KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

COUNTERING THE MYTHS OF IS

HOW TO COUNTER THE IS NARRATIVE ONLINE?
THE CASE OF ALBANIAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

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Kingdom of the Netherlands

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KEY FINDINGS:

- The report identifies three major themes weaved in the violent extremist narrative of the "Islamic State" as delivered to audiences in Kosovo and other Albanian-speaking countries. They are: **political, religious and gender power relations**

- The report finds that government agencies have not put forth a strategic communication effort to counter violent extremism despite the centrality that they accorded to it in the Strategy. No consistent counter-narrative sponsored by public institutions or NGOs that continually are implementing projects to prevent violent extremism at the local level and central level Kosovo has been found.

- The Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), the body that regulates the religious affairs for the Muslim followers in Kosovo, lacks a coordinated, unison platform to provide with counter – narratives against extremist groups.

- Several imams of BIK have independently published their sermons and lectures on their personal social media platforms that could serve as counter – narratives.

- An effective counter message to the violent extremist narrative identified through this research is the narrative that can be provided by the jaded returned former fighters of the "Islamic State" and their family members.

- The report finds that platforms such as Fol Tash, a counter-narrative portal run by a group of community imams and Not in My Name, a social media endeavor of Radio Free Europe, did not gain traction in the websites and chat groups that continue to promote propaganda and advocate support for the "Islamic State."

- As part of this study researchers tracked the habits of violent extremist sympathizers on social media. Out of 80 profiles and 100 pages of extremist groups monitored on Facebook neither "like" or "follow" or "share" any of the videos, texts or photos from the two counter - narrative sites. This signals that while these platforms may act as a preventative measure with the general public, they have failed to reach the supporters of extremist groups that continue to generate and spread extremist content in social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

At its core terrorist acts are a form of political communication. Such acts are meant to communicate something beyond the violence they cause[1] and the fear they inject on the Western societies. ISIS uses some of the committed terrorist acts to enforce their narrative, for instance ISIS has claimed responsibility for some terrorist acts for which no link between the attacker and the terrorist group was later found.[2] These violent acts have meaning and reference; they shouldn't be taken as something isolated or outside the sphere of communication, and as such, strategic communication should be a central part of any counter-terrorism strategy.

Arguably through terrorist acts on carefully chosen targets to maximize their effect and meticulously choreographed communication strategy that caters to 24-hour news cycles and the unfiltered communication with public, the present-day terrorist organizations and their supporters have already established a strong discursive platform. This platform is directed to vulnerable individuals and communities for recruitment purposes by the terrorist organizations, and against the Western liberal discourse or the traits associated with that system of values. It is within this framework that this report will seek to answer why strategic communication, primarily its counter-messaging facet, is crucial to every strategy that aims to counter radicalization and violent extremism and to minimize the appeal of terrorist organizations among vulnerable groups.

While IS' territory, once a vast area spanning Syria and Iraq, has been confined to several square kilometers in Syria, its fight has moved to a new battleground on the internet, particularly on social media platforms. The so-called 'Islamic State' has utilized technology in an unprecedented manner making it likely to reach anyone with access to Internet, disseminating messages of military, political and religious content.[3] The number and size of online extremist groups using social networks to harass users, recruit new members, and incite violence is

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1   Pattwell.A. & Tyson.M et al. 'Terrorism as Failed Political Communication' International Journal of Communication, 2015. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/2247/1359

2   **There's no evidence linking the Las Vegas attack to ISIS. So why did the group claim responsibility?** https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-10-03/there-s-no-evidence-linking-las-vegas-attack-isis-so-why-did-group-claim, 2017

3   Zelin 2015

rapidly increasing.[4] While _social media_ platforms are working to combat this (in 2016, Twitter reported it had shut down 360,000 ISIS accounts) they traditionally rely heavily on users' reports to identify these accounts.[5] This shows that efforts to curb ISIS online presence are not producing quick results, also taking into consideration the very nature of social media making it quite difficult for such content to be effectively removed.

ISIS sympathizers and recruiters are composed of individuals living in so-called "Islamic State" territory and of people living in various other regions of the world who believe in its so called utopia. [6] One of the strong points of IS narrative has been its consistency and the organization's ability to adapt and apply their master narrative to various contexts by catering to local grievances in democratic societies, by utilizing the rights guaranteed by liberal states, including the freedom of association, the right to free speech and religious practice.

The primary social media platform that IS utilized to reach the Albanian-speaking audience in the Balkans and its diaspora communities has been Facebook, a platform that is widely used. In Kosovo, a country of about 1.7 million people, half of the population, or 970,000 individuals are estimated to use Facebook, the majority of whom are between 18 to 24 years old.[7] For example, the page 'Islami është Hak'[8] has around 3698 followers, 3693 likes, 1000 average views and 661 photos.[9] Another Facebook page, which is now closed, 'Bota Islame' had 2700 followers and a similar number of likes (2650).[10]

From 2017 onwards researchers have not noticed a shift on the IS narrative delivered in Albanian to audiences in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, and despite the territorial loss and the fall of their leaders, the terrorist group's social media presence has remained the same. In the case of the Albanian speaking countries, the main components of IS narrative can be divided

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4   https://phys.org/news/2018-09-extremists-online-dangerous-content.html

5   https://phys.org/news/2018-09-extremists-online-dangerous-content.html

6   Haldun Yalcunkaya, Tansel Ozyer, Bedi Celik and Sabah Kardas "Twitter Social Network Analysis on Turkish speaking Daesh supporters"

7   330,000 18- 24 years old young people use Facebook in Kosovo. Source: Hallakte, 2018 https://www.facebook.com/Hallakate/photos/a.238589779544240/1566492466753958/?type=3&theater

8   This page is now closed by Facebook.

9   Kelmendi.V. 'New Battlegrounds: Extremists Groups in Social Media' 2017 pg.23

10   Kelmendi, 2017

into two major categories: internationally driven narratives and locally driven narratives.[11] Internationally driven narratives are in the same line as ISIS propaganda worldwide – propagating against secular democratic systems and issuing warnings about an Islam under threat.[12] On the other hand, locally driven narratives are focused largely in addressing local grievances such as low trust in institutions (portraying state institutions as corrupt), attacking the Islamic Community of Kosovo – BIK (also claiming that local imams certified by BIK are corrupted and not to be trusted) and using the already existing gender roles and stereotypes to indoctrinate women in a bid to join ISIS.

The importance of counter-narratives became evident in Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) capacity building programs. Participants of various programs identified the necessity of establishing the narrative's themes and the narrative's centrality to recruitment efforts as the first step to a providing an effective counter – messaging. In the Albanian speaking countries, extremist groups have been successful in creating online platforms that ignore country borders and create a *language of connection* between people through the production of their magazines, profiles, pages and locations.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the threats of extremist groups in social media, our research addresses three main narratives*: (I) political narratives (ideological and against state institutions) (II) religious narratives (III) gender roles narratives.* The report studies the Albanian-language propaganda purported by IS in a bid to target audiences in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, all three countries where Albanian is an official language.

1.1. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, researchers have largely based this analysis on qualitative data gathering techniques. Content analysis, literature review, desk research/documentation and interviews have been conducted over a period of six months from July through December 2018.

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11 Kraja.G. "The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo – Deconstructed one story at a time" KCSS, 2017. http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/ISNinKosovo-eng_794656.pdf

12 Ibid.

In the making of this report, content analysis was used the main research method through which researchers have closely studied documents and communication artifacts, such as texts, pictures, audio and video, to examine patterns in communication. A database of the main profiles, pages, groups in social media that promote violent extremists' ideologies has been created in the process to discern certain patterns that have helped the researchers draw the main conclusions presented in this report.

A literature review was conducted to compare various case studies as a way of identifying similarities and identifying the remaining gaps in the study of violent extremism narrative. Through a case study comparison, researchers have yielded a broader understanding of the differences in narratives that terrorist organizations disseminate in the Western Europe in comparison to the region of the Balkans. In this report, drawing from literature and case studies in Europe and beyond we have also assessed the relevance of strategic communication with its counter – messaging and counter – narrative components in search of a suitable model that would help various stakeholders in the Balkans to stave off the IS influence.

As part of the process of analysis for this report, researchers have conducted five interviews with representatives of Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) and scholars that work on the topic of violent extremism.

2. EXPLAINING COUNTER - NARRATIVES

2.1 WHAT IS A COUNTER - NARRATIVE

In reference to violent extremists groups and organizations, the term "counter – narrative" is presently used in relation to a wide range of activities, often government-sponsored or government-led, aimed at discrediting ideologies and actions of violent extremists.

In a report published by Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Briggs and Feve have created a 'counter – messaging spectrum' to help clarify the different kinds of activities that the term embodies.[13] Briggs and Feve suggest that there are three types of counter – narratives: government strategic communications, alternative messaging and counter – narratives. According to them, a government strategic communications is the area where government has the most natural and effective role to play – the government should device strategic communications policy related specifically to the challenge of countering such narratives online. Alternative narratives constitute narratives provided by the civil society and/or the government and the main aim is to provide with a different narrative, a new narrative rather than engage on the same level as the extremists groups; and finally, counter – narratives directly tackle an extremist narrative in an attempt to discredit violent extremists messages. They are aimed at individuals, groups and networks further along the path to extremism, whether they are sympathizers, passive supporters or those more active within the extremists movements.

In another article, Dimitriu from the Netherlands Defense Academy explained that a narrative can be defined as a 'resource for political actors to construct a shared meaning to shape perceptions, beliefs and behaviour of the public' and that this is the framework through which 'a

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13   Rachel Briggs and Sebastian Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What are the Implications for Government?" Institute for Strategic Dialogue, (2013): 1, https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/444/review-of-programs-to-counter-narratives-of-violentextremism-what-works-and-what-are-the-implications-for-government

shared sense is achieved, representing a past, present and future, and obstacle and a desired endpoint'. [14]

Given the wide-ranging definitions, for the purpose of this report, KCSS researchers will define the counter–narrative as *'a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimize extremist narratives.'*[15]

2.2. WHY ARE COUNTER-NARRATIVES NEEDED?

ISIS has had a sophisticated use of social media platforms to produce and share their messages and narratives. Its propaganda relied on its media outlets like Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production, the Al-I'tisam Media Foundation, the Alhayat Media Center, The Ajnad Media Foundation; its online magazines which include Dabiq, Islamic State News; and a number of other online forums. According to *The Atlantic*, Al Hayat, has produced "hundreds of films, ranging from three-minute beheading videos to hour-long features improbably combining elements of travelogue, historical documentary, and atrocity porn".

Strategic communication through propaganda videos and frequent social media messages has been the most powerful recruiting tool for IS. One example was Arid Uka, responsible for shooting U.S servicemen in Frankfurt, Germany. Uka was reported to have been compelled to action by a fabricated Jihadi propaganda video depicting the rape of an Iraqi girl by U.S soldiers. The video production posted on social media had actually utilized footage from Brian de Palma's fictional production, Redacted.[16] ISIS has masterfully crafted messages[17] that have reached out to millions, which in addition to recruiting, has launched an ideology and a worldview that challenges the Western liberal and secular democracies that it infiltrated. Given this state of play, provision of alternative ideas and narratives is essential in combating the clear-cut dichotomy of "us vs. them," which violent extremists groups have exploited.

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14   Dimitriu.G. & Beatrice.G. 'Fighting the War at Home: Strategic Narratives, Elite Resposnsiveness, and the Dutch Mission in Afghanistan 2006-2010', Foreign Policy Analysis 2016 12, 2-23 https://www.ris.uu.nl/ws/files/20779691/2.full.pdf

15   Tuck. H. 'Counter – Narrative Handbook' 2016 https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf pg.65

16   https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Countering%20the%20Appeal%20of%20Extremism%20Online-ISD%20Report.pdf

17   Tuck.H. 'Counter – Narrative Handbook' 2016, pg.4

Institutions and the larger society, ranging from civil society organizations, (online) activists, youth councils, teachers, psychologists to social workers, need to challenge extremists views anywhere they can. However, an effective counter narrative is time-sensitive: it must be done quickly and it should respond to the terrorist groups' claim. In most of Albanian-speaking extremist outlets with extremist content, researchers found that the narrative centers on religious matters. Most of the content focuses on radical imams, who are serving jail time on terrorism charges and interpretation of different religious scriptures.[18] To counter those claims, religious leaders should deliver a coordinated message and be in the forefront of challenging religious extremism online and offline.

In the Western Balkans - and in particular in Bosnia and Kosovo, both countries still overcoming the legacy of the 1990s wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution - extremists exploited the painful memories and the existing divisions to craft their narrative. Thus, providing counter messaging through offering explanations based on historical, sociological and political facts is key to successfully challenge extremists' narrative.

2.3. COUNTER – NARRATIVE CRITICISM

With extremists content readily available online, counter–narratives would ideally help provide users with a fuller understanding. While the idea of counter – narratives is compelling and promising, it faces a number of criticism that point to potential problems.

A report published by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change suggests that counter – narratives currently do not have a loud enough voice online, as they lack cohesion, purpose and a nuanced understanding of the online world. The report found that while extremists' content links well with big sites such as Kalamullah.com, Ummah.com and others, counter–narratives did not have similar relationships with major sites, which further suggests a lack of cohesion in counter – efforts. Moreover, while counter - narratives take a longer period of time to draft and to disseminate; terrorist groups like ISIS alter their communication strategy, making it difficult for researchers and policy makers to adapt quickly to the change.

In addition, counter narratives face a dissemination challenge. For example, the leading Muslim counter – narrative sites like Sandala.org (the official website of internationally renowned

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18 Kelmendi.V. 2017

Islamic scholar Hamza Yusuf who served as an advisor to President George W. Bush) and Haq-iqah.org a response to ISIS Dabiq magazine represent high quality counter–narrative sites, however they lack presence with Sandala.org receiving only 25,503 links into its site, and Haq-iqah.org only 110.

In addition, today's counter-narrative sites only offer a passive experience to the user, in contrast to the extremists sites that offer a much more interactive space, engaging viewers in its content while governments and other majors counter–narrative sites do not. Investment in a well-moderated, interactive site that facilitates ideological debate would help shift the balance of ideas online. It would also compete directly with websites using the same format to promote extremist views.

Policy makers also point to the lack of a clear relationship between viewing extremist content and actually engaging in violent extremism. However, this can be argued further as terrorist organizations like ISIS have largely used the internet, and social media to propagate their messages. Given the number of publications it is obvious that they have utilized the Internet on their main tool of their propaganda, and the most relevant and cost-effective means to reach their targeted audience.

In the case of the Western Balkans countries (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosova, Macedonia and Albania) National Strategies emphasize the need to provide with counter - messaging. However, to date no governmental systematic effort to provide with counter-messaging and counter-narratives has been recorded in the Western Balkans.

Counter-messaging, besides focusing on the local contexts, should also take a regional effort to respond to the nature of recruitment by the main recruiters, which in the Albanian speaking countries has truly transcended borders, both online and offline. For example, as seen from the followers, likes and shares in social media networks, Rexhep Memishi from Macedonia is very popular in Kosovo and Albania; Abdurrahim Balla from Albania is highly popular in Macedonia and Albania. [19]

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19   KCSS social media database & Kelmendi. V. 2017

3. MAPPING PROVIDERS OF COUNTER-NARRATIVE IN KOSOVO

In the recent years, social media platforms have been the main tool for terrorist groups such as ISIS and others. Terrorist group like ISIS, have used sophisticated strategy of communication using propaganda on social media platforms. Initially, their narratives were based on spreading messages of "ideal world" with luxury life to the most horrific sights of the murders.[20] In the context of Balkan countries, the most platforms used by extremist groups Albanian-speaking are Facebook, YouTube and Telegram.[21] Most of the discussions, messages and recruitment occur in platforms such as Facebook where they've created 'closed groups', or in Telegram application where they also have closed groups. For example, in Telegram there is a group of people that shares materials for jihad, for the so- called Islamic State and on former fighters from Albanian- speaking countries. This platform is called "Krenaria e Umetit" and has great attention even in Facebook profiles of extremist groups.[22]

 One of the reasons why their narratives have been successful, is because there has been a great deal of attention from Balkan media given to extremist groups especially ISIS.[23] Such was the case of the video published by an ISIS member[24], who threatened Albanians: "By Allah, dark days are coming to you, you will fear to walk in the streets. You will fear working in your offices. You will be terrorized in your homes. We will terrorize you in your dreams… We will come to you with explosive belts," Aqifi warned in the video from the battlefield.[25] This video circulated online, and even after Youtube deleted the video, all media had already published in their webpages. For instance, in chanel Kanali Shtate the report of the video reached more than 250000 people online.[26]

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20   Kelmendi.V. 2017

21   Social Media Report Vesa&Shpat

22   KCSS social media data base & Kelmendi.V 2017

23   Shpend Report Counter-Narrative Unpublished

24   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AmJ71iBSD0&t=34s

25   Kraja.G. 2017

26   Kanali Shtate, published June 2015. Accessed 26/02/2019 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AmJ71iBSD0&t=34s

● Governmental institutions

The framework of the National Strategy for the Prevention of violent extremism adopted by the Kosovo Government in WHICH YEAR places the emphasis on 'prevention' of violent extremism through the identification of narratives of extremist groups.[27] Since the adoption of the Strategy, numerous activities were undertaken by central and local institutions to raise awareness against violent extremism.[28] In addition to that, most of the activities and research have been focused on driver factors that have affected Kosovo citizens to join in terrorist groups, as well as the challenges of reintegration of returned Foreign Fighters (FF) form conflict zones.

Government agencies, however, have not put forth a strategic communication effort to counter violent extremism despite the centrality that they accorded to it in the Strategy. KCSS researchers have not been able to find any consistent counter-narrative from the institutions or NGOs that continually are implementing projects to prevent violent extremism in the local level and central level Kosovo.

● Religious leaders

It is necessary to engage religious communities and religious leaders, especially in the local level, in order to effectively respond to violent extremism and violent extremists content.[29] Religious leaders are important in this regard, as they have the potential to impact targeted audiences especially when the content is focused more on religious or ideological arguments.[30] For instance, when faced with the concepts of *'Jihad', 'takfir', 'kufr', 'shirk'* and other Islamic concepts, it is important to have an interpretation of these notions by religious leaders that understand and can offer different alternative meanings. In addition, religious leaders can serve as role models for interaction between different religious communities in Kosovo, such as the Catholic community, Orthodox Church, Bektashi and other religious communities.

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27   Strategy against violent extremism leading to terrorism by Government of Kosovo, 2016 http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGJIA_parandalim_-_SHQIP.pdf

28   Rudine Jakupi and Garentina Kraja "Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo" October 2018 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/CTR_CaseStudy3_kosovo_ENG_574166.pdf

29   Nimer. M. Alternative Approaches to Transforming Violent Extremism' Berghof Foundation, 2018 pg. 8 https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue13_Abu-Nimer_lead.pdf

30   Ziger.S. 'Undermining Extremist Narratives in East Africa – A how to guide' Hedayah, 2018. Pg. 20 http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-18201819229.pdf

However, when analyzing the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) it is noticed that there is a lack of a coordinated, unison channel produced by BIK to provide with counter – narratives against extremist groups. It is seen that some of the imams of BIK, in an independent manner have published their lectures and discussion is their personal social media platforms. These imams are very popular and have a great attention from communities as well. Such is the case of Elvic Naci (a very popular imam in Albanian speaking countries) who continuously posts and shares lectures, news, his opinions on religion, tolerance, diversity and peace. His Facebook profile has more than 600,000 followers from all Albanian speaking countries.[31]

Moreover, there have been attempts from locals imams to talk about these issues in local TV, and in their lectures published in their personal social media platforms. [32]While there are individual cases of different imams producing counter – narratives (although not focused specifically against violent extremism) there is a lack of a unified system from the BIK headquarters to produce counter – narratives.

- ● Former fighters and family members

The most effective counter-messages identified during this research are those articulated by the returned former fighters and their family members.[33] Individuals who once participated in violent extremism and terrorism and that have exited the group have the potential to be powerful messengers to prevent others from joining.[34] A report by Neumann (2015) suggests that defectors from Daesh can deliver four key messages that are also applicable in the context of Albanian speaking countries: 1) highlighting in-fighting and divisions within the group; 2) revealing the brutality against Muslims; 3) exposing the corruption and un-Islamic practices of the group; and 4) revealing the poor quality of life.[35] [36]

Despite the risks, stigmatization and pressure from society in Kosovo, there are cases when returned former fighters have shared their stories about their journey to Syria and Iraq, such

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31 https://www.facebook.com/ElvisNaci/

32 Enis Rama emisioni Ekstremizmi https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGDgTzFE3VE

33 Extreme Dialogue by ISD is a platform that publishes and shares true stories by formers and others effected by violent extremism. It is an initiative implemented throughout the UK, in schools and other spaces with youth. https://extremedialogue.org/stories

34 Zieger.S. 2018

35 Neumann 2015

36 Zieger.S. 2018

as in the case of the returned former fighter A.B[37] who was part of the terrorist organization. Upon his return, he appealed to Kosovo's young to stay away from the conflict in Syria.[38] He publicly spoke up about his journey to the conflict zones and what he has seen while there: "I had imagined this opposition to Assad didn't have people with criminal backgrounds in the ranks," he says. He thought it would, in his words, "only have people of goodwill who want to help the population".[39] His confession runs counter to those propagated by other Kosovo IS members who referred to opposition fighters and those of terrorist groups as "lions."

- Media outlets

During the desk research KCSS researchers have identified two media outlets such as FOL TASH and Radio Evropa e Lire, that are specifically producing counter-narratives through their platforms in social media. KCSS has created a database (2015-2018) of extremist groups and individual profiles in social media and we have compared how these counter-narratives have affected extremist pages and profiles.

FOL TASH – is a platform which has been established by imams, professors of Islamic Studies, and academics of Islamic studies. The main objective of this platform is related with the new trends of extremism in Kosovo, to protect the Islam from "the danger of radical and extremist elements, foreign ideologies" and to offer the believers an alternative and different sources on how to preach Islam. Moreover, in the website of Fol Tash focuses on sharing information about imams, who served for the Albanian causes during the history too.[40] The platform provides information on imams like Ali Kraja who have been close allies with Albanian Catholic figures such as Gjergj Fishta. [41] This is particularly important because viewers and readers can see that historically, there has been a culture of inter- religious dialogue between different religious communities in Kosovo, who despite their difference have shared a common cause.

Further, information on the contribution of Muslim Imams and preachers in the creation of the Albanian alphabet are given in the website too. This platform produces counter-narratives that are related more with misinterpretation of Islam and specifically is focused on terrorist

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37 Real names and initials are coded

38 Albert Berisha : https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-43173173

39 Ibid

40 Access on FOL TASH Platform: http://www.foltash.com/kategoria/personalitete/

41 http://www.foltash.com/kategoria/personalitete/

narratives such as ISIS, and report news related to these groups. [42] For example, the platform periodically publishes articles that offer rebuttal of ISIS propaganda – one of their articles analyses who in fact was 'Khalife Bagdadi'.[43]

Not in my name- is a digital platform of REL, whose aim is to raise awareness on youth and community, particularly to inform the audience for terrorist groups and other violent issues. This platform serves for dialogue on all forms of radicalism (including religious extremism and ethnic – political extremism) and encourages all readers and users to have public conversation related with their content.[44] They are more focused on producing videos, and publishing new researches related with violent extremism. Even though they are intended for all forms of extremism, this platform is more focused on counter-narratives of Muslims, and religious tolerance in Kosovo. It is important to note that this platform has more than 30,000 followers on their Facebook page.[45]

DOKUFEST- the International Documentary and Short Film Festival, is the largest film festival in Kosovo. This festival is organized every year since 2002, in municipality of Prizren. The festival is known for its lively atmosphere, the enthusiasm that grasps the city and its people and for the high number of 150 volunteers working for this event.[46] In 2018 Dokufest started to implement activities for youth which aim to raise awareness in local level. Different movies are presented in a space where youth can have discussions related with the themes of the movie. Movies are categorized on topics such as violence acts, diversity, human rights and history because they want to offer counter-messages through cinematography. Dokufest has also encouraged youth in municipalities that are vulnerable to violent extremism to produce documentaries about successful stories of individuals in their community.

While analyzing the pages of extremist groups, it is clear that these platforms such as Fol Tash , and Not in my name have not managed to stimulate curiosity in the profiles and pages who still promote propaganda and recruitment for the so called IS. KCSS researchers have identified these profiles based on pages who are supporting the so called Islamic State and promoting materials against Kosovo state institutions.

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42   http://www.foltash.com/mbeshtetesit-e-isis-it-ende-paraqesin-rrezik-per-kosoven/
43   https://www.foltash.com/e-kujt-i-sherbeu-i-vetequajturi-kalife-bagdadi/
44   https://www.facebook.com/joneemrintim/
45   https://www.facebook.com/joneemrintim/
46   http://dokufest.com/info/about-dokufest/

Some of the social media platforms like Facebook allow us to see pages that these individuals "like" or "follow" and by analyzing 80 profiles and 100 pages of extremist groups it is clear that they do no follow any of these two platforms. Also, from 80 profiles analyzed we can see that there were 0 "shared" videos, texts or news from platforms such Fol Tash or Not in my name. This indicates that these platforms have failed to reach to the groups who are still spreading extremists content in social media, and other materials in their community where they live.

4. OUTLINING THE NARRATIVE OF ISIS IN KOSOVO

In the context of the Balkans, the connection and co-operation of extremist groups is noticed, especially along the ethnic lines between Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo. There are several cases/profiles which have been identified from these regional countries that are continuing to propagate for the Islamic state, and who have recently returned from Syria but are in hiding at the moment.

Based on our analysis, the narrative that terrorist groups and supporters of ISIS have used in the case of Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia can be divided into three major themes:

1. **Political Narratives**
2. **Religious Narratives**
3. **Using gender roles as a narrative**

4.1. POLITICAL NARRATIVES

In line with ISIS propaganda worldwide, ISIS supporters in Kosovo actively promote narratives that are predominantly focused against Western countries/societies, state-building and other religious communities present in Kosovo. These political narratives are developed to

propagate against Government of Kosovo, NGOs, municipality and mayors, members of the parliament and in particular against the Islamic Community of Kosovo.

They seek to convince their followers to abandon democratically elected institutions and they do so by utilizing the already weak trust Kosovo citizens have towards the abovementioned institutions.[47] Further, they ask their followers to not partake in elections or any process that contributes to building a democratic society in Kosovo.

In 2016 the so – called Islamic Stated through Al – Hayat, released a 20-minute propaganda video, mainly focusing on the Balkan wars during the 90s. The video tries to make a connection between the war in Bosnia and an Islam 'under attack'[48] by Christians and non – believers.[49] The video goes further, to mentioning the dictatorship in Albania, it shows footages of the destruction of minarets, and attempts to portrays Muslims unprotected and under the threat by secular and democratic forces.[50] However, the video completely ignores the case of the war and NATO led intervention in Kosovo, with a majority of Muslim population too.

Violent extremists' groups in Kosovo actively promote against the idea of democracy itself, as seen in the pictures below. The poster claims that through elections and voting provided in a democratic system, laws that are against Allah will be put in place therefore making democracy "shirk" and "kufer".[51] The narrative goes as far as to claim that democracy is religion as people "worship" the system and they obey its laws, rather than the laws of Allah. According to an imam which KCSS researchers have interviewed *'their auricle is superficial, communicating with emotion more than the reason and the extent of great lack of the proper way of argumentation.'* He believes that their rhetoric appeals to some individuals because it is too simplistic: *'Perhaps for that reason, that rhetoric lacks the taste, the logic and the persistence and as a consequence we notice the unavailable level of communication. It is my mind that this way of conception of Islam is very compatible with ignorance and euphoria.'*[52]

47   KSB 2018 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/barometri2018-eng2_477654.pdf

48   ISIS continuansly has made the claim that Islam and Muslims all over the world are under attack bz the West, the US and Christians. They call upon all Muslims (the Ummah) to unite and overcome this danger.

49   Kraja.G 'Deconstructing the IS narrative in Kosovo', KCSS, 2017. Pg.21 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/ISNinKosovo-eng_794656.pdf

50   Ibid pg.35

51   On these concepts please see Perteshi.S. 'Journalist Guide – Violent Extremism: Definition and Terminology' 2018. http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Guideline_669605_187367.pdf

52   Interview with local imam, January 2019

Violent extremists' groups also claim that to vote or to be elected in a democratic system is "kufr", thus calling upon other followers to not vote or participate in elections. They ask their followers to mobilize against Democracy and democratic systems, since according to them, democracy allows for people to be elected and create laws. They claim that in democratic systems people and not God will judge others, thereby making it a sin to participate in any process in a democratic state. Further, they claim that working together with a secular state is forbidden, as democratic systems do not judge based on the Sharia law and any institution that has the power to judge (referring to the courts and justice system) is 'competing' with God.[53]

ISIS supporters often use local grievances and attempt to portray local leaders in Kosovo as Western puppets that are discriminating and oppressing Muslims in Kosovo. They use the current socio – political and economic context of Kosovo to create these narratives and claim that Kosovo leaders are corrupt politicians who are not to be trusted. These groups go as far as to claim that Kosovo Muslims are persecuted by the state.[54]

Picture 1: Propagating against democratic systems

53   Online propaganda, spread mainly through Facebook. Refer to Picture 1
54   Kraja, 2017 pg.30

Alternative Counter Message to political narratives used by ISIS:

- 💬 The issue of voting and engagement with the secular state institutions is often dealt with in accordance with an Islamic concept the "greater net benefit". This means that between two negatives ("evils") one should choose the lesser negative ("evil") and between the two positive things, one should choose the greater positive thing.[55] When the possibility of voting in a secular state is given, and with the voting the lives of Muslims can be improved, than voting in a secular state is often taken as the lesser "evil", and one should engage with it.

- 💬 As evidence shows, and given that ISIS is ready to attack and destroy mosques just because imams and/or worshippers of that particular mosque happen to disagree with ISIS, Muslims, and Muslim worshippers are allowed to cooperate with any secular state institution, including security institutions, in order to prevent such actions that ISIS or any other group or individual may take. Cooperating with secular state security structures, again is considered as the lesser "evils". In fact, in such circumstances cooperation with secular state institutions is indeed encouraged.

- 💬 Participating in elections, is a major hallmark of a Democracy, which is in the interest of the individual and the community at large whereas ignoring or boycotting such process pushes society in the brinks of authoritarian regimes, in which case the religious (Muslim) community would also suffer from.[56]

- 💬 The secular state is a reality in which people of all faiths collaborate and live together. Improving social conditions will not occur in a vacuum, isolation or even with (violent)confrontations. Islam teaches us that we should all work together, for the common good of the whole society. [57]

- 💬 Mentioning the war in Kosovo, and the NATO led the intervention to stop the mass crimes against Kosovo Albanian civilians in Kosovo is key to downplay propaganda against Western countries in Albanian speaking territories.

- 💬 Focus more on common grounds between different communities with concrete examples (Muslim, Catholic, Jewish etc) rather than the differences between the communities.[58] Religious leaders can draw upon many historical examples such as bloodfeuds reconciliation, the independence movement which managed to unite people from all religious backgrounds in Kosovo.

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55   Kursani.Sh. "Counter Narratives", 2015 Unpublished

56   Interview with imam, January 2019

57   Ibid.

58   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SubqELgVHb8&feature=youtu.be

4.2. RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES:

Some imams consider that ISIS extremist propaganda and their sympathizers in the Albanian speaking countries are widely spread through social media networks, and mostly from anonymous sources and these people are using pseudonyms or conspiratorial names. They may even be known in certain circles by name and surname, but nevertheless they are not signed with real names but with different names.[59] This might pose a challenge to provide with effective counter – narratives, as they may be widely spread throughout social media platforms, and disseminate through various channels by using fake profiles. According to this imam, their [extremists] references are not part of the academic world or when extremist groups are quoting scholars of the Islam, they change the context depending on their situation.[60]

While analyzing the content of individual profiles and pages it is seen that extremist groups are mainly focused on religious-related discussions. Based on these profiles, pages, closed groups it is noticed that they interpret and discuss various concepts like: jihad, holy land, the concept of martyrdoms and non-believers or kuffars. In the report "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy" six themes of Islamic State's brand are analyzed, which are similar with the narratives of extremist groups in Balkan countries. So – called 'Islamic State' propaganda is that it starts and finishes with brutality and they are using narratives and themes such as victimhood, war, mercy, belonging and utopianism.[61]

1.Narrative on Jihad - according to ISIS[62] - Terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida and ISIS have repeatedly misused the word "Jihad." Terrorists groups such as ISIS have interpreted it only in the narrow sense of warfare and use of violence by Muslims towards non-believers and others who do not share the same ideology with those groups.[63] Through the word "Jihad" the violent extremist groups have attempted to legitimize the killing of civilians who do not submit to the orders of terrorist groups. One of their main goal is to propagandize for the so called "Islamic State" and to recruit people in their communities.[64]

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59   Interview with imam, January 2019

60   Interview with imam, January 2019

61   "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy" file:///C:/Users/KCSS9/Downloads/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf

62   http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Udhezues_per_gazetar_797776_(1)_302167.pdf

63   Ibid

64   Ibid

Alternative/Counter-Messaging on Jihad[65]

- According to the local imam that KCSS researchers have interviewed, 'Jihad' is a concept promoted by Islam, but which includes much more than just armed struggle. Any effort and bestowal for the general good, according to Islam is jihad. Limiting jihad only in the armed struggle is wrong, just as it is wrong leaving jihad in the hands of those who have no legitimacy, knowledge or desire to do it properly. While the greatest damage to jihad and Islam in general is its misuse for murderous and devastating purposes.[66]

- Further on, according to this religious leader the best way to counter these narratives is a genuine, calm and arguable debate (online or offline in open spaces in the communities) that can only be run by the imams and Islamic scholars, the authentic connoisseurs of Islam, when we consider that those who embrace this way of understanding Islam are barricaded and take "protective" attitudes, which can also, at times, be hostile.[67]

- Jihad has been interpreted in several ways. One distinction is between, on the one hand, the "greater jihad" which means restraining oneself from committing immoral acts considered to be transgressions against divine law and, more generally, striving to become a better person. The "minor jihad" refers to the defense and the active propagation of faith by armed force. This particular meaning of a violent "holy war" is the prevalent one in the Quran. The first part of this ISIS claim (referring to passing through the stage of violent jihad) appears to be inspired by a hadith attributed to Mohammed which says: "Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords"[68]

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65 Mainly based on interview with imam in Mitrovica, January 2019

66 Ibid

67 Ibid.

68 Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State" https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf

2. Idea of the Caliphate - According to ISIS ideology the idea of the Caliphate is described in this way: ISIS through their propaganda has convinced individuals and groups from all over the world that they have created the utopian caliphate known as the "Islamic State of Syria and Iraq". According to ISIS, the "New State" is the place where all Muslims can live free, unlimited in the exercise of their religion, and it encouraged everyone to join this concept and to recognize its leader as the de-facto "Caliph" of all Muslims.[69]

For instance, this passage from the declaration of the Caliphate by Abu Bakr where he plays on the themes of shame and humiliation many Muslims have experienced in their lives:

"Lift your heads up high. You now have a state and a caliphate that restores your honor, your might, your rights and your sovereignty. The state forms a tie of brotherhood between Arab and non-Arab, white and black, Easterner and Westerner. The caliphate brings together the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, North African, American, French, German and Australian…. They are all in the same trench, defending each other, protecting each other and sacrificing for one another. Their blood mingles together under one flag [with] one goal and in one camp… perform hijra from darul-kufr to darulIslam. There are homes here for you and your families. You can be a major contributor towards the liberation of Makkah, Madinah, and al-Quds. Would you not like to reach Judgment Day with these grand deeds… A life of jihad is impossible until you pack your belongings and move to the caliphate."[70]

In the Albanian speaking countries, ISIS strategy is largely focused on Islam, promoting violence[71], and promoting the utopia of the so called "**Caliphate and *Muslims' unity under a single leader (Caliph)*"** whereby their arguments on jihad they justify their actions and propaganda in the name of Islam, to achieve their political and ideological goals. Moreover, in their recent discussions, it is stated that "Muslims' honor" should be returned and the Caliphate of so called Islamic State.[72] They have created heroic figures from the foreign fighters from Kosovo, for example when Lavdrim Muhaxheri was killed in Syria he was regarded as a hero by profiles of extremist groups in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia.[73]

69   Perteshi.S. " Journalist Guide Report",KCSS, 2018 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Guideline_669605_187367.pdf

70   Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State" https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf

71   KCSS database in social media

72   Facebook page of ISIS supporters and extremists content

73   Vese& Shpat Social Media Report

As seen in the picture below where it is written 'Shteti Islam do te Qendroj (The Islamic State will prevail)', while ISIS has lost territory, sympathizers of ISIS are continuing to support the idea of the caliphate and to 'protect Muslim Ummah from Kufars'.

Picture 2. Picture taken from the Facebook profile of a sympathizer of ISIS

Alternative/Counter-Messaging to the idea of the Caliphate:

- ISIS has adopted a popular variation of the jihadi standard banner used since the 1980s, a black flag with a white circle in the middle that encloses the seal of the Prophet with the words "God Messenger Muhammad". Its leader has declared himself caliph (meaning a "successor" who was meant to be the vice-regent of Muhammad). The title "caliph" has been used for Islamic rulers overseeing religious and political affairs of an Islamic community, while "caliphate" refers to the territory or state ruled by the caliph.[74] The caliph was originally a politico-religious leader who also acted as supreme military commander (amir al-mu'minin). This dual function has, however, disappeared after the reigns of the first four caliphs. The last (Ottoman) Islamic caliphate came to an end in 1924 when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in his secularisation and modernisation campaign for Turkey, abolished the institution headed by the last caliph Abdulmecid II. After a hiatus of 90 years, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi had himself declared "caliph" of a worldwide caliphate on 29 June 2014.55 According to one Islamic scholar, Rusydi 'Alyan (in his book Al-Islam wa al-Khilafah, 1996), a "caliph" has to have a "profound knowledge of Sharia law" (which the new caliph probably has) and "being fair, virtuous, dignified, mature and sane", which Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has already shown not to be.[75]

- The so – called 'Caliphate' based on ISIS logic, had little to do with Islamic scholarship or principles, as it had been reported that they also smuggled pornography.[76]

- There have been reports of some 75 Kosovo citizens who have died in the conflict zone. Around 63 individuals are currently being held in custody, two are in house arrest, 83 are under ongoing investigations.[77] Further, the current law in Kosovo which prohibits Kosovo citizens to join foreign conflicts, foresees a sentence of up to 15 years of imprisonment.[78]

- From a purely theological perspective a group of 152 leading Islamic scholars in September 2014 – some three months after the proclamation of the Caliphate – wrote a letter to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, outlining what they consider to be errors and violations of Islamic and international laws committed by the leaders and followers of ISIS. Here is a sample of their 24 objections[79]:

74 Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State" https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf

75 Ibid

76 Shpend Kurasni Counter-Narrative Report Unpublished

77 Jakupi.R. & Garentina.K 'Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo' KCSS 2018, http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/CTR_CaseStudy3_kosovo_ENG_574166.pdf

78 https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10763

79 Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State" https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf

💬 *"It is forbidden in Islam to force people to convert; It is forbidden in Islam to deny women their rights; It is forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent; The re-introduction of slavery is forbidden in Islam; It is forbidden in Islam to torture people; It is forbidden in Islam to declare a caliphate without consensus from all Muslims; Loyalty to one's nation is permissible in Islam; After the death of the Prophet … Islam does not require anyone to emigrate anywhere; Jihad in Islam is defensive war."[80]*

3. Non-believers/Kuffars/Kafirs Narratives: ISIS supporters and violent extremists consider the overwhelming majority of the local imams, the community, and everyone who thinks differently from them as an 'unbeliever' or 'traitor of Islam'[81]. On the other hand they are justifying killings of people through stating that the countries and people who are fighting ISIS are 'kafirs' or 'crusaders' that destroyed Islam. They use harsh narratives against local imams, Shi'ah sect and Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK). For instance, in video released on June 5, 2018, from '**Minaret e Shqipëris'** with the title 'Gjendja e Umetit Sot' which shows a short history of the Syrian war, civilians, and foreign fighters that are part of ISIS.[82] In this video their narrative highlights the concepts of unbelievers, kuffars, kaffirs and those who are trying to fight ISIS ideology.[83] The video has been removed from Facebook and YouTube, but during the time when it was released KCSS researchers have transcribed the text:

"When Muslims are calling for jihad they accuse us as Khawarij'
How can self-defense be Kharijites?
Is the defense of the Law of Allah alone and the rise of Caliphate primitive?
How is the Return of the Honor of Muslims Extremism and Terrorism?"[84]

"E kur muslimanët bëjnë thirje për xhihad → Akuza është gati (Kh kh Khaëarixh)
*   Vallë vetëmbrojtja qenka Kaëarixhizëm*
A mos vallë vetëmbrojtja e Ligjit të Allahut dhe ngritja e Khilafetit qenka prapambetje?
Kthimi i nderit të muslimanëve qenka ekstremizëm dhe terrorizëm?"

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80   Ibid.

81   Kursani, Unpublished report 2015

82   KCSS database on social media 2018

83   Ibid.

84   Ibid.

Alternative/Counter- Messaging to the Non - Believer narrative:

- Addressing the "true" in "true believers": ISIS followers and sympathizers should be confronted with alternative Islamic narratives, which stand for open and rational interpretations of Islam as these existed for centuries not just in the rich medieval history of Islamic civilizations but right until the 19th century and beyond. [85]In this way, Muslims might be able to challenge the "truth vs. untruth" discourse of ISIS-followers and help to highlight more nuanced Islamic interpretations. Truth is an elusive concept; most religions claim to be in possession of the final truth; yet their "truths" are often contradicting each other and many of them are even internally contradictory within one religion. One thing is sure: "truth" cannot be established by intimidating and decapitating those whose arguments cannot be successfully countered by means of logic, reason and empirical testing. While ISIS can kill people and destroy monuments of humanity's cultural heritage, it cannot kill the ideas that go with them.[86]

- While ISIS claims to be fighting the West, as they consider them to be 'kufars', they do little to hide the fact of the paying of foreign fighters in U.S. Dollars bearing the insignia of "In God We Trust", which ISIS knows and understand that the Americans are talking to a different interpretation of God from what ISIS believes. They also use the "kuffar" hummvies, the "kuffar" weapons, the "kuffar" clothing, the "kuffar" social media, etc. Even the self-proclaimed caliph is wearing a "kuffar" watch which is visible in the video ISIS has posted of his first public speech when he proclaimed the establishment of the "Islamic State"[87]

- Another hypocrisy that ISIS can do little to hide, is the fact that their main income comes from the smuggled oil. ISIS sells oil below the market prices to what they consider "kuffar" regime, and even go as far as to sell oil and gas to the Syrian (Assad) regime, which they claim they are fighting and based on which cause they are recruiting foreign fighter. [88]

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85 Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State" https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf

86 Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State" https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf

87 Shpend Kursani Narrative Report Unpublished

88 Ibid

4.3. USING GENDER AS A NARRATIVE:

The latest trend of extremist groups in social networks shows that much attention has been focused on the role of women in terrorist organizations. In their profiles, pages, close groups, and Telegram their narratives are focused on strengthening the role of women in the Islamic State. When the so – called IS was established, women had secondary roles as caretakers and care providers,[89] however now the attention is shifting to women as defenders of the "Islamic State." According to this narrative, women now should be an active part of creating the Caliphate, as they similarly to men should aim to recruit other women, and carry out suicide attacks.

A more recent page on Facebook has been opened, called the "Caliphate/Hilafet Sisters" or "The protections of Ummah" have been re-activated where IS supporters use arguments and various materials that are aimed at recruiting young girls to support terrorist organizations.[90] On Facebook, one group advertises a Telegram channel that offers operational security instructions like avoiding using their real names or identification when they register for an Apple ID or Android application. More explicitly, the post states:

"Our beloved sisters please share and follow this channel (in Telegram). The Kuffar don't want us to be safe but we have a duty to protect our Ummah and our Islamic State. These apps downloaded from this channel ensure that you don't provide your personal information to apple or android, keeping you more safe".[91]

Women were part of the IS recruitment strategy in Kosovo.[92] Court transcripts offer a glimpse on the little understood dimension on how gender perspective influences recruitment to IS, providing an account of the messages and conversations from and between women and men, showing the narrative that they have followed and have spread in their communities too. The wives of the defendants appear to support and even motivate their husbands to join the conflict and terrorist organizations in Syria, for example one writes *'This requires sac-*

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89 Jakupi & Kelmendi 'Women in Violent Extremism: The case of Kosovo' KCSS 2017

90 Kelmendi. V 'Not Just Victims: Women in Terrorism from the Western Balkans' pg.25, George Washington University 2019 https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Perspectives%20on%20the%20Future%20of%20Women%2C%20Gender%20and%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf?fbclid=IwAR29VYWw42qTxV8v1S1iXdPgaCGWuUvVlF3_7DLnh7Twz8tN-33NwT79xtw

91 Ibid.

92 Indictment PPS nr.111/2014, Basic Court of Prishtina on May 7, 2015

rifice, not everyone commands the blessing of Allah, use it because I don't know if you'll be given this chance again. Forgive me for these words, but I want us to earn the paradise',[93] another one writes: *"It's really difficult for me, but I am proud of you… Allah has honored us with your jihad and I will try to preserve this honor with pride and dedication… don't forget that I am proud of my husband, my mujaheed".*[94]

Further, many of the women also appear to disseminate the same IS propaganda to their other family members too. As seen from the court transcripts one of the woman tries to warn others by claiming that the *'secular state will take away the kids of a Muslim who are not send to school. We must go there where you will be judged by the Sharia law'*[95]

Picture 3: Profile of a woman supporting extremists pages on Facebook

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93   Indictment PPS nr.111/2014, Basic Court of Prishtina, May 7, 2015

94   Indictment PPS nr. 25/2015 Basic Court of Prishtina, May 7, 2015

95   Indictment PPS nr. 25/2015 Basic Court of Prishtina, May 7, 2015

Alternative/Counter Messaging to the Gender Role narratives:

- While living in ISIS held territories, women were forced to get married if their husband died with men they did not know before. Their desires and wishes were not taken into account as they merely served as slaves to the men there.

- While living in ISIS held territories, women were systematically raped by ISIS fighters. There are many different examples of this, starting from Yazidi women to women from Kosovo, who were forced to marry without their consent.

- In Islam, women are spared from any kind of military activity and participation in the battle-ground. The most that women can contribute in armed jihad is to become part of logistical operations, or serve as a nurse/doctor but never participating directly in combat.[96]

- While extremists' groups were known to offer a sense of 'sisterhood' and belonging, it is important to offer an alternative to this sentiment. For instance, different organizations should actively promote to women to form 'sisterhood' type communities in the places where they live, through joining different clubs, courses, online etc. not necessarily through joining extremists' groups/ideologies.

- Many women from Albanian speaking countries, who joined terrorist organizations remain still in the conflict zones in Syria/Iraq, mainly in refugee camps. Their safety and security is unknown, as it is quite difficult to reach them or communicate directly. As such, we need voices from their family members to give an account of their current situation. For instance, the brother of a women who is in refugee camp claims that his sister does not have good living conditions, often without food and proper sanitation. [97]

96   Interview with imam, December 2018

97   Interview with J.K. 2018

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government(s):

- Any counter - messaging or narrative released to the public should be done at the right time, following the latest extremists propaganda, and should be updated with the latest propaganda offered by extremist groups.

- The Government of Kosovo should launch a counter - messaging strategy. Further, Government officials should be consistent and not provide with different narratives at the same time. These messages should avoid creating further stigmatization and alienation, and should be directed in such a manner that they create a sense of community and inclusiveness.

To the Civil Society organizations and the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK):

- The Islamic Community in Kosovo should create a unified and coordinated platform where they can produce counter - messages through videos, public discussions, online campaigns and promote their community work.

- Islamic Community of Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia should create a cohesive communication strategy that prohibits the use of hate speech or promoting discrimination in any form by their imams.

- Civil society organizations, including local organizations should create digital education platforms where youth can be exposed to different ides and alternatives, and form their own critical opinion on issues like democracy, religion etc. These platforms should be established in a local level in cooperation with municipalities and donor community.

- Media outlets should come together to establish a code of conduct on how they report about terrorism and terrorist related stories.

To policy makers and researchers - How to develop a counter narrative?

According to Hedayah most recent publication on counter – narratives, there are nine steps that policy makers and researchers are advised to follow when designing an effective counter – narrative.[98]

1. To understand and assess relevant push and pull factors

2. Identify what is the main target audience you wish to address

3. Clearly identify what is the explicit or implicit VE narrative being countered (clearly state what is the narrative used by extremists groups)

4. Set a goal and objective of the counter – narrative

5. Determine who will carry out the narrative (who is the Messenger)

6. Develop the content to the message

7. Identify the mediums where the message (counter – narrative) will be disseminated

8. Develop a strategy for dissemination

9. Finally, assess the impact of your counter – narrative

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98   Zieger.S. 'Undermining Violent Extremists in East – Africa How to Guide' Hedayah, 2018.

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APPENDIX A:

KEY WORDS

Keyword	Keyword Inverted Commas	Translation
al furqan media	"al furqan media"	[Daesh media outlet]
al khansa brigade	"al khansa brigade"	[Female brigade of Daesh]
Amaq Agency	"Amaq Agency"	[Daesh media outlet]
amaq agency english	"amaq agency english"	[Daesh media outlet]
Amaq Agency news	"Amaq Agency news"	[Daesh media outlet]
Amaq Agency Twitter	"Amaq Agency Twitter"	[Daesh media outlet]
amaq news agency	"amaq news agency"	[Daesh media outlet]
anti ISIS coalition	"anti ISIS coalition"	
Bota Muslimane	"Bota Muslimane"	The Islamic World [name of Facebook page]
Coalition against Daesh	"Coalition against Daesh"	
coalition against ISIS country list	"coalition against ISIS country list"	
counter daesh nationen	"counter daesh nationen"	Nations against Daesh
counter daesh patch	"counter daesh patch"	
Dabiq	"Dabiq"	[Daesh propaganda magazine]
Dawla Islamiya Iraq	"Dawla Islamiya Iraq"	Islamic State Iraq
ebu bekr el bagdadi	"ebu bekr el bagdadi"	Abu Bakr al Baghdadi [Leader of Daesh]
Furat Media	"Furat Media"	[Daesh media outlet]
hayat media	"hayat media"	[Daesh media outlet]
Hilafeti	"Hilafeti"	The Caliphate
Hilafeti shqip	"Hilafeti shqip"	Caliphate in Albanian
honor is in jihad	"honor is in jihad"	[title of video released by Daesh]
How to join ISIS	"How to join ISIS"	
Islamic State nasheed	"Islamic State nasheed"	Islamic State acapella song

Islamic State website	"Islamic State website"	
Islamic State Wiki	"Islamic State Wiki"	
Islamic State Wordpress	"Islamic State Wordpress"	
Islamic State.Wordpress	"Islamic State.Wordpress"	
khilafah daulah islamiyah	"khilafah daulah islamiyah"	Caliphate Islamic State
kunder-#Isis	"kunder-#Isis"	anti-#ISIS
lajme isis	"lajme isis"	News of the Islamic State
Lavdrim Muhaxheri	"Lavdrim Muhaxheri"	[Kosovar Daesh leader and recruiter]
Lufta Isis	"Lufta Isis"	Battles ISIS
lufta ne irak	"lufta ne irak"	War in Iraq
Lufta ne Siri	"Lufta ne Siri"	War in Syria
"lufta ne siri alepo"	"lufta ne siri alepo"	War in Syria Aleppo
Rexhep Memishi	"Rexhep Memishi"	[Macedonian radical Imam]
Ridvan Haqifi	"Ridvan Haqifi"	[Kosovar Daesh commander]
Rumiyah	"Rumiyah"	[Daesh propaganda magazine]
rumiyah magazine	"rumiyah magazine"	[Daesh propaganda magazine]
rumiyah pdf	"rumiyah pdf"	[Daesh propaganda magazine]
shehid per allah	"shehid per allah"	Martyrs for Allah
shteti islamik	"shteti islamik"	Islamic State
shteti islamik i irakut dhe shamit	"shteti islamik i irakut dhe shamit"	Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham
shtetit islamik	"shtetit islamik"	Islamic State
Udhezimi Islam	"Udhezimi Islam"	Islamic Instruction [name of pro-Daesh website]
War against Daesh	"War against Daesh"	
war Islamic State	"war Islamic State"	
WIlayat al-Furat	"WIlayat al-Furat"	[Daesh province/media office in Iraq]
Wilayat al-Janub	"Wilayat al-Janub"	[Daesh province/media office in Iraq]
Wilayat al-Khayr	"Wilayat al-Khayr"	[Daesh province/media office in Syria]
xhihadi ne islam	"xhihadi ne islam"	Jihad in Islam
xhihadistet	"xhihadistet"	Jihadists
Zekerija Qazimi	"Zekerija Qazimi"	[Kosovar radical Imam]