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Good Girl, Wife or Foreign Fighter

Danish Media Constructions of women in ISIS



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Abstract

Women who have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, have been understood as serving passive and largely supportive roles in ISIS state-building by media and, to a far extent, academia. Academia has argued that the passive role evolves into active participation in weaponed combat and planning of attacks. This paper investigates the Danish Newspaper's constructions of Danish women involved with ISIS as developing from a local problem concerning marginalized young Muslim women to a widespread social problem about 'terrorism'. Furthermore, this paper investigates how these constructions are used in the public debate to argue for or against their repatriation to Denmark.

This paper argues that three overall narratives are used in the construction of Danish women who have joined ISIS. Firstly, the passive 'ISIS-bride' narrative, the passive 'ISIS-wife' narrative, and the dangerous 'foreign fighter' narrative. These narratives depend on master narratives deep-seated in Danish culture and have a lasting impact beyond this case. Furthermore, this paper argues that women joining ISIS should not only be understood as a change in ISIS-state building practices, as this position has largely disregarded the women's own voices and motivation for ISIS participation. Women's role should likewise be understood as a change in media, public and political understanding of women's participation in Violent, Militant Islamist organizations, such as ISIS.

Popular Science Abstract

While the participation of men in terror organizations, such as ISIS, has been thoroughly studied in academia and written about by news media worldwide, the participation of women is usually understood as naïve and innocent brides and wives to dangerous and violent men. Several scholars and media have argued that the role of women in ISIS has changed from being solely a mother and a wife to more active participation in the planning of attacks and armed combat. This paper investigates how Danish national newspapers speak about and construct Danish women who are believed to have joined ISIS. In addition, this paper examines how the media stories and constructions influence the public for and against the repatriation of these women to Denmark.

This paper establishes the presence of three main narratives in the Danish national newspapers regarding the Danish women who are believed to have joined ISIS. Firstly, an ISIS-bride narrative, which is a story about a well-integrated, naïve girl who fell into the arms of a dangerous man. Secondly, the ISIS bride becomes a wife understood as a woman with little to no active participation in the violence of ISIS. Lastly, the stories about the women change as the political and media debate about the women begins to understand them as foreign fighters – a title previously predominantly used about men in ISIS. This paper further argues that understanding the change from passive ISIS bride and Wife in search of husbands to foreign fighters as a ‘policy change’ in ISIS state building is an oversimplification. While marriage and Motherhood are indeed highlighted roles, this paper argues that the change from ISIS bride to foreign fighter should be understood as a change in how the women are understood by media and politicians, rather than a change in the women’s role and motivations for joining ISIS. Lastly, this thesis argues that the narratives about the women rely on deeply seated cultural understandings about womanhood, being a Danish Muslim and Danish citizen. These understandings enable several law changes regarding the Danish penal code and citizenship law, which reach beyond this case.

Keywords: ISIS; Female Foreign Fighters; Social Problems; Terrorism; Citizenship; Muslim Women; Betrayal Narratives

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1. Introduction

The fall of Mosul, Iraq, in 2014 marks the rapid expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, henceforth ISIS, territories in the region. At its height of territorial power, ISIS had established control over 40 per cent of Iraq and one-third of Syria (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020). In August of the same year, U.S. President Barack Obama announced a campaign of airstrikes targeting ISIS strongholds in cooperation with the Iraqi government, Kurdish forces (Obama, 2014) and later the Syrian Democratic Forces (Maguire, 2020). By 2017 ISIS had lost 88 per cent of its territory (Piazza & Soules, 2021). The final nail in the proverbial coffin is narrated in Western media as the fall of Baghouz in March 2019, which marks the end of the last physical ISIS stronghold (Saad, 2020).

As a result of the territorial loss, more than 63,000 people fled ISIS-controlled territories between December 2018 and March 2019 (Hauch, 2020, p. 1). Several people were detained or arrested under the accusation of being ISIS-affiliated (Mironova, 2021). Men have predominantly been placed in Kurdish-run prisons, while women and children have been placed in Kurdish-controlled camps¹ such as al-hūl and al-roj. These camps were established during the Gulf War for 10.000 temporary residents (Saad, 2020). However, as many as 72.000 people are said to reside in the camps by April 2019 (Prasz, 2019). Among these are several of the more than 1000 western women who are believed to have joined ISIS (Cook & Vale, 2018, p. 14), including Danish women. The Danish Intelligence and Security Police has estimated that approximately 1/7 of the 150 Danish citizens and residents, who are believed to have joined ISIS, are women (PET, 2020, s. 5). In the years following the fall of Baghouz seven of these Danish women (and their children) become a political hot potato in Denmark.

While the Danish Intelligence and Security Police and the Danish health authorities, *Sundhedsstyrelsen*, recommended the repatriation of Danish citizens on the grounds of national security (PET, 2020) and humanitarian reasons (Vilby et al., 2020), the Danish government

¹ The camps in Northern Syria are sometimes referred to as refugee camps, prison camps, the Kurdish camps etc. Labelling the camps is not a neutral act as will be discussed in section 1.1.1 of this paper

showed reluctance in efforts to repatriate its citizens as underlined by the Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen: “when [the government] do not want the men and women, who against all reason and all the correct values have left Denmark and joined the caliphate, to return to Denmark, then their children will pay the price” (Frederiksen, 2019). In counteracting the recommendation of The Danish Intelligence and Security Police and *Sundhedsstyrelsen*, entities which correspond to the Swedish *Säpo* and *Folkhälsemyndigheten* and the British MI5 and NHS, the prime minister and the government place their political line higher than expert entities. This positioning does not go unnoticed by the Danish national newspapers, which accuse the government of totalitarianism (Kildegaard & Domino, 2021) and insists this is, despite the women being Danish citizens, a product of a political hardline in Danish immigration policy.

This paper will show how the political debate about Danish women in the Syrian camps unfolds as a social problem in which these women are the main characters. The question, however, is, who are these women? The Social Democratic government claims they are ‘foreign fighters’ too dangerous to be repatriated to Denmark. The media claims that regardless of their status as ‘potential terrorists’, they remain Danish citizens with all the rights this status entails. This thesis will examine the following:

- 1) *How are Danish women in Syria’s al-hül and al-roj camps constructed in national print media and security reports?*
- 2) *How are these constructions engaged, in the public debate, to argue for or against repatriation of the women to Denmark*

This study, to my knowledge, is the first in-depth academic examination of what has been framed as illogical and inconsistent behaviour on the part of the Danish prime minister in her neglect of intel from expert government agencies such as the Danish Intelligence and Security Police as well as the Danish health authorities, *Sundhedsstyrelsen*. Furthermore, this study makes a theoretical, narrative criminological contribution to the study of how social problems are constructed in public debate and how these constructions are harnessed to serve specific political purposes.

1.1 Key Terms, Translation & Transliteration

The articles and security reports used in this paper are written in Danish. The author has translated all quotes used. Several considerations were made in the translating process. As this thesis pays attention to narratives, language is fundamental. Thus, translating is complex and must convey a meaningful English understanding and stay ‘in tune with the Danish meaning. When a direct translation has been deemed meaningless or awkward in English, the Danish words remain in the original, followed by a meaningful English translation.

The two camps in Syria, referred to in this paper as al-hūl and al-roj, will be written using the transliteration standard of the American Library Association – Library of Congress, which includes not capitalizing place names, exemplified by the spelling of the camp al-hūl, as the letter ‘h’ refers to two different letters in the Arabic alphabet in the higher and lower case, spectively. If the name appears in direct quotes, they remain as they are. Thus, the reader should note that when the camps are spoken of as al-Roj, Al-Roj, and al-Haul, Al-hawl, al-hul, they refer to the same two camps.

1.1.1 Prison Camps or Refugee Camps?

The media use different terms in the data corpus to describe the camps, such as ‘Syrian Camps’, ‘Kurdish controlled camps’, ‘prison camps’ and ‘refugee camps’. There is a large body of literature on the prison-refugee camp nexus (see, e.g., (McConnachie, 2016; Shacknove, 1993 & Holzer, 2013), which will not be further detailed in this paper. While an in-depth analysis of the political complexity of the region could have analytical benefits, it has been excluded from this paper due to the limited time and space. While these issues doubtlessly have a significant impact on the lives of the Danish women and children who live in these camps, how the camps are constructed only seems to play a liminal role in how the women are constructed in the Danish news media and the negotiation of potential repatriation. It should, however, be noted that labelling the camps as refugee camps, prison camps, displacement camps, or something else entirely is not a neutral act as the adjectives are value-laden and adds to the construction of the women. For this reason, I will refrain from adding adjectives to the noun and thus refer to these places as ‘the camp(s)’.

1.1.2 ‘Danish’

The complexity of Danish laws regarding citizenship and residency plays a vital role in this case, and putting the label ‘Danish’ is not just a matter of legal status but of symbolism which draws on master narratives about ‘Danishness’ enticed with morals and values. In this case, this becomes particularly complicated when some of the women in the camps lose their Danish citizenship. This complexity will be discussed analytically in this paper. When describing the women (and their children) as ‘Danish’, it is in the sense that the narratives about them include them in a discourse of Danishness (even when a particular narrative negates the Danishness claim) regardless of legal and (other) symbolic claims to ‘Danishness’.

1.1.3 Violent, Militant Islamist Organization

Answering the question of what ISIS is is difficult to solve in one sentence. This paper will refer to ISIS as a violent, militant, Islamist organization. The avoidance of using the term ‘terror’ does not mean that ISIS is not an international terror organization but rather that the term is ill-defined and overshadows what else ISIS is. Violent, understood as using harm with the intent to hurt (including killing), is used in this definition to highlight that ISIS is not only using violence in the form of terror attacks in the ‘Western world’, but they also inflict violence locally, internationally and within its own circle. Militant is used as a reference to the organized militant rhetoric and acts of war and war-like actions, including the planning and executing of what is usually referred to as ‘terror attacks’. The term ‘Islamism’ is, in the media, often used synonymously with the term ‘terrorism’ in the media and beyond. Islamism, in this case, refers to the belief that Islam, through sharia, should be the political and societal order of life (Mozaffari, 2007). Thus, Islamism is, in and of itself, not a violent ideology but can.

1.1.4 ISIS-label

While the media use different labels to describe the women and their children, none of them are neutral terms. I will refrain from using these labels (unless directly quoted from the data corpus) for two reasons. None of the women has, as of August 2022, been convicted of having joined ISIS (categorized as a terror organization by the United Nations), and thus I evoke the democratic principle of being innocent until proven guilty. The children are, per definition, legal minors and thus cannot be held responsible for being in the camps. Furthermore, I am concerned about the

possible re-traumatization and stigmatization of the children by labelling them in association with ISIS, given their ability to, as they grow up, read what has been written about them and their parents, including news articles and academic work.

2. Literature Review

This paper focuses on media representations of Danish Muslim women entwined with an international violent, militant, Islamist organization. The following will account for research on representations of Muslims and Islam in Denmark as a foreign ‘other’. Furthermore, this review will account for the historical and political development of neo-nationalism since the late 1980s in creating these othering practices. Lastly, this section will point to the academic understudy of motivations for those who join ISIS, especially in the case of women.

2.1 Islam in the media after 9/11

In the Western world, there has been increased media attention to Islam. Only a few events are recognized solely by their date; however, 9/11 is one of them. A few days after the terror attacks in the United States on 11th September 2001, U.S. president, George Bush, declared a symbolic War on Terrorism (Bush, 2001), a declaration which quickly manifested in the physical world in the form of a U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. The military campaign was launched in the hunt for Osama Bin Laden, the Saudi-born CIA-trained leader of the militant Islamist terror organization Al-Qaeda and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. A war that has had consequences for not only how violent and militant Islamism is constructed as a threat to the western world but the entire media discourse about all Muslims in the U.S. (e.g., (Ibrahim, 201; Powell, 2011; Yenigum, 2004) and in Europe (e.g., (Abbas, 2004; Shahwar, 2014) including Denmark (e.g., Hervik, 2002; Rytter & Pedersen, 2013). This discourse frames Muslims as potential enemies needing surveillance and control (Bleich, 2009; Ewing, 2008; Fekete, 2004). Rytter and Pedersen (2013) argue that 9/11: “is a ‘critical event’ that intensified processes of securitization in the West.” (ibid. p. 2304). In the Danish context, they highlight its effect on Danish immigration politics (ibid) and public debate about Muslim minority Danes.

2.2 ‘Us’ and ‘Them’

The public debate about minority Danes in Denmark has, according to language psychologist, Lamies Nassri, been marked by not only a harsh tone but considerable attention to minority Danes (Nassri, 2018, p. 7). The common denominator for the topic of minority Danes in the public debate: “is that minority and majority Danes are constructed in an ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourse [in which]

‘us’, ‘our culture’ and ‘our’ ethnicity is portrayed as ideal while ‘the other’s culture’ and ‘ethnicity’ is constructed in direct opposition. (Ibid. My translation).

Fadel (1997) and Hervik (2011) found through interviews that binary constructs were created regardless of political stance, creating an ‘immigrant’ outgroup and a ‘Danish’ ingroup. The ‘immigrant’ outgroup was often constructed in a frame of suppression of women’s rights, whereas the ‘Danish’ ingroup was understood to have emancipated women (ibid, p. 94). Andreassen (2016) analyses a comment section debate in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* regarding four young women of minority Muslim background and their difficulty finding husbands at the same level of education (ibid p. 22). While the four women are concerned with the level of education of potential spouses, the debaters in the comment section make it a matter of Muslim women's marriage practices. Practices, as understood by the debaters in the comment section, that are not controlled by the women themselves but by: "Muslim men, the women's (presumed Muslim) families and Islam" (ibid, p. 26). This understanding of Muslim marriage practices becomes a matter of unequal gender structures in Muslim families and that marrying an 'ethnic' Dane could have a deadly outcome (ibid, p 27), understood in this connection as gendered violence said to occur in minority families, popularly coined 'honour killings' (Keskinen, 2012, p. 73). It is worth noting that in the Danish context, 'honour-killings, 'forced marriage,' and even 'arranged marriages' have been constructed as problematic, which has had a direct effect on Danish family reunification rules, including a stipulation age of 24 years for both spouses (Keskinen 2009, p. 478). Furthermore, these laws are more likely to grant a 'white Dane' family reunification:" as many of the requirements [by the law] give native 'white' Danish citizens privileges they are only in possession of because of their birthright and membership of the whiteness/majority group" (Pedersen 2012, p.152).

While Immigration and Integration laws are central laws in the ability of the Danish state to control Muslim bodies wishing to enter the country, the Danish criminal law was changed in 2018, targeting face coverings (Straffeloven, 2018, §134). The law itself is broadly formulated to target all types of face coverings. However, the law's background material is primarily concerned with face coverings associated with the oppression of Muslim women (Bødskov, 2018). While the law was passed in 2019, the discussion of what in Denmark has been coined a *burkaforbud* (burqa-

ban) started in 2009 by the conservative party and was, at first, deemed unconstitutional (Warberg et al., 2013, p. 34). However, the issue of Muslim women's face coverings is not only discussed in Danish media and politics. As a result of heavy media and political debate, France (e.g., Hunter-Henin, 2012), Belgium (Brems et al., 2014) and the Netherlands (Gustavsson et al., 2015) have implemented bans on public face coverings. A common denominator European governments and intellectuals utilize is an understanding of Muslim face covering as a symbol: "that is inextricably associated with misogynist and otherwise anti-democratic regimes" (Vrieling 2014, p. 184). Edwards (2014) uses the Danish case and further argues that "the ideology of the veil is central to the project of the Western nation state's uncompromising condemnation of the increasingly present (Muslim) 'other' at every level of its operation" (ibid, p. 281). While 9/11 has undeniably impacted how Muslims are constructed in the political and media debate, the construction of 'cultural others' precedes this event and ties to the evolution of neo-nationalism, especially evident in the 1980s.

2.3 Neo-Nationalism

Hervik's definition of neo-racism ties in with neo-nationalism and refers to: "mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Through speech and action, Neo-racism highlights those who can make legitimate claims to the national community. At the same time, neo-racism presents its reasons to separate and criminalize the people [who cannot make claims to the national community]" (Hervik, 2002). Furthermore, Wren (2001) argues that "subtle manifestations of cultural racism [exists] in Denmark" (p. 141). Cultural racism: "conveniently legitimates the *exclusion* of 'others' on the basis that they are culturally [rather than biologically] different, and that their presence in core countries will inevitably lead to conflict" (p. 122, italics in the original). Neo-racism is thus to be understood within the neo-nationalist understanding of cultural ingroup and outgroup rather than ideas of biological difference. Several events are of interest in the neo-nationalistic development, including the Danish nay-vote to the first round of the Maastricht Treaty, which catalyzed an increasingly hostile attitude towards people with ethnic minorities, which also manifests in new policies (Hervik, 2002, p. 40). As a result of the Danish no to the treaty, the renegotiation gave Denmark four opt-outs, including that it: "would not cooperate with or be subsumed to a supra-national authority in questions of police work or refugee issues" (p 42). Jenkins (2011) likewise draws on the 1992 Maastricht vote as an essential point in Danish E.U. scepticism and a response: "to a deep-seated fear of threats to [Danish] national identity, culture and social values" (ibid. p. 84).

Østergaard 1992, Sørensen & Væver 1992 & Thomas 1995 likewise supports this position. Jenkins further argues that the assumption that there is one homogenous Danish people with one distinct and established identity entrenched in a shared culture was then and is, to a far extent, still a 'political trump card' (Jenkins, 2011, p. 84). Within Islamic studies, historian Mark Sedgewick (2013) argues that it is Neo-nationalist sentiment which is the main driving force behind the hostility towards Muslim immigrants and residents of Denmark (p. 211). He argues that what he frames as anti-Islamic activism probably raised fear of Islam as a threat to Danish culture. He identifies critical neo-nationalist figures in Danish politics and media, including *Dansk Folkeparti*, and their use of the 'Eurabia narrative' which Sedgewick defines as: "the apocalyptic threat of the Islamization of Europe." (ibid. p. 224)

2.4 Muslim women and Terror

There is a tendency in the literature on ISIS to neglect women. Within popular literature William McCants (2015) makes no mention of women. Clarke (2019) acknowledges women's presence but focuses entirely on male actions. In academia, the 'ISIS character' is often assumed to be male. Wilson (2017) analyses the appeal of joining ISIS by looking at: "[ISIS] state-building and state-defending enterprise" (ibid, p. 1). The analysis shows the complexity of desires to join ISIS and concludes that the reasoning was not ideological but often a sense of *brotherhood*." (Ibid, p. 8 my emphasis). While the article makes claims to investigate the appeal of ISIS to *people* who travel there, Wilson takes for granted that it is the appeal to men who travel to the self-proclaimed caliphate she investigates. The article makes no mention of women.

While the role of women in ISIS has been largely understudied, presumably due to ISIS's relatively short existence in targeting western recruits, there is an increasing academic interest in women's participation in terror organizations in general, especially in the past 20 years. Several scholars have argued for a recent change from supportive roles as wives and mothers to participating actively in recruiting and violence. Gan et al. (2019) argue that the role of women in ISIS has recently changed from supportive roles such as wives and mothers to participating actively in recruiting, policing, and violence (ibid, p. 208). Gan and colleagues' methodological approach has been analysis of 30 cases primarily built on media narratives about the women using a single line statement from a woman who joined the caliphate (ibid, p. 211). While the study is able to give

insight into media constructions of the women, it does not fulfil the promise of analyzing the actual role of women in the caliphate but rather the role media perceives the women to have in the caliphate. Vale (2019) likewise argues that women's role in ISIS is marked by a change from passive to active and Davis argues that: "using women may reflect a lack of male resources (Davis 2017, p. 21).

Martini (2018) offers a different insight on women joining ISIS. She argues that what has been coined 'the war of terror' has constructed Muslim women as a battleground fought between brown men who keep them captive in misogyny and oppression and white western men armed with guns and a liberation discourse (ibid. p. 465). The construction of women who join ISIS as 'ISIS brides', as opposed to 'foreign fighters' like their male counterparts, is a continuation of the infantilization of Muslim women (ibid. p. 464), as they are constructed as young and naïve without agency (ibid, p. 465). Martini's argument highlights the need for researchers to be attentive to media constructions, as well as their own, being influenced by pre-conceived notions about these women. The problem of pre-conceived notions gives rise to an important question. Is the role of women in Islamic Violent Militant Organizations changing, or are the media and academic *construction* of them women changing? This dilemma is further questioned when looking into academia's interest in women's acts of terror more generally, such as female suicide bombers in Palestine, including Naaman (2007), Brunner (2005), Schweitzer (2006) and Bloom (2007), and the so-called 'Black Widows' in Chechenia Nivat (2005), (West 2004) and Speckhard (2015). Furthermore, in Speckhard's study of Chechen women as 'Black Widows', she argues that: "female suicide bombers do not differ significantly from their male counterparts" (2008, p. 995). Beyond terror attacks within an Islamist framework, countless works both inside and outside of academia about Ulrike Meinhof, a founding member of the Red Army Faction, often referred to as the Baader-Meinhof group have been written. Female active participation in acts of terror, such as suicide bombing, car bombing and planning, is thus well-established in academia. However, *western* women's participation in so-called 'Islamist terrorism' is perhaps what has changed the media narratives about women in Violent, Militant, Islamist Organizations

3. Theory

This thesis draws on the social constructionist approach to social problems theory following sociologist Donileen Loseke's approach. Social problems theory is used to specify how narratives are used to construct the Danish women in this case. As this thesis focuses on how Danish national newspapers construct these women, narrative analysis will be used as an overall methodological and theoretical framework. This approach is inspired by the narrative criminological approach using criminologist and sociologist Lois Presser and narrative criminologist Sveinung Sandberg's works as they bring attention to narratives as not only explaining but likewise guiding action (Fleetwood et al. 2019, p. 20).

3.1 Social Problems Theory

Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, social problems theory was dominated by intervention methods meaning how to solve social problems, focusing on 'deviant' people and their deviant acts (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998, p. 4). This is a structural functionalist's view of social problems and an understanding of social problems as separate from people's interpretation of them (Miller & Holstein, 2007, p. 7). The constructionists' approach to social problems, established by Spector and Kitsuse, shifts the focus away from the 'deviant' people 'doing problems' to the people making claims about 'problems', how these claims are constructed and how these claims are accepted (Spector & Kitsue 1987 p. 168; Jamrazik & Nocella, 1998). Thus, the constructionist approach to social problems: "are attached to experience in order to enact identifiable objects of social problems discourse" (Holstein & Miller, 2007, p. 152).

Thus, in the constructionist understanding, social problems are about things and people 'we' worry about and therefore enter the subjective realms of feelings rather than objectivity (Loseke, 2010, p. 8). There can be objective indicators that a condition exists. However, that does not automatically mean that the public worries about it, or as Loseke puts it: "People's ideas about risk matter more than the actual risk measured by objective indicators" (Loseke, 2010, p.9). There is thus not necessarily a connection between the objective conditions of a social problem and the subjective conditions of social problems. The social constructionist approach comes with its criticisms. This paper will not go deep into the critiques against the constructionist approach.

However, one criticism relevant for the analysis of this paper is the issue of subjective and objective conditions of harm. This paper aims to highlight the subjective conditions of constructing harm. This is not to say that harm is just a construct, and no actual human suffering exists; it is to highlight that: [...] harm is encultured. It is naturalized, normalized, trivialized, excused, justified, commended, and/or obfuscated" (Presser, 2018, p. 23). This paper focuses on encultured aspects of (mass) harm while silently acknowledging the real tangible human consequences of such. In this way, this paper pays homage to the structuralist functionalist approach in acknowledging objective conditions but rejects the notion that social problems can be scientifically discovered, or as Loseke puts it: "conditions might exist, people might get hurt by them, but conditions are not social problems until humans categorize them as troublesome and in need of repair" (Loseke, 2010, p 14)

3.1.1 Defining a Social Problem

While the social constructionist approach to social problems agrees on the importance of claims-making (Spector & Kitsuse 1987; Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998; Holstein & Miller, 2007), the definition of a social problem differs in the details. Spector and Kitsuse argue that social problems are, by and large: "what people say they are" (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p.xi), focusing on claims-making processes that deem a condition: "unwanted, unjust, immoral, and thus about which something should be done" (ibid). Loseke's four-element definition of a social problem gives a similar yet more detailed definition. Her approach, furthermore, pays avid attention to each element of the social processes and actors in the construction of social problems. According to Loseke (2010), a social problem has four elements (p. 6). Firstly, when something is considered a social problem, it is to say something is wrong. This condition is similar to Spector and Kitsuse's definition. However, Loseke specifies the definition by adding three additional conditions. Second, it must be considered widespread for something to receive social problem status (ibid). This definition is absent in Spector and Kitsuse's definition but does occur in definitions by other social constructionists such as Farley (1987, p 2). Third, a social problem concerns something that humans can change, while the fourth element is that it has conditions we believe ought to be changed, another common ground with the definition by Spector and Kitsuse (1987, p xi). Similar to both Loseke and Spector and Kitsuse's definition, Jamrozik & Nocella (1998) argue that a social problem has an identifiable societal origin, constitutes a threat, and can be fixed (p. 2). In the

context of this paper, it is important to note that Jamrozik and Nocella's definition, unlike Loseke, does not make any demands to conditions being considered widespread. This distinction is analytically important in the following case of these Danish women, partly due to low media interest in the women leaving in the years prior to their internment in the al-hūl and al-roj camps and partly due to the very construction of women as ISIS brides as will be evident in section 5.1 of this paper. Thus, this paper uses Loseke's detailed definition in defining what this paper labels *widespread social problems*, whereas (social) problems that do not meet the widespread condition in the Losekean sense will rely on the definition of Jamrozik and Nocella (1998), as stated above, and have been labelled *localized social problems*. Furthermore, it should be noted that the term 'threat' in Jamrozik and Nocella's goes undefined but will, in this paper, be used in the sense of something causing potential harm. Harm is, in turn, defined in this paper as: "trouble caused by another" (Presser, 2018, p. 24)

3.1.2 Constructing a Social Problem

As mentioned above, the shift from structural functionalists' approach to social problems to the constructionist approach shifted the focus from the deviant to the people who make claims about deviance and the deviant. The role of claims-makers is first to make claims about a particular condition and/or people to be troublesome and, secondly, to convince the audience who are invested in evaluating the believability of the claims-making (Loseke, 2010, p. 51).

3.1.3 Claims-making, claims-makers and the audience

Making claims is the social problems work of claims-makers. In order for a social problem to be constructed, it is required that audiences, these are the people who see or hear social problems claims, are persuaded by these claims (Loseke, 2010, p. 21) to evaluate the believability and importance of these claims (ibid p.25). Claims-makers are people who say or do things to persuade audience members that a social problem needs to be rectified (ibid). Claims-makers can be many different types. Relevant to this paper are politicians, newspapers, NGOs, lawyers, academics in social sciences and security studies, medical professionals, public security agencies and newspaper readers. This is not to say that each of these types of claims makers' claims is evaluated with equal importance. The same is true for audiences. It is unnecessary to convince all audiences, but merely 'the right ones' (Loseke, 2010, p. 36). Some claims-makers are believed almost automatically.

Loseke argues that scientists hold the top position in what she refers to as the hierarchy of credibility (ibid). Below them are scientists who are professionals with special knowledge on the matter. This paper will argue, however, that this hierarchy of credibility is facing new challenges in what Hendricks and Vestergaard refer to as the 'post-factual society' (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2018) in which: "Democracy itself, as well as the political capacity to efficiently address and solve social problems [...], is threatened by political debate in which facts matter less than emotions and opinions. (Ibid, p. 104). The 'facts' Hendricks and Vestergaard refer to are: "facts obtained and verified by reliable methods" (ibid). These reliable methods are presumably peer-reviewed science, hence scientists being on the top tier of Loseke's hierarchy of credibility. The evaluation of emotions and opinions a par, or perhaps higher, on the hierarchy of credibility shakes this hierarchy of credibility, as will be evident in the case of the Danish women in the Syria camps.

3.1.4 Diagnostic frames Typifications and Formula Stories

The role of claims-makers, according to Loseke, is to "construct the parameters of the condition when they define what is included in it." (Loseke, 2010, p. 55); this is done through diagnostic frames. Diagnostic frames "construct blame and responsibility (Loseke, 2010, p. 59) or, as Christensen puts it: "typify a state of affair" (Christensen, 2013, p. 24).

Diagnostic frames can be categorized into two broad types. Frames can be constructed as having social causes, or they can be constructed as having individual causes (Loseke, 2010, p. 60). Social causes include social structures (i.e. the welfare state, schools and other social institutions) and social forces (i.e. racism, islamophobia, ageism). In contrast, individual causes shift the focus away from social structures onto the individuals and their qualities, including their behaviour and belief (ibid). It is possible to view 'the same problem' in different diagnostic frames (Loseke, 2010, p. 4). The issue of 'youth delinquency' can be diagnosed as having social causes such as insufficient educational opportunities for young people or individual causes such as violent behaviour. It is thus possible that everyone involved in claims-making about 'youth crime' agrees that this is a social problem which needs rectifying; they may not agree as to what has caused the social problem and, in turn, how to fix it. The structural understanding in the example above indicates that youth need education to rectify a crime problem. In contrast, the individual approach might claim that violence is what needs to be addressed in terms of, i.e., pshycological or psychiatric treatment of individuals or perhaps advocate for longer jail sentences to keep the violence of the streets.

For claims-makers to construct a social problem, they need to construct packaged claims, including the above-mentioned diagnostic frame. However, this packaged claim must also include typification of the villains, victims, conditions and solutions to the social problem (Loseke, 2010, p. 21). Social problems are about conditions that affect many people; it is not practical or possible to know every single person who is believed to be affected by a condition. Thus claims-makers must categorize by typifying people and conditions (ibid, p. 17; Best, 1995, .p 8). A typification is an: "image in our heads of typical kinds of things, be these cats, prostitutes, or ecological ruin" (ibid). Categorizing by type requires that we see similarities between individual conditions and people while ignoring dissimilarities between people and conditions (ibid).

Claims-makers do not just state that a given condition is a social problem. They categorize the problem as a particular type (Best 1995, p. 8). These stories about particular conditions and experiences involving particular types of people, Loseke, refers to these as 'formula stories (ibid, p 89). Formula stories are narratives about types of experiences, such as 'wife abuse' and it's distinct characters 'abused women' and 'violent men' (Loseke, 2001, p 107).

This does not mean that the audience exposed to claims evaluates all these claims as acceptable. Successful claims are often: "those that more or less appeal to audience member's understanding of cultural themes" (Loseke, 2010, p. 63). Cultural themes are normative beliefs about how the world ought to work. This likewise entails that these cultural themes are historically and culturally specific (ibid). This highlight how social problems claims-making is moralized within cultural structures. These cultural themes function as what Halverson et al. (2011) refer to as master narratives, defined as a narrative: "that is deeply embedded in a culture [...] and creates a framework for communication about what people are expected to do in certain situations." (ibid., p. 7). This thesis will highlight how master narratives are vital in constructing the Danish women believed to have joined ISIS. It should likewise be noted that while this paper understands claims-making in terms of constructions of narratives. There will be no distinction made between the term 'narrative' and the term 'stories'. However, distinctions are made between narrative/stories claims-makers constructs in the articles and security reports and master narratives as larger cultural embedded frames which claims-makers narratives may draw from.

3.2 Narratives

As this paper relies on narrative analysis as its methodologic approach, some theoretical assumptions are likewise made and should thus be addressed. There are several definitions of narratives. However, Presser (2018) suggests a series of typical features of narratives, of which this paper will focus on 4. First temporality. Narratives are time-ordered experiences (Presser, 2018, p. 52). This is also the case when stories are told as 'flashbacks' as they still reflect the passing of time of the alleged experiences (ibid). Second, Causality. It is not enough for a narrative to account for sequential experiences (ibid, p. 52), narratives: "allocate causal responsibility for action, define actors and give them motivation, indicate the trajectory of past episodes and predict consequences of future choices." (Smith, 2005, p. 18). Third, narratives often involve a conflict of sorts and focus the: "attention on the unusual and remarkable against a backdrop made up of highly structured patterns of belief and expectations (Herman 2002, p. 90; Presser 2018, p. 54). Thus, what is considered conflictual is highly cultural, which leads to the fourth feature of narratives, cultural codes (Smith, 2005). Frank (2010) suggests that narratives provide social approval: "by aligning events with normative cultural codes" (p. 132). These cultural codes are: "recognizable plots, character types, conventional tropes [and] cues that build suspense" (ibid, p 119; see also Presser, 2018, p. 5). thus, the narrative theoretical understanding of cultural codes largely overlaps with Loseke's definition of cultural themes described above. The stories we tell are thus not entirely our own. They tie into these cultural codes. We use these codes to understand the stories we are told (Presser, 2018, p. 5). The narrative criminological approach to narratives: "contests the popular notion that stories only rationalize past actions. Boldly, it professes that stories also inspire action." (Presser & Sandberg, 2015b p. 287). Thus, narratives are not just about meaning-making, the stories we tell and hear promote action (Presser, 2018, p. 2). Narrative criminologists: "consider how linguistic moves within self-stories [...] function to assert license to harm or conversely to deny responsibility for harm [as well as...] constructing the excusable harm and the blameworthy victim (Presser & Sandberg 2015a, p. 14).

3.2.1 Silence in narratives

While narratives are usually about what is said, in this case pertaining both to the textual and the visual, narratives can likewise be silent in the form of tropes that: "reveal what in society is taken

for granted [... and] address the complex relationship between events and story" (Sandberg, 2016, p. 156). Loseke's social problems theory likewise addresses the power of visual representation as a form of tropes in that social problem: "typifications of people and conditions are images in our heads" (Loseke, 2010, p 26). Furthermore, things that go unsaid because they are deemed trivial or simply omitted for the narrator's story to be more dynamic and adaptable (Presser, 2018, p 57) are likewise considered silences. This point is important for this paper as it highlights how people are represented in the media as more than just mere abstractions. It affects how lawmakers and others will understand and act upon the represented.

3.2.2 A Note on the 'Truth'

Social constructionism does not focus on whether a narrative is true. In terms of social problems, the focus should instead be on which claims are *believed* to be true by the audience (Loseke, 2010, p. 35) or, as Spector and Kitsuse (1987) put it: "we are not interested in if the putative condition exists or if it is a fabrication" (p. 76). Narratives affect us regardless of their foundation in 'truth' as stories are told to explain actions (Presser, 2018, p.14). This paper is thus not trying to give the right way to solve a social problem about Danish women (and their children) in Syrian camps, but rather to seek the truth of how these women are constructed as part of a social problem.

4. Method

The following gives an in-depth understanding of the data collection process. It presents a broad overview of the data corpus, the reasoning behind choosing Danish newspapers and security reports from the Danish Intelligence and Security Police. It addresses the significance of the newspapers as primary and secondary claims-makers and the role of the Danish Security and Intelligence Police as an expert claims-maker. Lastly, limitations and ethical consideration regarding the anonymity of the women (and their children) and author positionality will be addressed.

4.1 Data Collection and Population

This paper is based on the articles written by the ten national newspapers about Danish women who are believed to have joined the violent, militant Islamist organization ISIS between 2014 and 2021. The data extraction was conducted in three rounds. The Initial data collection was undertaken on 13th December 2021 through the media database *Infomedia*, which tracks and archives all Danish news production and an extensive range of international news. The initial search found that the narratives about Danish women as the primary subject of the articles began in March 2019. However, this paper will clarify how this date marks a narrative shift about Danish women associated with ISIS from being accessories in a story about the violent male so-called 'foreign fighters' to an independent social problem.

The initial search term "*danske statsborgere I Syrien*" (Danish citizens in Syria) generated just under 25,000 articles starting in 1985. As previously mentioned, articles concerning the women in the camps in Syria occurred in March 2019. However, most of the articles generated were related to Syrian citizens in Denmark rather than Danish citizens in Syria. In order to delimitate the results, 20 articles relating to the case, chosen at random between March 2019 and December, were analyzed in order to find common themes such as repeated words, sentences and links, inspired by Guest et al.'s approach to data reduction in thematic analysis (Guest, 2012, p.130). Two relevant terms were reoccurring in multiple articles. Namely, "*danske kvinder i Syrien*" (Danish women in Syria) and "*danske mødre I Syrien*" (Danish mothers in Syria). It was evident from the first extraction that the women's presence in Syria was pre-established. However, the initial search

terms missed this link. The secondary data collection thus focused on extracting articles more generally about Danish citizens, men and women, before March 2019 in the search for traces of the women associated with ISIS before the fall of Baghouz, which the initial search missed. This secondary search resulted in a body of articles relating to the bombing of Baghouz in February 2021, which, as previously mentioned, marks the fall of ISIS as a state-like entity, causing thousands of people to flee, many of whom have ended up in the camps and prisons in Northern Syria (Hauch 2020). The relevant search terms identified were *IS-krigere + familie* (ISIS-fighter + family) and *IS-krigere + koner* (ISIS fighters + wives). The final data collection focused on tracing these women regarding when they left for Syria and identifying if and how the national newspapers wrote about them throughout the years. This final round of data collection identified the search terms "*IS-brude*" (ISIS-brides) and "*jihad-brude*" (jihadi brides).

4.1.1 Newspapers

The ten national newspapers in Denmark are commonly understood to represent different standpoints on the political left-right spectrum; however, these differences are increasingly being washed out in the last couple of decades (Hjarvard, 2007). In the case of news reporting on this case, there is likewise no significant political differentiation between the newspapers as such.

The most significant variance in political standpoint is evident in how the potential repatriation of the women is discussed in the context of *udlændingepolitik* (Foreigner/Immigration policy). While there is a tendency in this data corpus of left-leaning newspapers to position themselves favourably towards immigrants and right-leaning newspapers argue for immigration restrictions, the entire spectrum of newspaper argumentation frame this, within an immigration discourse, as a matter of legal citizenship and stands in strong opposition to the government position of non-repatriation. While the political orientation of newspapers is not a focus of this paper, this could be of interest to a Danish readership and contribute to an ongoing discussion about Danish media on the spectrum of political and commercialized media (Hjarvard 2007, p. 28). However, to an international readership, this might be of lesser importance as all the ten newspapers have taken the same overall standpoint in debating the repatriation of the Danish women. Furthermore, they all, with noticeably few exemptions, construct the women in terms of citizenship and rights.

4.1.2 Timeline and Data Spikes

1115 articles were generated and manually sorted through, coded and analyzed. 746 were related to the Danish women who are believed to have joined ISIS between 2014 and December 2021, which marks the end of data collection for this paper. The remaining 371 articles were from news agencies such as Ritzau, not a national newspaper, and thus excluded from this paper.

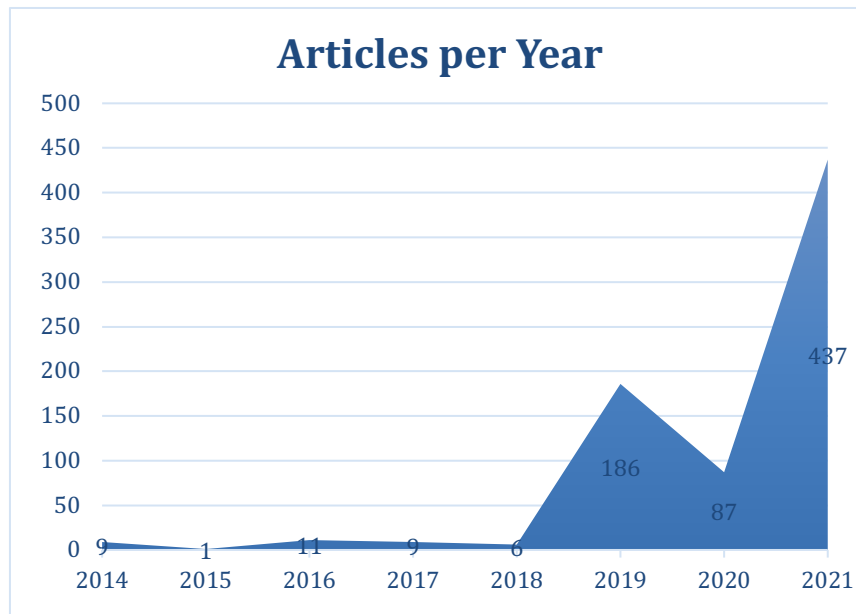


Chart 1: Article Distribution per year

The first article was written in March 2014, with 9 articles written about the Danish women that year. The low interest remains for the year 2015 (1 article). While, 2016 overall has a low frequency of articles with a total of 11 articles. 7 of these articles were written in July. Both 2017 and 2018 have a low frequency of articles. In February and March 2019, the women received a sudden increase in journalist interest, from 0 articles written about them in January 2019 to 37 articles in February and 22 articles in March. The rest of 2019 is marked by a steady journalistic interest in producing articles about the case, with spikes evident in June (32 articles) and November (34 articles), a total of 186 articles that year. 2020 is marked by a steady, yet lowered, interest marked by a few articles each month. I attribute this to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which put Denmark on lockdown, presumably taking over the news attention. One spike is, however, evident for December 2020 (28 articles) in the form of end-of-the-year summery-type articles, which focuses mainly on the Danish children in the camps. 2021 is marked by a steady

and high journalistic interest in producing articles about the case. March is marked by a sudden increase in article production with a total of 181 articles, on average 6 articles a day. April (92 articles) and May (70 articles) show a continued high interest in the case. The summer months are marked by a fading interest with a slight increase in the autumn with 14 articles in September and October. While all 10 national newspapers are interested in the case, the number of articles varies greatly.

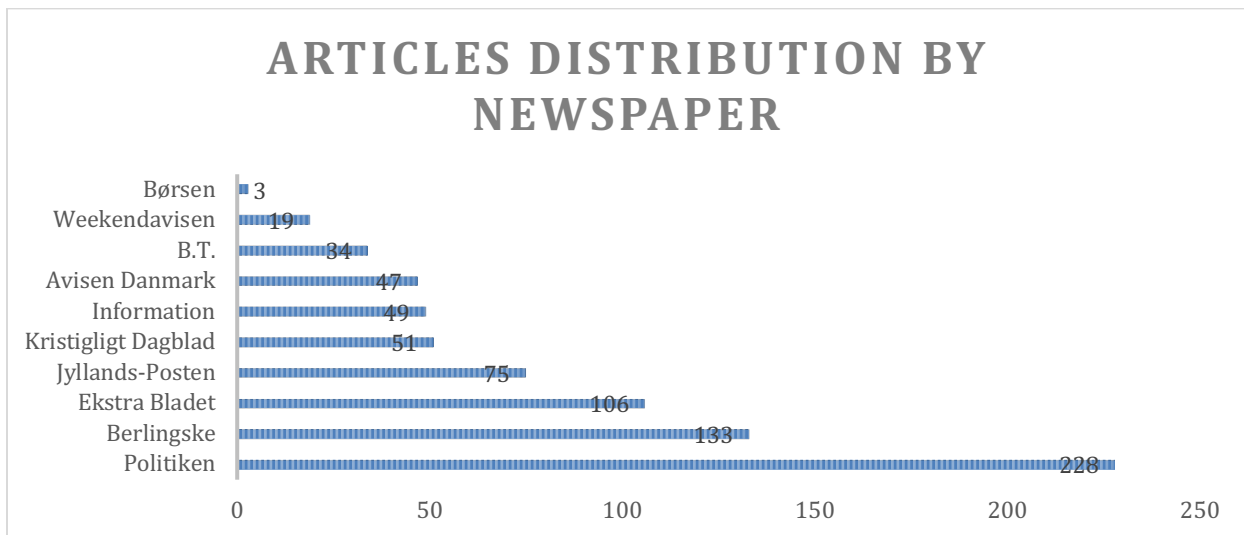


Chart 2: Article Distribution by Newspaper

The newspaper *Politiken* writes almost one-third more articles than the 'runner up' *Berlingske*. *Politiken* has many letters-to-the-editor and debate articles about this subject written by readers of the newspaper. It might indicate a more considerable interest by the readers of *Politiken* in the case of the women (and their children) in the camps in Syria. It may also indicate that *Politiken* is Denmark's largest paid subscription newspaper (Gallup, 2022). The largest newspaper is B.T., a free 'commuter' newspaper distributed on public transport (ibid). *Jyllands-Posten* and *Berlingske* take up third and fourth place, closely followed by *Ekstra Bladet* in fifth place (ibid). *Børsen* only writes three articles relating to the case, while *Kristeligt Dagblad* has 52 articles despite the two newspapers having a similar number of weekly readers. I attribute this low occurrence in *Børsen* to it being a business and stock market-focused newspaper. Thus, it should perhaps rather be a testament to the importance of this case, that the case is mentioned. *Information* is a leftist newspaper, primarily known for its academic approach to news production (Hjarvard 207, p. 31),

and *Weekendavisen* would be the right-leaning counterpart, published weekly rather than daily. *Avisen Danmark* is a relatively young newspaper which focuses on delivering news from the provinces in Denmark (Rasmussen, 2021). Despite this focus, they have produced articles about the women and their children in the camps in Syria.

4.1.3 Claims-makers

In this case, the media's role is central to how these women and children living in the camps are constructed and thus function as claims-makers. Loseke (2010) points to the dual role of media as both primary and secondary claims-makers, which is also evident in this case. In analytical articles and letters-from-the-editor, journalists and editors give their understanding of the case and thus actively make claims about this case as a social problem (ibid p. 41). The other role media serves is a secondary claims maker. This is a different social problems work in which news media package claims from other claims-makers into stories. In this case, the newspapers package claims from; the Danish government and parliament, the women the case is about, their lawyers, university experts, and different expert agencies, including the Danish Intelligence and Security Police and the Danish Health Authority. Furthermore, letters-to-the-editor and debate pieces are very prevalent in Danish newspapers regarding the case often written by the readers of the newspapers; thus, as secondary claims-makers, newspapers choose what is relevant (published) about the case and what is not – a speech by the prime minister to the parliament is never published in full in the articles, but reportable (Labov, 2006) extracts.

4.1.4 The Danish Intelligence and Security Police's reports

While this paper focuses on the Danish national printed newspaper's construction of these women, the initial analysis of the data corpus made it evident that these media rely heavily on security reports regarding the terror threat towards Denmark entitled *Vurderingen af Terrortruslen mod Danmark* (The Evaluation of the Terror Threat towards Denmark), henceforth VTD. Newspapers often refer to these reports either by direct quotations or indirect references to the reports. To highlight the role of VTD in the construction of the women through the media, an analysis of the reports is analytically beneficial. The VTD reports are publicly available through PET.dk in both Danish and English.

The VTD security reports are published by *Politiets Efterretningstjeneste* (the Danish Security and Intelligence Service) or PET for short. This entity serves the role of: "Identifying, preventing, investigating and countering threats to freedom, democracy and security in Danish society" (PET.dk). Thus, the role of PET is to construct national security narratives as well as narratives about how to solve established national security issues. It is important to note that from the social constructionist perspective, PET is *not* a player outside the constructionist field of claims-making but is instead high up on what Becker (1967) refers to as the: "hierarchy of credibility" (p. 241, see also Loseke 2010, p 35). Thus, PET's analysis of this case is perceived as having higher credibility than people who are not perceived to be experts on Danish national security.

4.2 Method

Two methodological approaches will assist each other in this paper. Thematic Analysis will serve to tease out patterns and themes in the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006), meaning all the collected, including newspaper articles from all ten national newspapers and the Evaluation of Terror Threat Reports by Danish Intelligence and Security Police's (PET). This is followed by narrative analysis in order to interpret the cultural logic behind these themes and patterns (Smith 2005). The data was organized into a Zotero attaching information about the individual article such as newspaper, date and writer, making it possible to efficiently track article occurrence in the individual newspapers, time periods the case has particular interest to the press, narrative developments over time and reoccurring claims-makers. The thematic coding was likewise done in Zotero using the tag function to register themes as well as the highlighting-note function to underline the themes.

In Thematic Analysis, a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some type of patterned response (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8). Thus, the themes must be reoccurring in the data corpus. Thematic analysis is used to tease out the content of the articles into relevant themes. It is likewise through these themes that it is possible to tease out binary codes (Smith, 2005), which construct the women as citizens withholding legal rights or dangerous terrorists – the ultimate villain. Narrative analysis, inspired by (Sandberg (2016) and Presser (2018), is used methodologically to analyze how narratives relate to the past and predict consequences for the future and how the narratives place responsibility, define actors

and give them motivation (Smith, 2005, p.18). Analyzing how narratives are sequenced gives an understanding of how actions (to repatriate or not) are meaningful through normative cultural codes. In extension, the concepts of 'things unsaid' (Presser, 2018) and Tropes (Sandberg, 2016) are essential in analyzing the construction of the women, as what goes unsaid is both knowledge taken for granted and widely understood as well as deeply encultured. This is especially evident in the depiction of the physical appearance of the women. Thus, these concepts highlight the tacit understanding and the pre-established narratives about them.

4.3 Limitations & Ethics

News Media that exclusively publish online are excluded from this study for reasons of time confinements. These media include but are not limited to, *D.R.*, *TV2* and *Altinget*. Regional Media are likewise excluded, Furthermore, social media have been excluded due to time confinements. Further research into this case would benefit from analysis of all these medias and perhaps calls for cross disciplinary cooperation between the social sciences and computer science. It should further be noted that while extensive investigation into the media interest in the Danish women believed to have joined ISIS has been conducted, it is possible that relevant articles have been missed. Parliament debates, T.V. debates, and various types of reports (except for the VTD) are excluded as primary data but remain tacitly in the media narratives. It is however not essential to understand the details of these reports in order to understand how these women are constructed and furthermore how the media uses these reports in constructing this case as a social problem. It should likewise be noted that many of these reports are not available in full to the public as they concern sensitive information about the children and what can broadly be phrase 'matters of national security'.

4.3.1 Anonymity

All the women and their children are presented anonymously in this case for several reasons. Firstly, a name ban currently exists regarding all the women. Denmark is, however, a relatively small country even if names and pictures of people involved in the case are anonymized. The background information presented by the newspapers could make it possible to identify them, especially considering that international newspapers have published several of the names and pictures relating to some of the women. While the press will often refer to the women by their non-

Danish nationality in the construction (Danish-Other Nationality) I will refrain from indicating which other specific nationality these women have as this is included in the name ban regarding a few of the women. The so-called ethnic Danish (white) women are referred to by media in this manner. As constructs of 'race' is of analytical interest to this paper, the media construction of the women as racialized will be addressed analytically (section 5.3.9) Thus, the identity marker of perceived race will be highlighted in the cases the print media make such a construct. This does of course make it easier to identify the people involved, however, this paper will not go beyond description not already publicly available and only highlight these identity markers when of analytical importance.

4.3.2 Positionality

This paper takes the social constructionist perspective and especially Loseke' (2010) concepts of claims-making and claims-makers. I am fully aware that when picking the data (and what I choose not to analyze) is creating a narrative and thus, I am myself a type of secondary claims-maker. However, the goal of this thesis is not to solve the question of how to solve this social problem and its source, but rather to analyze how this became a social problem and perhaps encourage people who are in the power to solve social problems to think critically of their own role in constructing social problems and their solutions. While objectivity is the goal, it is impossible to obtain in social research as the researcher exists in the same world as what is researched. This has both its benefits and potential pitfalls. On the beneficial side, my position as both Danish speaking and raised in the Danish political context. On the backside, I'm raised in the context potentially blindsiding me.

5. Results

The newspapers' constructions of the women have unfolded chronologically and can be divided into three narratives. Firstly, the early narratives of 2014-2018. They are few and construct the women as 'good girls'. Secondly, for a short period in early 2019, the women are constructed as 'wives of foreign fighters'; lastly, a betrayal narrative beginning in March 2019 dominates the mediascape. The following analysis follows this chronological development and investigations how the case of Danish women believed to have joined ISIS becomes a social problem depending on deeply encultured master narratives.

5.1 'Good girls' and 'ISIS-brides' (2014 to ca. 2018)

The 'good girl' narrative is a trope which plays into a moral discourse about respectable femininity (Griffin, 2004) and relies on what Crane and colleagues refer to as "the four boxes of gendered sexuality" (Crane et al., 2013). These four boxes consist of two dichotomies. Firstly, the dichotomy of 'good girl' versus 'bad girl' (ibid, p. 2) in which sexualization corrupts the 'good girl' into a sexualized bad girl (Jackson & Goddard, 2015, p. 242), and secondly, their dangerously close association with the other dichotomy, the 'sweet guy' versus 'bad guy' (Crane et al., 2013, p. 2). It is this 'good girl' versus 'bad girl' dichotomy and the sexualization of these women into ISIS brides which dominates the initial narratives about women who leave their families, their success and their innocence to join ISIS.

Ekstra Bladet published the first article about Danish women joining ISIS. It depicted two young women in their early twenties from the Danish city, Aarhus, who died a few months after travelling to Syria to join ISIS (Nielsen et al. 2014). The article announces that: "The stream of young Danes who change their school for holy war is not just men. According to [...] the police 2 out of 27 Syria-travelers from Aarhus are women" (ibid). The article points to a change in the previous assumption that participation in violent, militant, Islamist organizations, underlined in this article by the holy war trope, has been men only. The accompanying picture further emphasizes the gloomy story. The photo, larger than the article text itself, depicts a group of women in oversized military jackets, machine guns and snipers, black niqab and the infamous ISIS headband by the ruins of what could have been an apartment building with a small shop underneath. The two Danish

girls the article text is about are not actually depicted in the photo. The photo is a visual representation of a type these two women are understood to be part of, rather than the individual girl (Loseke 2010, p. 17).

In the article text, one of the Danish women is constructed in a narrative depicting specific actions arranged in a meaningful chronological order (Smith, 2005) into a newsworthy story. (Ibid, p. 18). The unexpected participation of two women from Aarhus in a violent, militant, Islamist organization, such as ISIS, is deemed reportable (Labov, 2006). It is, however, not enough to report their departure. The article needs to line out the pre-conditions (Labov, 2006), causing the women to leave for ISIS to construct a newsworthy narrative about women's participation in ISIS. One of the women is described as a "well-adjusted" student (Nielsen et al. 2014) who got involved with a notorious mosque and changed her way of dressing which, implicitly narrated, resulted in the reportable event, her leaving for Syria to join ISIS (ibid). The girl's father explains his daughter's departure as a result of a sudden change: "all of a sudden, she became very religious in her way speaking and in her conduct. Just like her clothes changed" (ibid). This article draws on the trope narrative form (Sandberg, 2016). These tropes reveal what: "in society is taken for granted" (Sandberg, 2016, p. 156). Thus, the journalist nor the father needs to specify what type of clothes she changed to. The accompanying picture of women in face veils, military jackets and machine guns highlights this trope. It is again unnecessary to describe the type of clothes she used to wear as a 'well-adjusted good girl'. Drawing on Loseke's concept of typification, the reader does not need to know the specific woman to understand how she dresses. Pre-established cultural ideas already exist about what a religious, perhaps even radicalized, Muslim women looks like, as well as the contrasting 'well-adjusted good girl'.

In an article in November of that same year, *Politiken* tells the story of two 16-year-old teenage sisters who shopped the latest fashion and took selfies (Skjoldager & Sheik, 2014). The sequencing of narratives begins with the statement that: "they were both hardworking, dreamt about becoming doctors, and their grades placed them in the top 10 per cent of the students" (ibid). Like the two women from Aarhus in the previous article, the two sisters are described as quintessential 'good girls' in the form of high achieving students with dreams of becoming doctors, according to the family. Then they undergo an unspecified online radicalization understood as the cause for them

to leave their homes for Syria. Unlike the women from Aarhus described in the previous article, people close to them did not notice any difference in their demeanour: “[T]heir astonished classmates can confirm that [name] and her [...] sister have chosen a completely different way of life compared to them just days after having posted a selfie of herself [...] on social media]” (ibid). In this connection, clothing functions as a trope telling a story of the contrast between the fashionable (= western style) ‘good girl’ typification and the sudden unexpected change to the ISIS bride type. An illustration accompanies the article that the journalists claim is inspired by a picture one of the sisters has uploaded on social media.



Illustration of the two sisters by Fotokollage (2014)

The newspaper claims that the illustration depicts the sisters: “clad in a burqa holding an AK-47 in front of the black flag of the Islamic State” (ibid). The newspaper makes the common mistake of mislabeling the black attire as a burqa² (Piela, 2021, p. 1) rather than the three-layered niqab covering the entire face, which is depicted in the illustration. The trope is efficient in that it places the narratives about the two sisters into a master narrative about Muslim women in Denmark, which includes several discussions about the possibilities of a so-called burqa ban and the 2018 legislation banning the face covering (Daverkosen, 2019). In the Danish context, face veiling has been constructed by politicians and debaters as oppressive to women. The background material for the law reveals a political understanding of face veils as a clothing item that is forced on the wearer

² The burqa is a, usually blue, full body and face covering with a grille obscuring the eyes common in Afghanistan, but rarely seen but often depicted in the west (Piela, 2021, p. 1) following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 by the United States and several allies including Denmark (McLarney 2009)

(Barfod, 2009) and a symbol of the oppression of women (Langballe et al., 2017). This understanding places Muslim women's face coverings in contrast to what is considered progressive Danish values of feminism and egalitarianism (Brems et al., 2014, p. 83).

5.1.1 Societal Blame

While it is established that young women leave for Syria, presumably to join ISIS, the question remains. Who is to blame for the 'good girl' turning bad? Previous research suggests a strong master narrative of suppression of Muslim women by Muslim men (e.g., Andreasson 2016; Hervik 2002). This narrative is likewise evident of the construction of the Niqab as a symbolic tool used by (Muslim) men to oppress women, as indicated above. However, in the case of Danish women leaving for ISIS, public debater and PhD in Psychology, Mustafa K. Topal suggests a different culprit. In his debate piece for Jyllands-Posten, he argues that it is Danish feminists who have failed their 'Muslim sisters'. The debate piece is entitled "Danish feminists have failed – young immigrant women are more interested in religious values and lifestyle than Danish women's freedom" (Topal, 2017). Topal makes a clear contrast between two typifications of women.

On the one hand, 'young immigrant women' and on the other, 'Danish women'. The 'immigrant woman' typification he constructs as a "new generation of *immigrant women from Denmark* [who] choose to join ISIS and observe a religious lifestyle isolated from the Danish" (ibid, my emphasis). Arguably Topal has made an oxymoron in calling women from Denmark immigrants. However, in the Danish context, the narrative is entirely meaningful as Topal highlights the contrasts between the Danish ingroup values of 'freedom' and, ultimately, the outgroup un-Danish values of not only terrorism but also religious lifestyle (Hervik, 2002).

However, Topal is not blaming 'immigrants' or use the famous tale of failed immigration (Rytter & Pedersen, 2013), often used within the discourse of Muslim women. He is blaming the Danish feminists for: "the lack of a feminists fight for immigrant women [.. that ensures] that [immigrant women from Denmark] participate actively in Danish society" (Topal, 2017). The oxymoron becomes meaningful as the 'immigrant' status does not pertain to legal status but as a status of being a cultural outsider, foreign to proper 'Danishness'. Furthermore, this construction of 'Danish' values as opposed to and better than 'Muslim' values capture Edward Said's concept of orientalism, as the west above the orient in a post-9/11 hyper-focus on Muslims and Islam (Samieci,

2010, p. 1146). This neo-orientalist notion places Danish values of egalitarianism, secularism, and non-religiosity as superior. This notion likewise dismisses the agency and autonomy of the Muslim women themselves in actively choosing religiosity, which Topal constructs as having close links with ISIS.

In an update to one of *Ekstra Bladet*'s 'good girl' turned ISIS articles, the 'radicalization' of the 'good girl' is highlighted (Pedersen & Kronø, 2016). Another outside force is constructed as the culprit for both young men and women leaving for ISIS. In the article spokesperson for the Kurdish party PYD in Denmark, Ibis Tas holds 'Quran schools' responsible: "They call themselves Quran School, but they are places where they brainwash the youth to believe that everything is great in the Islamic state" (Ibis Tas in Pedersen and Kronø, 2016). The teachings of these 'schools' are discredited by their placement within apartments as opposed to, e.g., Muslim community centres underling that the closed confinement of a private apartment indicates that something illicit is being taught that cannot handle the day of light. While male oppression of women, feminism and 'illicit Quran schools' all make clear and different assertions as to what turns 'good girls' towards ISIS, they share the common element of disregarding the women's own willingness and agency in joining ISIS. These three constructions of blame are drawn from previously established master narratives about (Muslim) men's oppression of women, shown in the political debate on the niqab as a symbol opposing western feminism. These are powerful narratives which, this paper argues, are essential factors in the creation of a new trope-typification – The ISIS bride.

5.1.2 Duped and Groomed Victims

Journalist Thomas Svensson writes an article in *Ekstra Bladet* in which he states: "heaps of Western women travel to Syria to become jihad-wives" (Svensson, 2015). This construction of the women as wives/brides is based on an orientalist trope (Azeez 2019, p. 115) which understands the women's motivation for joining as the prospect of marriage. In a different article the year prior, the 15 Danish women who are believed to have joined ISIS are constructed as 'good girls from good families' who have: "left their famil[ies] and travelled to Syria to marry jihad warriors from the terror organization ISIS" (Pihl-Andersen, 2014). This construction not only highlights the fall of the 'good girl' into the arms of the 'bad boy' but also alludes to the different motivational frames for men, that of being a warrior to women's wish for marriage rather than armed combat. In this

way, the men are constructed using a ‘war on terror’ trope (Speckhard, 2009, p. 93.) and create a new trope about the naïve and passive Muslim women: “attracted to, or groomed by, bad boy Muslim extremists (Shaban, 2020). In this manner, the women are understood as victimized by ISIS rather than active members of the organization.

The construction of the women as victims of men and naivete is not only found in newspaper articles. The Danish Security and Intelligence Police, PET, have, between 2014 and 2018, published the Evaluation of the Terror Threat to Denmark report, VTD. Danes leaving for ISIS have taken up a considerable part of these reports. Furthermore, extra reports targeting the relationship between Danish residents/citizens and ISIS have been published in addition to the VTD reports, highlighting PET’s concern about the threat of Danish ISIS members. Newspapers often refer to the VTD reports for ‘facts’ about the case. It is not odd for the media to rely heavily on the reports from PET as they have the status as experts on the security interests of Denmark and their function as a central expert claims-maker in this case. This expert status gives them a high rank on what Loseke calls the hierarchy of credibility (Loseke, 2010, p. 36) in their function as security professionals. This credibility, however, is not entirely stable, as will be evident in section 5.3.6. One finding is especially interesting in the VTD reports from 2014 to 2018. While women are spoken off in connection to Evaluating the Terror Threat against Denmark by PET, they are commented on as having a spousal and parental role. While the 2015 VTD report only confirms that women have left Denmark (PET, 2015a, p. 4), an additional security report by PET states that women primarily travel: “with/or in order to join their boyfriends/spouses, while a few may have left intending to find a spouse in Syria/Iraq (PET, 2015b). This places the men as the active part in going to Syria and women as the passive follower. If women may have left without a partner, the prospect of a husband is considered the motivational force for going. The 2016 report does not make any claims about motivational force but only updates the number of women in the area (PET, 2016, p. 5). As previously mentioned, the 2017 and 2018 reports state that women are increasingly active in planning terror (PET, 2017, p. 1). However, it is clear from those same reports that PET understands the main responsibility of women within constructions of ‘traditional gender roles’: “Some of the departed women have brought children to the conflict zone, and some have had children there” (PET, 2018, p 6).

Furthermore, women are constructed to have a potential: “radicalizing effect on others, including their children (PET, 2017, p. 5). The logic PET presents understands the women as the followers of men as they join ISIS and the children follow their mothers, making the women responsible as mothers. The construction of women as parents is thus highly gendered in that only women are narrated as having brought children with them. Men are not described in their function as parents or husbands. Only women are considered to have a radicalizing effect on children, despite the construction of men as radicalized and active fighters capable of performing terror (PET, 2018, p. 6). Thus, while women are increasingly constructed as individuals going to Syria and Iraq, they are, in the same breath, characterized as having supporting roles as mothers and wives carrying the sole responsibility for bringing children into the situation. The ‘ISIS-bride’ narrative thus is deeply founded not only in the newspaper constructions of the women but likewise by the Danish Security and Intelligence Police.

While there were no interviews with Danish women in the Danish newspapers from 2014 to 2018, the newspapers sometimes highlighted the women’s self-constructions—a construction which counters the ISIS-bride narrative. In the article about the two 16-year-old teenagers (pictured in niqabs and AK-47 machine guns above), the journalist uses a quote by one of the young women posted on her social media account, which counters the ISIS bride construction. The quote reads: “Thanks to God... I am 16 years old and among the *female warriors* at Dawlat al-Islam” (Skjoldager & Sheik, 2014, my emphasis). The young woman constructs herself as a female warrior indicating agency, autonomy, and danger a par with the male badass rather than the passive ISIS bride. In her study of British media narratives about women who join ISIS, Martini (2018) finds a similar clash between the media narratives about the women and the women’s own narratives about their motivations (ibid, p. 467). She refers to this as gendered neo-orientalism (ibid, p. 459). This neo-orientalist construction of the women relies on the gendered, previously mentioned narratives which understand Muslim women’s reasoning for joining ISIS as non-political and almost without agency entirely (ibid, p 469). This could indicate a discrepancy in how some women understand their choice to leave for Syria and how they are constructed in the media.

5.1.3 A Localized (Social) Problem

Interestingly, the newspaper interest was very limited in the five years of the ISIS-bride construction. A total of 35 articles were produced mentioning Danish women joining ISIS, the majority of which treated this story as secondary to non-Danish cases of western women joining ISIS. The articles in which the Danish women are the main character are entirely absent in 2017 and 2018. This paper argues that the Danish women leaving for ISIS are not constructed as a widespread social problem but rather a localized social problem in which the constructed victims, the women, and villains, the men, belong to a minority group in Denmark. This is indicated not only by the low frequency of articles but likewise by the construction of the women victims rather than active ISIS members. The construction of the women as a social problem began taking shape in 2018 and early 2019. However, the construction of women as passive persists.

5.2 ISIS-Wives (January 2019 – April 2019)

While the Danish women have been largely absent from media narratives in 2017 and especially in 2018 in narratives about ISIS, they somewhat reappear when collision forces bombings of ISIS stronghold cause people who live in the area, including men and women associated with ISIS, to flee. Several thousand people were arrested, and while men were placed in prison facilities, women were put into camps along with children (Hauch, 2020). However, while the women reappear, the focus on men remains: “More than 800 fighters from [ISIS], 700 of their wives and 1500 children are, [...], currently in captivity in Syria and Iraq” (Haislund & Albers, 2019). In terms of a widespread social problem, the men who are the main character are a threat in the construction of male (ISIS) fighters. The issue at hand was established by U.S. president Trump when he made a statement on 16th February 2019 through his now suspended Twitter account. In the tweet, he urges his European allies to repatriate the 800 or else: “The alternative is not a good one in that we will be forced to release them” (Trump, 2016). Trump frames the release of the 800 (male) foreign fighters as a necessary evil he is forced to conduct if European countries do not repatriate them. Thus, the pending release constituted an (unavoidable) widespread wrong that European countries (human actions) need to change by route of repatriation – before it is too late. The women are primarily constructed as dependents to male fighters rather than an independent security issue. They are accessories in a master narrative about Islamic terrorism. However, the social problem

in demand of a solution is instead the 800 male fighters and secondarily their families, including the women as wives. When analyzing the articles from January 2019 until the newspapers can confirm the presence of Danish women (and their children) in the camps in April 2019 have primarily been about well-known and named male fighters such as Jacob el-Ali, Said Mansour and Ahmed el-Haj. These men have been charged with joining a terror organization (Lingren, 2019). When the U.S. president calls for the repatriation of 800 European foreign fighters, this narrative is also about the three named men. Thus, the discussion of the repatriation of Danish citizens starts with the men.

5.2.1 No to Repatriation of Men

Jacob el-Ali (and others) were put on remand in absentia after pictures of el-Ali circulated of him posing with decapitated heads in Syria. Furthermore, a video (presumably) of Ahmed el-Haj allegedly shooting targets at prominent Danes, including MP for the Conservative party, Naser Khader, Cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and three other prominent Danes circulated the news stream (Johansen, 2013). El-Haj was likewise held on remand in absentia and charged according to the Danish terror laws (source). The symbolic value of target shooting at these men is hardly a coincidence. Kurt Westergaard became famous for depicting Islam's prophet Mohammed with a bomb in a turban. Rasmussen was the prime minister responsible for invading Muslim majority countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, in a U.S.-led coalition. Naser Khader is a controversial politician known for his critical positions on Islam and his conversion from Islam to Christianity. The video described all six prominent Danes as enemies of Islam.

Berlingske posted a double-sided article (Lingren, 2019) with a still frame from the video depicting 4 Danish men, allegedly including al-Haj, positioned on a hill of dried grass, guns in hand, dressed in shemaghs scarves, dark clothes, one in camouflage. The man, who is allegedly el-Haj, is wearing a black headband with the common Islamic statement لا اله الا الله (There is no other god than God) often found in everyday Muslim life, such as calligraphy and the call to prayer. However, featured on a headband, the symbolic meaning is different. Variations of this headband are commonly used by violent 'jihadists' in martyrdom videos (Baines et al., 2010, p. 476), while Hamas suicide bombers are known for wearing green bandanas with various Quranic texts (Berko & Erez, 2006,

p. 614) including women (Shahadi, 2008, p. 77). Islamic State has used a black version of the headband, prominently featured in propaganda material such as the organization's magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* (Munk, 2018, p. 228). The men portrayed in the still frame in *Jyllands-Posten* use culturally meaningful symbols. They construct themselves as capable of violence, dangerous and a badass, understood as a person who cast chaos into the lives of other people: Katz argues that the badass "may dramatize a sadistic pleasure in violence to suggest that chaos is natural to him and, therefore, that it is always his potential" (Katz, 1988, p. 103) The potential for chaos is ever present in the constructions of these men, even by experts who advocate for their repatriation experts (e.g. Bastrup, 2019, p. 6 *Politiken*). The construction of the 800 men as terrorists is rather stable regardless of the claims-makers position on the matter of their repatriation.

Furthermore, the men on the hill construct themselves within a discourse of 'Militant Islamism' as they frame themselves as defenders of Islam utilizing guns. The issue of repatriation thus starts with the denial of repatriation of men of the 'terrorist' typification, but what about the women? The men are a previous well-established social problem of 'violent Islamist terrorism'. In comparison, the role of women is less set in stone. It was previously established that these women have been 'good girls' victimized into 'ISIS brides'. The newspapers no longer tell stories about 'good girl' victimization but rather the role and duties of an ISIS wife, usually understood in terms of housewife and motherhood.

5.2.2 The Peripheral Role of Danish Women in Islamist Terrorism

While the ISIS-bride construction of Danish women has re-emerged after two years of relative silence, the personal stories about the 'Good Girl' are entirely absent. An article in *Politiken* in late February 2019 poses the question to several experts: "What is Denmark going to do with IS-fighters' wives if they want to go home?" (Nielsen & Skjoldager, 2019) In an answer, Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, chief of the Institute for Strategies at the Danish Defense academy, makes claims about the roles of women in the caliphate: "the majority have probably been stay-at-home mothers for the IS-fighters [...]" (Dalgaard-Nielsen in Nielsen & Skjoldager, 2019). Interestingly, the role of motherhood is not framed in terms of the children but rather as a role taken on for the sake of male fighters. The article continues to establish the role of women as mothers in drawing on the 2018 VTD report by the Danish Security and Intelligence Police making women responsible for bringing to or having children in Syria/Iraq (PET, 2018, p. 4). De-radicalization expert Fraser-

Rahim, in *Politiken*, constructs the women as: “accompanying women” (Fraser-Rahim in Jerichow, 2019) in need of repatriation (ibid). PhD at the Danish Defense Academy, Marc Schack, constructs the women in a parenthesis, both figuratively and literally. In his debate piece in *Berlingske*, he states that: “[a central part of the] debate about Danish IS-fighters (*as well as their possible wives and children*) have been their legal rights” (Schack, 2019, my emphasis). Security experts, such as Schack, both figuratively and literally bracket the role of women in their focus on men. However, the secondary role of wives and mothers ceases within a few months, and a new narrative about the women is constructed, relying on a ‘betrayal’ master narrative.

5.3 Betrayal Narratives (April 2019 – onwards)

Betrayal narratives have a deep Abrahamian and predominantly Christian tradition. The Bible is filled with stories of betrayal. Christianity’s most notorious traitor, Judas Iscariot, betrayed his lord and saviour with a kiss. According to the Bible, this kiss led to the crucifixion of Christ (John 18:5). In fictional literature, betrayal narratives are well-used. This is the case of the characters Lord and Lady Macbeth murdering their guest in the iconic play *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1606). The alchemist-obsessed Victor Frankenstein betrays his creation in the famous gothic novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly (1818). On a more recent note, the 1990’s octology *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 1996), which was turned into the most watched tv-series in the world under the name *Game of Thrones* (D’Adario 2017), in which characters betray each other for eight seasons for power, love and money. Betrayal narratives thus have deep roots in western society and are heavily popularized.

While betrayal narratives have been largely absent in the construction of the victimized ‘ISIS-bride’, a narrative change happens in the spring and summer of 2019, when the Danish media can confirm the presence of Danish women and children in the two camps, al-hūl and al-roj in Northern Syria. The newspaper *Politiken* first confirmed that 5 Danish women and 8 Danish children resided in the camps in April 2019 (Prasz, 2019a). Following this discovery, the newspapers shift their focus away from male foreign fighters and the women and children as a mere side-effect of male violence to a worrisome story about deteriorating conditions in the camps with a high mortality rate among young children (ibid). General secretary for Danish Red Cross, Anders Ladekarl, states that: “[the camp] is close to hell on earth” (Ladekarl in Prasz, 2019b). This discovery instigates

new stories about the women, and the formulation of a widespread social problem about the women is starting to take shape. *Politiken's* journalist, Frank Hvilsom, summarizes the situation in an article that accords to Loseke's definition of a (widespread) social problem. The first criteria of a social problem state that claims-makers have to assert that something is wrong – and something is indeed wrong: “eight children are currently stuck in a refugee camp [...] in which the conditions have been described as ‘hell on earth’” (Hvilsom, 2019). Secondly, this is a part of a widespread problem, the second criterion in a social problem, as: “[the Danish women and children are among the] 72000 women and children detained [in the camps]” (ibid). Thirdly, this condition must be changed. Other claims-makers quickly join journalist Hvilsom in his article, including the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Danish faction of Save the Children, which state that the government: “must clarify the situation in the camps [...] as children are innocent.” (ibid). This statement likewise fulfils the fourth condition of a social problem as it places the government as the responsible entity to evaluate the situation and rectify it.

Danish newspapers have actively claimed that this is a problem for the government to solve, raising the pressure for the government to respond to the claims made by the newspapers. The following months are primarily marked by governmental silence on the matter, with several articles ending with the statement: “neither the Ministry of Foreign affair nor the Ministry of Justice wants to comment on the case” (e.g., Søndergaard, 2019a). It was not until September 2019 that the government answered the claims by presenting the official government line of non-repatriation. *Politiken* summarises the government's statement: “the Danish women who are residing in the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps should not make any hopes of the government helping them back home to Denmark” (Prasz, 2019c). Not long after the government's official line was published, the government initiated a new proposal for changing the citizenship laws, which aimed to prevent children born to Danish parents in Iraq and Syria from obtaining Danish citizenship at birth. While the law proposal is a new initiative by the social democratic government, the notion itself is not new, nor is the rhetoric.

5.3.1 They have Turned Their Backs

Minister of Justice Nick Hækkerup states in the consultation presenting the official government line that: “these people, who left Denmark to join IS[IS], have *turned their backs on us*. They have

joined a fight, and thus, foreign fighters are unwanted in Denmark” (Hækkerup, Prasz?) Hækkerup is constructing the people who have left Denmark for ISIS as betrayers of the collective ‘us’. While this betrayal narrative is repeated multiple times by the social democratic government, its origin is the previous VLAK government’s Immigration and Integration minister, Inger Støjberg: “Their parents have turned their backs on Denmark, so there is no reason for their children to become Danish citizens” (Støjberg, in Haislund, 2019b). This statement is, like in the Social Democratic case, made in a press release in connection to a law proposal in February 2019 to restrict the right to citizenship for children of Danish parents born in a so-called conflict zone. This proposal would result in children born in these regions by a Danish parent not automatically being granted Danish citizenship (Haislund, 2019b). While the law was never passed during the VLAK government, the Social Democratic government, established in June 2019, picked up the law proposal and its rhetoric again in October that same year. This time the laws passed, resulting in several changes. The law made it possible for the Ministry of Integration and Immigration to administratively revoke the citizenship of dual citizens of people who have travelled to Syria to join ISIS. Citizenship can be administratively revoked without the subject being convicted of a crime (Indfødsretsloven, 2019, §8B stk. 3-5). The parliament passed a law similar to the previous government’s proposal in late January the following year. This law removed the right for children to have Danish citizenship if born in a conflict zone regulated by the Danish penal code §114 j stk. 3 (commonly known as the Danish terror laws), if their parents are there illegally, i.e. as foreign fighters (indfødsretsloven 2019, § 1 stk 2).

The change in citizenship law is criticized by the Institute for Human Rights, Danish Red Cross, Amnesty International and other NGOs, as well as different law unions, accusing the government of letting the children suffer the crimes of their parents. One is *Retspolitisk Forening*, an association that functions as a non-governmental watchdog on law production. The union compares this type of law-making to the Old Testament: [this is the first time since the establishment of the Danish constitution in] 1849 that the Old Testament principle that the children inherit the sins of the father has determined children’s legal status (Holm, 2019). Another concern posted by these organizations and journalists in *Weekendavisen*, Røskva Würtz, is the risk of children becoming stateless against Denmark’s commitment to: “prevent people becoming stateless and protecting children’s rights” (Würtz, 2019). The social democratic and the VLAK government constructs people who have left for ISIS as betrayers. Thus, a betrayal construction is

used to justify legal changes in citizenship law. In terms of constructing the women in the camps as an independent social problem, the social democratic Minister of Justice, Hækkerup, makes a diagnostic frame of the social problem. He constructs the ‘foreign fighter’, male and female, as a matter of the betrayal of individuals. The task of the government is thus to protect Denmark from these individuals and their children. Two measures are used to secure this. Firstly, by taking a stance of non-repatriation, the culprit is physically kept away from entering Denmark. Secondly, by preventing children born to these Danish ‘foreign fighters’ from the right to citizenship – legal membership of the Danish nation-state.

The proposal became law after modifications aimed at preventing statelessness. The winter of 2019/2020 is marked by media attention to the repatriation of a less than one-year-old Danish boy who has lost his parents in Syria (e.g., Bloch 2019) and several debate pieces and letters to the editors demanding the repatriation of all children (e.g., Weihe, 2019). However, government statements are largely absent from the newspaper’s case depiction. 2020 is marked by a general media silence on the matter, with only a handful of articles each month. This relative silence is especially evident from March 2020, coinciding with Denmark's nationwide lockdown and changing restrictions. This paper argues that this unprecedented event has had an overshadowing impact on the news scape removing the newspaper focus away from the case of the Danish women and their children in the Syrian camps (SSI,2020)

5.3.2 Repatriation without Mother

Several events from late December 2020 to the spring of 2021 regarding the case reach newspapers' attention. In January, Danish Broadcasting, *DR* and newspaper *Ekstra Bladet* reported that a 4-year-old girl had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. *Ekstra Bladet* claims that the Ministry of Foreign affairs, Jeppe Kofod, ordered the chief physician at the Center for Visitation and Diagnostics in Copenhagen and medical expert to the Danish Board of Health, Birgitte Moltke, to evaluate the situation. She claims: “[both the four-year-old and the sibling] shows signs of psychological disease/suffering and have symptoms such as anxiety, heightened state of alert, trouble sleeping and night terrors” (Moltke cited in Khaja, 2021). This inconsistency between government policy and its health experts resulted in two separate political consultations in which Kofod was demanded to give an explanation. Shortly after, the minister is required in a

third consultation concerning what *Ekstra Bladet* frames as a: “hidden tightening [of Danish law] which demanded separating the parents from the children, if the children are [repatriated], leaving the women in the camps (Findalen et al. 2021). *Ekstra Bladet*’s narrative about the government countering health experts’ evaluations and the accusation of keeping law changes out of the public eye is a severe questioning of the government’s legitimacy as a claims-maker. When the government’s intention to repatriate the 4-year-old girl without her mother is made public, it triggers a response from the newspapers arguing for the repatriation of both mother and child. It likewise triggers a response from parties on the political right in the parliament who oppose the repatriation of the children (and especially the parents). The political right demands reassurance from the government that they are staying in line with their previous stance of non-repatriation. The demand is met with reassurance in a speech by the prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, in which she relies on the foreign fighter narrative.

5.3.3 Women as Foreign Fighters

Foreign Fighters are [...] unwanted in Denmark regardless of if they are mothers or fathers, and the government does not want to run any risks; we will not actively bring the parents, foreign fighters, to Denmark (Frederiksen et al., 2021)

In the reassurance speech in late February 2021, Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, highlighted that the government line remains the same, despite considering the repatriation of the 4-year-old girl without her mother. This is likewise the first time the government actively places women a par with men in terms of their status as ‘foreign fighters’. At the same time, the women continue to be framed as attached to someone else, in this case, their children. Frederiksen’s construction negates the ‘good girl’ victimhood narrative of the ISIS brides and ISIS-wife narrative by aligning the women with the men with the label ‘foreign fighters’, a label that indicates agency, violence and suspicious behaviour.

The women are still constructed as mothers; however, there is a change in how motherhood is framed prior to the establishment of the women as an independent widespread social problem. Motherhood was largely taken for granted in what Loseke refers to as a formula story, which are narratives about:” types of experiences involving distinctive types of characters”. (Loseke, 2010,

p. 89). As the women were previously a (side) character of a social problem about (male) terrorists, their character was shaped within this framework. The construction of these women has thus drawn from previous narratives and notions about these women, which have understood these women as serving supporting roles such as housework and childrearing (Vale, 2019). Likewise, these women can be constructed as victims of (Muslim) male oppression within this framework. Frederiksen's narrative negates the possibility of victimhood and a mere 'accessory' role by constructing an 'egalitarian' narrative in which both women and men are 'foreign fighters'. Thus, the women are constructed as active characters in the social problem of terrorism and its villains, the foreign (terrorist) fighter. The construction of the women as an active villain place this within a diagnostic frame (Loseke 2010, p. 59) about the condition 'terrorism' in which responsibility is to be placed, according to prime minister Frederiksen, on the individual 'parent terrorist fighter' not the government. Repatriation of terrorists, constructed as the ultimate betrayer of Danish society and 'Danish morals', is impossible as they have lost their moral rights to citizenship as alleged members of ISIS. It is interesting to note that the construction of the women as active 'foreign fighters' and passive mothers, wives and followers of men is likewise found in the security reports published by the Danish Intelligence and Security Police, PET in 2020 and 2021.

5.3.4 Gender Neutrality in Security Reports (VTD 2020-2021)

The Danish Intelligence and Security Police made two interesting changes in its formulation and presentation of their Evaluation of the Terror Threat to Denmark reports in 2020 and 2021. It should be noted in this connection that the 2019 report is not published until March 2020. The significance of this pertains to the Danish government rather than the PET and will be discussed in more detail in section 5.3.6. The first change in the VTD report is the visual presentation of the report. Before the 2020 report, the VTD was a plain PDF file without attention to graphical presentation with a simple white background with a standard font of black letters. The length of the reports has been between 6-10 pages. This changes in the 2020 report. This report is a 30-page long report with pictures, graphs, colours and highlighted quotations. An indication that PET is aware that the report is receiving increased public attention.

The second change has to do with the content of the report. As argued previously, the VTD has constructed the women as wives and mothers playing second fiddle to male foreign fighters rather

than fighters themselves. The 2020 VTD report opts for a more gender-neutral language. The previous construction of women as the primary parent responsible for introducing children to live in the self-proclaimed Caliphate (PET, 2018, p. 4) changes. PET now states, " Several *people* departed from Denmark, who brought their children to the conflict zone or have had children while there (VTD 2020, p. 15, my emphasis).

Furthermore, the term 'foreign fighter' is likewise introduced for the first time about both men and women (ibid p. 16). It is tempting to assume that the change to the gender-neutral language and the 'glossier' VTD report are a direct consequence of the public debate. However, this is not the most critical question in this connection. What is essential is that linguistic changes have happened concerning the people who left for Syria. Consequently, moving the passive mother closer to the violent foreign fighter construction and the male foreign fighter closer to parental responsibility.

It is not possible to establish the relationship between the gender-neutral construction of the 'foreign fighter' by the Danish Intelligence and Security Police and the government's use of the term. However, it could be an indicator that the case gained a broader and more public audience requiring a language of 'political correctness' reflecting a progressive understanding of gender by avoiding: "negative and offensive connotations [as well as] stereotyping" (O'Neill, 2011) of women and motherhood. While the newspapers agree on the construction of these women (and men), the diagnostic frame differs from prime minister Frederiksen's individualistic frame.

5.3.5 Legal Rights above Moral deterioration

"The mothers must return home to Denmark, and then the court will have to decide on their [alleged] actions" (Johanne Schmidt Nielsen in Dahlin, 2019).

General Secretary of the Danish faction of Save the Children and former leader of the far-left Danish party, *Enhedslisten* Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen, understands this as a straightforward case of repatriation in that the Danish court can process the women's cases. In terms of the diagnostic frame, Schmidt-Nielsen claims this to be a matter of social structure. While the women may (or may not) have committed a crime, these women still have legal rights as citizens. If the women are to be convicted for terrorism, they are *Danish* terrorists. It is primarily as a matter of legal rights that newspaper editors across the entire spectrum frame this social problem and its solutions.

Collignon, an editor for the traditionally centre-right newspaper *Berlingske*'s, urges readers to see past their own and the government's initial emotional response of horror. Instead, the focus should be turned to the citizenship contract as a legal matter that entails Danish responsibility to its citizens: "even the most unsympathetic of the type" (Collignon, 2019). The type(ification) Collignon refers to in this case resembles the construction of the women in Mette Frederiksen's reassurance speech. Collignon argues: "they have cursed Denmark and the democracy and committed atrocities in the name of the Islamic State. They may, likewise, still pose a terror threat" (ibid). Unlike the prime minister, Collignon gives two reasons for why these '(potential) terrorists' ought to be repatriated: "partly, we owe the victims of [ISIS...] a contribution to the restoration of justice. Partly, we must, as a state, take responsibility for Danish citizens [...]" (ibid). While Collignon does not exclude the terrorist typification, he constructs the 'Danish citizens' as a type that requires repatriation even if this person is the ultimate villain. On the other end of the newspaper spectrum is traditionally leftist newspaper *Information*. In a later from the editor, under the title "A citizen is a citizen" (Fjordbak-Trier, 2019), he concludes that: "the Danish state carries the responsibility for its citizens regardless of them being dangerous, horrible or politically despicable" (ibid). The editor of debate pieces, Marcus Rubin, for the traditionally centre-left newspaper, *Politiken*, concludes on the newspaper's front page that: "Citizenship cannot be *gradbøjet* (literally: conjugated) neither in the fight against terror." (Rubin, 2020). The conjugation Rubin is referring to is similar to *Information*'s statement about citizenship, rejecting that citizenship can be remodelled in order to, as Sociologist Sandra Mantu puts it: "oust [the state's] midst 'terrorist' citizen (Mantu 2018, p. 28). The newspapers use a structural diagnostic frame turning this into a social problem about the rights to legal citizenship for (potential) terrorist citizens, rather than following the governmental individual diagnostic frame of a behavioural 'flaw' in the 'foreign terrorist fighter-type. The media construction of the government is outside this paper's scope; however, it is interesting to note that the media constructs a narrative that questions the morality and legitimacy of the government and its claims. Thus, it is not only the women's morality and claims to 'proper Danish conduct' that is questioned.

5.3.6 Legitimacy and The Hierarchy of Credibility

As previously stated, *Ekstra Bladet* initiated a series of accusations against the government in December 2020 into the spring of 2021. The government is accused of withholding the 2019 Evaluations of the Terror Threat to Denmark Report by the Danish Intelligence and Security Police not only to the public but, likewise, the rest of the parliament (Findalen et al. 2020). The report was published in March 2020, conveniently, as *Ekstra Bladet* argues: “while Denmark was [a few days] into a corona lockdown” (ibid). The report states that the children do not pose a terror threat due to their young age (VTD 2020, p. 16), and the risk of radicalization of both the women and the children increases the longer they remain in the camps (VTD 2020, p 15). The VTD report constructs repatriation as the safer choice, countering the government line of not taking any risks by repatriating ‘foreign fighters’ (ibid). Thus, it becomes an issue for the government’s claims-making as it loses legitimacy.

The second issue relates to the first and concerns how the government responds to the accusations. The government places its position as a higher authority on what Loseke refers to as the hierarchy of credibility (Loseke 2010, p 36) than ‘constituted experts’ such as the Danish Intelligence and Security Police, comparable to MI5 in the UK and Homeland Security or the CIA in the USA. As a result of *Ekstra Bladet's* revelations, The Minister of Justice, Nick Hækkerup, is called into new consultations by *retsudvalget*, the Danish judicial committee. Members of parliament constitute this committee. It is tasked with processing legislative proposals within their field and parliamentary government control in the field of judicial policy (Folketinget, 2014). Hækkerup is called on in order to answer the dilemma of the incongruence between PET’s Evaluation of the Terror Threat Against Denmark (VTD) and the government’s political line of non-repatriation. In this consultation, Hækkerup attempts to place the government's position higher in the hierarchy of credibility as he states: “PET has made its assessment. That is fair enough. It just does not agree with the government's policy, and we are not forced to conform to what an agency might think” (Hækkerup, 2021). Reducing PET to a government agency is a speech act that actively downplays its role as an expert entity and tacitly highlights that PET refers to the Ministry of Justice, in which Hækkerup is the minister. Arguably, this is what philosophers Vincent Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard refer to in the definition of the post-factual society as reducing: “verified facts obtained by reliable methods [to] partisan contributors” (Hendricks & Vestergaard 2018, p. 105). Reducing PET to an agency is diminishing their expert security status high on the hierarchy of

credibility to a partisan contributor in the politicized debate with no more legitimacy than a political party.

The government's attempt to restructure the hierarchy of credibility is met with heavy critique from the newspapers (e.g., Kildegaard & Domino, 2021; Miles, 2021), which shakes the legitimacy of the government as a claims-maker. While the government and the newspapers both agree that a social problem is at hand, there is little consensus as to what exactly the social problem is about; hence the different diagnostic frames used. However, while the newspapers and the government do not agree on this being a social problem about 'moral Danish' or legal Danish citizenship, they both frame this within the master narrative of immigration politics.

5.3.7 Danish-Foreigners?

Despite the media, with noticeably few exceptions, countering the government construction of the women as not morally worthy of Danish citizenship, the issue of the women and their children in the camps in Syria is framed as a matter of immigration politics regardless of which political orientation the newspapers traditionally adhere. This 'immigration' narrative is likewise evident regardless of the placement of political parties on the left-right political spectrum, as will be argued shortly. However, before analysing the significance of framing the case within an immigration policy framework, it is essential to distinguish between two Danish ministries and their involvement in the case.

The Danish Foreign Ministry caretakes Danish interests outside of Denmark and thus also the case of Danish citizens in the camps in Syria. Political matters concerning the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are usually referred to as *Udenrigspolitik* (foreign policy), with Jeppe Kofod as the responsible minister during the Social Democratic government. Matters of *udlændingepolitik* (foreigners policy /immigration policy) are under the Ministry of Integration and Immigration, at this point, led by Mathias Tesfeye as its minister. Jeppe Kofod plays a vital role in the newspaper critique of the government regarding this case. The media and politicians frame this as *udlændingepolitik* (foreigners policy /immigration policy). However, the minister for integration and immigration rarely figures in the newspapers and rarely comments on the case. The question remains if the minister of immigration and integration is not held responsible for the case officially

nor by the media – how is this a matter of *udlændingepolitik*? The answer to this conundrum is legally simple and ‘culturally’ complex.

In terms of legality, the question is indeed simple – this is, legally, not a matter of ‘foreigners’ policy’. The women are not foreigners; they are, at least initially, legally Danish citizens. Regardless of legal status, the women are constructed as foreigners. This construction has legal consequences in the case of four of the seven women as they have their Danish citizenship administratively revoked by the Ministry of Integration and Immigration qua the law change in Danish citizenship law in 2019 (section 5.3.1). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the construction of the women as foreigners is consistent across the political and media spectrum regardless of opinion on the issue of repatriation or the women’s legal rights. A debate piece in traditionally centre-left leaning newspaper *Ekstra Bladet* criticizes not only the government but the entire parliament for: “the numerous oratorical attacks on the foreigners and particularity on the seven Danish mothers” (Pedersen, 2021) while the debate article is set out in defence of the legal rights of the women as Danish it, controversially, likewise constructs the women as a foreigner. *Berlingske*’s Collignon is making the same equation between Danish and foreigners, accusing prime minister Frederiksen of letting the children: “Rot in Syrian camps, as it will make her appear as an *udlænder* (foreigner) political hardliner” (Collignon, 2021). While some women administratively lose their citizenship, all the children remain Danish and are thus not legally foreigners. However, Collignon places this clearly as an issue of a political hardline in a matter of immigration policy. Center-left *Politiken* frames this case as another story about an “inhumane immigration policy” (Klarskov, 2021). Furthest out on the left on the traditional newspaper spectrum is *Information*, in which journalist and debater Lars Mogensen links what he analysis as a general immigration hardline in the Social Democratic party to the case of the women and children in the Syrian camps (Morgensen, 2021). The women are thus constructed in a complex mixture of Danish citizenship rights and foreignness. This narrative relies on the Master Narrative about Muslims-others in which it is possible to be legally Danish but culturally foreign.

5.3.8 Images of the Muslim Other

The possibility of being an immigrant and a Dane is a construction which recalls Topal’s debate piece (section 5.1.1), in which he constructs Danish (women) Muslims with a non-white ethnicity

as a foreigner. It is the same master narrative of ‘Muslim Otherness, which is a play on the construction of the issue of Danish (Muslim) women in the camps in Syria. The claims diagnosing this as a story of ‘foreigners’ draws from what Loseke refers to as cultural themes (Loseke 2010, p 63). These narrative constructions are deeply culturally embedded and create what people are expected to do (Halverson 2011, p. 7). Thus, this master narrative draws on a previously constructed notion of an immigrant-Muslim nexus and Muslim women. While interviews with the women themselves take up a relatively small part of the articles (7 articles), visual representations usually accompany the majority of articles written about the case, much like the first article written about ‘good girl’ turning ‘ISIS-brides’ by *Ekstra Bladet* (Section 5.1). In March 2021, Politiken posted an article entitled “overview: “here are the 7 women, 19 children and 2 men in the centre of a flaming hot debate” (Hergel, 2021); the photo accompanying the article was taken by Ivor Prickett of the New York Times (on the left). Although the article's title indicates that we are to be presented with the 7 Danish women, the photo is not of the women in question but rather a typ(ification) of these women. Broni’s graphic (on the right) accompanies a similar article in Jyllands-Posten in October 2021 about the three women and their children who were repatriated from the camps to Denmark in October 2021. Both pictures depict women dressed in long dark abayas. In Prickett's photo, the women are wearing a three-layered niqab with the veil lifted, revealing the women's eyes. Broni’s graphic likewise hints that the woman is wearing a Niqab.



‘women and children in al-hol’ by Ivor Prickett (2021)



Graphics by Thorgerd Broni (2021)

While this paper has focused on the written narratives about the Danish women in the Syrian camps, visual narratives are as vital as textual (Copes et al., 2019, p. 254). These images depict symbols of recognizable stories (Copes & Ragland 2016), which can be used to: “mobilize symbols of known cultural types” (Copes, Hochstetler & Ragland 2019, p. 254). Thus, the depiction of the women in photos, graphics and other visuals are symbolic identity markers in the newspaper constructions of the women. The ‘issue of the Niqab’ is rarely actively addressed in text in the articles; the Niqabi is depicted everywhere as a trope which functions as a small snippet of a story which carries ambiguity. This trope is largely taken for granted and is crucial to understanding hegemonic discourse (Sandberg, 2016, p. 154). The almost painful detail paid to clothing may seem like a minuscule problem in the larger context of negotiating the repatriation of the women and their children.

Nevertheless, the issue of ‘Muslim dress’ sporadically arises as a social problem in Denmark at times (Østergaard et al., 2014; Jacobsen et al., 2013). The stigma connected to wearing the niqab is well established in narratives connected to Muslim women. In the Danish context, veiling is a trope represented in a public master narrative about Islam as an oppressor of women (by men) and: “an expression of extreme Islamic religious symbolism, such as Salafism” (Edwards 2014, p. 281), which in turn carries strong associations to terrorism³ (Østergaard 2014, p. 57). Østergaard further argues that in the Danish context, the niqab: “[...] has largely been portrayed as an issue of integration (or lack of integration) and as an insistence on the continuation of ‘un-Danish’ customs from a Muslim country of origin” (Østergaard et al., 2014, p. 54). While the women may hold legal claims to Danish citizenship, their association with ‘symbols of un-Danishness’ construct them as an outgroup. The association, as evident from the construction of the women as ‘foreign fighters’, ‘sticks’ (Ahmed, 2004) easier to some bodies than others. The niqab functions as a symbol in “a slide of metonymy [... which functions] as an implicit argument about the causal relations between terms (such as Islam and terrorism), but in such a way that it does not require an explicit statement (Ahmed, 2004, p. 76). Thus, using visual tropes in constructing the women as a foreigner, a Muslim-other, and a potential terrorist-other is an efficient yet silent mechanism. Thus, the women become de facto foreigners regardless of the newspapers and politicians’ opinions on the social problem itself.

³ The association between Salafism (as well as terms such as Wahhabism and Islamism) and terrorism is a reductionist generalization, this paper does not address this issue in further detail but refers to e.g. Euben and Zaman’s (2009) concise analysis of Islamist thought which include violent as well as violent interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence.

5.3.9 Whiteness and Muslim Women

The construction of women as foreign others is especially interesting in the case of two of the seven women. They are not only Danish citizens; they do not hold any other citizenship (and thus cannot have it revoked according to Danish citizenship law). They are likewise constructed as so-called ethnically Danish (Søndergaard, 2019b) and converts to Islam (ibid; Pedersen 2021). However, the ‘ethnic ingroup marker’ does not exempt them from being constructed as foreigners or as ‘racially’ different. In a letter-to-the-editor by *Ekstra Bladet*’s reader Henrik Skov racializes the women. In his claim, he constructs what type of women the social problem is about: “This is about Muslim wives and their children [...]. The Arabic mothers with children [...] joined their IS-fighter husbands [...] they are not welcome on Danish ground.” (Skov, 2019). The key role of typification, according to Loseke, is that typifications serve to find similarities in a group and overlook dissimilarities (Loseke 2010, p. 25). The type Skov presents finds the similarity of these women to be ‘Muslim’ and overlooks that 5/6 women are either ethnically Danish or have descent from other non-Arabic speaking countries. However, the close association between Muslims, Arabic and, as argued above, foreigners racializes the women. It is unclear if Skov is unaware that most of the women are non-Arabic or if he excludes it from his narrative and typification of the women. Regardless, the typification he presents nullifies the possibility of the women being Danish in legal, moral and ‘racial’ terms.

When journalists seldomly interview the women from the respective newspapers, the ethnically white women are constructed in a frame of ‘blonde exceptionalism’ as: “they are [born] in Greater Copenhagen and South-West Jutland and have blue eyes and beet-coloured passports” (Pedersen, 2021). Journalist Thea Pedersen from *Jyllands-Posten* highlights a series of ‘Danishness’ markers, including the geographical location in Denmark they are born and their blue eyes, a racialized trope associated with ‘whiteness’ (Meer, 2019, p. 286). They are also the holders of a red Danish (EU-coloured) passport, which, in legal terms, gives them access to the Danish nation-state. *Politiken*’s journalist Bo Søndergaard likewise interviews one of the white women and describes her as having a: “completely normal Danish face, greenish eyes, round cheeks and a light skin. It fits her name, which you would be able to find in every single Danish school class 20 years ago” (Søndergaard, 2019b). Søndergaard, like Pedersen, finds this woman an ‘image of typical Danish whiteness’ so typical that she might as well have been any other white Danish girl. These racial

markers are highlighted to indicate their ‘oddity’ in this narrative about ISIS-associated women. Had the interview had a different context than the women’s association with ISIS, their physical appearance would probably not evoke a ‘blonde exceptionalism’-narrative. However, in this connection, the fact that these women are ethnically Danish is very reportable (Labov, 2006). The racialization of the two white women indicates their presence as a reportable ‘oddity’ as whiteness is not one of the metonyms which sticks (Ahmed, 2004, p 76) to the Muslim nor the (potential) terrorist body. The construction of these women as racial others is not made along biological lines but rather ‘cultural lines, and in this way, they: “cross the border of whiteness” (Franks, 2000, p. 926).

Due to space confinements, the racialization of the non-white Danish minority women will not be detailed in this paper (see Evans et al. 2022 & Hervik 2011 for the racialization of minority Muslim Danish women). It is, however, essential to note that there is a significant difference in the racialization of white and non-white women. While the white Danish women are disadvantaged in being constructed as culturally different in terms of ‘Muslimness’, they can theoretically remove their racialized markers, i.e., veils. The effect of non-white Danish women removing the veil would not give them access to what social scientist, Myfanwy Franks, refers to as ‘invisible whiteness’ (Franks 2000). The women’s whiteness is not an ignorable invisibility because of their status as converts to Islam (Moosavi, 2014, p. 1919). However, sociologist Leon Moosavi argues that white Muslims hold privileges due to their whiteness (ibid, p. 1929). In the Danish context, Pedersen argues that Danish family reunification laws are constructed in a way which gives: “native white citizens” (Pedersen 2012, p. 152) privileges which they only hold due to their membership of the Danish whiteness majority group (ibid.), so while it is possible to construct the ethnically white women in a racialized manner in terms of culture, they keep their legal privileged as a member of the majority whiteness group. In this connection, it is worth noting that the three women repatriated in October 2021 are the two white women referred to in Pedersen and Søndergaard’s articles. The third is a white woman with dual citizenship in Denmark and another European country (Jensen & Götler, 2021). The non-white dual-citizen women have their Danish citizenship administratively revoked and remain in the Syrian camps with their still legally Danish children. The legally Danish children’s ability to be repatriated thus relies on their mother’s legal ability to claim Danish

citizenship or that the remaining women allow for their children to be repatriated to Denmark without a parent (Gabel-Jørgensen, 2021)

5.3.10 Self-Constructions

While newspapers and politicians are actively making claims about who the women are as a typification in a social problem, it is essential to investigate the women's self-constructions and understanding of the social problem of repatriation. While the women have some limited contact with the newspapers, they are rather someone we are talking about than someone we talk to. This has multiple reasons, of which two will be highlighted in this paper. First, the construction of the women as niqabis are sequenced into the debate about Muslim women and Muslim dress in general and, as argued earlier, carries with them metonyms of the women being brainwashed with no own agency or voice. This is likewise evident in the construction of the ISIS bride. This is especially evident in the political debate about veiling: "which has excluded the meaning the veil holds to for the subject (Edwards 2014, p. 281). This paper argues that because the women are already constructed as a silenced Niqabi, their voices are largely disregarded when they make claims. The founder of the right-wing and Islam critical party *Dansk Folkeparti*, Pia Kjærsgaard, writes a commentary in the Newspaper *Berlingske* as an answer to a plea for repatriation by one of the women, 'Aziza', in an interview in the same newspaper, a few days prior: "Everything seems so rehearsed and planned. As something the lawyer has advised her to say. It is a record we have listened to for a decade" [...] (Pia Kjærsgaard, 2021). Kjærsgaard disregards 'Aziza's' plea as a dishonest play by her lawyer rather than her own words or 'the truth'. Second, even if we accept the interviews as the women's own voices and agency, it is important to note the limitations to this idea, which lies in the notion of a narrative. Presser argues that an important aspect of telling stories/narratives are what is kept silent and underwritten: "it is [...] because one's self-narrative is [...] underwritten that a narrator can adapt it to new events and understandings." (Presser, 2018, p. 57). While the object of this paper is not to assert if Kjærsgaard is correct in her disregard of 'Aziza's' plea as a dishonest lawyer's play, she does point to an important aspect of silence and agency regarding the women. The women are entirely dependent on newspaper journalists to tell their stories. Thus, the newspapers can edit what is part of their narrative and what is not. While the newspapers are their only voice while in the camps, they are likewise silencing and controlling the narrative, which is especially evident when journalists infer commentary on the women's story,

questioning the women's narrative: "This story is her answer, as she tells it today, it is not a story that can be fact-checked, especially not the part that took place in the Islamic State" (Søndergaard, 2019b). Søndergaard is writing under the pretence that this is the women's story, a story the reader is cautioned not to believe entirely. Her story is likewise marked by silence: "she [speaks] so low her voice disappears behind the grey whistling from the air conditioner" (ibid). Journalists likewise indicate that the women are reluctant to speak about themselves and their lives on the advice of their families and lawyers (Søndergaard, 2019b; Pedersen, 2021). The women likewise fear having the interviews used against them (newspaper), a fear which becomes a reality in the case of one of the women who have 2 of these interviews used against her in court (Østre Landsret, 2022). Thus, the stories the women tell are generally met with scepticism and condemnation and marked by silence. This is especially true regarding questions of why the women left, if they have been active ISIS members and what they have done while in ISIS-controlled areas.

Other people primarily construct the answers to the question of what the women have done. Including, as mentioned earlier, the government claims they have been foreign fighters (section 5.3.1), PET (2014-2018) and academia (Vale, 2019; Gan et al., 2019) who claim the women have had supporting roles rather than being violent themselves. One woman, 'Nadia', interviewed by the newspaper *Berlingske* offers the reader a narrative in which she constructs the women in the camps as two different typ(ifications). In the interview, it is clear that 'Nadia' is aware of the 'foreign fighter' construction but objects to the typification of all the women along this line because: "they do not know us" (Kamil, 2021). Her objection to the typification is that it neglects to see her, and the other Danish women, as individuals. In turn, she offers two typifications: "We all had different reasons. Some came out of pure naiveté, others because they are convinced" (ibid). She uses a narrative trope to divide the women into two types of people. 'the convinced' is a trope describing people who would fit the security threat narrative of a convinced foreign fighter who believes in the ISIS ideology, the same narrative the Danish government relies upon. The other narrative evokes the 'good girl' narrative previously used to construct the women. Nadia points out not a security threat but rather someone who did not understand the consequences of getting involved with ISIS and, more importantly, is understood not to pose a security threat. Nadia places herself in the latter category.

6. Discussion

The examination of this empirical case has elucidated some of the deep-rooted narratives in Danish culture, which organize the way people in Denmark understand, organize, and move through their everyday lives. The ‘good girl’ who has fallen into the hands of ‘bad men’ is a deep-seated master narrative that intertwines with other master narratives about the oppressed (Muslim) women in creating the ‘ISIS bride’ typification. The most recognizable feature in the construction of the ISIS bride is that her voice is rarely heard. When articulating her motivation, she is disregarded, victimized and spoken for. The ‘ISIS bride’ turns into the ‘ISIS wife’. This construction shifts the focus away from the tragic tale of ‘good girls’ leaving their families to ISIS wives. She remains a non-violent character, but her role as a family member of violent militant Islamist men rather than the lost daughter fuels this narrative. The ISIS wife narrative, like the ISIS bride narrative, relies on the master narratives about the role of the oppressed (Muslim) women in terms of ‘traditional marriage’, a narrative in which she is constructed as a passive housewife and a mother. The ‘ISIS-bride’, as well as the ‘ISIS-wife’, never reaches the status of a widespread social problem in the Loskean sense. she functions as an accessory in the master narrative and global social problem of ‘Islamic terrorism, a problem in which the antagonist is typified as a violent, Muslim, man with Middle Eastern decent with a long beard and ‘traditional clothes’ qua the representations of men such as Jacob el-Ali and Ahmed el-haj in Danish newspapers, such as the Jyllands-Posten double spread articles describe in section 5.2.1.

While these women have allegedly been engaged with ISIS since they left in 2014 and 2015 (PET 2014; PET 2015), it was not until April 2019 that they received the status of a social problem and the construction of the women as ‘foreign fighters’ on par with men. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent the physical separation of the women (in the camps in Northern Syria) and the men (in Prisons) facilitates the narratives about the women. However, the narrative shift coincides with the discovery that there are Danish women and children in the camps in Northern Syria, the attention to Danish men in prisons, of which two have been confirmed by the newspaper (Hergel, 2021). The construction of the women as foreign fighters relies on a master narrative about betrayal, illustrated by the repeated phrase by the government: “they have turned their backs” (e.g., Anton Bjørnager & Hodzic, 2021; Jørgensen, 2021; Wivel, 2021) – a phrase the newspapers

reproduces both in their role of secondary claims-makers highlighting an important point from the government's position as well as in debate pieces and news articles calling for the repatriation on the women. The construction of the women as 'foreign fighters' downplays the role of gender; however, the construction remains highly racialized in terms of being a cultural other Muslim.

6.1.1 Voices Lost in Typifications

The construction of the three typifications 'the ISIS bride', 'the ISIS-wife' and the 'Foreign Fighter' removes the complexity of the women. This reduction is partly due to their self-constructions as innocent as well as their silence, and partly due to other claims-makers, such as the Danish government and the Danish newspapers, making typifications about these women. They are not presented as individuals. In their self-constructions, this is likewise the case. Thus, the complexity is reduced into constructions of the women as either A or B. It is, however, essential to note that the 'good girl' and 'ISIS bride' construction clashes with the women's own narratives, as has been shown in the case of the 16-year-old girl's claim to be a "female fighter" (Skjoldager & Sheik, 2014) rather than a bride. While the Danish cases are few, they are consistent with similar patterns in the British media coverage of women leaving for ISIS (Martini 2018). This clash indicates that while marriage is required of the women as they join ISIS (Gan et al., 2019), this may not be their motivational force for joining but rather a gendered neo-orientalist construction of Muslim women's role in marriage. Rather than understanding these women as seduced by alluring and dangerous men, it is perhaps more sensible to follow in the footsteps of anthropologist Saba Mahmoud's suggestion. She argues that it is essential to ask the women themselves what these choices offer them, including their choice of observing puritan interpretation of Islam and religious piety (Mahmoud 2005, p.168). In this connection, this paper suggests that it is essential to include the women's narrative in the debate about them and their actions. As an example, the 'ISIS bride' narrative simplifies the women's motivational frame as being that of marriage. While marriage and dependency on childbirth for state-building is an important 'policy' for ISIS (Yilmaz, 2017), it is perhaps more sensible, in some cases, to understand these marriages as an entry pass to the caliphate, much like the passports these women needed to get through Copenhagen Airport – a necessity to move, rather than the main object of going. This argument against brainwashed innocence should not stand alone and fuel the 'foreign terrorist' fighter narrative. Instead, it calls

for claims-makers, newspapers, governments, and academics alike to be aware of what preconceived notions might influence the debate and our work.

6.1.2 Continued Legal Impact

This case has triggered the public debate about the repatriation of these particular women. It has likewise questioned the very understanding of Danish citizenship as both moral and legal entities and has catalyzed citizenship laws in Denmark. Most notably, the possibility for the ministry of immigration and integration to revoke Danish citizenship for dual citizens long before the case can reach a courtroom. This move is arguably a reinterpretation of the democratic division of the legislative, the executive and judicial power.

While this case has subsided media attention by the end of 2021, the master narrative of betrayal of ‘Danish morale’ lingers in public debate. It keeps sticking to use Ahmed’s (2004) terminology to marginalized bodies. As of May 2022, the citizenship laws in Denmark are facing another change, which seeks to remove Danish citizenship for dual citizens involved with: “criminal actions causing serious harm to the state’s vital interests” (Indfødsretsloven L 127, 2022). These criminal actions are to include gang-related activities. The villains in this social problem are young Muslim men of Middle Eastern and African origin (Kalkan, 2022, p. 415) – people who metonymically are constructed in the public debate as very closely related to the ‘foreign fighter’.

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