few realistic alternatives. Herein lies the power of Memishi's construction of Ash-Sham as a masculine social space of violence and honour.

If the goal of gender performance is the creation of the illusion of substance, as Butler writes, then the source of the substance and authenticity and truth in Memishi's sermon stems from the linking of Ash-Sham with the Prophet, the Qur'an and God. This becomes a particularly powerful source when it is linked to a) the Prophet, who was God's chosen man, the ultimate and perfect man, and b) when Ash-Sham is mentioned in the actual word of God, the Qur'an. Remember, however, that the Qur'an never says that "the furthest place of worship" is present day Syria. "The furthest place of worship" is never localized. But the most important feature

of Ash-Sham is not its geographical location: instead, it is who Sham is for. To explain who Sham is for, Memishi says, already in the beginning of his sermon:

"Sham. This place of bounty, this place of abundance, this place for Muslims [masculine form] before Judgement Day. It was called [thusly] by the Prophet *salla llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam,* that it [Sham] is the place where Muslims [masc. form] gather before Judgement Day. [Memishi speaks Arabic] It is the place of Muslim warriors, it is the place of Muslim *awliya*, it is the place of Muslim men, a place which gathers the Muslims before the Judgement Day."

(Memishi 2013, emphasis mine)

It is interesting that Memishi uses the word *awliya*, which is an Arabic word which historically has been used for Islamic saints. In conservative and particularly Islamist and Salafist branches of Islam, this practice is highly condemned and considered as polytheism (*shirk*) – God alone is holy and worthy of worship. It could, however, also be a way for Memishi to sanctify Muslim warriors. It is striking how quickly masculinity becomes important in the construction the social space of Ash-Sham. The chain of equivalence is almost explicit:
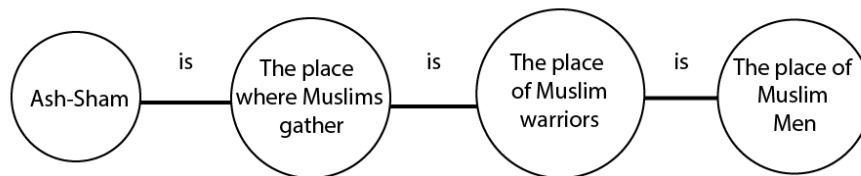
Thus, Memishi constructs Ash-Sham as a masculine space by connecting it first to the hadith stating that Muslims will gather there, then connecting it to the sign of 'Muslim warriors', and lastly to the sign of 'Muslim men'. Other connections are possible: Ash-Sham might be a place of pilgrimage, a place for Muslims of any gender. Instead, Memishi constructs Ash-Sham as an inherently masculine space intended for warfare, or rather, that it is a space designated for men and warfare. Memishi consistently uses the masculine form of Muslim, except when he says that the Assad regime "feeds off the blood of Muslim women" (Memishi 2013). It is when we view this in light of Butler's theory of gender performativity that it truly becomes powerful. What we are dealing with is not just an idea of masculinity: we are dealing with masculinity as a *stylized repetition of acts*. Memishi is not speaking of *one particular* Muslim man, nor a unique Muslim man. Ash-Sham is the place of *Muslim men*, plural. The act to be repeated is not just to travel to Ash-Sham, but to travel there as a warrior to take part in the great war

before Judgement day, *and to travel there as a man.* Memishi is here providing an ideal to be imitated, an ideal to be repeated and hopefully, solidified as a hegemonic masculinity-act.

Ergo, present-day Syria is a place of Muslim warriors and a place of Muslim men. The men who decide to become foreign fighters (in Memishi's words, "mujahedeen") are in fact placed there by God to protect the local population ("when they see a raped woman…"). The Syrian Civil War is articulated in religious terms by linking the war to a hadith. In the hadith, the Prophet's companions, after fighting all the major battles and establishing Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, put down their arms and tie up their horses, saying 'the war is over, there is no more war, all our wars have been fought'. When the Prophet is made aware of their saying so, he says "They have lied. The war has just arrived." Memishi says:

> "In the moment where the people thought that the war has ended, that the Arabian Peninsula has been taken (…) ,[the Prophet] *salla llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam* said that a group of Muslim fighters will be in Sham, a group of fighters from my *Ummah*, a group of fighters from my *Ummah*, [Memishi speaks Arabic]. They will fight in the path of Allah, they will fight for the cause of Allah (…) no one will harm them this small group which Allah protects among [with] angels, with the wings of the Angels, Allah *jalla jallalehu* has placed these people in Sham. Thus spoke [the Prophet]."
>
> (Memishi 2013, emphasis mine)

Being connected to the Prophet thus becomes a source of authenticity and truth. These warriors are not just placed in Syria by God, they are also protected by God and his angels. Thus, Memishi (2013) constructs the place which we know as Syria as a place of devout Muslims, or as Brubaker (2016) has called it, a place of "hypercommitted selves". In a paper exploring the religious aspects of violence, Brubaker (2016) identifies six violence-enabling mechanisms, one of which is the social production of hypercomitted selves. Brubaker writes that there is a connection between hypercommittment and violence:

> "The indifference to consequences that is constitutive of a hypercommitted self facilitates both the *suffering* and the *inflicting* of violence. It does so by suspending ordinary forms of moral accounting, and ordinary forms of sensitivity to risk and harm, in the name of an overriding concern with the one thing that matters. The radical discounting of consequences may go so far as to entail indifference to the possibility or even certainty of one's own death, or indifference to the deaths of others (…) religion's

formidable socializing and world-defining powers make it a distinctively robust and productive source of hypercommitted selves (…) The power to shape selves and subjectivities and to define reality comes into focus most clearly in the case of conversion to a new and more demanding and integral form of religious engagement. Conversion can involve a fundamental shift in identity, a rupture in the way of seeing and experiencing the world, a relativization and devaluation of existing social ties, and a powerful cognitive, emotional, moral, and bodily resocialization

(Brubaker 2015, pp. 7-8, emphasis in original)

Note that Brubaker is not referring to conversion as from one faith to another, but rather, from one mode of religiosity to another, more demanding one. This can also be seen in Memishi's sermon. The fighters of Sham, which come from the Prophet's Ummah, do not represent the common Muslim, but rather, the crème de la crème of Muslim men. As I have shown, Ash-Sham is constructed as a masculine space. Therefore, Memishi is not just constructing Ash-Sham as a place of devout hypercommitted Muslims, but rather, a place of *hypercommitted Muslim men*. Indeed, when Memishi speaks of Ash-Sham, women only appear once, or rather, their blood does. Women are the providers of blood off which the Syrian tyrant (Assad) feeds. Syria, or Sham, is not therefore not just the place of any Muslim men – it is the place of devout, committed, authentic Muslim *men*.

In *The Will to Change*, bell hooks writes that the first violence which the patriarchy expects men to commit, is the violence towards the self. While hooks is referring to a psychic sort of violence which renders men emotionally crippled, this can be seen in Memishi's sermon in a far more literal sense. The following snippet from his sermon highlights what I consider an important symbolic ritual in the construction of masculinity in the Kosovar Islamist discourse, namely self-harm:

"The prisons of Syria, the prisons of Syria are full of mujahedeen, full of good Muslims. Do you know what tortures the Muslims are suffering in these places? One of the tortures one hears from people who have been in those prisons (…) the snake was inserted in the anus and pulled out of the mouth. They put snakes in the prisons, the most poisonous kind. They put in dogs, different kind of insects, of scorpions, and punishments against the Muslims."

(Memishi 2013, emphasis mine)

This snippet is crucial in many ways. Firstly, it shows that emotions do play a central role in the construction of masculinity, at least in the Kosovar Islamist discourse. Memishi is not asking his potential warriors to turn off their emotions completely, but rather, forms an emotional bond to the state of being the warrior of God. Secondly, it reveals not only that violence is a part of masculinity ideals, but that masculine ideals manifest through exerting violence. This violence consists of the ability and willingness to commit violence towards the 'others' to protect that which is 'ours', but it also consists of directing violence towards the self. Performing masculinity includes performing rituals which harm you severely, or seeking these rituals out, not avoiding them. The snippet above is crucial because it shows that masculinity is "put on" the body, like a garment, with pain and violence. If you choose a life as a Muslim warrior, these are the tortures that might await you. As a warrior and as a man, you are supposed to know of these tortures and choose actively to become a warrior anyway.

This pain can be physical or emotional. The pain can either be like what Memishi is describing, *or what Memishi is doing*. In the first, the pain consists of embarking on a journey where pain is mandatory. As you set out for war, you know that you are putting yourself at risk for the worst acts that humans can commit to one-another. The detail about the snake in the quote above is surprisingly sexual, it is loaded with rape symbolism, a line one would not expect when describing the fate of God's warriors. The second, equally real pain consist in what Memishi is doing: mentioning this, listening to this, soaking in the pain and shame which 'the others' are committing to even 'our men'. We could see the same tendency in Demolli (2015). This emotional self-harm which consists of dwelling in and soaking gruesome details of the war will also be discussed further in the next section on anasheed and emotions. I return to this point in the next section, where I analyse Albanian jihadist anasheed.

In summary, we can see that Ash-Sham is constructed as a holy masculine social space. This holiness stems from its connection to the Prophet, hadith, the Qur'an, and therefore God. Of course, in all these turns, in all these connections, lies the process of interpreting, the process of guiding this linking *in a certain way*. This linking is not natural, nor is it pre-discursive, an absolute truth. Instead, this direction is constructed actively: Memishi chooses to interpret the bountifulness of Ash-Sham as a holiness rather than a fertility of the soil. The Qur'anic verse could just as easily refer to Ash-Sham's fertile soil. Of course, by making Ash-Sham sacred, Memishi also creates conditions for certain actions. If Memishi had constructed Ash-Sham as a place of fertile soil, he might have called his congregation to pursuit an agricultural life in the

Levant region. Instead, Ash-Sham is constructed as a sacred masculine space, a place of warriors and a place of men. In this sense, Ash-Sham can be understood as a homeland for Muslims, *a motherland in need of the aid and protection of Muslim men.*

5.2.2 *"The Jews of San Francisco and the Jews of New York": misgoverning Ash-Sham*

Having established how Syria is constructed as a masculine and sacred homeland of Muslims in desperate need of masculine force and protection, I will now go on to analyse the imagined antagonism in Memishi's sermon. Ash-Sham *is* the homeland of the Muslims*, but it is being misgoverned by the disbelievers*. This subsection will consequently analyse this aspect of Memishi's sermon, namely the construction of antagonism, and the notion that the homeland of Muslims is being misruled by the disbelievers.

An integral part of the construction of Ash-Sham is also the construction of antagonism, the antagonists to the Muslim fighting men. In his sermon, Memishi uses the name 'Syria' 8 times, while Sham is mentioned 28 times. This distinction is very important, because 'Syria' is used in exclusively negative sentences. Memishi uses Syria when he speaks of the war, when he speaks of the cruelties of the civil war, when he mentions atrocities and human rights violations. There is, in other words, nothing sacred about *Syria*. Indeed, even the name Syria indicates the misruling of the Muslim homeland. In the three excerpts below, Memishi constructs a connection between Syria and the Jews, the Jews being the source of Syria's existence *and* Ash-Sham's inexistence.

   a) "Sham is not just Syria, brothers. But this is how it was divided, [by] the Jews of San Francisco and the Jews of New York. The ones whose colours are blue and white, the UN (…) The ones with the same colours as the flag of Israel. The ones who are controlled by Israel and the people of Israel."

   (Memishi 2013, emphasis mine)

   b) "[Israel was created] through their [the Jew's] rroktar, Britain. And all the states which are in Europe today, all these states and all these governments, all these prime ministers, they have been trapped by the Jews. They are tied. Just like the magician who ties the jinn [i.e., spirits], (…) so are these people tied. Except for one small group of Muslims. What sets this small group of Muslims apart?

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(…) they fight for the cause of Allah, they fight for the cause of Allah and no one can do them any harm."

c) "We are in times of *fitnah* and in times of the fall of oppressive *zullumqar*, <u>which were placed through a game of chess played by the Jews and the others, the Americans who are the *rroktar* of the Jews, the Europeans, who are the *rroktar* of the Jews, (…) and all other places are *rroktar* and work for the money of the Jews,</u> now a difficulty has arrived for the Jews, now a difficulty has arrived for the Jews, for that fabricated state."

The three sections above, which I have named a), b), and c), are very important in the creation of the notion that Ash-Sham, the homeland of Muslims, is being misruled by the disbelievers, the Jews, in particular. In fact, Ash-Sham is being forced into inexistence through this misrule. Sham, Memishi says in a), is not just Syria, but this is how it was divided. Ergo, all the current borders, forms of governance (including all those in Europe), stem from the Jews. Memishi creates a dichotomy, one in which the area can either be sacred Ash-Sham, or misgoverned, evil Syria & co. The existence of any other form of government, of existing, cannot be. Thus, we see a chain of difference in which Ash Sham = not Syria = not the UN = not the Jews = not Israel.

In b), Memishi explores how Israel came to be, namely through their *rroktar*, Britain. *Rroktar* is an Albanian term for a very lowly and badly paid servant in a farm. It is thus meant as a derogatory term, intended to convey that Britain is a servant controlled solely by the will of "the Jews" and "Israel". Britain is not unique: all of Europe, all its prime ministers and governments work for the Jews and Israel, for "the money of the Jews". It is through their servants, Europe and the UN, that the current borders of the Levant are drawn. While Europe and the UN truly were central in drawing the borders in the Middle East, Memishi is here suggesting that they did so under direct, almost supernatural control of "the Jews" ("like the magicians ties the jinns"). Notice, however, the use of contrast: except for one group of fighting Muslims, who fight for the cause of God. These are the only 'free' people in the whole world, free of the bondage of the Jews, in Memishi's terms. They are invincible fighting men, and this

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is a crucial point of the matter. The small group of Muslims are not those who pray, or those who are kind, or read the Qur'an – it is the ones who fight, in a physical sense, for God. They fight the Europeans, "the Jews", "Israel", and everyone standing in the way of the existence of the Muslim homeland of Ash-Sham.

Lastly, then, in c), Memishi says that the current leaders, the 'zullumqar' of the region are also a result of a dominance of "the Jews". They were placed through a game of chess, Memishi says, by the servants of "the Jews" and those who work for the money of "the Jews". The difficulty Memishi is referring to in the end of section c), is of course the small group of Muslim fighters who will not be 'tied' by "the Jews". Once again, this form of masculinity is hardly unique or different. In fact, it is the same play but with different actors. What is unique in Memishi's sermon is *not* that he abolishes the roles altogether, but rather, that he recasts the actors. The heroes are not the American soldiers fighting for freedom and democracy, but the Muslim fighters who resist the bondage of "the Jews" and the misgoverning of the sacred homeland. Other than this feature, the play of masculinity is remarkably similar.

Another important aspect of the imagined antagonism is to reimagine the mujahedeen, i.e. the foreign fighters, and understand them as the heroic Muslim fighters mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad. Speaking of the mujahedeen, Memishi says:

> "Others call these people terrorists, they call them murderers, that they are beasts, and so on. Unfortunately, it is Muslims too who call them these things. They believe the magicians of this age, just like there existed magicians in the time of the Prophet *salla llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam*, and in the times of the earlier prophets, in reality, the magicians of today are the journalist who are payed with good money by their bosses, to whoever manages to steal a news story or bring a photograph, is rewarded with big money."

> (Memishi 2013)

Memishi explains how a part of the 'bondage' he described earlier, is viewing the mujahedeen, which are in fact 'the warriors of God', as terrorists, beasts, monsters, etc. Remember, as we discussed in the subsection above, how Memishi described the mujahedeen instead: when they see a woman raped, or a child murdered, or an old man beaten and bloody, they emerge on the path of Allah, and they fight. Through 'the magicians of this era,' however, the journalists, not

only is Ash-Sham misgoverned, but its heroes are misrepresented. Thus, this constructed antagonism also includes journalists who are paid good money to 'steal a news story or bring a photograph'.

To summarize this subsection, just as Memishi constructs the potential of Ash-Sham as a sacred Muslim homeland, he constructs the antagonist "Jews" who, with their money and through their servants, have placed oppressors and divided the holy land, resulting in its misgoverning. It is important to keep in mind the depth om Memishi's conspiracy theory. The "Jews" have not only "bought" the US, Europe, and every other country: they have invented the system of democracy for the sole purpose of ruling the world. In all the world, one small group of Muslims stands out, an invincible group who cannot be hurt even when they are fought. The construction of antagonism therefore serves to solidify the heroism of the mujahedeen, but also as a condition for collective action. This is the subject of the next subsection.

"Abstain sometimes (…) leave them with just two votes": calling for collective action
If Ash-Sham is the sacred Muslim homeland misgoverned by "the Jews", what should be done about this? Should Muslims form political parties, organize rallies and meetings, or should they create humanitarian organizations and NGOs to aid their fellow Muslims in Syria? None of the above. It has been very clear that what Memishi is calling for is a complete boycott of the democratic system. However, it doesn't become explicit until the very end of his sermon. Towards the end of the sermon, Memishi says the following:

> "We as Muslims must know that today's systems, democracy, which is a system about to break down (…) this is the system of the Dajjal, this Dajjal and the other ones created two *tabor*s, and the Muslims did not know that they have a third, you are Muslim, you have your own *tabor*, you do not need to be a *rroktar* of the communists and of the democrats. One has already fallen [i.e. Communism], the other will also fall soon"

> (Memishi 2013)

In the section quoted above, Memishi is in fact rearticulating of European history, though this might be difficult to see at the first glance. Instead of linking 'democracy' to other signs like 'voting', 'fairness', 'justice', etc., Memishi links it to Dajjal, the Islamic Anti-Christ. Memishi does so because democracy questions, even challenges, the divine authority of God. It is, ergo, a form of polytheism or shirk, according to Islamist discourse. The laws of God shall govern

the land, not the laws of man. When Memishi says 'this Dajjal and the other ones' he of course is referring to "the Jews", "the Americans", but also "the Communists". Memishi uses the word *tabor*, an archaic word for 'group of soldiers', or battalion, instead of political orientation, ideology, or even group. It is striking as Memishi is rearticulating European history, namely the rise and fall of communism in the Cold War era, he is doing so in military terms. He is understanding communism and capitalism as armies, rather than political ideologies. Lastly, Memishi says that the Muslims did not know that they had a third option, their own *tabor*: the tabor of Islam, which follows the divine laws of God. Muslims do not need to be servants of other tabors, according to Memishi, when they have their own. In other words, it is the very simple idea of 'us' versus 'them'. This, and the militaristic features of his reinterpretation of European history, are commonly understood as masculine projects. It is important to keep this fact in mind when analysing Islamist texts.

The system of democracy, then, just like the current borders of the Middle East, are a system of "the Jews" and a system of "Dajjal" and therefore Satan. Thus, all but the Islamic *tabor* must be rejected and defeated, because giving anyone but God law-making authority is a form of idolatry and polytheism, both great sins in Islam. In other words, *democracy is blasphemous*. Thus, Memishi shares with his congregation the following warning:

> "Beware of political parties, beware of voting. (…) Abstain sometimes. Leave them [the politicians] in the mud, leave them [the politicians] with just two votes. Let's see how that will go for them. Because the people themselves are the creators of tyrants, creators of *zullumqar*, when we stand up for them, when we remain calm, when we vote for them, when we applaud them, when we appear in their gatherings, and so on. They create the tyrants, they create the *zullumqar*."

> (Memishi 2013)

Thus, then, apart from going to fight in Syria, Muslims must reject and resist the system of democracy, and indeed, any other system but that of Islam. If Muslims cannot aid in the creation and maintaining of an Islamic homeland, they must at least oppose other systems. When Memishi says 'leave them in the mud', he means 'leave them hanging'. Do not feel pity for them, abstain and see how that will affect them. Further, he says that voting creates oppressors, or dictators. Thus, he links democracy not only to Dajjal, "the Jews", and Satan, but also to misgovernment and oppression. Democracy does not prevent tyranny, according to Memishi, it creates it. By voting, by upholding law and order, by applauding, the people create

tyrants. This is very interesting when seen in the light of the earlier parts of the sermon. In the Albanian-speaking world, the people create mis-governance by voting – but what about Bashir al-Assad, the ultimate tyrant, according to Memishi? Was he created through voting, and this by the people? Is al-Assad also created by the people, or do only Europeans create tyrants? Indeed, Memishi creates a chain of difference between Ash-Sham and Kosovo, Europe, the Albanosphere (i.e. the Albanian-speaking world): in Ash-Sham, the tyrants are created through the constellation "the Jews" – "Europe" – "the US", rather than everywhere else, where the mis-governance is by the people's own fault. They create mis-governance by agreeing to play a rigged game with corrupt, blasphemous rules.

Summary
In this section, I have analysed the construction of the social space of Ash-Sham in a Friday sermon by the imprisoned imam Rexhep Memishi. By analysing Memishi's words, I have discovered that Ash-Sham is understood as something entirely different from Syria. The existence of the state of Syria is in fact the proof of mis-governance of the area. Syria, and all the other countries in the region, and their political systems, are a result of the influence of "the Jews", who, together with "the Americans", and "the Europeans", have divided and indeed desecrated the sacred homeland of Muslims. Ash-Sham is not just a masculine social space of violence, the Muslim homeland in need of protection and takeover – it is the place of the rule of God, the only right form of governance which does not produce hardship and oppression.

The diagram below summarizes the different positions in Memishi's sermon and shows the discursive construction of Ash-Sham. It also shows how different signs are linked into chains of equivalence. In so doing, Memishi in fact simoutaneously constructs subject postions whereby your positionality (whether you subscribe to the idea of Ash-Sham or the current division of countries) also affects whether you are on the team of 'the Jews' and thereby 'Satan' or on the side of the Prophet Muhammad and God. The red line represents what I call the line of antagonism, which marks where the Islamist "we" end and where their "them" begins. The antagonism, however, should not be seen as a competing discourse, but rather, as an *imagined* competing discourse. An *imagined antagonism*. When I state that the current map of the Levant was created by the Jews, and by extension, Satan, I am observing Islamist discourse instead of identifying a counter-discourse. The diagram also shows how Sham is constructed by constructing what Sham is, and simultaneously (and perhaps, more importantly) *what Sham is not*. The blue line on the other hand, I have labelled 'line of discursivity', implying that the

discursive construction of meaing begins under said line. The physical land in the specific location does exist, *it does manifest physically*, but it only obtains meaing through the linking with other signs in chains of equivalence.

The diagram also identifies priviledged signs, also known as nodal points in Laclau and Mouffe's terms. Nodal points are privilidged because of their central roles, and because other signs are articulated in ralation to that sign (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p. 96). As the diagram illustrates, the Prophet Muhammad is an important sign because of the Prophet's position and role in Islam. As God's chosen messenger, the Prophet in many ways serves as a mediator to Muslims' relationship with God, exactly because he is believed to be the last prophet to experience a direct divine connection. The role of the Prophet, but also of the Qur'an and God, can therefore not be overstated. Any authority, authenticity, and religiosity stems from being connected to the Prophet, and thereby God. The diagram also identifies exactly how foreign fighters can claim that theirs is a fight for God. The claim rests on these exact chains of equivalence, and the relation of some signs to other signs.
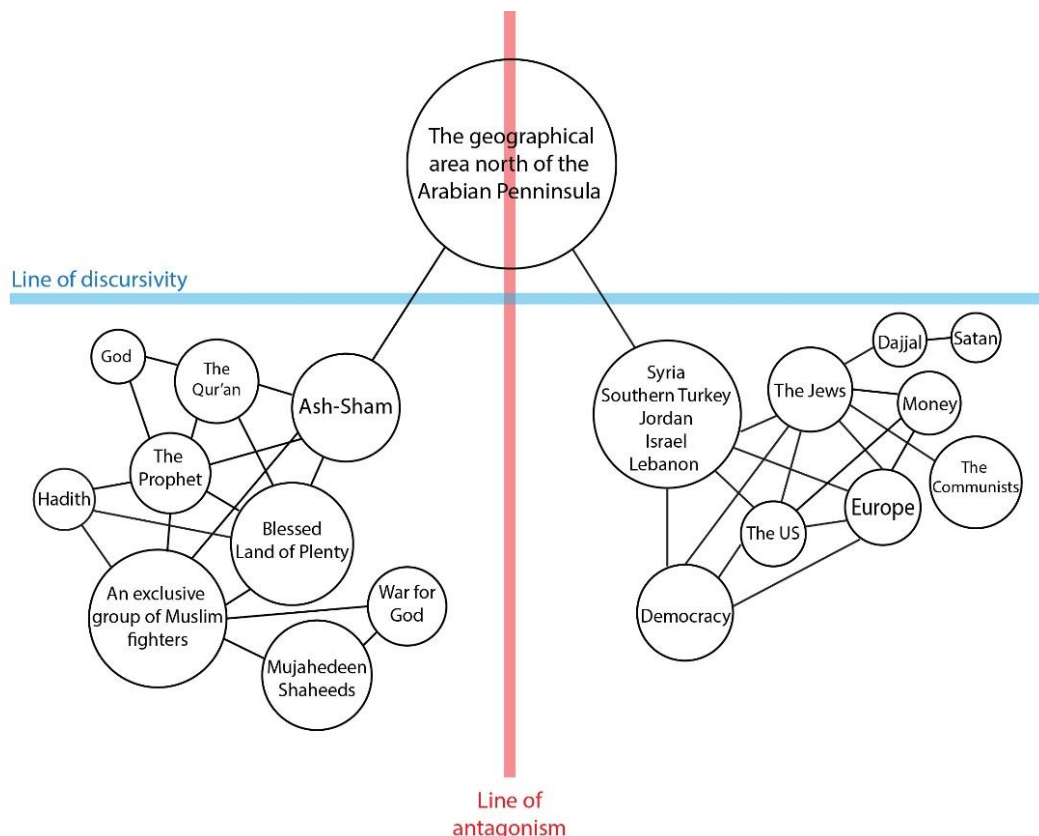
Another priviledged sign is "the Jews". Please note that throughout this section, whenever I refer to "the Jews" I refer to the constructed idea of "the Jews" in Kosovar Islamist discourse, rather than followers of the religion of Judaism. As a researcher, I am merely describing the social construction of meaing. Remarks or ideas about "the Jews" are therefore anything but

mine. As the diagram below shows, every sign is connected to "the Jews", and this connection is antagonistic only because it is further connected to Dajjal, the Islamic Anti-Christ, and Satan. In other words, it is an unholy chain of equivance. In fact, according to Islamist discourse, the connection of "the Jews" with other signs (like "the US", "Europe", and "money") comes exactly *as a concequence* of their link with Satan, or Anti-God. Another consequence of this connection is that they a) have power to alter the world map, dividing countries in ways that befit them, b) pay all countries in the world, particularly the US and Europe to be their 'servants', following their every order, and c) have so much money, which upholds a) and b). Ash-Sham versus Syria and the other countries of the region therefore becomes, by proxy, a war between God and Satan, good and evil. It is important to note that the mujahedeen are only the warriors of God through the linkning of mujahedeen to "an exclusive group of fighters", "the Prophet", and "God". The same can be said about the warfare mujahedeen engage in: it is holy not because it is holy in its nature, but because it can be linked to the Prophet, the Qur'an, and to God.

In conclusion, Memishi's sermon works on three levels. Firstly, it discursively constructs the geographical area of the Levant as something entirely different from the countries which make up this area currently (Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, south-eastern Turkey). Instead, this geographical area is Ash-Sham, a sacred land of bounty, the homeland of Muslims. It is also, as I have shown, constructed as a masculine space of Muslim warriors and Muslim men. Ash-Sham is thus constructed as a place of what Brubaker has called "hypercommitted selves" (Brubaker 2015) although I would argue that it is in fact hypercommitted *men.* Secondly, it constructs an antagonism. The sacred homeland of Muslims is currently being misgoverned by disbelievers and oppressors placed there by the disbelievers (through "the Jews"). Said differently, Memishi constructs a situation where the sacred Muslim homeland is desecrated and misgoverned by the non-Muslims. Lastly, Memishi calls for either a) becoming a part of the "small group of Muslims from the Prophet's Ummah" (i.e. become a foreign fighter), or to boycott any other system than Islam, including democracy. The entire universe constructed by Memishi, including ideas of us and them, is based on masculinist and militaristic notions. In fact, it is one where women merely exist as props and feelers of pain, pain which must be defended and avenged by Muslim warriors and Muslim men.

"I Long for Paradise": pain and masculinity in jihadist *anasheed*

Having analysed the construction of Ash-Sham as a masculine social space, and a homeland of Muslims, I will now turn to anasheed (singular: nasheed), acapella songs with religious themes. I will analyse the role of these songs, and what role emotions play in them. Why analyse songs when we study violent extremism? Surely, better sources must exist? Surely, correspondence, ideological documents, tactics and manuals must be more important? This section, however, is based on a point which Hegghammer (2017) has already made: jihadi culture, including acapella songs (anasheed), can serve as an indicator of commitment, but also a tool of emotional persuasion. A battle for young men's hearts, rather than their minds. Thus, it is an invaluable source of information about how Islamist discourse. If Memishi is fighting for young men's minds, anasheed fights for their hearts. We must understand what these songs are about, and what motivates. As I will show, ideas of masculinity are central in these motivations.

When I conducted the fieldwork in Kosovo for this thesis, I was told a joke. While the joke contains a horrible racist portrayal of Kosovo's Roma population, the central point of the joke serves as a good entry point for this section. Once upon a time there was a man who was too old to seek vengeance on a family with which he had a blood feud, so he hired a young Roma man to do the killing. Before he was to set out to do the deed, the old man hired a group of men to sing songs of heroes and bravery, to man him up for the job. The musicians played a few songs, and soon enough, the young man was ready. Very soon, however, he came back, saying that he was not able to do the deed. But, said the Roma man, he surely would if only the musicians were to follow him the entire way. The point of the joke is that all men need a little push and inspiration to commit acts of bravery, unless they belong to the Roma population. Then, not even heroic songs can help, because they are not real men.

A few words about the songs, and what they have in common. All songs are found on and transcribed from YouTube. They are all sung my adolescent or adult men, and most of the comments are positive, commenting on the singer's voice, and their ability to convey powerful emotions. The singers are in interesting age-groups. Sometimes, they are as young as in their early teens, but rarely older than their mid-30s. This is exactly the age-group which Shtuni (2016) identifies as the most likely to become a foreign fighter. I have also selected anasheed which deal with what Memishi calls 'fighting in the path of God'. They convey emotions around taking arms for God, but more importantly, dying in the process. They also have in

common the delinking of the act of dying in warfare as death, but rather, a rebirth, an immortalization, a joyous occasion rather than a tragedy. Another important feature is that they all were created and performed during the Syrian Civil War; they also are implicitly or explicitly dedicated to foreign fighters slain in Syria.

The Albanian anasheed universe is vast. Most Albanian anasheed are not about jihad. They praise God, the Prophet, or the Islam's holiest sites, Mecca and Medina. They explore the power and mercy of God, the purity of the Prophet, but also far more emotional subjects. Mothers, what they must endure, and how they are mistreated by their families is another, as is the death of parents and other existential moments of personhood. What they all have in common is that they very often are intended to be emotional, rather than educational. They are created with the intention of inspiring piety and devotion, but also to trigger an emotional reaction. Studying Albanian jihadist anasheed is therefore a unique possibility to analyse what is meant and intended as motivation and what is meant to trigger emotions. In jihadists context, what comforts, soothes, inspires and triggers powerful emotions?

One of the most common chain of equivalence in Albanian jihadist anasheed is the linking of death in battle with eternal life in paradise, with poetic words and description. A very clear example of this is the song "Zogu i xhenetit" (The bird of paradise) by Adem Ramadani. Adem Ramadani is arguably the most popular nasheed singer in the Albanian-speaking world. But he is not an exclusively jihadist singer. In fact, his thematic spectre spans from the death of one's mother, to the beauty of Mecca, to the celebration of Eid. Ramadani's songs play loudly from most mosques in Kosovo on Eid and play on many TV-channels during the holy month of Ramadan. The song was published on YouTube January 2018, is professionally produced, and has 5,35 million views. The entire population of Kosovo is just below 2 million.

The nasheed begins by emotionally describing the moment a martyr dies:

> "What is this pleasant smell of musk
>
> which has gripped the earth and sky?
>
> What is this soul which is ascending
>
> And is greeted with so much honour?
>
> What is this green bird

Which flies above springs of water?

It wanders through the Heavens

And visits their every corner".

<div align="center">(Ramadani 2018)</div>

Ramadani (2018) also uses audio-effects to create a depth in his voice, and a soft choir in the background, adding to the effect of sanctity. Here, the singer is not referring to hadith, the Qur'an, or even the Prophet. Instead, he is constructing meaning, where, for many there is none. It challenges the idea that death is an ending, that is all there is. Death, in the context of fighting for God, is a joyous occasion. It is the ultimate achievement, resembling an achievement like finished education, obtaining a new job, marriage, or a new child. It is a joyful start, rather than a tragic ending. That death in battle is a joyous occasion is clearest in the refrain. Ramadani (2018) sings:

"Good news for you, mother

Your son has fallen Shaheed

He has left you a last will

When people visit you for my wake

You may not be saddened

I don't want to see you teary-eyed

Keep your head high, mother

Be patient, with *iman*"

<div align="center">(Ramadani 2018)</div>

Ramadani (2018) is saying that the death of her son is good news for the mother, a scenario which is very difficult to imagine. Surely, news of their son's death would crush any mother. Nonetheless, even when meeting death, this imagined martyr asks his mother to be brave, to stay with her head high, and to keep her faith, her *iman*. But there is something inherently flawed in Ramadani's reasoning. If the real mothers of the real men slain in war are supposed to be strong, why is Ramadani (2018) using so emotional phrasings? Why is he using effects which trigger strong feelings, doing the exact opposite of what the song is calling for, textually? *Because the real bereaved mothers are not the real intended audience of this song, despite the*

lyrics. The real intended audience is young men, it is those who can perform martyrdom masculinities: the Muslim men, the potential Muslim warriors

Death in battle and martyrdom is also the cure of all things. In short, it is a shortcut to Paradise, despite your previous life. Ramadani (2018) sings:

> "A single drop of blood from the [his] body flowed
>
> And it [the drop of blood] demolished every sin
>
> You were a servant of God
>
> And so, God has elevated you
>
> Open, oh you doors of Paradise
>
> For you [martyr] this place [Paradise] has been adorned
>
> No more worries, and no fatigue
>
> This is the day of immortality"

<div align="center">(Ramadani 2018)</div>

When the martyr bled, and died for God, all his previous sins were removed. He is elevated by God into Paradise, which has been adorned for the martyr's sake only. His life of earthly toils has ended; that of immortality and eternal bliss has begun. It is based on this that the mother should be joyous, even though the song can hardly be said to be uplifting or comforting.

Lastly, a central idea in this nasheed, and indeed, most other jihadist anasheed, is that the martyrs *choose* death. They are not *killed*, *murdered*, or *defeated*, they *choose to die for God*. As we already have discussed through the analysis of Memishi's sermon, fighting for God (and then dying for God) consist in taking a part in a war which is linked to, and understood as, a war foretold by the Prophet and a war for the rightful governance of God in the homeland of Muslims. In this particular nasheed, the singer says:

> "Blessed are you, o Shaheed
>
> You are feasting with your God
>
> You were pure of heart
>
> You choose the best of deaths
>
> Your blood is very precious

It watered the holy land

You fought for the Shahadah

Your name will remain [relevant, in our memory]".

<div align="center">(Ramadani 2018)</div>

Here, Ramadani (2018) personifies the Muslim warrior man ideal: he feasts with God after choosing the best of deaths, he was pure of heart, and he fought for the Shahadah, the Islamic creed ("there is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God"). Further on, their precious blood waters the holy land. It is difficult to imagine Ramadani singing of any other "holy land" but the same Ash-Sham which Memishi covers in his sermon. In fact, according to the Kosovar post-war meta narrative, the martyrs of the Kosovo war died for the nation and their ethnicity, not for God or his creed. Ergo, one of the features of Albanian jihadist anasheed is linking death in warfare to martyrdom, heaven, and eternal life. Death does not become a defeat, or even a tragedy. Death in battle is in fact presented as something which is actively sought for.

Most would consider death in battle a tragedy, even if one dies for a noble cause. In jihadist anasheed, death is not only welcome, it is the desired outcome. This is often admitted directly in many anasheed. This becomes particularly uncomfortable when the songs are sung by young adolescent men. In one graphic descriptions, a young boy sings:

"I long for Paradise

Mother, do you give me permission to go?

Before the God who has created me

I wish to appear, covered in blood"

<div align="center">(Abazi 2014)</div>

Once again, death is not seen as an end but as a beginning. The singer is not longing for death, he is longing for Paradise. Thus, becoming a foreign fighter guarantees a spot in Paradise. The singer is not suicidal, at least not explicitly. In fact, suicide is a grave sin in Islam. Instead, the singer longs for Paradise and eternal life. The singer expresses his wish to appear before God covered in blood, because, as Ramadani (2018) sings: a single drop of blood demolishes all sins. In another anasheed, the singer, as young as Abazi (2014), sings:

<div align="center">95</div>

"Who is he which, after dying

Begs God to bring him back to life?

Even if he had a thousand souls

For Allah, he would give them all"

(Ferati 2017)

The question in the first lines is a rhetorical one: who would ask to come back to life when they give their life for God? No one – dying for God is the highest honour, because it witnesses commitment but also success. So committed are these warriors to fighting in the path of God, that they wish to sacrifice their life for it. I would argue that these boys are not actually praising death: they are praising commitment to warfare, fighter spirit, and masculinity. They are not wishing death, they are wishing reward for masculinity well-performed. Seen from a gender-perspective, one could question whether it is masculinity, even at the price of death, which is really being sought. Once again, this echoes the words of bell hooks, and the violence men are expected to direct towards themselves. Dying as a man is better than living as a failed man. In fact, in the last song, which is dedicated to an Albanian man who died in Syria, the singer sings: "A rare hero, and brave / You were always a man / Our brother, Rijad Memishi / You were never afraid" (Abazi 2017). Thus, the song is sung as if by the dead Rijad Memishi, in his perspective. Rijad Memishi was a man and brave exactly because of his will to die for God, and his ability to sacrifice even a thousand souls to God. It is important to keep in mind the innately masculine nature of martyrdom as well. Out of the many, many jihadist anasheed I listened to, not one was dedicated to women as warriors. Fighting for God is a masculine act, just like I showed in the previous section. Once again, masculine ideals not only often contain violence, masculine ideals are also sought out and "put on" through violence, a violence which is first directed toward the self, before the foreign fighters even appear in the conflict theatre. Becoming a man is a violent endeavour.

Ergo, in order to perform masculinity, one must not just exert violence towards others, but also towards the self. A life with warfare is not hardship, it is a chosen death for God. The violence towards the self consists in both *becoming a foreign fighter but also in listening to anasheed about desiring death.* I would argue that that martyrdom in jihadist anasheed is only sought after because there is a discourse which constructs and necessitates martyrdom as masculine, a

masculine act, as a masculine expectation and ideal. Further on martyrdom is not just a duty for God, it is something which benefits you as a person. As one singer sings in a nasheed,

"The war for Allah delights my heart

He who is sick, will find a cure here

The war for Allah delights my soul

He who is a sinner, will find a cure here"

(Abazi 2019)

It is striking as it is tragic that we live in a word in which warfare, with all its destructive force, is understood as a masculine cure for masculine problems. In one way, masculinity protects you from the violence of other men, but it also necessitates and forces you to be violent to others. In short, it is a system in which it is impossible to win, even if women are the real victims of patriarchy. We can thus say that Albanian jihadist anasheed construct much of the same subject positions as Memishi's sermon – the holy warriors of God, willing to risk everything, stopping at nothing. In the end of this section, let us consider the following quote: "Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure" (Butler 1988, p.531). In summary, we can therefore argue that the emotional bond to warfare and dying in warfare in jihadist anasheed is by linking death in battle to birth, start, immortality and paradise. The emotional bond is created by describing the rewards of masculinity well performed. These rewards are both religious, in the shape of Paradise, but also as glory, immortality and honour.

Discussion

My findings are neither ground-breaking nor unique. The connection between masculinity and warfare, force and violence have been academically established long ago. It is one of the subjects one rarely speaks of, because it seems so obvious, so natural. What makes my findings unique is that it fills an existing gap in the Kosovar foreign fighter literature. As I already have covered in chapter two, this phenomenon has not been analysed from a masculinity perspective, even though most of the foreign fighters are men. In fact, most reports admit that everyone who travelled to Syria to engage in warfare were men; women have travelled, but often as wives or daughters, as have children. Nonetheless, there is a surprising lack of gender-perspective. This is tragically ironic, since one of the main contemporary critiques of Islam in the West is that it

oppresses women and does not care about gender relations. Despite this, the analysis of the foreign fighter phenomenon, and indeed, any form of violent extremism, is shockingly blind to masculinity and understandings of gender within these milieus.

I am not arguing that masculinity *causes* the foreign fighter phenomenon. Nor am I saying that it is the only factor which should be analysed. Rather, I am saying that it is highly influential, yet highly unstudied. Nor am I saying that *all young Kosovar men will travel to Syria*, due to the somewhat outdated ethno-nationalist model. Gender and masculinity are immensely complex ideas to analyse, particularly in the Kosovar context. What I am saying, however, is that there are few circumstances present in Kosovo currently for ethno-nationalist masculinities to be performed successfully, gloriously. Few young men consider Kosovo a sacred homeland for which one is willing to die, like their fathers, brothers and uncles did before them. Nothing hampers an emotional, sacred bond to a place like social issues like poverty, corruption and unemployment do. When there are no Serbs to fight in Kosovo, and no sacred homeland to protect, some might look for their replacement elsewhere. One such replacement may be the disbelievers and "the Jews" who are currently misgoverning the sacred homeland of Muslims, Ash-Sham.

Kosovar Islamist masculinity discourse is not very different from Kosovar ethnonationalist masculinity. Indeed, Kosovar Islamist discourse is very similar to nationalism, but where faith replaces ethnicity. The urge to defend, the need to free the sacred homeland of misrule, the protection of sisters, wives and daughters against foreign predators are major themes in both cases. They are subject positions in both discourses, even if the collective We is ethnic in the former and religious in the latter. Nagel (1998) argues, in fact, that nationalism is a masculine project. She identifies three reasons for this. Firstly, statehood is a masculine institution – consider male-dominated national assemblies regulating female reproductive rights. Secondly, "the culture of nationalism is constructed to emphasize and resonate with masculine cultural themes" (Nagel 1998, p. 251). Lastly, in nationalist discourses and politics, women are reduced to a masculinist understanding of womanhood (women as biological reproducers, mothers, homemakers, etc.).

This does not mean, as Nagel (1998, p.243) argues, that women are completely irrelevant in nationalist thought:

"This is not to say that women do not have roles to play in the making and unmaking of states: as citizens, as members of the nation, as activists, as leaders. It is to say that the scripts in which these roles are embedded are written primarily by men, for men, and about men, and that women are, by design, supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and women's proper 'place'"

Women take symbolical role, as we saw in Demolli's speech, Memishi's sermon, and most of the anasheed. As Nagel (1998, p.244) women often symbolize the nation, "to be elevated and defended". If they are not sisters to be defended, they are "booty or spoils of war, denigrated and disgraced. In either case, *the real actors are men who are defending their freedom, their honor, their homeland and their women*" (Nagel 1998: 244, emphasis mine). Throughout this thesis I have argued that a central feature of the foreign fighter recruitment propaganda has been to glorify and even sanctify this exact point. That men are the protagonists, the real actors, the ones whom the script is written for. Indeed, not only do the texts analysed in this chapter create subject positions which are based on masculine ideals – they are protagonist subject positions intended to be filled by men exclusively. They exclude women, children and elderly altogether.

We can also see what Neumann (2001, p.178, translation mine) calls intertextuality: "each linguistic expression carries with it a baggage from earlier relationships with other linguistic expressions that influence its new relationship with texts and its position in new contexts". The intertextuality is particularly seen between Memishi's sermon and the nationalist Kosovar post-war master narrative. Memishi (2013) is using much of the same language and phrasings of ethnonationalist Kosovo-Albanian masculinities, but like Demolli, he has replaced the *Albanian We* with a *Muslim We*. This reimagining alters little but the location of performing martyrdom masculinities. Where the Jashari-based discourse in Kosovo located martyrdom in a war which has passed long ago, Memishi (2013) provides a new battleground in Syria, or Ash-Sham. This is also a reason why the Syrian Civil War was the first to not feel distant or foreign in Kosovo – in Islamist discourse, it was articulated in the same way as the Kosovo War. Thus, the intertextuality of Memishi is that he portrays Syrian (Muslim) civilians in a manner which is very similar to how ethnic Albanians were described during the war – helpless civilians in need of rescue, who are being exposed to cruelty and humiliation.

Perhaps what makes Islamist masculinities and ISIS propaganda so seductive is that they are the only discourse which constructed a favourable position towards young Muslim men – they made young Muslim men protagonists. The foreign fighter phenomenon is not only proof of how we have failed to create masculinities which are nurturing and healthy rather than toxic and crippling, but also a testament to of our failure to consider a significant demography and their needs. In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, the self is fundamentally split and incomplete and can only gain meaning, become whole through discursive representation. In the political climate post 9-11, where Islamophobia has become increasingly normal, BREXIT is a reality, and so is the presidency of Donald Trump, few discourses have existed where young Muslim men can be portrayed positively while maintaining their Muslim-hood. In the Kosovar Islamist masculinity discourse, for a brief time, this changed. Young Muslim men were not only good enough, they were holy warriors fighting for God, holy warriors fighting to protect their holy homeland, and to free it of tyranny and suffering.

The subject position of the invincible soldier of God is a powerful one, and perhaps the foreign fighter phenomenon witnesses a greater, and more international issue: the loss of young men to a life of violence. In many ways, the young men who travelled to Syria just sought what everyone has always expected them to seek: glory, honour, and respect, even at the cost of violence. ISIS might have been defeated, but we lost the battle for young Muslim men – a battle in which ISIS fought particularly well. For a moment in time, the Kosovar Islamist milieu managed to provide these things exactly, through their masculinity discourse which has been analysed in depth in this chapter. For a moment in time, Islamist discourses managed to provide a sense of meaning and purpose to a demography which the rest of society did not. While there is absolutely no doubt that their acts were immoral, cruel, and horrendous, we must, as a society consider whether we are dealing with a greater issue than Islamist jihadism. We must consider whether we are in a masculinity crisis. It is my belief that we are.

CHAPTER VI:
CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been to highlight the linkages between masculinity and the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo, an aspect of this phenomenon which have not yet been analysed. This phenomenon has received much deserved media coverage. Kosovo has had among the highest rate of foreign fighters per capita, the fifth place globally. Yet, Kosovo is among the most pro-American countries in the world, even in the Trump-era. Further on, the average Kosovar foreign fighter is in his mid-twenties, meaning he remembers and experienced the atrocities of the Kosovo war first-hand. How, then, could he approach a new but very similar conflict theatre almost 20 years later? I began this study by identifying the need for an analysis of the construction of masculinity in the Kosovar Islamist milieu. Masculinity was understood through Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance – gender as a stylized repetition of acts. I worded my research question as follows: How is the masculinity-warfare nexus constructed in Albanian Islamist texts?

The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon as a Performance of Masculinity

I began this study by reviewing the literature written about this phenomenon in the Kosovar case. I argued that while the body of literature concerning this phenomenon is vast, it is unfortunately rarely detailed and analytical. The strength of the existing literature however, is that it provides an overview of the numbers and statistics, as well as a timeline, and thus an excellent starting point for an in-depth discourse analysis of meaning within the Kosovar Islamist discourse. My analytical framework but also my methodology is based on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Laclau and Mouffe are largely inspired by Saussure and studies the construction of meaning through linking some signs to others. I based this study on texts collected in YouTube, and later transcribed. They are mostly sermons, speeches and religious acapella songs, anasheed. The analysis was carried out in the original Albanian, in which I am fluent, and then I translated relevant excerpts to English. All the texts directly address masculine ideals, but they also address the foreign fighter phenomenon directly as well. Of course, 'foreign fighter' is not the term they use – instead, they use 'mujahedeen', 'shaheed',

or even just 'Muslim'. After identifying important signs in the texts, I analysed how these are given meaning through linking them with other signs, thereby creating conditions for possibility for the foreign fighter phenomenon.

In analysing my texts, I discovered three important ways in which the masculinity-warfare nexus is constructed. Firstly, Islamist masculinity discourse in Kosovo redefines the Kosovar history, thereby redefining the terms and conditions of masculinity. Particularly the war in Kosovo is constructed as a religious war rather than an ethnic war – it was not a war against Albanians, but against Islam. In redefining history, masculinity is also redefined. As a man, as a *Muslim* man, you are expected to protect and uphold *Muslim* sisters, mothers and *Muslim* honour, and you are expected to protect a *Muslim* homeland. Kosovo is not the land of Albanians, but of Muslims. This contradicts hegemonic masculinity in Kosovo, which I have argued have been based on ethno-nationalist ideas – we are Albanian men, we must protect our Albanian homeland and our Albanian sisters, wives and daughters. In redefining history, the conditions of possibility alter, making the foreign fighter phenomenon possible. In speaking of Kosovar identity differently, different acts are justified, and different social practices are triggered. This practice is the foreign fighter phenomenon, which I have shown to be masculine act –a way of performing Islamist masculinity.

Secondly, Syria is constructed as *a sacred homeland of Muslims*, but more importantly as a place of Muslim warriors and a place of Muslim men. It is constructed as a place of divine warfare – of fighting in the path of God. Indeed, Syria is constructed as Ash-Sham instead of Syria – Ash-Sham is linked to the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad where Syria is linked to "the Jews" and "Satan". Ash-Sham is the holy Muslim homeland misgoverned by the disbelievers, among others "Europe", "America", and "the Jews". More importantly, it is a place which needs men to perform their masculinity – a place to protect, to free, and to establish the rightful rule of God alone, and to do these three things *as a man*. The current map of the region (Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine), on the other hand, is a result of "the Jews" desecrating and humiliating the sacred homeland, altering the world map as befits them. It is these enemies that must be defeated by Muslim men. Muslim women, if they are present in the narrative at all, are either humiliated sisters to be defended, or mothers to birth warriors of God.

The act of fighting for God in the sacred Muslim homeland is not just a means for an end. In fact, anasheed construct emotional bonds to the masculinity-warfare nexus. Warfare is not just understood as a technicality, as a hardship to overcome for a bigger price. Instead, fighting and dying for God is a goal in and of itself. As I have already argued, however, this does not imply that foreign fighters are suicidal. They do not crave death, but reward for masculinity well performed. Death is proof of not just fighter spirit, but of willingness for the cause. In many anasheed, dying while waring for God is understood as a cure for all ills, and as an act which demolishes all the sins one has committed. The ultimate reward for masculinity well performed is not just Paradise, it is immortality and endless glory. Previous analyses of the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon have not considered this aspect.

Therefore, we can see that what all these three aspects have in common is not just that they construct protagonist subject positions deeply based on masculine ideals. The foreign fighter phenomenon is closely linked to masculinity not just because the subject positions constructed in Kosovar Islamist discourses are based on masculine ideals, but rather, because these subject positions as protagonist are in roles for male actors only. The protagonist roles in Islamist discourses are not only based on masculine ideals and patriarchal order – *they are roles for men exclusively*. This means that we can view Kosovar Islamism as a religious nationalism. As Nagel (1998, p.243) has argued, this does not mean that women have no role in these narratives, but rather, that "the scripts in which these roles are embedded are written primarily by men, for men, and about men". Indeed, all the texts I analysed in my analysis were for, by and about men, either as protagonists or antagonists.

Waitt 2010 calls for rich texts in a discourse analysis. Mine have been heavily packed, and indeed, rich. It is particularly telling what they are rich *in* exactly: highly masculine notions, masculine ideals, masculine honour and masculine shame. The texts are rich with details and descriptions, but what these descriptions have in common is that they are descriptions in masculine terms. Memishi (2013) and Demolli (2015) both are direct and explicit about details, Memishi even describing a torture the mujahedeen are exposed to which is sexually charged. The foreign fighters are enduring even rape for the freeing of the sacred homeland of the misrule of the disbelievers, and for the protection of Muslim wives, sisters and mothers, and Muslim children. This is particularly important because the texts I analysed are the first things that meet the potential foreign fighters. Detailed knowledge about the organisation they travelled to is obtained once they are inside the organisation. It is striking that masculinity is so central this early in the radicalisation process. Thus, if Kosovar men have been "lured" by

anything, it is not money, but the possibility to perform a particular form of masculinity, and societal rewards for doing so.

Based on my findings, I argue the study and reporting of the Kosovar foreign fighter phenomenon thus far have in fact largely come from within a Western hegemonic discourse, whereupon the phenomenon is caused by the foreign fighters' failure to "play the game". There is an assumption that these individuals were ensnared by Islamism because they were unable to become part of a Western democratic system – they were victims to poverty, to lack of education, and to unemployment. I would that this view seriously limits our analysis of the phenomenon. What is at play is far more important. What we have witnessed is an attempt to challenge the Western hegemonic discourse of governance and identity. Foreign fighters did not travel to Syria because they failed to integrate in the "modern Western system" – they travelled because they wished to create a completely different system altogether. Thus, we should continue to analyse the construction of meaning within Islamist milieus, in order to better understand the seductiveness of Islamist propaganda. We must analyse Islamist discourses, and simultaneously suspend the categories from our own discourse. In so doing, we should perhaps consider whether our "Western values" and our "Western system" is as universal as we assume.

Butler's theory of gender as performance has been of great importance in this study. She argues that gender being performative does not mean that the individual creates their gender through their performance, but rather, that the gender performance itself creates the gendered individual. We must always keep in mind that the foreign fighter phenomenon is an act, or rather, a chain of acts: acts of purchasing airplane tickets, travelling, crossing borders illegally and engaging in dangerous warfare. It is not only a radicalisation of the mind, but also of one's behaviour, one's acts. In this study I have shown that in the Albanian Islamist discourse, the foreign fighter phenomenon is considered a performance of masculinity.

 We can argue, based on this, that not only is violence an important aspect of masculinity performances, but also that this process itself is violent. Becoming a man includes exerting violence towards others, but very first, towards oneself. Particularly in the Kosovar case. This remark has yet not been made, because very little effort has been given to analyse the connection between gender and extremism in Kosovo. In highlighting this linkage, I have contributed to this field of research in a significant way.

Masculinity beyond Islamism: Implications and Future Research

The link between masculinity and violence are hardly a distinctive feature of the Kosovar society. Indeed, it feels seemingly impossible to find a society in which this connection is not norm, even if this link is not identical everywhere, and manifests differently in different settings. If Islamists and ISIS had a monopoly on making warfare a masculine act and a masculine duty, had Islamist and ISIS had monopoly on articulating and interpreting events, acts, text, and people in toxic masculinist terms, the battle to defeat them would be much easier. Alas, they do not. I began this paper by identifying a need to properly analyse the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo, but I end it with far more universal implications. ISIS, Al Qaida and other militant Islamist groups do not enjoy a monopoly on masculinity-inspired violence. Nor are they beats without any form of reason or logic. In fact, after familiarizing with Islamist texts, I discovered that the Islamist gender script is very similar to other gender scripts, but the roles have been recast with Muslim actors. In fact, replace the Qur'an with a constitution, and mujahedeen with a formalized state-army, and we may discover that many of the same rhetoric and social practices are at play. We must therefore continue to analyse the link between masculinity and violence and actively challenge it.

When I was nine, my family and I went on a very long car-ride to visit a family member. In the backseat, with me, sat an elderly female relative. She was crocheting a wool hat to pass the time. I was always fascinated by creativity and creative processes and was amazed at her ability to create something – a hat – out of something so simple as a ball of yarn. Amazed at her skill, I asked her to teach me. She looked at me with a stern glance. "No," she said, "because when men do women's work, their rifle does not fire". Confused, and slightly ashamed, I never asked her again. Looking back, I realise that the comment was intended to shame me out of "women's work" – what I should worry about, instead, is the state and quality of my rifles. Warfare is my intended realm, not 'women's work', two words which are conveniently undefined. I have since then learned those words are actually a saying in Albanian. The point of this anecdote is this: in Kosovo, the link between warfare and masculinity is not just present, it is something which men are socialised into from a very early age. Masculinity is thus an extremely powerful identity, whose power must be further analysed and studied.

In analysing the role of masculinity in the foreign fighter phenomenon, I have identified two new fields which further should be explored through academic research. Firstly, which role has masculinity played on the other side of the barricades? When dealing with ISIS, and indeed, any other Islamist terrorist organisation, what is the role of masculinity in Western discourse?

Are the same mechanisms at play? Is there a Western anti-Islamist masculinity discourse, and does it use similar rhetoric in its discursive formation of masculinity? Secondly, if ethno-nationalist masculinities are difficult to perform currently in Kosovo, what sort of masculinities are performed by non-Islamist or even non-Muslim young men in Kosovo? What sort of masculinities are being performed in Kosovo by the men who neither perform ethno-nationalist nor Islamist masculinities? In fact, what steers this choice? These subjects are immensely interesting, and I have but scratched the surface of masculinity in Kosovo. There is still very much left to analyse, discuss and deconstruct.

As I have clarified throughout this study, the foreign fighter phenomenon is something which belongs a specific timeline. Thus, the main task of governments and societies today is not necessarily how to prevent young men from travelling to Syria, but how to rehabilitate and reintegrate the ones that returned. My findings have profound implications on the rehabilitation of previous foreign fighters. Gender and particularly masculinity must be a central part of the process of rehabilitation. Returnees must engage in conversation on what being a man means, particularly in the Kosovar context. This particularly becomes clear when analysis of Islamist texts reveal how central masculinity is in the process of recruitment. More than anything, we must criticize and challenge the idea that gender is easy, simple, natural, and monolithic. In this study, I have not only shown that this is not the case, but also that viewing gender thusly can be extremely harmful. For young men, and for the rest of society. If we can continue to explore the fluidity of gender and sex, perhaps we can begin to construct masculinities which are not toxic.

CHAPTER VII:
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